

THE MANY TRANSLATIONS OF A NATION:  
READING CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN MIGRANT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which migrant autobiographers produce the experience of migration and the histories attached to it for a diversified Canadian audience. In this study, I explore the type of knowledge that migrant autobiographies create and suggest interpretive structures that demonstrate the social and political relevance of these personal accounts of Canadian history.

I approach migrant autobiographies through theories of translation in order to question the concepts of “sources,” “origins” and “authenticity” that these texts raise. Mobilizing the idea of translation for this study destabilizes the notion of “sources” or “origins” and complicates the “originality” or “authenticity” often attributed to them. Using this framework of translation invites a focus on the dynamic processes of transferring experience and memory from one context to another, manipulating language in certain ways to do so, and brings to the foreground the problems that these processes reveal.

Chapter One examines the processes of linguistic translation that language migrants engage in and the strategies that they develop to cope with the identity translation that goes hand in hand with the manipulation of a foreign language. Chapter Two focuses on cultural translation and explores how the textual strategies used in migrant autobiography question and complicate common assumptions about the “originality” and legitimacy of cultural models. Chapter Three examines the strategies that the writers of family memoirs develop to translate their relatives’ personal memories into a historical narrative that recreates the family history and the complex power

relations involved in these processes of historical reconstruction. Chapter Four focuses on the concept of “home” and the functions that migrant writers attribute to their textual creations of homes and homelands. The chapter also translates these writers’ textual representations of home into a form of critical discourse that examines the functions of patriotic discourses and the shaping of national identities.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Speaking the Self in an Other Language	21
• Introduction	21
• Naming or the First Act of Mistranslation	30
• Self-Translation: from Mutilation to Mutation	42
• Self-Translation or the Double-Edged Sword of Linguistic Power	60
Chapter Two: Mimicking “Original” Cultural Models: The Complexities of Faking It	80
• Introduction	80
• Mimicking “Original” Cultural Models: Revealing Tainted Origins	90
• Translating Strategies: Putting Together the “Ethnopoetic Toolbox”	110
• Articulating Modes of Translatable Cultural Knowledge	125
Chapter Three: Translating the Family across the Generations	136
• Introduction	136
• Exploring “Transgenerational Haunting” and Establishing Authority	148
Confessing Lies—Transmitting Lives: The Difficulty of <i>Losing the Dead</i>	152
<i>Honey and Ashes</i> : Claiming her Place in the “Old Place”	162
<i>Running in the Family</i> in the Name of the Father	167
• The Migrant Family Memoir and Social Action	175
The Family Memoir as a Form of Auto-Ethnography	175
The Family Memoir as a Tool for Reclaiming Ethnic Identity	179
The Family Memoir as a Form of Historiography	185
Chapter Four: Writing Home: Repatriating Memories and Shaping Individual and National Identities	197
• Introduction	197
• Denise Chong’s <i>The Concubine’s Children</i> : Bringing the Family Home	211
• Anna Porter’s <i>The Storyteller</i> : Shaping an Imaginary Homeland	231
Conclusion	256
Bibliography	261



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## INTRODUCTION

Confronted with a growing corpus of autobiographical literature that recreates the diversity of individual migrant experiences and articulates the migration history of this country, I am interested in examining the ways in which migrant writers produce these experiences and histories for a diversified Canadian audience. I would also like to pay attention to the identities that these literary productions enable migrant writers to articulate and how these identities affect the concept of national identity. I intend, with this thesis, to articulate reading practices for Canadian migrant autobiographies. I plan on developing relevant questions with which to approach these texts—questions that will identify the type of knowledge that migrant autobiographies create—and suggesting interpretive structures that will demonstrate the social and political relevance of these personal accounts of Canadian history. This work is timely since, as Rudyard Griffiths explains in the preface to an anthology published in 2002 and entitled *Passages: Welcome to Canada*,

[i]n the coming decade, the majority of Canadian citizens will be first- and second-generation immigrants. This majority will consist not of a single monocultural group as did, say, the earlier waves of Anglo-European immigration, but of people who have come to Canada from the world over [...]. The only common thread binding these disparate cultures and individuals together will be the experience of being immigrants. At the most basic level, what it means to be Canadian will be extended to what it means to be an immigrant. (viii)

This anthology, through the contributions of well-known migrant writers such as Danny Laferrière, Anna Porter, Nino Ricci, Ken Wiwa, and Moses Zneimer among others, aims

at exploring the ways in which migration experiences are shaping the values that articulate Canadian society and identity. Developing a theoretical framework through which to read these texts is therefore not only timely but also necessary.

Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* has made familiar the view of immigrants as "translated men" (and women) (17). Borne across the world "(the word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across')," migrants are commonly seen as people living in translation, indeed often, "lost in translation," as Eva Hoffman's famous autobiography has suggested (*Imaginary Homelands* 17). Rushdie challenges the common view that "something always gets lost in translation" and instead "cling[s], obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (17). Like Rushdie, I am interested in exploring the concept of translation in new ways in order to identify not just what gets lost in the translating process but also what new layers of meaning can be added to narratives about the migration experience. I propose to examine different aspects of the migration experience through the lens of translation. Mobilizing the concept of translation for the study of migrant autobiographies is useful because it opens the way to questions about "sources" or "origins" and complicates the "originality" or "authenticity" often attributed to them. It also invites a focus on the dynamic processes of transferring experience and memory from one context to another, manipulating language in certain ways to do so, and brings to the foreground the problems that these processes raise. Finally, it generates an interest in identifying the type of audiences that the interpreting process targets and deconstructing these audiences' expectations.

I propose to explore questions about the concept of “source” or “origin,” the ways in which language and the autobiographical genre are used to interpret and re-articulate experience, and the audiences that such interpretations target by bringing these questions to four distinct, but closely interrelated, contexts: linguistic, cultural, familial/communal, and national. The multiple translation processes involved in migration experiences are obvious at the linguistic and cultural levels. Migrants whose first language is neither English nor French are confronted with the realities of “living in translation” upon their arrival in Canada. Most migrants not coming from North America would also experience cultural shock and have to learn to negotiate the differences between the culture(s) that they bring with them and the culture(s) that they encounter in their new environment.

Exploring translation processes in the familial/communal context is a bit less obvious. In “Mother Tongues and Other Strangers,” Angelika Bammer analyzes the impact of the migration experience on families and the communities they belong to. She convincingly demonstrates that the linguistic and cultural disruptions that the migration experience creates among the different generations of a family can fragment families and destabilize the communities to which these families belong. She argues for the importance of reconnecting the different generations of migrant families in order to re-establish the historical continuity that the migration experience has disrupted, to preserve the memories of earlier generations, and articulate the history of migrant communities. She suggests that one way of achieving these goals is “to construct the family language multilingually. Such a construct allows for families with more than one native culture or more than one mother tongue to expand into, rather than fragment over, a dialogic space in which ‘family’ can be spoken in a variety of ways and need not be translated to be

communicable” (97). Bammer is articulating here what I think is a productive way of looking at translation. When she argues that migrant families need to develop “dialogic spaces” in which to communicate instead of relying on translation, she is pointing at the restrictive meaning commonly attributed to translation: i.e. the faithful linguistic transfer of information from one language to another meant for the linguistic and cultural mainstream. Bammer is calling for new ways of conducting conversations about migration experiences, ways that would enable the different speakers to draw on their linguistic and cultural background and contribute to the discussion without having to interpret in a traditional way the information that they are sharing. A non-traditional understanding of translation can provide such new ways of communication. In her introduction to *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, Sherry Simon explains that “[w]e increasingly understand cultural interaction not merely as a form of *exchange* but as *production*. Translation then is not simply a mode of linguistic transfer but a translingual practice, a writing across languages[,] which permits new kinds of conversations and new speaking positions” (28).

The national context constitutes the fourth context to which I propose to bring the concept of translation in order to analyze the types of transactions that happen at that level. When migrants arrive in Canada, they are invited, and later expected, as they swear political allegiance to the country during the ceremony that grants them citizen status, to consider Canada as their new home. This invitation/expectation triggers a complex negotiation process through which migrants learn to deal with multiple, and often dissenting, understandings of home and navigate their ways through conflicting patriotic discourses that shape their sense of belonging and national identity. Exploring this

negotiation process through concepts borrowed from translation studies can initiate fruitful conversations about what constitutes national identity and the ways in which patriotic discourses emerge and function.

It is not my intention to articulate a new theory of translation or even to manipulate that theory rigorously (i.e. use its terminology systematically throughout the thesis and engage in the kind of discussions that translation theorists are developing). Rather, I am interested in borrowing some of the key concepts that articulate that theory (i.e. a concern with “origins” and fidelity or infidelity to an “original” source, language and genre usage, and target audience) and analyze the insights that these concepts bring to common issues developed in migrant autobiography. The issue of “originality” and fidelity to what is too often presented as an “authentic original” is particularly relevant to discussions of translation. In *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Rey Chow devotes a chapter to discussing the problem of cross-cultural translation in the postcolonial world. She reminds her readers that etymologically the notion of translation has always been linked with notions of “tradition” on the one hand and “betrayal” on the other (182). She also argues that the terminology used to describe translation processes (i.e. “source” or “original” language/text and “target” or “translated” language/text) “suppresses the fact that the ‘unoriginal’ language may well be the ‘native tongue’—that is, the original language—of the translator, whose translating may involve turning the ‘original’ which is actually *not* her native/original language into her ‘native’/‘original’ language” (183). This example clearly illustrates the complicated and multi-layered nature of the translation process and the limitations of available terminology. More importantly though, Chow’s argument points to the problem of

“valorizing some ‘original’” (192) and aims at articulating ways of theorizing translation that would make visible the asymmetrical power relations at work in the process. She argues for a “*dismantling* of the notion of origin and the notion of alterity as we know them today” (194). Drawing on Benjamin’s theory of translation, Chow suggests that the translation process should move from transforming what is “other” into the “familiar” to allowing the two poles of the translation process to interact and affect each other. This interaction would bring to the foreground the multiple and often contradictory forces that intervene in the articulation of both the text that is being translated and the text that translates it. It would also make visible the complicated power relations at work in the translation process and illustrate what is at stake in trying to present certain realities as “original,” “authentic,” and “authoritative.”

In order to “dismantle” the prioritizing of one language/text over another in the translation act, Chow suggests that a move beyond the linguistic realm to the visual realm is necessary. She turns to film as a particularly useful form of translation. “There are at least two types of translation at work in cinema,” she explains, “[f]irst translation as inscription: a generation, a nation, and a culture are being translated or permuted into the medium of film; and second, translation as transformation of tradition and change between media: a culture oriented around the written text is in the process of transition and of being translated into one dominated by the image” (182). Chow’s analysis of contemporary Chinese cinema as a translating tool challenges the traditional understanding of translation because it “highlights the fact that [translation] is an activity, a transportation between two ‘media,’ two kinds of already-mediated data, and that the ‘translation’ is often what we must work with because, for one reason or another, the



‘original’ as such is unavailable—lost, cryptic, already heavily mediated, already heavily translated” (193). Chow identifies here several translation processes that are also at work in migrant autobiography. Although migrant writers produce *linguistic* forms of translation of their migration experiences, the processes that make this translation possible require the “transportation” of “lost, cryptic, [...] already heavily translated” data from one medium to another. Migrant writers often work from oral versions of history, photographs, filmed interviews, and documents to produce their autobiographies. There is therefore not one “original,” “authentic,” “authoritative” source for their autobiographical productions but rather a collection of disparate and often contradictory source materials. This diversity explains their reliance on innovative linguistic use and/or generic hybridity. Migrant writers draw on linguistic processes such as abrogation, hybridization, and creolization and combine autobiography, biography, historiography, ethnography, and fiction in order to articulate complex translations that challenge the very notion of “authority” and “authenticity” of “original” sources.

Focusing on issues of “original” and “authoritative” sources and the translation processes that deconstruct and challenge such an understanding will enable me to perform what Annie E. Coombes, in “Translating the Past, Apartheid Monuments in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” identifies as “a reading against the grain and between the lines” (175). She discusses the usefulness of translation theory in her analysis of the ways in which the South African government attempts to rehabilitate monuments imbued with experiences and meanings from South Africa’s Apartheid past. “The concept of translation is helpful here,” she argues, “both in the Benjaminian sense of supplemental meanings which necessarily transform the ‘original’ through the act of translation but

also in the sense that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests of an active ‘reader as translator’ capable of performing a reading against the grain” (175). This type of reading is important as it enables the theorist to articulate “the operations of agency in the construction of historical memory” (175). Coombes’s study connects translation theory with linguistic, artistic and historical representation, and cultural theory, and illustrates why this theory constitutes a rich site for analysis.

Drawing on this theory, I will ask questions about 1) the concepts of “source/origin” and issues of fidelity: What do migrant writers identify as source materials for the translation of their migration experiences? What elements do they choose to include or omit from their translations? Why? Do they attempt to produce a “faithful” translation or not? What is at stake in articulating “faithful” and/or “unfaithful” translations? 2) the use of the English language and the manipulation of diverse discourses and the autobiographical genre: How do migrant writers manipulate English, various discourses, and/or autobiography? For what purposes? 3) the functions of migrant autobiographies: What audiences do migrant writers target? What relevant and translatable knowledge can readers extract from migrant autobiographies? These very practical questions illustrate my concern with emphasizing the idea that migrant autobiographies articulate specific forms of knowledge. The increasing popularity of the genre demonstrates the necessity to make these forms of knowledge accessible and therefore translatable. Sherry Simon confirms the importance of making knowledge accessible through translation by arguing that “translation [constitutes] a necessary means through which knowledge is tested, recontextualized, submitted to critical scrutiny” (*Changing the Terms* 27). My reading of migrant autobiographies in this thesis therefore

constitutes a form of translation that enables me to “test” and “recontextualize” the various forms of knowledge that migrant autobiographers produce.

Fred Wah’s argument with Margaret Atwood’s claim that “[we] are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here” (qtd in *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity* 52) illustrates the political implications of a study of migrant autobiography. There are contested meanings of what counts as “migrants’ experience” and who can claim that experience. The danger of Atwood’s claim lies in the fact that such an assertion flattens out the many differences involved in the migration experience. Surely being the descendant of a white Anglo-Saxon family who settled in Canada several generations ago cannot be the same as being a non-white political refugee entering the country today. Wah’s criticism reminds us that there is not one migration experience but many migration experiences. It also warns against the appropriation of a distinct linguistic, cultural, and political experience by members of the cultural and linguistic mainstream. Wah’s warning demonstrates the necessity of clearly positioned readings of migration experiences. This warning echoes Donna J. Haraway’s concern with clear feminist positioning in a different context. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Haraway discusses the importance of defining what constitutes “women’s experience” and particularly of recognizing that “women’s experience” does not constitute a homogeneous site for analysis. She emphasizes the necessity to situate oneself clearly in that sphere in order to produce what she calls “situated knowledges.” These “situated knowledges,” she explains, “[constitute] powerful tools to produce maps of consciousness for people who have been inscribed within the histories of masculinist, racist, and colonialist dominations” (111). Haraway’s argument can be transferred to this

discussion about migrant autobiography. It is important to understand that the category “migrants’ experience” is not a homogeneous one and the way one is positioned in that category will determine the type of knowledge one produces. Similarly, the knowledge that emerges from the work of migrant autobiographers provides ways of mapping the migration history of Canada that complete, and sometimes compete with, the maps drawn by historians, government officials, and earlier white settlers.

\* \* \*

I write about migrants’ experiences as a white woman who emigrated from France to Canada eight years ago for educational purposes. My immigration experience is different from the experiences of many migrants who have to contend with forms of racial, cultural, social, and political discrimination. I entered Canada with full command of one of its official languages and a decent grasp of its second. I joined the privileged circle of academia and apart from the financial difficulties that emerged from long months of initial unemployment and the general disregard of English-speaking people for my struggles with their language, I cannot say that my migration experience was one of strife. It did, however, present serious difficulties and led me to question numerous aspects of life that I had taken for granted until that point. Many of the questions I seek to answer in this thesis emerge from my own migration experience. The study of migrant autobiography can be approached from several angles—one can consider the economic, racial, cultural, social, and political aspects of migration experiences—but my entry point has to be the personal.

I chose to examine the ways in which migrant autobiographers negotiate and represent their migration experiences in the linguistic, cultural, familial/communal, and

political contexts because these are the spheres in which my own experience has taken place. The fact that my study is not centered on issues of economic, racial, and gender differences does not mean that it ignores them; it addresses the problems that these issues raise within the contexts presented here. The decision to explore the linguistic aspect of the migration experience emerges from my own difficulties with “living in translation.” Having to negotiate daily life in a foreign language is alienating and disempowering and raises practical questions about finding the right words to express oneself accurately, modulating one’s voice properly, and mustering enough energy to follow fast-paced conversations. It also generates intellectual concerns and existential angst because one is not simply manipulating a foreign language, one is also undergoing identity translation. Speaking another language displaces the mother tongue and changes who one is even if one is not quite aware of it. When I go back home, feeling that what I call my “French self” is as I remember it to be the day I left my country, I read incomprehension in my father’s eyes as he is trying to get re-acquainted with his now foreign daughter. I make my mother laugh when I describe to her what a washing machine does because I have forgotten the word for “washer” in French. When I fight with my sister, I know that I have lost the argument when she walks away (with horror and sadness written all over her face) telling me that I can no longer understand her because I have become “too Canadian.” How can I be “too Canadian” when I still feel “so French”? How can what I see as my “French self” be disappearing with all the preservation work that I have been doing? Of course, the distance that now exists between my family and me is the result of years of separation and distance both geographical and temporal, but it also has a lot to do with the fact that I can now read them in two languages and that I have become a

bilingual text that they are trying to decipher with only one language. We are all “lost in translation.” They have lost the person they remembered me to be before I left and I have lost the ability to reproduce this person and to look at things from the French perspective only. The process is irreversible because it is dynamic; once the process of identity translation starts, one can never get back what one considered was one’s “original” self.

The process of identity translation often starts with the new pronunciation of one’s name. Some of the most memorable episodes of migrant autobiographies are those that recount the moment when language migrants hear their names pronounced by their English-speaking interlocutors for the first time. In *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, Rodriguez describes how he first heard his English name on the first day of school. The nun did not try to pronounce the Spanish version of his name (Ricardo Rodriguez); she directly translated his first name into its English equivalent, thus renaming him. Rodriguez transcribes what he heard as “Rich-heard Road-ree-guess” (11) and remembers experiencing this naming as a distortion of who he was. He still felt like a human being though and later came to appreciate the power that the English equivalent of his Spanish name brought him in American society. I, too, experienced Rodriguez’s sense of distortion when hearing the anglicized version of my own name. Where French speakers, Italian speakers, or even German speakers have never had any problems with the fluidity of the vowel sounds in my first and last names, English speakers introduce syllabic accents, distort the sounds, and destroy the melodious effect that both names are supposed to have when pronounced together. They stumble on the number of syllables and the vowel sounds cannot roll off their tongues. My name sounds complicated and awkward. English speakers speak my name the way I speak English. Early on, I also

discovered that when I pronounced my name the way it should be pronounced, English speakers could not understand it; it seemed to be too fluid, too fast for them; there was no syllabic accent to hang on to, no asperity to cling to. So I learned to pronounce my name their way in order to be identified and to feel less awkward. It is ironic that it was this awkward pronunciation of my name that actually made me feel less embarrassed to confront my Anglophone interlocutors. I also realize now that I am not the only one to be “lost in translation” as I, too, am mispronouncing their names. English names make no sense to me. I need to see them written before I can understand them and then I need someone to tell me how to pronounce them. And it took me years to realize that “Bill” was in fact “William” and “Dick” “Richard.” Although I still don’t know why.... If I have now become reconciled to the fact that I will probably never hear my English-speaking interlocutors pronounce my name properly, I cannot feel, like Rodriguez, that the anglicized version of my name is empowering. It is too cumbersome to be empowering and each attempt at naming reminds me that I am the other.

These very personal experiences with identity translation emerging from the manipulation of the English language lead me to investigate the process of linguistic self-translation in migrant autobiographies. I seek to understand how this process works through the textually reconstructed experiences of others and to define how these experiences can be translated into accessible knowledge for other language migrants and English-speaking Canadians to use. Closely connected to issues of linguistic translation are issues of cultural translation. Eight years spent in the English-speaking part of Canada have made me acutely aware of the various cultural transactions that take place in a context where multiple cultures interact. Living in cultural translation, I have learned to

examine the elements that constitute my French culture against the light of Anglo-Canadian expectations. I now read the narrative of what I think constitutes French culture against the readings that Anglo-Canadians make of that culture and against the reading that my negotiations with Anglo-Canadian culture have produced. In other words, I have learned to read cultural scripts from multiple perspectives and to recognize that each perspective produces a slightly different version of “culture.” Positioning is, again, crucial here. My position in the academic sphere colors my take on experiences of cultural translation; the issues that I choose to discuss, the questions that I propose, the interpretations that I articulate, all emerge from my immersion in academic culture and the particular perspective it grants. Interestingly, many migrant autobiographies are written by academics or people who hold graduate degrees in literature and therefore speak from a privileged position. As university educated people, we have the ability and freedom to articulate, interpret, and diffuse our experiences and the experiences of others. This option is not available to most migrants and therefore illustrates the social responsibility that comes with the privilege. Migrant writers and academics are responsible for producing careful analyses of “migrants’ experience,” analyses that take into account the many diversities of that experience, deconstruct the various power relations at work in the migration process, and establish the relevance of such studies for a Canadian audience.

My interest in exploring the process of generational translation (i.e. the process through which migrant writers recover family stories and memories and translate them into public autobiographical accounts that can be passed on to wider communities) also has its roots in the personal. The fact that there is a flourishing market for the production



and consumption of personal stories articulating attempts at reclaiming linguistic and cultural heritage fascinates me. The popularity of such stories indicates a national concern with preserving a history of cultural and linguistic diversity. In France, any attempt at reclaiming a language or a culture that is not French is usually frowned upon and often leads to accusations of unpatriotic betrayal and/or insolent ingratitude toward a “*terre d'accueil*” that welcomes its immigrants with “open arms.” This does not mean, however, that migrant literature is not available and widely read, as the success of writers such as Assia Djebar, Nancy Huston, and Marjane Satrapi among others, illustrates. Politically though, cultural diversity and the shift in political allegiance that it often triggers or reveals, are not encouraged. This attitude is particularly prevalent in a place like Corsica (where my family lives) where claims for sovereignty and independence from France rest on the necessity to present a linguistically, culturally, and politically united front to negotiate with the French government. Of course, Corsica is not a homogeneous entity and the results of a recent referendum rejecting Corsica’s independence illustrated the many differences of the Corsican people. The current Corsican population is constituted mostly of long-time residents of the island (the “true” Corsicans) and of migrants from Italy, North Africa, and France. French and Corsican are the two official languages of the island, but Italian and Arabic are spoken widely. In spite of this obvious diversity though, a discriminatory attitude towards linguistic and cultural difference prevails.

It took my mother, who is originally from the North-East of France (hardly a foreign country), years to be accepted in my father’s family (themselves immigrants from Italy). She was labeled a “foreigner” because she could not speak Corsican. The fact that

her grandmother was Chinese and that she has slanted eyes did not help either. The discrimination that she experienced in her own family illustrates the power of Corsican nationalist discourse. My father's family learned to identify as Corsicans quickly after their arrival in Corsica right after the Second World War. They mastered the Corsican language rapidly and, with a name that could be considered Corsican, rejected their Italian identity and ancestry and identified as Corsicans in order to end the often violent discriminatory actions that their Italian roots triggered at that particular historical moment. To this day, my father will fly into rages if you even suggest that he has Italian roots. This makes my interest in reclaiming my cultural and linguistic heritage difficult. I am confronted with a father who refuses to speak and a grandfather whose languages I do not share. My mother is not much better. She claims not to know anything about her Chinese grandmother and cannot understand why I would be interested in knowing anything about her if she herself knows little about her. "After all, she was *my* grandmother, not yours," she stubbornly repeats. These are apparently not my stories to tell, so I turn to Canadian family memoirs to assuage this desire to know about the process of reclaiming heritage, to find new ways of deciphering the clues that I can find in my own family (hi)stories, and maybe even new ways of convincing my parents to talk about their past.

I clearly have a vested interest in this study of migrant autobiography. But so do the migrant writers who compose these autobiographies and the public who read them. The genre illustrates the connection between the private and public spheres. In their texts, migrant autobiographers contribute to the articulation of a communal historical narrative that helps fashion a sense of national identity. These personal narratives play an

important role in shaping Canadian identity because they are vehicles for private experiences that inscribe themselves in collective memory and preserve the cultural heritage of the country. The self-nation connection appears clearly in the migrant writers' interest in exploring various versions of history and questioning the concept of "home" and/or "homeland." Their exploration unveils the complicated processes at work in the production and functions of historical and patriotic discourses. Examining these processes will identify the social and political actions that this genre can perform. It will also demonstrate their relevance for issues that currently occupy the nation, such as, for instance, the development of multicultural policies, changes in immigration policies, revision of the national anthem, and claims for sovereignty from First Nations people and the *Québécois*.

Although my personal migration experience influences the ways in which I approach this project, I intend to remain as self-reflexive as possible but not let personal interests interfere (too much) with the rigor of literary analysis. To achieve this goal, I will draw on multiple theories to keep me grounded in critical mode and to bring to the reader a diversity of perspectives that will illustrate the many complexities of the issues I explore. This theoretical diversity is essential as it emphasizes the variety of migration experiences and the heterogeneous nature of the audiences that these migration stories address. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah argues that the study of the "diasporic space" calls for

[t]heoretical crossovers that foreground processes of power inscribing [multiple, intersecting axes of differentiation]; a kind of *theoretical creolisation*. Such creolised envisioning is crucial, [...] if we are to address fully the contradictions

of modalities of enunciations, identities, positionalities and standpoints that are simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside'. It is necessary in order to decode the polymorphous compoundedness of social relations and subjectivities. (210)

Such a creolized use of theory is also crucial in a study of migrant autobiography in order to examine the many forces at work in the complex translation processes that produce migrant experiences and identities. My study obviously relies on autobiography and translation theories, but it also draws on the theoretical discourses that emerge from studies of cultures, travel writing, postcolonialism, and genre. Psychoanalysis, Sneja Gunew reminds us in *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, has also been useful in redefining the process of identity formation. In particular, she explains that "recent feminist debates around the vexed question of identity politics" have "led to terms such as 'intersectional identities' or 'differential consciousness'" which provide critics with a "way of moving beyond the paralyzing binaries which are often an inescapable part of identity politics" (11). This move "beyond paralyzing binaries" is indeed essential to the deciphering and understanding of the complex identities that migrant writers articulate and I will refer to psychoanalysis obliquely through the works of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Sneja Gunew, Sherry Simon, and Gayatri Spivak among others.

Intent on respecting and illustrating the diversity of migration experiences, my work incorporates texts by migrants from Argentina, the Caribbean, China, Hungary, Japan, Poland, Sri Lanka, and the Ukraine. These texts represent the migration experience from different perspectives as several migrant writers studied here who have not experienced migration first-hand have inherited the experience from their parents and/or

grandparents. The texts also present the migration experience in widely different racial, social, cultural, and political contexts which allows for an analysis that takes the context of production of the experience into account, along with its context of reception. Each chapter explores a different facet of the multi-layered translation process that migrant writers engage in, but all question issues of origins/sources, language and/or genre use, audience and reception. All chapters draw on various theories and critical discourses, but one prominent theory is brought to the surface in each chapter in order to illustrate in some detail the particular type of knowledge that the texts under consideration in one chapter are constructing.

Chapter One examines the processes of linguistic translation that language migrants engage in and the strategies that they develop to cope with the identity translation that goes hand in hand with the manipulation of a foreign language. The texts under consideration in this chapter are Wayson Choy's *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*, Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, and Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas: American Borders*. Relying heavily on translation theory, the chapter articulates ways of analyzing and understanding language migrations that can be particularly useful for monolingual members of the reading audience. Chapter Two focuses on cultural translation and explores how the textual strategies used in Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* question and complicate common assumptions about the "originality" and legitimacy of cultural models. Drawing on postcolonial theory, the chapter also analyzes the power relations at work in the articulation of cultural values and identities. Chapter Three offers a study of Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead: A Family*

*Memoir*, Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, and Christopher Ondaatje's *The Man-Eater of Punanai: A Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon*. The chapter examines the strategies that these writers develop to translate their relatives' personal memories into a historical narrative that recreates the family history and the complex power relations involved in these processes of historical reconstruction. Through the use of genre theory, this chapter also attempts to show how the genre of the migrant family memoir works and illustrate ways in which the genre can function as a form of social action that can impact not only the families whose experiences are recreated in these memoirs but also the wider communities to which these families belong. Chapter Four analyzes Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* and Anna Porter's *The Storyteller: Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* and focuses particularly on these writers' exploration of the concept of "home" and the functions that they attribute to their textual creations of homes and homelands. Drawing on cultural studies, the chapter also translates these writers' textual representations of home into a form of critical discourse that examines the functions of patriotic discourses and the shaping of national identities.

## CHAPTER ONE: SPEAKING THE SELF IN AN OTHER LANGUAGE

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I would like to explore the concept of self-translation<sup>1</sup> and examine how migration into a new language (in this case English) affects the ways in which migrant writers reconstruct their pre-migration selves in their autobiographies. I am particularly interested in examining the concept of source (or origin) for these identities, analyzing these writers' agency in the act of self-translation, and studying the ways in which the writers' texts address their audiences and the purposes of such address. My work in this chapter inscribes itself in a wide and complex theoretical context. Theorists in postcolonial literary criticism, cultural studies, and postmodern autobiography studies have addressed the concepts of translated identities and cultures in their work. Critics like Françoise Lionnet, Sherry Simon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Niranjana Tejaswini among others have all emphasized the importance of translation and the necessity for readers and writers to demonstrate linguistic flexibility in order to confront the multivoicedness of postcolonial texts that construct hybrid identities. Françoise Lionnet has demonstrated that postcolonial identities are necessarily *métissées* in order to braid the multiple aspects that constitute them. *Métissage*, as a multi-voiced practice, enables writers to privilege the differences that living in multiple languages afford them and to shape hybrid identities. Tejaswini has labeled postcolonial people as "people living in translation" ("Colonialism and the Politics of Translation" 36). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her essay "The Politics of Translation," has established the impossibility for the translator to "translate from a position of monolinguist superiority" (410). This impossibility demonstrates the necessity for linguistic diversity and flexibility in order to

engage in “the most intimate act of reading” that translation constitutes (409). In order to be able to render the foreign into the familiar, the translator must be flexible enough to translate herself into the other. Sherry Simon’s most recent work, *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, focuses particularly on the translation of cultural and gendered identities<sup>2</sup> and emphasizes the necessity of translation not simply as a form of linguistic and cultural transfer, but as a mode of knowledge production.

The work of all these theorists constitutes an important basis for any study of translation, but, apart from the theorists whose work appears in Simon’s *Changing the Terms*, very few of them actually draw on translation studies and focus particularly on the linguistic shift that the translation of identity requires. Very little work has been done on the particular problems that “language migrants,” as Mary Besemeres calls them, encounter when trying to translate themselves into a new linguistic code. Many of the theorists who have worked on the concept of translation conflate cultural and linguistic translations and manipulate “translation” as the wider concept of “transfer” from one sphere (linguistic, cultural, social, and/or political) to another. In this chapter, I would like to return to the primary focus of translation as the transfer through the shift of a linguistic code from the source language (SL), usually a foreign language to a target language (TL), usually the mother tongue of the translator. The vast majority of translators translate from a foreign language into their mother tongue. Their task is to make the unfamiliar (the other) accessible to their home audience by presenting it in familiar linguistic forms. The task of language migrants is the opposite. If one considers the narrative that articulates the pre-migration self as a source text written in the migrant’s mother tongue and the narrated self that emerges from the translating act for



their Anglophone audience as the target text, language migrants are translating from the mother tongue to the foreign language. They are translating the self into the other. This seems to me to be a particularly important and yet under-studied issue that requires a temporary separation from the wider issue of cultural translation and its social and political consequences. However, this return to the linguistic aspect of translation is not meant to oversimplify the very complex issue of translation. I am well aware that, language being the main medium for culture, the act of translation is necessarily multi-dimensional and simultaneously linguistic, cultural, social, and political. However, I would like to separate these different aspects for the time being in order to bring more clarity to the particular issue of linguistic translation. When I speak of focusing on the linguistic aspect of translation, I do not necessarily mean to compare the various words available to language migrants to translate themselves into the new language. Rather, I want to focus on their own discussion of how the shift in languages has affected their way of perceiving and understanding themselves and reality and how their negotiation between the two languages (mother tongue and English) is rendered in the autobiographical text.

The extensive focus on cultural translation displaces the fact that “a translation is a *linguistic* ‘zone of contact’ between the foreign and translating cultures,” as Lawrence Venuti, borrowing from Mary Louise Pratt, reminds his audience in “Translation, Community, Utopia” (477, my emphasis). By “limiting” the study of translation to its cultural aspect without proper attention to its linguistic origin, theorists run the risk of working in a state of “monolingual superiority.” And even though I agree with Alvarez

and Vidal, who claim in their introduction to *Translation, Power, Subversion*, that “translation is culture bound” (2), I strongly disagree with their suggestion that

The importance of the cultural milieu of each language is such that it could be argued that its significance cannot be found at the linguistic level (neither SL nor TL) but rather on a third level: in the cultural space that emerges from the clash [...] between the two cultures. (3)

Before there can be a “clash between two cultures,” there has to be a linguistic collision. The priority of the linguistic is evident in autobiographical writings by language migrants who repeatedly identify the first “clash” or “shock” as being the linguistic one. Further, language (a mother tongue in particular) is so closely connected to identity and the ways of shaping that identity that focusing on the impact that linguistic dispossession has on identity shifts seems only logical. As Gloria Anzaldúa claims in *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (59). If indeed one is one’s language, then examining one’s process of identity formation requires attention to the linguistic skills and strategies used in the process.

In her introduction to *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, Françoise Lionnet observes the concept of race through the lenses of *métissage* and language. Although she recognizes the interdependence of language and culture in the shaping of racial concepts, she argues that “it is language that conditions our concept of race and that the boundaries of that concept change according to cultural, social, and linguistic realities” (12). She proposes a “linguistic and rhetorical approach to the complex question of *métissage*” in order to show “how and why racial difference is a function of language itself” (16). I would like to adopt this “linguistic and rhetorical

approach” and apply it to the self-translations of language migrants in order to examine to what extent the language and form they use in their autobiographies shape the type of self that they recreate. The language migrants studied in this chapter, Wayson Choy, Eva Hoffman, and Guillermo Verdecchia, as well as the ones that I will be referring to, Gloria Anzaldúa, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Richard Rodriguez, are all academically trained. This training enables them to adopt a self-reflexive attitude toward the act of self-translation. They are aware that they are translating themselves into English, while at the same time commenting on the ways in which English affects the form of the translation and dictates the “translability” or “untranslability” of certain aspects of the self. I would like to observe these language migrants’ self-translations and study the ways in which they engage with the English language and deal with the problems of translability and untranslability that they encounter.

Alice Kaplan, Salman Rushdie, and Tzvetan Todorov have all addressed the problems that “translated beings” encounter,<sup>3</sup> but Mary Besemeres, in *Translating One’s Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography*, is the only one to have devoted a book-length study to this particular issue. Besemeres focuses on autobiographies and novels written in English by migrant writers who all acquired English as a foreign language. She observes the sense of loss, both active and passive,<sup>4</sup> that these writers have experienced through the acquiring of English and notices that language migrants are at first torn between two different languages before they learn to reconcile them and live in both. This process of reconciliation is difficult and dangerous for the self shaped by the mother tongue, because it can be “threatened with partial extinction” and for the self that is being shaped by the new language, because it has “to

hide its lack of history” (26). She identifies this particular problem as “the point of entry for the problem of self-translation, in the extent to which the second “self” is founded on the first, can speak for the first, can preserve aspects of the first, must distort (‘betray’) the first” (26). Besemeres’s study explores the ways in which the second self, the writing self, translates the self originally shaped in the mother tongue and analyses the interaction between the two.

Besemeres’s study is important because it explores issues that have attracted very little attention, but her work presents three problems that undermine the originality of her research. First, although Besemeres sets out to work on the role language shift plays in the translating of the self shaped in the mother tongue, she ends up focusing mostly on issues of cultural translation. As a result, her analysis resembles many other studies, especially because she works with texts that have been widely studied, such as Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*, and Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory*. Certain texts are, of course, essential to the study of self-translation, but references to a wider variety of texts would have helped to preserve the originality of the questions she started her study with. Second, she ends her study with a categorization of the texts that she has analyzed. She places texts by Milosz and Nabokov in the category of language migrants who give more weight to the self of their first language and culture, texts by Rodriguez and Riemer in the category of language migrants whose self in the native language is buried after the acquiring of English, and texts by Hoffman and Hong Kingston in the category of language migrants who “embrace both linguistic sources of self in their writing” (275). This type of conclusion to the complex activity of self-translation suggests that language migrants have two

different selves (the self of their first language and the self developed in English) and that there are three ways of writing as a “translated being.” The simplification of this conclusion might be the result of Besemeres’s worry about terminological clarity. Because the hybrid identities she is dealing with in the different texts she is studying are very complex, she might have decided to clarify what she was referring to by labelling the multiple aspects of these identities as “self of the first language” and “self developed in English.” The problem is that, although she refers to “aspects of the self,” she never clarifies whether she conceives of each of the selves that she defines as multiple and constantly shifting or not. This particular problem leads to the third weakness in Besemeres’s work: her terminology is often lax and confusing. Take for example the way in which she introduces the type of questions that self-translation opens: “the process of self-translation poses questions about the extent to which the self is continuous or multiple” (19). The concepts of continuity and multiplicity seem, to me, to exist at different levels and are not necessarily exclusive. In other words, multiplicity is not a result of self-translation as Besemeres’s statement seems to suggest. Self-translation can, of course, increase the multiplicity of the self, but does not mean that diversity was not already present before the translation, in which case multiplicity would be “continuous” even after the translation. As for the concept of a “continuous self,” I am not quite sure what Besemeres is referring to. Since this statement comes after her explanation of the close connection between self and native language (18-19), she seems to be talking about the self that language migrants shape in their mother tongue. In this case then, the continuity has to do with the connection between self and language, not with the quality of the self as multiple or not. Besemeres’s diction is confusing here (her “continuous”

could be read as “coherent” or “consistent”) and oversimplifies the concept of self-translation in two major ways. First, this confusion suggests that the translation process will reveal the self’s multiplicity or continuity when both qualities could have been present before the translation. What self-translation should reveal instead are the aspects of the self shaped in the mother tongue that can be translated or not. And the work of the theorist here should be to explore how the “translatable” aspects of the self are translated and why the “untranslatable” aspects of the self cannot be rendered in the new language. Second, Besemeres’s confusing diction oversimplifies the activity of self-translation by suggesting that the self shaped in the mother tongue is “continuous” enough (i.e. consistent? unchanging?) to stand still during the translation process. It is true that many migrant writers feel that the sudden break from their native language freezes what came before the interruption in the same way a camera would capture a certain image of the past. In *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Eva Hoffman sees the moment of passage into the new language as a loss, but also as “a magical preservative. Time stops at the point of severance, and no subsequent impressions muddy the picture you have in mind” (115). She has the impression that her life in Poland and her Polish self remain untouched by her English speaking years and that both are just waiting to be re-captured in English at the moment of self-translation. This illusion of preservation of the past and the prior self as they were emerges from the fact that language migrants often cease to speak their native language; they therefore cease to *be* who they were and their identity cannot continue to evolve, at least not in the mother tongue.<sup>5</sup> Their memory of the past and of who they were then often becomes quite static over time, very much like the pictures that they keep in order to remember their previous lives.<sup>6</sup> However, this illusion

(or simply desire for preservation) is an early one in the experience of immigration as language migrants often realize through the autobiographical act of revisiting the past and reconstructing who they once were that their prior self has continued to evolve in translation. Unlike photographs that picture their subjects frozen in time, memories are often accessed through language and accessing them in English and not in the mother tongue starts the process of self-translation.

Besemeres's terminology, although I can understand her concern for clarity, does not do justice to the complexity of the self-translation process.<sup>7</sup> Like her, I intend to refer to the self that language migrants shaped in their mother tongue and the self that they shape in English. However, I would like to preface this use by explaining that I do not assume that the self shaped in the mother tongue is one-dimensional and coherent. This self is indeed multiple and constantly shifting, but because being thrown suddenly into a new linguistic environment constitutes a destabilizing experience, this self is often presented as apparently coherent and stable in many migrant writers' texts. This apparent stability and coherence enable language migrants to hold onto something they can recognize and identify with when the new language they are immersed in suddenly breaks the connection they had always assumed between language and reality. This sense of continuity or unity between mother tongue and self is seen in many migrants' sense that their mother tongue is directly connected to reality and represents them and their relation to that reality without questions. The prior self, because it seems to coalesce with the mother tongue, to share, in Eva Hoffman's words, "a living connection" with the language, affords them a grasp on what they understood to be reality, what they understood to be true, when the new linguistic environment threatens these values. One

of the focuses of this study on language migrants' self-translations is of course to analyze this presentation of the self shaped in the mother tongue as apparently stable and coherent and to observe whether language migrants themselves are aware of this tendency in their own act of writing.

### **NAMING OR THE FIRST ACT OF SELF-MISTRANSLATION**

Every language migrant has a border story to tell. Every language migrant can tell you about that moment when one is no longer what one used to be and not yet what one will be. The border is where you stand in limbo between countries, histories, and identities. The border can be the interview room of a Canadian embassy in your country of origin, or the desk of an immigration officer at your entry point in Canada, or your first Canadian classroom. The border is where you explain yourself (often poorly) in a foreign tongue; where you wish that the immigration officer or the teacher would not judge the quality of your character or your intellect by the quality of the language you are trying to speak. The border is where you wait for the stamp of approval of the person who inspects you, evaluates your story, and identifies you as desirable or not. If you are deemed worthy of acceptance, the border is where you hear your new name for the first time as the immigration officer stamps your papers or the teacher enters you in her class list, welcoming you to Canada or to the class. The border is where you cease to be your self to become the other.

The border is also often the place where the first act of self-translation takes place. One of the very first things to be translated is the language migrant's name. The translation can be literal: an English equivalent of the language migrant's original name



is chosen to represent her in the new country, or phonetic: the language migrant's original name is "translated" by anglicizing its pronunciation. Sometimes, when no equivalent can be found in English or when the phonetic abilities of Anglophone speakers are too limited to enable them to produce sounds close enough to even approximate the original name, a new name is chosen to identify the language migrant in Canada. Many migrant writers incorporate this translation of the name in their autobiographies and recall the event with particular feelings. The impact of the translation of their names on language migrants depends on the ways in which the translation happens and, most importantly, on the person to whom the power of translation is given.

When this power is given to the language migrant herself or to a relative, the translation of the name seems to have a less traumatic impact on the individual. In *The Concubine's Children*, Denise Chong describes how her mother, Hing, chose her English name herself. On Hing's first day in kindergarten, her teacher refused to enter her Chinese name into the class list, ordering the child to go ask her mother to rename her in English. Hing, aware that her mother, May-ying, had no interest in speaking English and would not be able to rename her, took the matter in her own hands and called herself "Winnie" (92). This particular episode of her mother's life, Chong claims, was the one she liked best (219), because it marked the only moment of her mother's childhood in which she controlled what happened to her. As "Hing," Chong's mother had to obey May-ying and endure the abuse and hardship that life in Chinatown entailed, but as "Winnie," she was able to make her own decisions and shape a life for herself outside of Chinatown, away from the controlling rules of Chinese family life. In this particular case, the process of translation is empowering as it enables Hing, who is made to feel

unimportant and invisible in the Chinese world, to impose her presence and become visible in the English-speaking Canadian world. The translation inscribes her into being and opens the way for a future in which she will be able to control the circumstances of her life.<sup>8</sup>

Traditionally, the power of naming is given to God and to parents, but in the experience of language migration, others can usurp that power. In *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir*, Lisa Appignanesi examines her family's immigration documents and discovers that her brother's name has been "written over, fudged by some official, perhaps perplexed by the slippage between Borensztejn, the Polish original of the family name and its later, more Germanic elision into Borenstein. The result on the card is neither one nor the other" (11). Appignanesi's brother is literally un-named in this anonymous act of translation; he enters Canada without a name. This act of official un-naming was probably not considered a problem in Appignanesi's family, since her parents were both Jewish and had spent many years changing names and life stories in order to protect their family from Nazi persecution. However, this example demonstrates how slippery identities can become at border crossings. This slipperiness also shows how the act of naming at the border can be both empowering or dis-empowering for language migrants. Many autobiographies by language migrants of Asian descent recall the episode of their ancestors' entry into Canada made possible by the acquiring of false identity papers.<sup>9</sup> Because of very severe immigration restrictions imposed on the Chinese in particular, many people had to buy false papers and enter the country bearing false names. In *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*, Wayson Choy remembers the documents that make his birth official and establish his relationship to his parents:

I was born Choy Way Sun, on April 20, 1939, in Vancouver, in the province of British Columbia, to Nellie Hop Wah, age thirty-eight, and Yip Doy Choy, age forty-two, the *gai-gee meng*, the *false-paper names*, officially recorded in my parents' immigration documents. (14)

The irony of these documents, of course, is that they make total fictions official. Choy's parents' "real" names seem to be Lilly and Toy Choy, although the autobiographer cannot find any "official" documents to confirm this. When researching the history of his father's family, Choy is unable to locate papers that would confirm his father's "real" name.<sup>10</sup> His mother, he knows, "had come to Gold Mountain around 1922 as a 'paper bride.' She used the birth document of a married woman born in Canada. This woman had died on a visit to China, but her death was never officially noted" (297). The autobiographical process also reveals to him that the birth certificate that made his birth and English naming official (i.e. English transcription of his Chinese name) is a fake. Choy, aged 58, discovers that he had been adopted at birth. The only fact that Choy is able to confirm is his own naming. From his parents and relatives, he hears the story of his naming many times. His paternal grandfather, *Gung Gung*, came especially from Victoria, six weeks after he was born, in order to name him. In the traditional Chinese naming ceremony, Choy's grandfather "picked up his brush and dipped it into the prepared ink stone. With exquisite strokes of black ink, Grandfather slipped onto the surface of the vermilion-coloured paper the two characters of [his] name" (16). The Chinese characters on this "vermilion-coloured paper" identify Choy more "officially" than the "official" Canadian birth certificate written in English that is supposed to identify him in Canadian society. The English translation of his name in this document is

clearly presented as a fake, referring to a fiction. The fact that the Chinese community produced both documents, the fake birth certificate, written by the woman who helped with the adoption, and the naming ceremony document, testifies to the resourcefulness of this community and to the empowering nature of the act of naming.

The fact that Choy presents his Canadian birth certificate as a fake does not mean that he rejects the Anglophone Canadian identity that it introduces. Choy, who grew up responding to the English nickname, “Sonny,” and learning English at school, soon came to identify as primarily Canadian and not Chinese.<sup>11</sup> His father, aware that the family would never return to China, encouraged this identification, but his mother and older relatives opposed it, thus creating tension in the family. Among Choy’s older relatives, his grandfather was the most vocal in his disapproval, calling his grandson “*Nay mo-no doi!*” “*you no-brain boy!*” (78), because he was unable to speak Chinese correctly. All through the autobiography, Choy allows English transcriptions of Chinese and their translations into English to stand side by side. This incorporation of both, in italic, reminds the reader that he is writing in translation. The English transcriptions of Chinese appear in italic, as is usual for incorporating a foreign language into an English text. The English translation of these transcriptions appear in italic as well in order to remind the reader that the dialogue that Choy is recreating originally happened in Chinese. This technique enables Choy to illustrate the cross-cultural and cross-generational aspect of this act of translation and lead his readers to cross these linguistic and cultural boundaries as well. It might also constitute a way for him to make amends for having lost almost all of his mother tongue and for feeling that he might indeed have become a “*mo-no.*” “A *mo-no,*” Choy explains, “was Chinese and not-Chinese at the same time, someone

doomed to be brainless” (78). Young Sonny’s Chinese identity is starting to dissolve in translation. Because he is losing his ability to manipulate his mother tongue with ease, he feels that he is also losing his Chinese identity. The dissolution reaches its climax when Sonny, a very good student in English school, is unable to perform in Chinese school. He fails the first year and his further attempts at mastering the difficult calligraphy of Chinese characters are disappointing. He ends up quitting Chinese school. Recounting one of the many difficulties he encountered in his acquiring of formal Chinese, Choy remembers being asked to transcribe the ideogram “I,” which he evaluates as “the toughest one to write... a killer ideogram, drawn with seven breathtaking strokes. One *upward-dash*; two long, opposing-facing *curves with hooks*; and three *criss-crosses*—or was that two *dashes* and three *criss-crosses*?”(221). Choy uses italic in the English text to inscribe the description of the different characters that form the ideogram. Even though these are English words, he renders them with italic to indicate translation. The italic in the English text enables the reader to visualize the Chinese ideogram and in a sense “read” the Chinese characters while reading the English sentence. Choy is allowing Chinese to affect the English language that he is writing in, thus incorporating plurilingualism in an apparently monolingual sentence and making the process of translation visible.<sup>12</sup>

Choy’s encounter with the Chinese “I” contrasts sharply with Hong Kingston’s encounter with the American “I” in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. In her memoir, Hong Kingston remembers young Maxine’s inability to pronounce the American “I.” She describes the anxiety that her confrontation with this “I” produced:

I could not understand “I.” The Chinese “I” has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American “I,” assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness; “I” is a capital and “you” is lower-case. I stared at that middle line and waited so long for its black center to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it. (166-67)

Even though Hong Kingston alludes to the different number of strokes between the two characters used to refer to “I” in English and in Chinese and to the fact that both seem to be “wearing a hat,” her translation of the Chinese ideogram “I” into English is less visible than Choy’s. This passage, however, enables her to comment on the process of self-translation. By recalling her inability to understand how two characters that look so completely different could be referring to the same thing, she is, of course, demonstrating the most common method that people use when engaging in the act of translation: she is trying to find an exact equivalent in English for what she understands “I” to be in Chinese. Most importantly, however, she is making visible the fact that words do not simply refer to people or things, they also contain concepts that define the reality that they are representing. She reproduces young Maxine’s realization that the assertive way in which the capital “I” stands for the self reveals the idea that American people have of an individual’s identity. This idea contrasts so sharply with the concept of the Chinese “I” in general, and of the female Chinese “I” in particular, that young Maxine remains unable to pronounce it, thus denying herself access to an American identity and condemning herself to a life in mistranslation as her teachers continue to read her as “zero IQ.”

Young Sonny Choy has the opposite problem and wonders how “if [he] could not read or write the language, if [he] could not learn to speak the Sam Yup Cantonese dialect that was being taught, how could [he] ever be Chinese? [He] thought right away of giving up on being Chinese. ‘I’m Canadian,’ [he] said” (238). Part of Sonny’s distress in Chinese school is that he is being taught a formal form of Cantonese that is different from the Toisanese dialect that he speaks at home.<sup>13</sup> He is actually learning Chinese in translation and does not have any practical use for the formal dialect he is learning in school. The only place where he could perform this aspect of his Chinese identity is at Chinese school. “All respectable Chinatown families felt obliged, even coerced,” Choy explains, “to send their sons and daughters to one of the half-dozen private Chinatown schools. A Chinese boy or a Chinese girl must be taught Chinese, in the formal Mandarin or Cantonese dialects” (214). The irony of the situation lies in the fact that by doing what they believe is their duty as Chinese parents, Toy and Lily Choy lead their son to question and reject his Chinese identity. Sonny is too young to realize that his inability to speak and write formal Cantonese does not mean that he has to renounce being Chinese. Instead of simply rejecting this particular performance of Chinese identity, Sonny feels that he must shed his entire Chinese identity. What he really rejects though, as Choy comes to realize later, is not his Chinese identity but the imposition of formal Cantonese. Sonny can understand that English and Toisanese are two different languages that he needs for different aspects of his life, but he cannot see the point of being forced to learn a language that does not bear a direct connection to his daily reality. Sonny’s behavior highlights the difficulty of “living in translation” and the connection between language and identity.

Choy's autobiographical recreation of this early dilemma exposes what Antoine Berman calls "the trial of the foreign." In "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign," Berman explains that translation is a process that uncovers what is foreign in both the foreign language and the mother tongue. In other words, Berman suggests that translators are not simply dealing with foreign languages, they are also discovering that their own mother tongue can be foreign to them because the act of translation casts a new light on it. By being coerced to learn formal Cantonese, Sonny is confronted with his own "foreign-ness;" he is made to feel like "the other." The irony, of course, is that unable to feel Chinese in formal Cantonese, he identifies himself as Canadian, not remembering that the white population will "read" his skin tone and slanted eyes and identify him as Chinese, thus denying him the identity that he is claiming.

Sonny's "trial of the foreign" in Chinese school and his feeling that he must identify as Canadian emphasize the familial division that "life in translation" has already imposed on the Choys. In one of the rare episodes of closeness between Sonny and his grandfather, Sonny asks his *gung gung* why he looks different from the other boys he plays with at the park and his grandfather replies: "*nay-hei tong-yung—you're Chinese*" (136). His mother joins in the explanation and tells him that Chinese people are "*gee gai yun—our own people*" (137). Sonny's reaction to this conversation was to feel that "[he] belonged" (137). This episode, set before Sonny has to go to Chinese school, demonstrates the child's attachment to his Chinese identity and marks his belonging to his family and the Chinese community. It also points to the implications of his "forced" identification as Canadian. Sonny feels "forced" to choose one identity over the other, not because Chinese and English clash, but because formal Cantonese clashes with his



mother tongue. By claiming to be Canadian, Sonny does not simply express his frustration at being unable to master formal Cantonese, he also renounces belonging to “his own people” and he starts participating even more willingly in the process of translation that will ultimately lead him to “lose almost all his first language” (137).

In his autobiography, Choy presents himself as very much in control of his linguistic choices. He recreates himself as a determined young boy and establishes his linguistic agency early on. His desire to be identified as Canadian and to speak English seems to be an innate attribute of Choy’s autobiographical persona when young. This desire is made particularly obvious in Sonny’s decision to speak *Chinglish* against his mother’s wishes. When his mother complains to his father that Sonny refuses to obey her and speak Chinese, Toy Choy replies that the child will grow up to be Canadian and should therefore be allowed to favor English over Chinese. At that moment, Choy recalls, “Mother looked at [him] and saw the victory in [his] eyes” (83). This reaction marks the immaturity of the child, but it also reveals the power struggle at stake in the issue. Sonny claims the right to speak the language of his choice and by doing so, he establishes the right to identify as he pleases. This preferred identification emerges from his love of North American cultural icons such as the “cow-boy” and, most importantly, from the power that English affords him. Because he can speak English, his mother must rely on him for translation during their rare excursions outside of Chinatown. English also constitutes his way in into story reading and story making. Story reading becomes Sonny’s favorite subject in kindergarten and pretending to know how to read becomes one of his favorite games. After school, he rushes home and uses *Chinglish* to “read” the stories read in class to his mother and grandfather. In these reading sessions, the child is

in total control of the situation. He “reads” the English words printed on the page and translates them into a mixture of Chinese and English that his mother and grandfather can understand. Both languages are interwoven to form the “perfect Chinglish” that Sonny requires to fit the needs of the particular situation he is in (144). Even if he could actually read the English words printed on the page, his audience would not understand them and telling the story in Chinese would not convey their foreign-ness, so the child allows both languages to come together to fit the reality that he is dealing with. Once again, Choy makes visible the process of translation and opens up a linguistic space in which the child can experience being Chinese and Canadian simultaneously.

This space in which the child experiments with translation in the way that is most natural to him constitutes the only space in which he is not “lost in translation.” In this space, he does not need to choose one language or one identity to perform in. The boundaries between the two languages and the different identities that they delineate dissolve in the act of translation. The type of translation that Choy advocates here is one that paradoxically makes the act of translation visible (two different languages are visibly interwoven or intertwined) while erasing the boundaries between the two different languages (they both share a common space and interact with each other). Choy is presenting translation as a kind of *tissage* in which two languages can come together to create a third one in the same way as the different threads of the *tissage* come together to form a whole. Choy is not guilty of what Walter Benjamin, in his essay entitled “the Task of the Translator,” calls “the basic error of the translator.”<sup>14</sup> This “basic error,” Benjamin explains, “is that [the translator] preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue” (22).

In his manipulation of Chinglish, Choy allows his language (English) to be affected by “the foreign tongue” (Chinese). Chinese constitutes the foreign tongue for most of Choy’s English speaking readers of course, but also for him in a sense as he has lost most of the language that was once his mother tongue. Autobiographical reconstruction enables Choy to manipulate translation as a mode of linguistic production and not simply as a form of transfer from one language to another. The autobiographical text also provides Choy with a space in which he can reproduce the oral form of that third language into a written form. This further translation, from the oral to the written form, makes the child’s early experiment with this third language official as it gives it a reality that it only had until then in the autobiographer’s memory. The rendering of Choy’s memory appears in Chinglish on the page and forces the reader to live that experience in the “original” language: i.e. in the language in which the experience actually happened, not in the language of translation (English). This rendering enables Choy to impose “the trial of the foreign” on his audience, leading them to experience what it feels like to be a foreigner in one’s own language and casting a new light on a language that they had perhaps taken for granted.

Choy’s recreation of his childhood self as a determined young boy who consciously chooses to manipulate both Chinese and English in ways that fit his needs creates an overall sense of continuity in Sonny’s linguistic development. Except for the formal Cantonese that he rejects, Sonny navigates in the Toisanese dialect of his family and in English without any serious problems. Choy discusses the problems that can arise from imposed translation in the mother tongue, but he does not present Chinese-English bilingualism as an issue that is particularly difficult for the child to deal with. This

relative absence of problems in Sonny's progression towards bilingualism can be explained by the fact that he is acquiring both Chinese and English from the bottom up (i.e. in slow increments from the requirements of daily life) and not from the top down (i.e. from a school book without a progressive practical application in daily life). One of the main advantages of learning a foreign language from the bottom up is that the learning process and the experience are simultaneous; one learns the language because one lives in that language. This experiential way of learning a foreign language is particularly dynamic because the conditions of learning are almost the same as the conditions in which one learns one's mother tongue. This is especially true of young Sonny Choy who grows up and learns to speak in a Chinese speaking environment in an English speaking world. As a young child, his sense of identity is also more malleable than that of an adult and he does not experience speaking English as an imposition on his mother tongue and on his Chinese self. Speaking both languages often constitutes a game for him and he is quite comfortable speaking "Chinglish" and being identified as Chinese and Canadian simultaneously. Unlike Fred Wah, Sonny does not need to "fake it" in order to fit in the two communities that he identifies with. Both his Chinese and Canadian identities emerge simultaneously as he learns to speak and interweave both languages to meet the needs of his daily life.

### **SELF-TRANSLATION: FROM MUTILATION TO MUTATION**

Eva Hoffman's experience of self-translation into English is radically different from Choy's because it occurs in circumstances that are vastly different from Choy's. *Ewa* is thirteen years old when she leaves Poland in the spring of 1959 to immigrate to Canada

with her family and settle in Vancouver. In *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Hoffman retraces her linguistic journey from Polish to English and the identity shifts that came with it. Opposed to her parents' decision to leave her native country, *Ewa* embarks on the sea journey to the new country with antagonistic feelings towards English. As some of her traveling companions gather daily on the ship to learn some rudiments of the new language, she complains that "[she doesn't] want to let the sounds in" and admits that "[she doesn't] think [she] like[s] English" (90). Her first day of school in language classes provided by the Canadian government to teach English to newcomers does not assuage her adverse reaction to the language being imposed on her. Quite the contrary. Before they can join the class, *Ewa* and her sister, *Alina*, need to be re-named in English. Both Mr. Rosenberg, a member of the Polish community who has been helping the Wydra family since their arrival in Vancouver, and the teacher take it upon themselves to translate the two sisters' names into English. *Ewa* becomes Eva and *Alina* becomes Elaine. Hoffman's use of simple diction and syntax to describe this episode reproduces the simplicity of the whole process for the teacher and Mr. Rosenberg. "The teacher," she remembers was "a kindly woman," but she had "seen too many people come and go to get sentimental about a name" (105). The simplicity of the description contrasts sharply with the complex consequences that this first act of identity translation into the new language would have for Eva and her sister. In her very understated prose, Hoffman introduces the mental and emotional upheaval that the name shift has triggered: "my sister and I hang our heads wordlessly under this careless baptism. The teacher then introduces us to the class, mispronouncing our last name—"Wydra"—in a way we've never heard before [...] nothing much has happened, except a

small, seismic mental shift” (105). The irony in the last part of the sentence marks the contrast between the simplicity and impersonal quality of this act of renaming and the serious consequences that this act would have for *Ewa*. Her Polish, monolingual, self was unable to articulate this sharp contrast at the moment of renaming, but her now anglicized, university trained, self can recreate and critique this moment. The act of translation enables the autobiographer to add a layer of meaning to the experience. Hoffman identifies this episode of re-naming as a sort of “mutilation,” thus emphasizing the violence of the act of self-translation as it severs the connection between language and reality. She comments:

Our Polish names didn’t refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can’t yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. (105)

Taking away the name that *Ewa* considered to be as surely her as any of her body parts constitutes, for Hoffman, a form of “mutilation.” The act of re-naming dismembers *Ewa* and severs the continuity that she felt existed between her body and her name. As Leigh Gilmore explains in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation*, “proper names assert an identity and continuity between the self and language, between signifier and signified, and cover over the differences produced by discourse” (87). *Ewa*’s re-naming triggers a linguistic epiphany in which she discovers that the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary and that her relationship to her name establishes her relationship to language. English becomes at this moment the language in which she is an object, not a subject, and she needs to learn to manipulate

this new language in order to create a connection between the name tag that represents her and the mutilated identity it is referring to. The loss experienced in the name shift is irremediable though, as Eva will no longer be able to retrieve this sense of continuity between self and language that constituted her Polish self. She will no longer be *Ewa*. Instead, she will have to learn a new language both to create “Eva” and then to re-create “*Ewa*.” In Gilmore’s terms, *Ewa* now needs to consider names as “potential site[s] for experimentation rather than contractual sign[s] of identity” (93). *Ewa*’s re-naming enables Eva to realize that identities can be (re)created and performed.

At the moment of re-naming, however, *Ewa* cannot yet see the possibilities that this new take on identity can offer and she experiences her linguistic epiphany as a complete loss. Hoffman recreates the episode in ways that demonstrate how disempowered her Polish self was once *Ewa* and *Alina* were made to feel like “strangers to [them]selves” (105). In his article “Des tours de Babel,” Derrida discusses problems of translation and dates these problems back to the biblical episode of the destruction of the tower of Babel. God’s anger at his people, Derrida argues, “destines them to translation, [...] subjects them to the law of translation both necessary and impossible” (253). Translation becomes necessary, because God “sows confusion among his sons” (246) in order to “impose his name” (253) and remind them that they are not in power. God’s gift of tongues turns into a curse, as his people must now converse in translation, knowing that direct “understanding is no longer possible” (246). Translation is impossible because “complete understanding and linguistic harmony,” which the process of translation often strives to achieve, constitute the exact reason why God imposed translation in the first place. God’s anger targeted linguistic harmony and his imposition of translation as a

mode of communication is a curse because it becomes the only mode of communication available to his people and the mode contains in itself “an internal limit” that prevents it from ever achieving “transparent and adequate interexpression” (244). God’s people are now dependent on an inadequate mode of expression to communicate and something will inevitably always get lost in translation, thus preventing them from being totally empowered through language.

Mr. Rosenberg and Hoffman’s first Canadian teacher impose “their” name on *Ewa* and thus “subject [her] to the law of translation” (“Des tours de Babel” 253). Her anglicized name marks Eva’s entry into English and her first encounter with the disempowering effect that linguistic shift can have. The passage into English annuls her linguistic abilities and condemns her to silence as she does not yet possess the target language (English) into which she is supposed to translate. This particular predicament, very frequent in language migrants, constitutes an important problem involved in the process of self-translation. As I have already noted, very little attention has been given to the situation of translators who are forced to translate into a target language that they do not speak. In “The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity,” Annie Brisset prefaces her study of the problems of translation from French into Québécois by remarking on this theoretical void: “the absence of a target language, the language into which one translates, is not usually cited as a formal translation problem” (344). Her essay demonstrates that the translation of literary texts written in French into Québécois constitutes repeated attempts at shaping a “Native language,” a language that comes into being through the act of translation. The act of translation, Brisset suggests, gives birth to the language of translation. The act of translation seems to precede the



language of translation in the same way that the act of translation for language migrants precedes their ability to manipulate the language in which the translation is happening. *Ewa* becomes *Eva*, is involved in the act of self-translation, before she can manipulate the language. In *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, Peggy Kamuf argues in her introduction to the section entitled "More than One Language" that

[i]n its limited sense and within the confines of its traditional concept, translation has always implied a secondary operation coming after the original. The deconstruction of this concept displaces that order with the almost unthinkable notion [...] of an originary translation before the possibility of any distinction between original and translation. (242)

As unthinkable as it may seem, Hoffman's re-naming as "Eva" is not so much a translation into English of "*Ewa*" as the point of origin from which Hoffman can reconstruct both the original text "*Ewa*" and the translated text "Eva." The translation process necessarily had to come first for the distinction between the two selves to ensue.

Eva's realization that she can no longer be "*Ewa*," that her old self must, in a sense, die in order to allow her new English self to come into being is a violent and terrifying process. The concept of violence involved in the act of translation is not a new one. Many translation theorists, translators, and literary critics have observed the violent aspects that the translation act can have.<sup>15</sup> For Eva, the violence takes a psychological and emotional form. She first realizes the impact the imposition of self-translation has on her through a nightmare. She dreams that she is drowning in the ocean while her parents are swimming away from her. This nightmare can, of course, be interpreted as adolescent Eva feeling that her parents have betrayed her by immigrating to Canada in spite of her

disapproval, but it also reveals the severance of the relationship she had had with her parents. With this nightmare, Eva understands that the world as she understood it (a world in which she could safely trust that her parents would help and protect her) cannot be reproduced at this point in the new country. In Canada, she will have to fend for herself and will not be able to rely on her parents to help, as they, too, are going through the same process of self-translation and cannot provide answers to her questions or comfort for her fears. Eva identifies the scream that wakes her from her nightmare as “the primal scream of [her] birth into the New World” and claims to know at that moment “what it is to be cast adrift in incomprehensible space; [to] know what it is to lose one’s mooring” (104). Her parents, instead of comforting her, urge her to be quiet and go back to sleep in order not to disturb the other people sleeping in the house. This absence of parental understanding marks the events of the nightmare as real and brings to life the fear that she has experienced in the dream. She calls this fear, “the Big Fear,” and describes it as a “black bituminous terror [...] that solders itself to the chemical base of [her] being—and from then on, fragments of the fear lodge themselves in [her] consciousness” (104). Hoffman’s description of the “Big Fear” roots it in the body; the fear becomes an integral part of her being. She feels that the experience of self-translation so far, has “mutilated” her and is now starting to infiltrate her body, transforming it into something new, giving birth to a new being. The fear that comes with the violence of the act of self-translation marks the first stage of “mutation” of her Polish self into her English speaking self.

In this first stage, silence rules. Although she learns new English words and expressions every day, Eva cannot speak. She is constantly reminded that the relationship

between signifier and signified is an arbitrary one which transforms learning English into a labeling process. Eva feels that she is not learning to express her self or her ideas into a new language, but rather, that she is memorizing how to label things in the New World. She finds herself in a state of “languagelessness” as Polish does not correspond to the Canadian reality that she is experiencing and English words are meaningless labels that designate things, not yet tools for meaning making. Eva feels that she has “no interior language, and without it, interior images—those images through which we assimilate the external world” (108). Unable to find a language that is appropriate to describe and explain what she is experiencing, Eva enters what I believe is a stage of “suspended selfhood.” In this stage, Eva has a self, but she lacks the medium and the audience that are necessary to articulate it in ways that others could (or would be willing to) validate. In “The Politics of Translation,” Gayatri Spivak claims that “making sense of ourselves is what produces identity” (397). Language often constitutes the medium or the tool that enables us to make sense of ourselves, especially through interaction with others. Without language and the possibility to engage in dialogue with others, the process of meaning making is temporarily interrupted or suspended, and the process of identity production deferred. In this state of “suspended selfhood,” the language migrant has an impression of “selflessness” and finds herself in the position of the other. Hoffman reconstructs adolescent Eva as an individual who “[doesn’t] really exist” (108) and who observes that “alienation is beginning to be inscribed in [her] flesh and face” (110). Language learning is primarily an intellectual exercise that requires memory and interpretative skills, but it also contains a very important physical aspect. The new language therefore inscribes itself on the body of the language migrant. Sounds have to be generated in different parts

of the body, words have to be mouthed differently, voice modulations need to be changed, and breathing needs to be adjusted to the flow of the new language. Learning English, Eva discovers, also involves behaving differently when speaking this new language. She should not be too close to her Canadian interlocutors, should not speak directly in their faces, and should definitely not mark any of her points with physical contact. The physical space that she must put between her Canadian interlocutor and herself reminds her of the widening gap between her Polish way of expressing herself and the English way she must now rely upon. She feels alienated, pushed away, both in the learning process and in the speaking process.

The alienation that language migrants feel in this first stage of self-translation is not only due to the intellectual and physical adjustments that the shift of linguistic code requires. The primary language that language migrants use to translate themselves at first is silence. The problem is, however, that in most Western cultures and in North American culture in particular, silence is not recognized as a language.<sup>16</sup> Language migrants are thrown into conversations in English that develop, in their mind, at the speed of light. Focusing on following and deciphering these conversations constitutes their first task. While their English-speaking interlocutors are speaking, language migrants engage in an internal dialogue of their own in which they identify the words and expressions they hear, probe their memory for references to these words and expressions, retrieve their meaning and apply it to what is being said. If they cannot identify or remember the words and expressions that are being used, they have to create their meaning from the context of the conversation. Pace is key in an oral situation and if a response is required, that is where problems of self-translation become visible for the language migrants' English-speaking

interlocutors. Unable in many cases to find the right words and/or to form a correct sentence fast enough to participate in the conversations that surround them, language migrants often choose to remain silent or to limit their responses to one or two words, thus taking the risk of being considered arrogant, uninteresting, and/or stupid people. What language migrants are encountering here is a problem of mistranslation, but the responsibility for this mistranslation does not necessarily lie where it seems to lie. The most common take on the situation that I have just described is that language migrants do not participate actively in conversations in English because they do not understand what is being said properly or because they have not mastered the language well enough to be able to respond. In other words, the mistranslation is primarily presented as the language migrant's responsibility. Their English-speaking interlocutors might, of course, take partial responsibility for the even flow of the conversation by reducing the speed at which they speak, repeating certain words or phrases, and/or allowing for longer periods of silence to encourage response. Very often, however, the responsibility for understanding and responding through translation is left to language migrants<sup>17</sup> and the language migrants' interlocutors rarely acknowledge their own responsibility. Language migrants might not be able to translate accurately or respond fast enough, but their interlocutors are responsible for mistranslating these linguistic limitations as marks of arrogance, disinterest, and/or stupidity. The language migrants' English-speaking interlocutors are also responsible for not understanding that silence or limited replies constitute a form a response that awaits translation, that translation is partly their own responsibility.

Hoffman's recreation of young Eva's interaction with her Canadian friends demonstrates the need for shared responsibility in translation and suggests that a two-way

translation process is necessary in monolingual conversations with language migrants. Describing her interaction with her friend Laurie, Hoffman recalls: "Much of the time, it [took] an enormous effort on my part to follow her fast chatter and to keep saying yes and no in the right places, to attempt to respond. I [tried] to cover up this virtual idiocy by looking as intelligent as I [could]" (113). Apparently the responsibility of (mis)translation here rests on Eva alone. Her friend seems too self-involved to notice Eva's very limited participation in the conversation and, were she ever to become aware of it, Eva's self-mistranslation as "stupid" suggests what Laurie's interpretation of the situation would be. This mistranslation is the only possible translation as Laurie would never question her own way of speaking as the source for mistranslation. Laurie, lacking the linguistic flexibility that plurilingualism brings, could not interpret her own "fast chatter" as a source of difficulty for Eva; she would conclude that something was wrong with her Polish interlocutor, not with herself. Eva comes to terms with this unfair situation a bit later when a class conversation about Poland makes her understand that, because she is the one who possesses linguistic flexibility, she is also the one "who will have to learn how to live with a double vision" (132). Eva understands at that moment that with the task of translation comes the necessity for mutation. As a bilingual speaker, Eva is the one who has to move from her own position (the self) to her monolingual interlocutor's position (the other), because she is the only one who has the ability to do so.

This mutation, which becomes quite natural once language migrants have mastered the new language,<sup>18</sup> can be very difficult to handle at first. Having constantly to shift between the position of self and other while the very concept of "self" is being challenged by the imposition of the new language can indeed be quite challenging. In

order to deal with this challenge, and also because she cannot find an English-speaking interlocutor who meets her needs, Eva turns to internal dialogue. With internal dialogue, Eva can craft the interlocutor she needs, one that can listen, ask the right questions, and provide the answers that she herself wants to hear. Hoffman incorporates three of these internal dialogues in her autobiography. Each dialogue occurs at a turning point in Eva's life: when her language migration starts, when she receives a marriage proposal, and when she is considering a divorce. These internal dialogues enable Hoffman to present the double vision that her bilingual self is always confronted with and show the process of negotiation involved in making decisions and imposing meaning on life events. In the first internal dialogue, Eva's Polish self and her Canadian self discuss what *Ewa* would be like if she had stayed in Poland and agree that "she is the real one" (120). In this dialogue, Eva's Polish self and her Canadian self address each other as "you" and refer to *Ewa* as "she." The reference to "the real self" in the third person indicates the process of objectification that the act of translation has triggered. *Ewa*, lost in translation, can no longer be "I;" she can only be the subject of conversation between the two selves that her translation has given birth to.<sup>19</sup> She now exists only as a product of the dialogue between these two selves; she can no longer speak for herself and must come into being through the language of others. In this first dialogue, written in English without any indication as to which language is used in the interaction between the two selves, Hoffman exemplifies the process of identity formation at work in the act of self-translation. The self shaped in the new language addresses and is addressed by the self shaped in the mother tongue; their subject of conversation is the prior self, the one they both emerged from, which they try to recreate and preserve through language. This process suggests the necessity of

both dialogical interaction and the ability to conceive of oneself as self, other, and object for identity to be shaped. Eva's Canadian self, without a proper interlocutor, is unable to speak and therefore unable to develop her Canadian identity and recreate *Ewa*. By splitting herself in three: the Polish self [the self], the Canadian self [the other], and *Ewa* [the object], Eva can create the dialogical conditions she needs to create her identity. This split enables her to assert the existence of her Canadian self, recognize the existence of the Polish self, and recreate who she was before she had "dual selfhood."

Hoffman's use of internal dialogue as a site of identity production emphasizes the necessity of dialogical interaction and the presence of an audience in the process of identity formation. In the act of self-translation, the language migrant's self is split in order to become both the speaker and the listener, the addressee and the addressed, the performer and the audience, the self and the other. This split allows language migrants to reproduce the dialogical conditions that they need to articulate themselves and that are not necessarily available to them in their English speaking environment. The internal dialogue constitutes a key stage in the process of self-translation as it enables language migrants to shape and consolidate the different selves that result from language migration, to practice conversing in English, and to develop confidence and agency in the manipulation of the new language. The internal dialogue enables language migrants to experiment safely with their new language and the new identities it creates.

Hoffman's autobiographical recreation of these internal dialogues also enables her readers to trace the progress of Eva's self-translation into English. The last two internal dialogues incorporated in the autobiography mark events that occur years after Eva's language migration, when she has settled in the United States and embraced the



American way of life. Hoffman opens these last two dialogues by indicating that Eva's Polish self speaks in English and reverts to Polish only to emphasize a point or mark her disagreement with Eva's American perspective:

I have acquired new ideals, do you mind?

You're an immigrant, you can't afford ideals.

I'm trying to live as if I were free. At least I can have that dignity.

Free. You're playing a dangerous game. A charade.

Leave me alone. It's you who's playing the charade now. Your kind of knowledge doesn't apply to my condition.

I'll never leave you quite alone... (231)

Eva's Polish self promises never to leave her alone thus emphasizing the importance for American Eva to continue to shift positions between Polish and American perspectives even though she now lives and speaks in English only. In other words, these interventions in Polish remind American Eva that she should not become the English-speaking interlocutor that she once had difficulty addressing. The internal dialogue at this stage in the process of self-translation still constitutes a site of survival for the self shaped in the mother tongue, but the "other" that threatens Eva's Polish self with extinction is no longer the English-speaking outsider but the English-speaking self. The "enemy without" has become the "enemy within." The major difference between Hoffman's first internal dialogue and her last two is that in the first, both the Polish- and English-speaking selves work together to recreate and preserve *Ewa*, whereas in the last two, the Polish self works alone, against the English speaking self, to incorporate the Polish perspective in American Eva's life decisions. In her last two internal dialogues, Hoffman also shows

that the process of self-translation can become linguistically invisible (i.e. bilingualism disappears) when language migrants become completely fluent in English. And indeed Hoffman's self-translation is almost literally linguistically invisible as she uses very few Polish words in her autobiography. She does not manipulate Polish or allow Polish to affect English the way Choy allows Chinese to affect English. In fact, quite the opposite, as she explains that "Polish is no longer the one, true language against which others live their secondary life. [...] When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head" (273). Hoffman's "interior language" has now become English and her technique of self-translation reveals the almost total mutation of Eva's Polish self into an American self. Eva's Polish self is recreated in the text through English only and her few attempts at resisting mutation are often dismissed by Eva's now powerful American self. Eva's Polish self is denied linguistic presence in the text; it can only speak through Eva's American self. Eva's Polish self does not have agency to inscribe itself in the text in the mother tongue. Hoffman's last two internal dialogues demonstrate the power struggle at work in the act of self-translation and the suppression of heteroglossia. Hoffman concludes her last internal dialogue between the two selves with American Eva claiming: "I don't have to listen to you any longer. I am as real as you now. I'm the real one" (231). In this exchange, *Ewa* is nowhere present; she has been replaced by Eva's Polish self in translation and this self is being threatened with extinction by Eva's American self. "Perhaps," Hoffman speculates, "I've read, written, eaten enough words so that English now flows in my bloodstream. [...] [O]nce this mutation takes place [...] [words] become, more and more, a transparent medium [...] through which I can once again get to myself and to the world" (243). Hoffman's

observation is ironic here as she seems to have forgotten that the language that she now judges a “transparent medium” that allows her to see through herself is also the medium that covers up the dissenting voice of her Polish self. “I don’t need you any more,” her American self tells her Polish self, “I want you to be silent. Shuddup”(199). Eva’s self-translation into English requires the erasure of her Polish self and she sacrifices the self shaped in her mother tongue to articulate her American identity.

The English text in which Hoffman reconstructs both her Polish and American selves bears very few marks of the process of translation, testifying to the type of identity shift that the autobiographer has undergone. English-speaking Eva makes the decision early on to learn to speak “perfect English,” i.e. English spoken by highly educated people. By identifying the type of English she desires to speak, she also chooses the type of identity she will shape in the new language.<sup>20</sup> Hoffman is aware that Eva’s decision to speak “perfect English” emerges from her desire to regain the social status and power that language migration has deprived her of. Back in Poland, the Wydras belonged to the lower middle class and *Ewa* was a talented musician and gifted student. In Canada, the Wydras are poor and Eva is struggling with the basics of English, reduced to silence or monosyllabic answers in conversations that she could shine in if they were happening in Polish. Eva’s decision to master “perfect English” is her way of reclaiming an identity that was once hers. The irony of the situation is twofold. First, it is ironic that in order to reclaim that identity in English, Eva feels that she needs to lose her Polish self (as if she could not be brilliant both in English and in Polish). Second, it is ironic that the concept Eva has of the connection between class and language comes directly from her Polish perception and understanding of the world. Hoffman observes, “the class-linked notion

that I transfer wholesale from Poland is that belonging to a 'better' class of people is absolutely dependent on speaking a 'better' language" (123). In order to translate into English what she wants to translate (i.e. the linguistic mastery and intelligence she possesses in Polish), Eva feels that she needs to surrender to the claims of totality that English makes on her. She feels that she has to choose between being brilliant in Polish or being brilliant in English. She does not feel that she can live and articulate herself in both. American Eva's decision to silence the voice of her Polish self in order to master English and locate herself in the spheres of social and political power in the American world illustrates "the notion of active consent" that Gramsci judges necessary for the establishment of hegemony. In *The Politics of Writing*, Romy Clark and Roz Ivanic discuss Gramsci's concept of hegemony in relation to writing practices and suggest that "hegemony is not a relationship of domination by force or coercion but one of consent achieved by 'intellectual and moral leadership,' which is exercised in what Gramsci calls 'civil society'" (22). Clark and Ivanic's take on hegemony is particularly useful in this study of Hoffman's articulation of the process of self-translation because it emphasizes the concept of "active consent" and participation on the part of the writer in the act of self-subjection to hegemonic linguistic practices. American Eva willingly embraces Anglo-American linguistic practices and manipulates them to silence the dissenting voice of her Polish self.

Unlike Fred Wah and Guillermo Verdecchia, American Eva does not choose to live on the hyphen by embracing the linguistic and cultural diversity that bilingualism offers her. She selects to become an American, not a Polish-American, woman. At the end of their second internal dialogue, Eva's Polish and American selves both *seem* to

agree that shifting constantly between the two subject positions that bilingualism creates is becoming too burdensome. They are both aware that “it’s going to hurt, giving it up,” but agree that “[they]’ll get along somehow” (200). The use of the pronoun “we” punctuates the end of this dialogue, “Yes, we’ll get along” (200), for the first and only time in the autobiography, thus emphasizing the autobiographer’s desire for coherence. The fact that both selves come to this decision in English complicates the situation, because it, once again, raises questions of agency. At this stage in the process of self-translation, Eva’s English-speaking self is the more powerful. Eva lives and speaks in English daily, she has been educated in English, she writes in English for one of the most prominent American newspapers, she has lived in North America for much longer now than in Poland and has developed more memories in English than in Polish. Eva’s American self’s desire for coherence seems to echo the American ideal of “melting pot,” of assimilation of differences into one seemingly “coherent” whole. Eva’s Polish self seems not so much to decide to accept assimilation as to surrender to it. Hoffman, however, claims that she is aware of the danger of assimilation incurred in the translation process. “I have to translate myself,” she explains, “[b]ut if I’m to achieve this without becoming assimilated—that is, absorbed—by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced” (211). This statement suggests that Hoffman is trying to translate herself into English without endangering her Polish self, but other passages in her autobiography contradict this position. In her discussion of social mobility in the United States, Hoffman claims that “[w]hen [she] begin[s] the process of [her] Americanization, [she] find[s] [herself] in the least snobbish of societies and the most fluid of generations. It’s that very mobility [...] that makes assimilation an almost

outdated idea” (195). The problem here, I would like to argue, is that Hoffman considers “assimilation an almost outdated idea” because she has indeed been assimilated. She is a white woman, educated in Ivy League American universities, writes for the *New York Times*, and moves in the New York intellectual milieu. She has lost her ability to look at the immigrant condition in the United States from the margins. And perhaps Eva’s American self’s unease with the split selfhood that her Polish origins impose on her emerges from the fact that now that she is located in the center of American culture, she no longer wants to have to go back to its margins.<sup>21</sup> Eva’s self-translation into English was originally motivated by her quest for power; she wanted to recover the power that language migration had taken away from her. Once she regains this power, her self-translation is over and the text she produces bears very few marks of the translating process. She incorporates very few Polish words and expressions, reconstructs everything Polish in English, and shapes her story in accordance with the structure of “the American Dream” narrative. Hers is very much a story of “the American Dream” come true and of the successful journey from immigrant identity to American identity.

### **SELF-TRANSLATION OR THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF LINGUISTIC POWER**

In an article entitled “‘this is the oppressor’s language/yet I need it to talk to you’: Language, a Place of Struggle,” bell hooks uses Adrienne Rich’s lines of poetry to illustrate the idea that language is both an empowering and a dis-empowering medium. hooks’s article analyzes black people’s linguistic experiments with English and their creation of a new language as a tool for shaping a culture of resistance. She concludes her

analysis with pedagogical suggestions for instructors of English confronted with multilingual students who manipulate English differently from the way they do themselves. She insists particularly on revoking the concept that standard English should be the medium for knowledge-making par excellence and suggests that instructors in general, and monolingual instructors in particular, should learn “to think of the moment of not understanding what someone says as a space to learn.” “Such a space,” she claims, “provides not only the opportunity to listen without ‘mastery,’ without owning or possessing speech through interpretation, but also the experience of hearing non-English words” (299).<sup>22</sup> Many language migrants incorporate foreign languages in their autobiographies in order to provide their readers with this opportunity to “listen without ‘mastery’” and themselves with the opportunity to experience total linguistic control. The strategies these language migrants use to create this empowering/dis-empowering space of linguistic difference in the autobiographical text often reveal the type of identities these writers have developed in the process of self-translation.

Both Wayson Choy and Eva Hoffman reconstruct their experience of self-translation into English from the North American side of the border. Both of them recall the turmoil and/or tension that crossing the linguistic border between their native language and English created and describe the process of self-translation that preceded the synthesis of their identity.<sup>23</sup> Both of them are, in a way, acting in complicity with the dominant culture as they clearly position themselves in the Canadian academic sphere for Choy and in the American intellectual milieu for Hoffman. This particular position as Canadian and American affects their act of self-translation and the strategies they use to reconstruct themselves as they both write at a point in time when they have managed to

balance the different aspects of their identity and have achieved a certain stability. *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* and *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* afford their readers a synthesized view of the process of self-translation, a view that emerges from the relative stability of the writers' respective positions and from the power that retrospective exploration grants them. Wayson Choy does confront his readers with linguistic difference by creating textual spaces in which he uses English, Chinese, and Chinglish, but he never really places them in a position of feeling dis-empowered by the linguistic diversity that he introduces. As for Eva Hoffman, she incorporates so few Polish words that she never confronts her readers with the loss of control that linguistic dispossession can create.

Guillermo Verdecchia, in his autobiographical play, *Fronteras Americanas: American Borders*, does a radically different job. Verdecchia offers his readers a different view of the process of self-translation by placing himself and his audience right at the border and reconstructing the process of self-translation from the perspective of the translator located at the border. He describes the act of self-translation before synthesis has been achieved. His choice of drama as the form in which to represent the autobiographical act of self-translation also emphasizes his different take on self-translation into English.<sup>24</sup> Instead of reconstructing a narrative in which he can trace the evolution of his Argentinian and Canadian selves retrospectively, he dramatizes two main characters: his Argentinian persona, Wideload, and his Canadian persona, Verdecchia. Drama enables him to bring to life the recurring situations in which language migrants often find themselves and the behaviors associated with these situations. Where Choy and Hoffman recreate textually the border situations they have experienced and comment on



their ability or inability to react the way they would have liked to, Verdecchia produces the border situation and acts in it. The autobiographical genre enables him, as Amy Devitt suggests “to construct and respond to situation” (578).<sup>25</sup> Choy and Hoffman manipulate autobiography to make their audience aware of the complicated process of self-translation and to produce knowledge about language migration. Verdecchia manipulates autobiography to put knowledge about language migration into action. His play does not simply inform his audience about self-translation, it enlists them in the process.

The audience is directly involved in Verdecchia’s act of self-translation as both his personae address the spectators/readers directly and require their participation in the play. Unlike *Paper Shadows* and *Lost in Translation*, *Fronteras Americanas* is clearly addressed to a plurilingual audience as the performance uses Spanish, English, French, and Spanglish and rarely provides translation.<sup>26</sup> This set up allows Verdecchia to impose the borderland experience on his audience and to force them “to listen without ‘mastery’”; spectators/readers cannot remain passive observers of the performer’s act of self-translation, they have to undergo the process themselves. This play, Verdecchia’s persona claims, “is a summons to begin negotiations, to claim your place on the continent” (54). During the performance, Wideload, Verdecchia, and the audience are all confronted with different aspects of self-translation; all of them have to occupy the positions of translator and translated and negotiate among the multiple languages, translations, and readings available to them.

As in *Paper Shadows* and *Lost in Translation*, naming marks the first act of self-translation in *Fronteras Americanas*. Wideload is the first one to introduce himself. He does so in Spanish first: “Mi nombre es Facundo Morales Segundo. Algunos me llaman

El Tigre del Barrio,” before translating into English: “My name ees Facundo Morales Segundo. Some of you may know me as de Barrio Tiger” (23). Wideload’s Spanish inflection of the English language is rendered in the text. The autobiographer could have indicated inflected English through stage directions, but he chose to modify English words in the text instead. This choice enables him to remind his readers in particular that Wideload speaks with an accent and to make the act of translation visible in the text by allowing the source language to affect the target language. Also, the autobiographer does not use italic the way Choy or Hoffman do to incorporate a language other than English into their texts. The absence of italic marks the equality between the different languages used in the play. Wideload continues with his introductory speech by describing how English-speaking people often react to his name:

“Sorry what’s de name? Facoon-doe?”

“No mang, Fa-cun-do, Facundo.”

“Wow, dat’s a new one. Mind if I call you Fac?”

“No mang, mind if I call you shithead?” (24)

Wideload’s comical impersonation of English-speaking people encountering his name for the first time enables the autobiographer to highlight the two-way process of self-translation and the problems of mistranslation that often accompany it. Both Wideload and his English-speaking interlocutors are involved in the act of self-translation. Wideload reproduces the exchange in translation and his translation affects the way his English-speaking interlocutor speaks (i.e. in his translation, his English-speaking interlocutor speaks an English that is phonetically inflected by Spanish sounds). Wideload’s English-speaking interlocutor also acts as a translator as s/he tries to

reproduce Wideload's Spanish name in English. S/he tries to make the unfamiliar sounds familiar by reproducing the name with English sounds that are phonetically close to the Spanish sounds. S/he is manipulating the traditional form of translation: trying to make the unfamiliar aspects of the source language familiar by replacing them with their equivalent in the target language. When confronted with Wideload's rejection of the anglicized version of his name, s/he tries to nickname him by shortening his name to its first syllable, another attempt at imposing English-speaking norms on the foreign name s/he is struggling with. Wideload's insulting reply to this second attempt at re-naming marks his strong disapproval at being baptized so carelessly and reveals the inappropriateness of his English-speaking interlocutor's behavior. With this episode, the autobiographer targets the English-speaking members of his audience and confronts them with their own incompetence as translators and with the impact that their mistranslation can have. Wideload's introduction continues with the story of his "Saxonian" naming. Dissatisfied with the way English-speaking people handle his name, Wideload decides that he must "come up with a more Saxonical name" (24). He selects his "Saxonical" name from a television show and now "go[es] by the name Wideload McKennah," which, he claims, "get[s him] a lot more respect" (24). The fact that Wideload has to re-name himself into English in order to get respect in the first place is disturbing, because it suggests that his English-speaking audience cannot respect what is unfamiliar, different, other. In order to be respected and not carelessly re-named, Wideload has to manipulate the language of the dominant culture himself in order to avoid having that language manipulated against him.

Choosing a bizarre name that Anglophones can, nonetheless, “respect,” Wideload adds a further comical twist to the act of translation by re-naming his audience. He calls English-speaking people, the “Saxonian community.” This label constitutes an act of traditional translation in the sense that Wideload is crafting an equivalent of the way in which the English-speaking population of Canada refers to the different ethnic groups among them. This label also reveals the power relations involved in the act of naming; only communities that are not Anglo-Saxon are identified by their ethnic origin, presumably because these communities deviate in some way from the Anglo-Saxon norm. Wideload’s christening of the Anglo-Saxon majority as the “saxonian community” names something for which there had been no word and forces members of his English-speaking audience into the position of the other that this form of naming determines. Wideload’s English translation of his Latino perspective on the “Saxonian community” is not limited to re-naming as he also rewrites “Saxonian” people and their lifestyle in exotic terms. He labels his early experiences of the North American lifestyle as exotic when he describes his “first contact with an ethnic family” (34). Wideload’s manipulation of the stereotypical script that “Saxonian” people traditionally use to describe him and his community objectifies his English-speaking audience and reveals the discriminatory nature of their understanding of ethnic difference. English-speaking members of the audience thus get to “read” about themselves in an English translation by a Spanish-speaking translator and to observe themselves in a situation similar to the situation that language migrants encounter when they have to translate themselves into a new language. They have to manipulate an unfamiliar language (i.e. the foreign language for language migrants, Wideload’s phonetically inflected English for the English-speaking audience)

in order to recreate themselves, and this act of imposed self-translation leads to the shaping of themselves as other.

Wideload's extensive work with stereotypes is hilarious and cutting. His sustained attention to stereotypes unveils the linguistic and cultural biases that spectators/readers bring to the process of translation. The act of translation, Wideload demonstrates, is very much a subjective act as translators tend to subvert the source text by insinuating the concepts that shape their own perception of the textual content into their translation. Wideload's performance makes the act of translation visible and provides his English-speaking audience with the opportunity to confront the type of (mis)translation that they produce. In case they miss the point though, Wideload becomes more and more insistent as the play progresses. In one of his most violent confrontations with the audience, he criticizes the way Latino people are represented in forms of North American popular culture such as films, magazines, and commercials. He recalls one ad in particular, "de ad dat McDonald's had for deir fajitas not too long ago, featuring a guy called Pedro or Juan," who goes to McDonald's to get some fajitas because "Dese are de most gueno fajitas I eber ate" (76). Wideload, mimicking the actor in the commercial, recites the line "with supreme nasality" and launches at his audience the "Saxonian" expression: "What de fuck ees dat?" (76). He demonstrates the racist undertones of the ad by transposing its script to a different scenario involving a man, named Sambo, who answers a white man's question with "well, Mistah, I come up here to get some o' yo' pow'ful good McGrits. Mmmmm-mmm. Wif a watahmelon slice fo' deesert. Yasee"(76). This transposition, or contextual translation, which brings colonial racism to the foreground, allows Wideload to make visible the manipulation of linguistic and cultural stereotypes in everyday forms

of popular culture and their inappropriateness. Wideload also demonstrates the violence of the process of self-translation when he aggressively confronts his audience: "So, what is it with you people? Who do you think you are? Who do you think we are? Yes, I am calling you you—I am generalizing, I am reducing you all to de lowest common denominator, I am painting you all with the same brush. Is it starting to bug you yet?" (76). It is interesting to note that in this angry outburst, Wideload drops his Spanish accent; only one of the "th" sounds is pronounced as "de" and his "is" is not pronounced "ees" as it usually is. He also expresses his outrage with idiomatic expressions, thus illustrating his mastery of the English language. By dropping phonetic distortion and using idioms, Wideload demonstrates how easily and fluidly he can shift from Latino identity to "Saxonian" identity and forces his audience to see themselves in him (i.e. both in the behavior that he is rejecting and in the act of unaccented speech in English). The fluidity that his identity shift exemplifies here also speaks against the rigidity of the stereotypes that his English-speaking audience attempts to impose on him. Stereotypes, Wideload's self-translation demonstrates, fix identity and prevent the people they represent from speaking for themselves.

In another funny and devastatingly cutting deconstruction of linguistic and cultural stereotypes, Wideload shows how "Saxonian" stereotypical representations of Latino people misrepresent and silence them. He uses examples from popular magazines like *Elle*, *Mirabella*, and *Gentleman's Quarterly* and points at some of the problems that stereotypical translation creates. Wideload's deconstruction of the act of translation by "Saxonian" translators enables him to identify three major problems: reduction, shortsightedness, and fakery. To demonstrate the silencing effect of "Saxonian"

translation on Latino people, Wideload refers to popular magazines' representations of Spanish actor Antonio Banderas as the "Latin Lover." "The [*Elle*] article," Wideload explains, "begins by explaining the myth of the Latin Lover and then uses the myth to explain Banderas. Banderas cannot explain himself apparently because his English is too limited" (45). Wideload sees mistranslation arising both because the "source" speaker cannot speak English and because the "target" audience cannot understand the "source" outside a stereotypical representation of "The Latin Lover." This example illustrates traditional translation: the "source" text (in this case Banderas) is transposed into English and made familiar to the target audience (Anglophone *Elle* readers) through the use of familiar concepts. The "source" text is made to fit a target text that already exists. Wideload's analysis here unveils the ethical dimension of translation. Trying to fit the source text into an already existing target text erases (or silences) the original text and reinforces stereotypical interpretations of linguistic and cultural differences. This type of translation, Wideload suggests, is not respectful of the source text and demonstrates the unethical behavior of many "Saxonian" translators who substitute their own texts (stereotypical understanding of Latino people) for the "original." Performing such acts of mistranslation enables Verdecchia to confront his audience with their own responsibility in this dishonest process.

Rey Chow's treatment of stereotypes in her analysis of cross-ethnic representation in *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* adds an additional dimension to this discussion of stereotypes in *Fronteras Americanas*. Chow does not simply criticize the role of stereotypes in the production of negative representations of ethnic difference or insist that Third World writers resist the stereotypes that represent them fraudulently by

producing counter representations of themselves. She suggests that these two theoretical approaches, because they encourage the elimination of the stereotype, do not take full advantage of the political potential that stereotypes contain. What she proposes instead is to look at stereotypes not as “misrepresentations,” but as “political weapons capable of generating belief, commitment, and action” (59). This view of stereotypes as “political weapons” enables Chow to shift the discussion from the type of representation that stereotypes produce to the issue of power differentials. Thinking of the stereotype as a “political weapon” enables theorists to ask such questions as “Who controls and defines stereotypes?” and “Whose interests do they serve?” (60). This shift is apparent in *Fronteras Americanas* as the individual who is usually represented through stereotypes is now the one controlling the stereotype on stage and utilizing it to regain some agency in the asymmetrical power relationships that often subject him to the Anglo-Saxon “other.” Such use of the stereotype also illustrates for the audience how stereotypes serve the interests of the people who manipulate them. In particular, such use enables English-speaking members of the audience to see that cross-ethnic translation is a political act that relies more on power relations and political purposes than on some sort of “original” and “authentic” source text. In other words, Wideload’s manipulation of stereotypes on stage enables Verdecchia’s audience to realize that translating the ethnic other does not originate in an “objective” and “authentic” source text but in the vested interests that the translator has in the representation of that ethnic other.

In addition to issues of stereotypes, *Fronteras Americanas* addresses the problems of fakery and fidelity in translation and examines how they affect the type of identities that translated texts produce. Wideload’s alter ego, Verdecchia, comes on stage in a



section entitled “the Other” and states: “I would like to clear up any possible misimpression. I should state now that I am something of an impostor. A fake. What I mean is: I sometimes confuse my tenses in Spanish. I couldn’t dance a tango to save my life” (51). Verdecchia, the Anglo-Canadian part of the character, who, funnily enough is the one with the Spanish surname, experiences difficulty in reconciling himself with the Argentinian part of his self. The two reasons he gives to explain his unease at claiming the Argentinian part of his identity—his limited linguistic ability in Spanish and his inability to dance the tango—ironically reinforce his identity as Anglo-Canadian. Like many of the English-speaking people that Wideload is attempting to educate during the performance, Verdecchia assumes that linguistic mastery and stereotypical behaviors define identity. Verdecchia, by acknowledging that he is unable to speak Spanish perfectly, somehow places himself in the position of the English-speaking person who fakes his/her way into the Latino world by faking the language. He also identifies himself as Anglophone when he construes the stereotype of the tango as a defining characteristic of Latino identity. Verdecchia is a “fake” Argentinian, not because of his inability to speak Spanish perfectly and/or to dance the tango, but because he adheres to the Anglo-Canadian view of what defines Latino identity. And yet, when confronted with his Anglo-Canadian audience and with his stage alter ego, who identifies him as “dat neurotic Argentinian” (56), he is read as the Latino other because of his name and the way he looks. Verdecchia makes this reading of himself particularly clear in a section entitled “Roll Call” in which, like Hoffman, he recalls his first day of class in Canadian school and describes the moment when the teacher calls out the names written on the class list. All the names she calls out before his are names that do not challenge her

phonetic habits. Each name is followed by a physical description of the student she has just called. When she reaches Verdecchia's name, she has to "force her mouth into shapes hitherto unknown to the human race" (33). Little Guillermo raises his hand and describes himself as "a minuscule boy with ungovernable black hair, antennae and gills where everyone else has a mouth" (33). He then tells the teacher to call him "Willy" and "[t]he antennae and gills disappear" (33). Verdecchia's autobiographical reconstruction of this moment emphasizes the sense of alienation he felt when hearing his name mispronounced in the teacher's mouth. The fact that he felt "subhuman" and describes himself as a pre-mammalian sea creature marks both the feeling of inadequacy he had in this Anglophone classroom and the irony of the situation. The teacher was the one having speech difficulty, and yet he was the one being deprived of a mouth. "The antennae and gills disappear" as soon as he opens his mouth and identifies himself in English, with an English name. Both the English name and the language allow him back into the human species. Verdecchia ends the episode by telling his audience that "it could have been here," and thus forces many of his viewers/readers to realize that they too, by mispronouncing his name, could have alienated him from his own identity and from their world (33). This episode and Verdecchia's identification of himself as a "fake" Argentinian emphasize the permeability of the border between his Anglo-Canadian and Argentinian selves. The processes of translation happening at the border are very slippery and constantly changing depending on the language, the audience, and the situation.

Verdecchia's autobiographical reconstruction of his Argentinian-Anglo-Canadian identity enables him to demonstrate the fluidity of the process of self-translation. Wideload "fakes" his way into the "Saxonian" community by renaming himself in

English and mastering the language with which he plays in different ways, depending on the type of impact he wants to have on his English-speaking audience. This ability to play with the English language and to deconstruct his audience's ways of translating and reading him identifies him as the other even to himself: i.e. Anglo-Canadian. In other words, the very same process that enables him to "fake" "Saxonian" identity is also the process that creates that identity. Wideload also "fakes" his way into the Latino community by defining and presenting himself through almost all of the stereotypes that his English-speaking audience would use to define Latino people: he has a mafioso uncle, a promiscuous cousin, he did poorly at the university, he is a good Latin dancer, he is a noisy neighbor, he intends to have a large family, he does not wash very often, etc. These characteristics make him a "fake" Latino by Latino standards, but a true one by stereotypical Anglo-Canadian ones. A similarly slippery process of self-translation is at work in the character Verdecchia. He "fakes" his way into Anglo-Canadian identity by anglicizing his name and manipulates Anglo-Canadian stereotypes of Latino identity as an excuse to reject that identity, but cannot escape being read as Latino by his Anglo-Canadian audience. Verdecchia's manipulation of linguistic hybridization exemplifies the slipperiness of this process of self-translation. After having quoted Guillermo Gómez-Pena on the concept of "a floating culture and a fluctuating sense of self," Verdecchia merges Spanish and English into the same accented sentences: "porque I speak mejor Inglish que eSpanish [...] porque hasta mis dreams are subtitled" (70-1). This linguistic hybrid demonstrates the hybridity of his Argentinian-Anglo-Canadian identity and the fluidity that exists between the different parts that constitute it.

Verdecchia's fast-paced autobiographical play presents the process of self-translation quite differently from Choy's *Paper Shadows* and Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*. Verdecchia is more of an "activist" than Choy and Hoffman are; his agenda is clearly political. Where Choy crafts an aesthetic and artful reconstruction of childhood memories that encourages tolerance of linguistic and cultural differences, and Hoffman describes the whole process of self-translation and uses this experience as a springboard for her intellectual musings on linguistic and cultural shifts, Verdecchia is determined to shake the ground on which his audience stands and to push the boundaries of their experiences of self-translation. By placing his spectators/readers at the border and imposing on them the experience of linguistic dispossession common to language migrants, he forces them to develop what Min-zhan Lu calls "a tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence" and to learn "to sustain contradiction and turn ambivalence into a new consciousness" (122). This new "consciousness," he hopes, will encourage his readers/spectators to change their way of thinking about border experience and language migration and alter the way they act and/or react toward linguistic and cultural difference. Verdecchia's insistence that his play be seen as "a summons to begin negotiations" emphasizes the political dimension of his autobiographical act (54). He calls his audience to arms and "summons" them to appear in front of him, to hear his case, judge, be judged, and act. The fact that his audience hears his case in different languages without translation places him in a position similar to Anzaldúa's. Both Verdecchia and Anzaldúa militate in favor of plurilingualism and seem to agree that "[u]ntil [they are] free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while [they] still have to speak English or Spanish when [they] would rather

speak Spanglish, and as long as [they] have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate [them], [their] tongue will be illegitimate" (Anzaldúa 59). Verdecchia's autobiographical play constitutes a social action that aims to legitimize plurilingualism and the hybrid identities it gives birth to and challenges the imposition of self-translation on language migrants.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "self-translation" to mean "translation of the self" as well as "translation by the self." The language migrant is both the translator and the "text" that is being translated. This use of the term explains why, in this chapter, I focus only on texts written by migrants for whom English was not the native language (i.e. it was not the language spoken by their parents and they did not spend their childhood speaking English at home). Other types of translation, such as cultural translations and generational translations, occur in immigrant autobiographies and will be explored in Chapters Two and Three respectively. The separation of these different types of translation is somewhat arbitrary as they all occur simultaneously, but I have decided to separate them and examine them individually in different chapters as each one is important in its own right.

<sup>2</sup> Simon has also worked on the problem of cultural translation in Quebec. See *Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec*. For the issue of linguistic and cultural translation in Quebec also see Annie Brisset, "The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity."

<sup>3</sup> See Alice Kaplan, "On Language Memoirs"; Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*; Tzvetan Todorov, "Dialogism and Schizophrenia."

<sup>4</sup> Besemeres defines "passive loss" as the encountering of the absence of the mother tongue in the new country and "active loss" as the acquiring of and living in the new language, thus betraying the mother tongue (9-10).

<sup>5</sup> This is not necessarily true of people who migrate to a new country but settle in their cultural community. I am thinking particularly of Chinese migrants who often settle in the Chinatowns of the cities they are moving to. Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*, for example, clearly demonstrates the continuity of life and identity in the immigration process. The immigration of her grandparents, Chan Sam and May-ying, from China to Canada, is conceived of as a parenthesis in their Chinese life. Chan Sam and May-ying have no intention of settling in Canada and only want to make money to ensure the survival of the family in China. They settle in the Chinatowns of the West Coast of Canada, do not learn English, and socialize with Chinese people only. Denise Chong, their Canadian born and raised granddaughter, (the parenthesis lasted much longer than intended) is the one who translates their lives and identities into English. This is an example of generational translation, not an example of self-translation, but it shows that the experience of immigration does not necessarily interrupt the development of identity in the native language if the migrant continues to speak it in the new country. Chong's grandparents' case, however, is quite extreme and most migrants do have to express themselves in a new language and this necessarily affects who they are. This is particularly true for someone like Laura Goodman Salverson, who continued to speak Icelandic in her family and in the Icelandic community her family evolved in, but deliberately chose to master English in order to empower herself in the Anglophone environment she wanted to belong to. The self she presents in her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant Daughter*, is very much shaped by English and American concepts of personhood (such as individualism, independence, and empowerment) that she has acquired in the language-learning process. Her act of self-translation enables her to re-incorporate into the self that she shapes in English the aspects of her Icelandic self that she chooses to preserve (her identity as a story teller and as a woman warrior for example). Goodman Salverson's autobiography shows that self-translation allows the migrant writer to re-visit the self shaped by the mother tongue (she locates that identity primarily in her mother's stories and not necessarily in her own memories of herself) in a new language, but there are

no guarantees that that self has remained unchanged or that it can be rendered in another language completely. The language-learning process alters the mother tongue and the identity attached to it. The process is irreversible because it is dynamic, which is why Besemeres's idea of the "continuous" self is problematic: it assumes that the self to be translated remains unchanged until the process of self-translation starts.

<sup>6</sup> *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka* by Roy Kiyooka constitutes a very good example of the type of static memories that this work of preservation can create. Although Mary Kiyooka is aware of the passing of time and of the changes that have affected her native city, she does not allow these changes to affect her version of the past. Her memories, like her Tosa-ben dialect, are frozen in time and Masutani, the translator who transfers her stories from Japanese to English, comments on the archaic nature of her language and the type of memories it recreates. For a discussion on the problems of translation in *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka* see Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms, "The Many Tongues of *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*."

<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of her book, Besemeres establishes the terms "native language" and "natural language," explaining that the "native language," or mother tongue, of migrant writers was often at some point a "natural language" (i.e. a language that they spoke often and with ease), but that it could cease to be (when the language migrant became more comfortable in his/her second language, which then became the natural language). I find this distinction both interesting and highly problematic. It is interesting because it points to the slippery difference between "native" and "natural" languages, a difference which leads Besemeres into trouble as she seems to forget her own distinction and talks mostly of "natural language." The term is highly problematic because language migrants in particular cannot conceive of language as "natural;" they are too much aware of the "unnatural" processes required to master a language, even if it is a language in which one has become comfortable enough to prefer it to the mother tongue. In order to avoid this type of confusion in this chapter, I use the term mother tongue to refer to the language migrant's first language, (whether s/he still speaks it comfortably or not) and the new language or English for the language of the self-translation.

<sup>8</sup> The process of re-naming or name translating seems to be more fluid and less problematic in Asian cultures than in Western cultures. Many texts by migrant writers of Asian descent deal with name changes (through translation or acquisition of false papers), but I cannot think of one writer who recounts the name shift in particularly traumatic terms (*The Concubine's Children*, *Diamond Grill*, *Falling Leaves*, *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*, *The Woman Warrior*). Perhaps the absence of "trauma" involved in name translating in these texts can be explained by the fact that in Asian cultures individuals are primarily identified through their relationships to others (First son, elder sister, etc) and not through their given names. Because the process of translation does not affect the relationships between individuals, the name shift might not matter as much as it does in Western cultures where individuals are identified by their names exclusively.

<sup>9</sup> The complex business of false identity papers could be both very empowering and dis-empowering for Chinese immigrants to Canada in particular. For many Chinese immigrants, obtaining false papers was their only chance to enter Canada and find a job that would enable them to support the family that they had left in China and to save enough money to go back home and have a future there. The false papers gave them the power to fool Canadian authorities and to try to improve their lives, but they also condemned them to a life of deception and limited their already reduced opportunities in Canadian society. In *The Concubine's Children*, Denise Chong recounts how her grandmother, May-ying, entered Canada as a paper-bride. The false papers that opened the doors of Canada to her also made her dependent on the husband who bought her and provided her with these papers. Although May-ying would leave Chan-Sam after a few years of marriage, she remained dependent on the Chinese community all her life and could never move beyond the limits of Chinatown or back to China. The false papers that bought her what should have been a life in a free country actually enslaved her to her condition of illiterate Chinese immigrant who had entered the country illegally.

The business of false papers also makes clear the marketability of identity. False names are expensive for the buyers and very profitable for the sellers. Chan-Sam experienced both ends of the business. He first had to borrow money to buy May-ying's false papers and her passage from China to Canada. He borrowed money from a restaurant owner, promising that May-ying would be his waitress until this debt was entirely repaid. In his old age, Chan-Sam once again found himself on the identity trading market when, in dire need of money, he decided to sell the birth certificates of his first two Canadian born daughters, Ping and

Nan. Knowing that neither of his daughters would ever leave China to return to her country of birth, he sold their identity papers to two Chinese women who entered the country pretending to be May-ying and Chan-Sam's children. Retracing her family history decades later, Denise Chong discovers that these two women had gotten in touch with each other and with May-ying after their arrival in Canada and had created a "paper family" of their own.

<sup>10</sup> The fact that Choy was an adopted child and that Nellie Hop Wah and Yip Doy Choy (a.k.a Lily and Toy Choy) were not his biological parents reinforces the irony of papers making total fictions official.

<sup>11</sup> In his 1997 interview with Wayson Choy, Glenn Deer asked the writer how Chinese was part of his memory ("An Interview with Wayson Choy"). Choy recalled being raised by several members of the Chinese community who spoke different village dialects and often shifted dialects within a conversation in order to make a point or position themselves differently in social and cultural contexts. This multiplicity within his mother tongue allowed Choy to "absorb the sounds as meaningful language, sound-puzzles that [he] could figure out" (35). Ironically, the mixture of Chinese dialects that were easy to understand for young Choy has become the mark of his inability to speak correct Chinese as an adult. As he jokingly explained, "I speak a 'Vancouverese,' which is very elementary Toisanese, mixed Cantonese vocabulary, mixed English grammar, oh, a kind of junkyard mix" (36). The adult version of his mother tongue testifies to Choy's early preference for schooling in English. He had, he claimed, "unrestricted and encouraging access to English, but not to Chinese" (37). The restricted access to schooling in Chinese would have an important impact on young Sonny's sense of identity as I will show later in this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> For arguments in favor of the visibility of the act of translation in the translated text see Lawrence Venuti, "The Translator's Invisibility" and Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier, eds. *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*.

<sup>13</sup> In *The Politics of Writing*, Romy Clark and Roz Ivanic demonstrate that schooling and language education do more than simply educate children. They also expose students to the values and ideologies that the dominant culture favors. They explain, for instance, that "written language has a normative, disciplinary, and discriminatory role in social life [...]. Adherence to standard conventions in these technical aspects of written language has come to be used as a criterion for assessing people's intelligence and even moral worth" (189). This thinking emphasizes the connection between linguistic mastery and identity articulation and is particularly relevant for this present discussion of Sonny's feeling of inadequacy in Chinese school. Because he is unable to master standard written forms of Cantonese, his teachers judge him incompetent and he is led to conclude that he cannot be Chinese.

<sup>14</sup> For historical surveys of translation studies see Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*; Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, eds. *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*; Lawrence Venuti, ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, in "Des tours de Babel," presents translation as God's violent way of imposing control on his people, but see also Michel Foucault who, in an article devoted to Pierre Klossowski's translation of the *Aeneid*, talks about "translations that hurl one language against another [...] taking the original text for a projectile and treating the translating language like a target" (30). George Steiner, in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, articulates the act of translation into four key stages: 1) trust, 2) aggression/penetration, 3) embodiment, 4) restitution. Steiner argues that in order to engage in the act of translation, translators first have to trust that the content and the form of the source text (ST) can be borne across into the target language. When this transferability has been established, translators must "attack" or "penetrate" the ST in order to extract meaning that will be transferred into the target text (TT). The meaning that is dislocated from the ST must then be relocated or "embodied" into the TT, where it can be restored. Steiner's analysis of the process of translation is key in highlighting the violence of the translating act, but his terminology has led feminist critics, such as Sherry Simon and Lori Chamberlain, to deconstruct and/or revisit the stages of translation as he had defined them. In an article entitled "Toward a Theoretical Practice for Cross-Cultural Translation," Carol Maier also re-visits Steiner's four key stages of the process of translation and examines how power struggles between translators and their audiences give translation a political dimension. This dimension, she suggests, confronts many translators with issues of violence, silencing, recuperation, and imperialism.

The act of self-translation for language migrants also highlights another type of violence. Because the act of self-translation is triggered by linguistic dispossession and the loss of power that goes with it, language migrants can sometimes develop feelings of resentment and violence against the English speaking

environment in which they evolve. "Linguistic dispossession," Hoffman argues, "is a sufficient motive for violence, for it is close to the dispossession of one's self" (124).

<sup>16</sup> See King-Kok Cheung, *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa* for a discussion on the complexities of silence and on the possibilities of silence as a form of communication and site for identity production.

<sup>17</sup> Language migrants are relatively rarely confronted with English-speaking interlocutors that are aware of the difficult situation they are in. More often than not, the English speakers in Anglophone Canada are monolingual and unaware of the ways in which language migration works. Every one has witnessed at one time or another English-speaking people expressing their frustration at language migrants by telling them to "go back to their country" or "go learn English." Even with good intentions, English speakers are often unaware of their responsibility in the process of mistranslation. Thinking that talking louder will help language migrants to understand better, some English speakers will raise their voices. Some English speakers will try to help in the process of translation by repeating the same thing over and over again, but they will use a different way of saying it each time. They end up bombarding language migrants with a myriad of expressions that they might not understand instead of the original one.

<sup>18</sup> This mutation often takes the form of an internal dialogue in which language migrants translate and interpret for themselves what is happening in their conversations with English speakers. This internal monologue enables them to take note of new words or expressions, register cultural bias, play with the two (or more) linguistic codes they can manipulate, express what they really want to say but cannot or should not, or simply think about something else in their mother tongue. This type of internal monologue is also possible for monolingual speakers, but the monologue in this case is not plurilingual and does not constitute an act of translation.

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note here that Eva cannot manipulate "I" in English at this point. When one of her Canadian girlfriends gives her a diary as a birthday present, she decides to write in it in English because its content will deal with events of the present and she lives in the present in English. However, she chooses to use the diary to imagine what her Polish self would have been like had she not immigrated to Canada. Because the self she is creating in the diary is a pure fiction, she cannot claim it as "I" and addresses it as "you," thus reproducing the dialogical structure that she manipulates in her internal dialogues with her Polish self. At this stage in the process of self-translation, Eva is unable to identify as Canadian yet, unable to identify as Polish any more.

<sup>20</sup> Eva's decision to master the formal language transmitted at school contrasts with Sonny's rejection of formal Cantonese and the identity attached to it. This contrast might be explained by the fact that Eva feels completely disempowered in her new Canadian context. The only way she can think of to regain some of the control that the migration experience has deprived her of is through linguistic mastery. Sonny, on the other hand, has control over several spheres of his life. He is sufficiently proficient in English to act as his mother's translator and he is in control of his Toisonese mother tongue. Sonny's experience of linguistic displacement at school is not accompanied by a sense of disempowerment as intense as Eva's and might explain why the two children react differently to formal language training.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman's discussion of the concept of origins oscillates all through the autobiography. Remembering her childhood in Poland and her family's experience during the Second World War, she first claims, "I come from the war; it is my true origin. But as with all our origins, I cannot grasp it. Perhaps we never know where we come from; in a way, we are all created ex nihilo" (23). (Her most recent book, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, enables her to explore this concept of origins more thoroughly.) Hoffman's early suggestion that "nothingness" or "absence" constitutes the site of origins for the self can be seen as a very freeing possibility. If the writer, when trying to articulate herself, is confronted with an "absence" or a "void," then she is potentially free to create anything she wants; she does not have to be faithful to a previously shaped self that needs to be re-presented textually. This view, however, complicates the concept of self-translation as it suggests that there is no text (i.e. a self) to be translated. Hoffman continues to grapple with the concept of origins and later redefines "origin" as the point of "childhood unity" (273), clearly establishing there that she conceives of the self shaped in childhood (and in Polish) as the source for the autobiographical self shaped in the text (in English). Hoffman presents the childhood Polish self as unified and laments the fact that there is "no regaining of childhood unity" (273). With this lamentation, Hoffman appears to be rejecting again the idea of a concrete, unified, origin for the self. The point of origin is not a void any more, but it is still absent in the sense that it is a concept of the self that is irretrievable, unachievable, forever lost. What Hoffman seems to be rejecting



here is the concept of an essential self out of which the autobiographical self can emerge. However, her later discussion of her search for a "true" voice seriously challenges this position. She explains that when she writes, she looks for a "true" voice, a voice that is truly her own, not one of the many voices that she had to acquire and mimic when learning English. This "true" voice, she explains, is found in silence. She defines this silence as "the white blank center, the level ground that was there before Babel was built, that is always there before the Babel of our multiple selves is constructed. From this white plenitude, a voice begins to emerge" (275). Hoffman's description of this silence could very well be understood as a description of an essential self that existed prior to the multiple selves that emerge from plurilingualism. Her diction ("white center," "white plenitude") and her Biblical reference emphasize the autobiographer's ideological positioning. As an Ivy League educated, white, English-speaking woman, Hoffman conceives of the point of origin that shapes the voice that gives birth to her autobiographical self as a white center molded in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

<sup>22</sup> See also Min-zhan Lu. "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing." In this article, Min-zhan Lu examines the ways basic writing is taught in American institutions and suggests that higher education can be seen as either a process of acculturation that requires the erasure of languages other than standard English or a process of accommodation that pretends to respect the students' linguistic diversity but really does not. Like bell hooks, she writes in favor of an educational system that would recognize and respect linguistic diversity and question the dis-empowering effects that imposing standard English can have on students.

<sup>23</sup> In his 1997 interview with Glenn Deer, Wayson Choy comments on the fact that he started writing about his identity quest relatively late in his life because "when people are in the middle of these identity struggles, they don't have anything to say because they can't get a fix on anything" (40). He had to understand the formation process of his own identity before he could write about it.

<sup>24</sup> Wayson Choy and Eva Hoffman also incorporate the idea of performance in their texts, but they do not adopt drama as the form in which to present their autobiographical reconstruction. Choy recalls his favorite childhood games and describes in detail his performance of various Chinese operas and North American movies. Hoffman's incorporation of internal dialogues between her Polish and American selves also marks the importance of performance in the process of identity formation. The fact that Verdecchia chooses to present this process through theatrical performance emphasizes the dynamic quality of identity formation.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of genre as action see Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept" and Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as a Social Action."

<sup>26</sup> There are two instances in particular where both Wideload and Verdecchia address their audience in a language that their audience might not understand. Wideload, in his deconstruction of Latino dancing and its connection to sexual behavior is about to explain to his audience why "a Latin and a Saxon hav[ing] sex [can] be a mind-expanding and culturally enriching experience," when he reverts to Spanish (41). He ends his long explanation by addressing the monolingual members of the audience and telling them to come see him at the intermission if they want a translation of the explanation. This behavior, apart from creating comedy, places Wideload's monolingual Anglophone audience in a position of linguistic inferiority and deprives them of power and agency. They experience first hand what it feels like to be a language migrant, to be reduced to silence, to be left out, and to lose the power to understand what is happening. For the members of the audience who understand Spanish, however, this moment is empowering as they can share the character's joke and enjoy one of the rarely recognized privileges that bilingualism brings.

Verdecchia also challenges his audience's linguistic ability when he addresses them in French while describing the two years he spent in Paris: "En France où mes étudiants me disaient que je parlais le français comme une vache catalan. En France où j' étais étranger, un anglais, un Argentin-Canadien, un faux touriste" (28). Verdecchia's manipulation of French achieves the same result that Wideload's manipulation of Spanish does: the non-French-speaking members of the audience feel alienated and disempowered and the French-speaking ones feel empowered and amused because Verdecchia's French is quite good, but he needs to work on getting his idiomatic expressions and the gender of words right. Verdecchia's use of French also enables him to remind his mostly Anglophone audience that Canada is a bilingual country, a country that officially welcomes linguistic diversity. The various linguistic disabilities that the play uncovers can be read, of course, as an ironic comment on this official understanding of Canada.

## CHAPTER TWO: MIMICKING “ORIGINAL” CULTURAL MODELS: THE COMPLEXITIES OF FAKING IT

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the processes of cultural translation at work in Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*. Both texts examine various forms of cultural displacement and the impact that these displacements have on individual and communal identities. Clarke's work illustrates the complex interactions between imperial British culture and Barbadian culture and the complicated identity negotiations that these interactions trigger. Clarke uses the autobiographical space to illustrate the many ways in which British culture displaces his native Barbadian culture, but also the many ways in which British culture is displaced in Barbados. His autobiography, then, reconstructs the interactions of two displaced cultures, brings to the foreground the complex power relations at work in these interactions, and reveals what is at stake in the production of cultural identities. Furthermore, because Clarke is reconstructing events that happened in another part of the British Empire, his autobiography has meaning for Canadian readers interested in issues of globalization and transnationalism. Wah's autobiography also examines cultural interactions, but develops this examination in the social and political context of multicultural Canada. Set in a political framework that “officially” welcomes cultural diversity and exchange, Wah's reconstruction of his experience with various forms of cultural translation highlights the discriminatory nature of official discourses of multiculturalism and challenges the stereotypical representations on which these discourses are grounded. Both Clarke and

Wah are intent on making clear (i.e. translating) the ways in which dominant communities draw coercive cultural maps that position them in the margins. Such acts of translation enable these writers to illustrate how they find their place by negotiating interstitial spaces on these maps for themselves and their communities.

I would like to draw on the work of Stuart Hall and Mary Louise Pratt to establish some useful definitions and on Homi Bhabha's criticism and the work of various translation theorists to illustrate my approach to Clarke's and Wah's autobiographies. Stuart Hall's study of Caribbean cinema and the representation of Afro-Caribbean blacks is particularly useful in providing views of "cultural identity" that take into account the complex and heterogeneous nature of this identity. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall identifies two contradictory views of cultural identity. He compares and contrasts these two views in order to illustrate the complex processes at work in the articulation of cultural identity. He explains that

[t]here are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture[.] [...] Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us [...] with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (223)

Hall's first definition points to the "constructed" nature of such a view of 'cultural identity.' This identity, in order to be applicable to the community, needs to gloss over the "shifting divisions and vicissitudes of [...] actual history." Hall presents the narrative that shapes cultural identity as "incomplete," a narrative that contains gaps. These gaps

are important because they contain meanings that migrant writers often tap into when translating cultural scripts. As we will see later, Clarke and Wah are particularly dexterous at translating these silences and bringing to the foreground meanings that the “original” narrative does not display.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this first view of cultural identity that rests on processes ensuring similarity and continuity, Hall articulates a second view of cultural identity, one that

recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also some critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather—since history has intervened—‘what we have become’. [...] Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. [...] It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (225)

Hall’s second definition seems to contradict his first understanding of cultural identity as a construct that requires the omission of certain elements to ensure coherence and stability. His reference to “what we really are” here seems to suggest an “original” (i.e. true or authentic in essence, not constructed) difference, but “difference” can only be articulated (i.e. constructed) in relation to a model. The differences within the group can only be articulated against the narrative that shapes the “shared culture” (223); since that “shared culture” is artificially constructed, so are the differences it contains.

Hall’s second definition, however, is useful in emphasizing the dynamic and changing nature of cultural identity and in identifying the presence of difference and rupture. Unlike the first definition that establishes cultural identity as a stable narrative

that grounds the group in a “common” past, this second definition insists on the notion of alteration. “Difference” then is presented as a means for regeneration. This idea is relevant for my study of *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* and *Diamond Grill* because it opens up the possibility of reading cultural difference, not as a threat to cultural “purity” and legitimacy, but as a regenerative device that can help prevent the ossification of culture. In terms of translation, Hall’s second definition introduces the opportunity for migrant translators to focus on preserving differences instead of making them familiar through translation. In other words, instead of having to find ways of translating difference that the dominant cultural group will be able to understand, migrant writers can simply leave difference untranslated in their texts and/or manipulate English in unfamiliar ways to illustrate that difference. As we will see, both Clarke and Wah make extensive use of this technique that introduces linguistic foreignness in their English renditions of cultural exchanges.

Hall’s analysis of these two views of cultural identity enables him to identify the two contradictory forces out of which cultural identity emerges: the continuous and homogenizing force of an “original” cultural script and the destabilizing and disruptive force of difference. This identification allows him to demonstrate that cultural identity does not originate in a fixed origin but in a series of complex interactions between these two contradictory forces. Cultural identity, then, is “[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*” and “there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (226). This definition is particularly relevant for my work in this chapter because it presents Clarke’s and Wah’s intentions. Both writers, in their various acts of cultural translation, aim at revealing and

analyzing the interaction of the contradictory forces that, to use Althusser's term "interpellate" them in the positions that the dominant culture provides for them. Their analyses produce forms of cultural contestation that destabilize the meaning and value of the behaviors and identities that the dominant cultural script prescribes. Both writers use their autobiographical reconstruction as an opportunity to challenge the dominant culture's attempt at positioning them on the cultural map and to claim their right to question that positioning. If, as Hall suggests, "*positioning*" is what constitutes cultural identity, being aware of the forces at work in the process of "interpellation" and developing new ways of negotiating this process constitute essential tools for the articulation of cultural identity. Autobiographical reconstruction grants Clarke and Wah the opportunity to probe the "interpellation" process and examine how cultural identity is produced. In Homi Bhabha's terms, Clarke's and Wah's opportunity "to engage in the 'war of position,' to shift the ground of knowledges, marks the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies of identification" (*The Location of Culture* 162).

Hall's focus on the dynamic interaction of contradictory forces illustrates how dominant and marginal cultural groups vie for the freedom and power to articulate a space from which cultural identities can be produced. What interests me particularly in this chapter is to analyze how this interaction works from the perspective of the marginalized migrant writer and his community. I would like, in other words, to examine the processes of what Mary Louise Pratt originally called "transculturation." In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt uses "transculturation" in the same way as ethnographers do, "to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (6). This term,

Pratt explains in a note, “was coined in the 1940s by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz [...] [who] proposed the term to replace the paired concepts of acculturation and deculturation that described the transference of culture in reductive fashion imagined from within the interests of the metropolis” (228). Recent developments in cultural studies have demonstrated that the type of cultural transactions that takes place in the processes of transculturation is not limited to the sphere of postcolonial discourse. Indeed, in *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, Sneja Gunew explains that discussions of globalization have made clear the connections between the global (where postcolonial discourse traditionally operates) and the local (where multiculturalism is instituted).<sup>2</sup> “[T]erms such as ‘transnational’ and ‘transcultural’,” Gunew suggests, “attempt to capture the ebb and flow of [the] dynamics” of complex interactions between local and global movements of people, capital, and power (37). She identifies “‘transculturalism’ as the latest term in a continuum to which multiculturalism belongs; a continuing quest to capture the hybrid realities of diaspora and globalisation” (127). This term is important for my present discussion as it illustrates the connections between the local events that Clarke and Wah reconstruct and the global sphere in which their texts are received. The term also emphasizes the relevance of Clarke’s reconstruction of Barbados and Barbadian culture for his Canadian readers. Clarke is not, like Wah, reconstructing events that happened on Canadian territory, but as part of the global culture of British imperialism written in Canada, his stories have meaning for Canadian readers.

Processes of transculturalism are particularly visible in the “contact zone.” Pratt defines the “contact zone” as “the space in which peoples geographically and historically

separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6).<sup>3</sup> Clarke and Wah construct various contact zones in their autobiographies; Clarke sets Combermere school and his home in the Barbadian community as two of his main contact zones and Wah uses school, the familial home, and the Diamond Grill, his father’s café, as his main contact zones. Clarke and Wah manipulate these contact zones as settings in which they can perform repetitive stagings of past events. These repetitive performances function as multiple and different translations of the dominant cultural script and destabilize its authority. The autobiographical space itself can also be seen as a contact zone in which characters, autobiographical personas, and readers who are “geographically and historically separated” meet. Because Clarke’s and Wah’s writing strategies are clearly subversive, their autobiographies can represent the types of conflict and disturbance that traditionally develop in the contact zone. Their autobiographies, as contact zones, constitute unstable spaces where meanings, cultural narratives, identities, and power relations are fiercely negotiated.

Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* and “The Third Space” and the work of translation theorists guide my analysis in this chapter. What alerts me to the value of Clarke’s *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* and Wah’s *Diamond Grill* is the writers’ production of translations that undermine the authority of the “original” cultural script that they are confronted with. This production, emerging from innovative writing techniques and language use, invites their readers to think beyond, indeed to challenge, the concept of “authentic” and/or “fixed” “original” cultural models. Homi Bhabha confirms this view of the “original” in “The Third Space”:



Translation is [...] a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense—imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it can be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the “original” is never finished or complete in itself. The “originary” is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalised prior moment of being or meaning—an essence.

(210)

Here Bhabha suggests that the “original” can only be interpreted and actualized as “culture” through the act of translation. Culture is presented as the product of the translation act, not as the source of the act. This complicates the very notion of an “original” from which the translation process can draw. The articulation of the “original” and the production of the translation are simultaneous, thus illustrating the complex, dynamic and often contradictory forces at work in the simultaneous creation of both the “original” and the translated texts. Without a “fixed” and/or “coherent” “original” to reproduce, but rather a culture to produce, Clarke’s and Wah’s texts demonstrate that individuals and communities have the opportunity to employ translation processes as ways of developing their own modes of identification. Bhabha opens *The Location of Culture* with this very idea:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and

innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1)

Bhabha outlines here the various sites of my analysis. My reading of Clarke's and Wah's autobiographies will examine how these writers shift the focus from "narratives of originary and initial subjectivities" to the complex processes that articulate cultures and cultural differences in order to emphasize the need to initiate new ways of shaping individual and communal identities. Bhabha's point also identifies the political potential of such innovative strategies to influence concepts of nationhood and the articulation of national identities.

The act of translation presented here is not a "traditional" one. Translation, in the cultural context, is not used to bridge the gaps between two different cultures but to actualize and produce these different cultures. Commenting on this shift from culture as "the source of conflict to an element of production," Sherry Simon explains that this new understanding of the translation process opens "onto a 'Third Space' which accommodates a whole fund of syncretisms, recombinations and mechanisms of acculturation. The Third Space is a space of cultural creation, where translation is a 'grounds for intervention,' creating texts that resist categorization and renaturalization" (21). I do not share with Simon the sense that the Third Space "accommodates syncretisms and mechanisms of acculturation." It seems to me, on the contrary, that the Third Space challenges processes of reduction and homogenization such as syncretization and acculturation because the discursive conditions in that space "ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity [so] that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (*The Location of Culture*

37). Simon's thinking, however, is useful in reinforcing the concept of translation as a tool for social and political intervention. Fred Wah expands on this notion in "A Poetics of Ethnicity" where he explains his use of the term "poetics." He uses the term, he says, "not in the theoretical sense of the study of or theory about literature, but in its practical and applied sense, as the tools designed or located by writers and artists to initiate movement and change" (51). Wah's concern with the designing and locating of tools that can "initiate movement and change" illustrates his view of writing about cultural differences as a means for social and political intervention.

My analysis of *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* and *Diamond Grill* will proceed in three stages. I will first explore the complex translation processes that Clarke and Wah engage in in order to deconstruct and contest the "originality" of the dominant cultural scripts that position them in the margins and produce these dominant scripts as well as their own scripts of cultural difference. I will then present some of the linguistic tools that they fashion for their acts of cultural translation and analyze the techniques that they develop to undermine the authority of normative English and open a linguistic space in which they have the freedom and power to articulate their cultural differences. Finally, following Bhabha's suggestion that cultural translation constitutes the "grounds for intervention," I will examine the ways in which Clarke's and Wah's texts can be manipulated as forms of social and political action.

## MIMICKING “ORIGINAL” CULTURAL MODELS: REVEALING TAINTED ORIGINS

Clarke and Wah set their autobiographical personas' interactions with the culture of the dominant group in various contact zones. Clarke has his autobiographical double, Tom, move from his mother's home in the village to Combermere, the British private school that he attends. Clarke sets up two clearly distinct cultural spheres: the Barbadian village, with its complex “rituals and customs” and its own language, and Combermere and other British institutions (22). Tom's constant movement between these two spheres illustrates the incessant interpenetrations between Barbadian and British cultures. Wah also constructs different cultural spheres, but he does not separate them as clearly as Clarke does. Instead, he often merges the sphere of the dominant culture and the sphere of Chinese culture within the same spaces. In his father's Chinese café, the Diamond Grill, both cultural spheres are spatially represented: the Canadian dining room with its modern design and appliances, where English is spoken, and the Chinese kitchen and basement, where Chinese is the language in use. Things are not so clear-cut though, as food (such as the “*mixee grill*” (2)), language, and hybrid bodies constantly traverse the fluid border between the two: the “swinging wooden doors” that separate kitchen and dining room (1).<sup>4</sup> Wah's familial home is also a space of complex cultural interpenetrations. Wah's father, Fred Sr., is half Chinese and half Scots/Irish; his mother, Coreen, is of Swedish origin. Wah's familial home is therefore a sphere where complex cultural interactions are at play.

Both Clarke and Wah establish these complex contact zones as spheres in which cultural values, practices, and behaviors are articulated and passed on. They both present

education (both institutional and personal) as the privileged avenue for the transmission of cultural models. Tom and Fred Jr. learn about cultural values and behaviors through their school teachers, parents, and various members of their communities. *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* opens with ten-year old Tom's official admission into Combermere School and the voices of Barbadian mothers telling the boy that "[l]earning going make [him] into a man" (5). As this assertion and the title of the autobiography suggest, Clarke focuses his narrative on his education and the ways in which it fashions his identity. He describes the brutal fashioning of his identity as a "little black Englishman," and the gruesome amounts of work imposed on the "Cawmere" boys. He also emphasizes the alien nature of this education in the cultural context of Barbados. Describing his history lessons, he explains:

We learned about the Battle of Hastings; the Battle of Bannockburn; about Kings who lost their heads; about Kings who kept their heads; and about Kings whose wives lost theirs[.] [...] I knew *all* about the Kings; the Tudors, Stuarts and Plantagenets; and the Wars of the Roses; but nothing was taught about Barbados.

We lived in Barbados, but we studied English society and manners. (72)

In this representation of his history lessons, Clarke reduces key events and people of British history by summarizing detailed information into the repeated "who lost their heads." This mocking rendition of British history illustrates its violent and bloody nature and undermines its authority by suggesting that its meaning can be reduced to figuring out which Kings got to keep their heads and which ones did not. Clarke further subverts the authority of British history when he inserts a reference to a hero, "who could have been a Barbadian," in the middle of his description: "We learned about a man who could

have been a Barbadian, who wanted to blow up everything, including the King and the Houses of Parliament, and who lost his head. On Guy Fawkes Day we now celebrate him in Barbados by eating *conkies* and blowing up gunpowder and spinning wheels and ‘bombs’” (72). This insertion enables Clarke to indicate the colonized people’s potential for rebellion against British imperialism. It also aligns the hero with important British Kings as he, too, lost his head. This individual’s rebellious act, now a part of Barbadian history, is, ironically, celebrated in Barbados through the consumption of originally British “*conkies*” and the manipulation of British-introduced weapons. Of course, when this episode of British history was being passed on to the “Cawmere” boys, the fact that the insurgent lost his head functioned probably as an implicit threat, reminding them of what could happen to individuals intending to attack the imperial power structures.

Clarke’s subversion of the authority of the historical discourse that is supposed to impress him with the grandeur of the British Empire and extract his political allegiance to the British Crown is also made clear through his appropriation of British history.<sup>5</sup> He remembers that

[his] mind crawled with battles and speeches, with Divine Rights, Magna Cartas, and [he] saw [himself] sitting in ermine with the Lords and Dukes, eating and drinking with Charles the First[.] [...] The women in the book—Anne Boleyn, Anne of Cleves, Elizabeth Tudor (one by this name lived in Town), Mary Queen of Scots—all these were women with whom I was in love. I painted their faces black and put their huge crinolined dresses on the girls I saw around me. (72-3)

This recollection illustrates both the autobiographer’s subversive use of translation and the insidious power of colonial rule. Confronted with a historical script that overwhelms

him with the deeds and lives of important people and is supposed to demonstrate his subjected position (i.e. he is, after all, a British subject), Clarke grants his autobiographical persona the freedom and power to identify with the heroes of British history. Tom rejects his “subject position” and instead, mockingly “sits in ermine” and dines with “Charles the First.” He rejects the identity and life that this historical discourse prescribes for him and instead appropriates the lives and women of the white heroes of British history. Clarke employs Tom’s fantasy about being in love with “the [white] women in the book” as a way of deconstructing stereotypes. Having Tom fantasize about seducing the white women of his history book enables Clarke to point at the commonly held stereotype among white people that “blacks are licentious” and are intent on contaminating the white race by seducing their women (*The Location of Culture* 75). This stereotype, Bhabha argues, constitutes “the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse” because it allows the dominant group to reduce and fix the identity of the other to the one quality expressed in the stereotype (75). Clarke, however, only hints at the “traditional” meanings of the stereotype (i.e. the black man’s attraction to white women, turning black women into white women by dressing them in “huge crinolined dresses” to make them attractive) and articulates a different meaning, produces a different translation. He has Tom transform the white women he dreams of into black women by “paint[ing] their faces black.” This, of course, reinforces the stereotype by illustrating the “contamination” of white women by black blood, but it also suggests an alternative reality: these important white women could be black women. Tom’s reduction of different white women into one stereotypical representation of “women with huge

crinolined dresses” also offers Clarke a way of introducing his readers to a zone where the stereotypes they are familiar with are differently ordered.

Clarke’s multi-layered translation of the historical script he received at school makes clear his intention not to abide the British version of his life and identity. He concludes the passage describing his history lessons by asserting: “I did not use [British history] as a stepping stone to the Civil Service or the Department of Sanitary Inspection. I decided instead to live it, to make it a part of me” (73). This final statement clearly rejects the behaviors that the dominant culture prescribes. Combermere boys are the stars of the Barbadian community because their formal British education means that they will not have to work at menial jobs, but will instead have a chance to join the ranks of British civil servants. Learning British history ironically prepares Tom for such jobs, but it also teaches him that they are still jobs that subject him to British rule. From his history lessons, he learns that the real positions of power are held by white people only and that is why he “decides to live [British history]” instead by fantasizing “sitting in ermine” and “eating and drinking with Charles the First.” A further layer of irony reveals, of course, that Tom has internalized the racism inherent in colonial discourse. When he rejects the life prescribed for him by the dominant culture and “make[s] [history] a part of [him],” he internalizes the belief that white people are the ones entitled to better lives.

Clarke’s reconstruction of his lessons in British history illustrates the trappings of mimicry. British colonial discourse draws its legitimacy and authority from the power of its imperial history and Tom’s Combermere school masters impose this discourse as a way of disciplining their black students and subjecting them to the power of the Empire. Through the inculcation of this formative discourse, the school masters endeavor to make



little Barbadian boys into “little black Englishmen,” almost the same as the white English men that people their history, but not quite. This discourse operates in two contradictory directions. On the one hand, it empowers the “Cawmere” boys by granting them the opportunity to step out of poverty and enter the middle-class sphere of civil servants; on the other hand, however, it limits them to positions of service to the British Empire. Actually mimicking the fabulous deeds of historical characters is forbidden to the colonized student; he will never be allowed to join the class of leaders of the Empire. Clarke’s reconstruction of his history lessons translates the hidden meanings located between the lines of the formative discourse that shapes his identity as a “little black Englishman.” His translation, by revealing the concealed meanings contained in the cultural script imposed on the “Cawmere” boys, exposes the constructed nature of this script and consequently undermines its assumed “originality” and legitimacy.

In *Diamond Grill*, Wah also deconstructs attempts by institutions of the dominant cultural group to force him and members of the Chinese community into positions where their identities are fixed, thus depriving them of the freedom and power to identify as they choose. The members of the dominant cultural group present the criteria on which they base their articulation of “Canadian identity” as “pure” and legitimate, but Wah’s reading and translation of the dominant cultural script reveal the racial and ethical murkiness of these so-called “pure” and legitimate values. Fred Jr. describes having to fill out forms on the first day of school and remembers, “The first couple of years I was really confused. The problem was the blank after Racial Origin, I thought, well, this is Canada, I’ll put down Canadian. But the teacher said no Freddy, you’re Chinese, your racial origin is Chinese, that’s what your father is. Canadian isn’t a racial identity” (53).

The teacher forbids Fred Jr. to identify as he pleases and instead positions him in the margins of the Canadian cultural mainstream. Ignoring the fact that his father is only half Chinese and that Fred Jr. is therefore only a quarter Chinese, the teacher reminds him of his non-white origins and emphasizes the idea that only “purely” white people, not those who can pass, can claim to be Canadian.<sup>6</sup> Wah’s recreation of this episode illustrates the simplistic concept of racial origin upheld by the dominant cultural group and ridicules the teacher’s definition of “Canadian,” which does not take into account the cultural and racial diversity present in the classroom. Unaware or unwilling to acknowledge this diversity, the teacher imposes foreignness and difference on most of the students.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the autobiography, Wah counters the dominant cultural group’s emphasis on racial “purity” by manipulating the concept of “mixture” almost to an extreme. He chooses his examples of “mixture” from every day elements such as food, language, habits, conversations at the Diamond Grill, racial slurs in the school yard, the experiences of mixed-race families. Illustrating “impurity” in elements of daily life enables him to emphasize the reality of hybridity. This reality contrasts sharply with the fictive ideal of racial purity that teachers, immigration officers, and politicians try to uphold. Opening his autobiography with a description of the “mixed grill” served at the Diamond, Wah explains that the dish

is your typical improvised imitation of Empire cuisine. No kippers or kidney for the Chinese cafe cooks, though. They know the authentic mixed grill alright. It is part of their colonial cook’s training, learning to serve the superior race in Hong Kong and Victoria properly, mostly as chefs in private elite clubs and homes. But, as the original lamb chop, split lamb kidney, and pork sausage edges its way onto

every small town cafe menu, its ruddy countenance has mutated into something quick and dirty, not grilled at all, but fried. (2)

With this episode, Wah establishes that Canada is the ground for “imitation” and “perversion” of the “authentic mixed grill” that belongs to the cook’s colonial past. In the Canadian context, the colonial original “mutates” and becomes something different, a “*mixee grill*” as Shu, the cook at the Diamond, calls it. Using this episode at the beginning of *Diamond Grill*, Wah suggests that hybridity, not “purity,” lies at the point of “origin;” this origin is not fixed, however, but rather open to “imitation.” He contends that the mutation from authentic (or pure) to mixed (or hybrid, impure) is what constitutes the basis for Canadian identity and later suggests that “[I]f you’re pure anything you can’t be Canadian. We’ll save the name for all the mixed bloods in this country” (53-4).

Wah’s translation of official documents that regulate the cultural landscape of the country emphasizes this radical redefinition of “Canadian” and unveils the unethical quality of the dominant group’s cultural script. Mobilizing the multiple discourses at his disposal—official immigration documents such as the Head Tax form, various administrative forms, written histories of the Chinese community in Cabri, promotional brochures—Wah pieces together the multiple fragments that constitute the dominant cultural script. He translates this “source” text in the light of his personal experiences, his father’s and grandfather’s, as well as the experiences of other members of the Chinese community. This is how he interprets the Head Tax form that Chinese immigrants had to fill out to enter Canada:

This certifies that under the provisions of the Chinese Immigration Act Charley Chim Chong Say Wong Liu Chung a native of The Peach Garden in the Kingdom of Laundry of the age ancient years and whose title official rank profession or occupation is that of a rented muscle who arrived or landed at Gold Mountain on the auspicious day of The Yellow Pages 190\_\_ 1858, 1885, 1903, 1923, 1947 Vide statement and declaration form No. one son has (never will be) paid the fee or duty imposed upon Chinese Immigrants on their arrival in Canada NOT, no Chinky way being exempt from such payment under the terms of the said Act[.]

(130)

Wah's translation makes clear the history that such a document seeks to conceal (i.e. what happens to Chinese Immigrants after they have filled out this form). With expressions like "the Peach Garden" or "the age of ancient years," Wah illustrates the stereotypical and exotic ways in which Asian cultures are often represented in the Canadian context. "Kingdom of Laundry," "rented muscle," and "Gold Mountain" speak to the history of hard physical labor of Chinese men who came to find gold and ended up toiling in laundries and factories and/or building the railway that was, ironically, supposed to bring people together. The list of dates reminds the reader that the Head Tax was raised many times to prevent Chinese immigrants from entering the country. The last date in the list (marking the moment when Chinese immigrants were granted the right to vote in Canada) indicates the official end of systematic discrimination against Chinese immigrants. "No chinky way" and "Yellow Pages" (echoing "Yellow Peril") illustrate the negative and abusive ways in which Chinese immigrants were depicted and addressed. Wah's translation of the Chinese Head Tax form reveals the racist, exploitative, and

coercive nature of the values and practices that regulated the entrance of Chinese immigrants in Canada. This act of autobiographical reconstruction enables the writer to go back over a particular period of Canadian history in order to fill in the potential gaps in his readers' historical knowledge, to open discussion, and to revise history.

The shameful content of the dominant group's cultural script and the racist behavior it prescribes anger Wah. *Diamond Grill* retraces the history of anger that is passed down in the Wah family from generation to generation. This anger stems from the violence of racist acts and behaviors, mostly by members of the dominant cultural group, but also by members of the family. Wah recreates his father's history and identifies the source of Fred Sr.'s anger as the moment when his father, Lucky Jim, sent him and his older sister, Ethel, to China to live with his first wife. Torn from his Canadian family at only four years old, Fred Sr. spends nineteen years in China before his stepmother sends him back to Canada. Upon his return, the Canadian Immigration authorities place him in jail because, although he was born in Canada, his parents cannot produce the documents necessary to confirm his Canadian identity. After the resolution of this administrative problem, Fred Sr. spends several years learning to speak English again. Fred Sr. lives with the experience of having been doubly displaced. Wah explains that his father is

peevish enough at all the shit he's going through back in Canada, the immigration jail, this so-called family, father mother brothers sisters most of whom he can hardly remember and some he's never met, his older sister left behind in China, pretty much languageless except for the cooks in the café, this cold, dry prairie after lush and humid Cantonese landscape, no friends, strange music, white farmers in coveralls and white bankers in business suits—screw that. (17)

Forced to live in translation again after his second Pacific crossing, Fred Sr. feels alienated by the racist behavior of his white Canadian customers and his wife's parents. As a result of his forced translation that leaves him speechless, Fred Sr. seethes with anger and passes it on to his children through unexpected outbursts. For instance, when they laugh at his accented English: "watch out for his quick dagger defense," Wah warns, "you smart-aleck kids, you think you know so much [...] and that'll be the redness in his face the English problem, him exposed" (61). Learning to become Canadian again is an insidiously violent process for Fred Sr., one that keeps revealing the traces of his linguistic and cultural displacement and the inflexibility of the criteria that define Canadian identity. Confronted with the dominant group's cultural script that rejects all forms of "impurity," Fred Sr. is identified as a "Chinaman" because his skin color and accented English mark him as such.

Fred Sr.'s mixed blood alienates him from both the white and the Chinese communities. His father has problems, Wah explains, "from both the Chinese (he's a half-breed, he's really a white man, he's married to a white woman) and the Wasps (he looks Chinese, he can talk Chinese, and he runs the café, right?)" (39). With this explanation Wah unveils the reductive and restrictive nature of the cultural identification process. The textual reconstruction of his own experiences with cultural and racial prejudice emphasizes the inappropriateness and unacceptability of the criteria that define cultural belonging and identification. Remembering an episode when the father of his white girlfriend forbade him to see her again because he did not want "his daughter marrying a Chinaman" and Fred Jr. had "sneaky eyes," Wah lashes out at the page: "Well fuck! I can't even speak Chinese my eyes don't slant and aren't black my hair's light

brown and I'm not going to work in a restaurant all my life but I'm going to go to university and I'm going to be as great a fucking white success as you asshole and my name's still going to be Wah and I'll love garlic and rice for the rest of my life" (39). The use of profanity and the absence of punctuation illustrate Wah's anger and his violent reaction to a blatant act of racism. The tirade, however, does more than simply allow Wah to vent; it outlines the possibility for and validity of hybridity in the concept of Canadian identity. He avoids Chinese identification at first, not because he wishes to deny this part of his ancestry, but because he rejects the reductive linguistic and physical criteria on which white conceptions of what constitutes Chinese identity are based. He then claims his place in the sphere of white Canadian culture by identifying himself with the white racist who just displaced him to the margins of the cultural mainstream. Wah's violent reaction breaks through the rigid boundaries of cultural categories and promotes an understanding of cultural identity that would not be grounded in fixed and reductive linguistic and physical criteria, that, his experiences demonstrate, lead to misunderstanding, intolerance, and violence. His reaction illustrates his frustration with the absence of a "third space" in which processes of transculturation would allow for more fluid productions of cultural identity.

Clarke also demonstrates the rigidity and violence of cultural expectations. The autobiographer articulates many detailed and graphic descriptions of the floggings that school boys receive at the hands of the headmaster and/or the schoolmasters. He clearly interprets this physical violence against the bodies of black boys as an act of colonial oppression when he describes the headmaster of St. Matthias school beating him and five other boys: "[H]e was flogging all six of us at the same time, across our backs, our heads,

our feet as we jumped in stupid attempts to avoid the snake, criss-crossing, horizontal, diagonal, like the various crosses in the English flag and in the flags of other countries he had taught us about in classes of social history” (12). The episode illustrates the humiliating effect of the physical punishment on the boys and combines the colonizing of the boys’ minds (through “classes of social history”) with the subjection of their bodies. With this episode, Clarke clearly establishes the asymmetrical power relations at play in the shaping of “little black Englishmen.” Although the Barbadian community is not completely helpless (and in fact sometimes actively complicit, as we will see) in the articulation of their “British” identity, the imposition of the dominant group’s cultural script is presented as systematic and coercive.

The boys’ teachers, as representatives of the dominant cultural group, control the boys’ bodies, minds, and political allegiances. The Second World War makes this omnipotent control even clearer. When Barbados declares its allegiance to Great Britain in the conflict, Clarke recalls: “We were English. The allegiance and patriotism that our leader, Mr. Grantly Adams, had imprisoned us with had been cabled to the Colonial Office in London. We were the English of Little England. Little black Englishmen” (52). The “little black Englishmen’s” political duty is reiterated at school where the headmaster shows the globe to the boys, reminds them of the grandeur of the British Empire, and affirms that they “as free people belonged! *Our* empire!” (45). The irony of the declaration, of course, lies in the fact that these “free” people “belonged” to the Empire and is underlined in Clarke’s italicizing of “*Our*.” The headmaster’s declaration both empowers and disempowers the boys, who are left suspended in the ambivalence of the in-between space that colonial mimicry opens. They are British subjects, but they are also



subjected to British rule and violence. They are on the side of the Allies, fighting against Hitler and his attempts at cleansing the world of its racial and cultural “impurities,” but their school is “like a concentration camp” and their headmaster is “now like Goebbels” (45). The boys manipulate elements and names emerging from the historical moment in which they live in order to create a version of their daily reality that undermines the authority of the version that the dominant cultural group produces. In their private conversations, the boys are free to articulate a discourse that subverts the authority of the one that is imposed on them in school and on the BBC and to decide their own political allegiances.

In one of their many conversations about the war, Tom and his friends try to determine where to position themselves in the conflict:

“Between Churchill and Hitler then. The Allies and the Axes.”

The voting was to begin.

“Those in favour of Hitler and the Nazzies?”

Two of us put up our hands.

“Who for Churchill and the Allies?”

The other two raised their hands.

I was the chairman. In my wild small world of international affairs, and of the British House of Commons debates, I did not know that the chairman had a casting vote. (57-8)

The game reveals divided political allegiances and the potential for subversion in the Barbadian community. In spite of their teachers’ and the BBC’s relentless rehearsing of patriotic discourse, the boys voice their own political opinions outside of the dominant

cultural sphere. It is interesting that the vote remains tied in the end because of Tom's ignorance. Had he learned his lessons better (or had the role of the Chairman been explained better?), the political positioning and identities of these four "little black Englishmen" would have shifted. The reconstruction of this seemingly innocent game enables Clarke to return some agency to his subjected characters and to demonstrate the limits of colonial rule. Once outside of the dominant culture's sphere, the subjected individual can regain some of his/her ability to speak for him/herself in his/her own language and to experiment with identity positions other than the one prescribed by the colonizing culture. Full agency is not granted the colonized subject, however, as Tom does not know that he has a casting vote, but the autobiographer, through the power of retrospective analysis, has the ability to bring to life the subversive reality that that knowledge would have created. In other words, autobiographical representation attributes political meaning to the boys' game and identifies the potentially subversive ways in which the boys could employ their colonial education.

Through their multiple acts of cultural translation, both Clarke and Wah present the dominant group's cultural script as the source of complex processes of exclusion, imposition, and expropriation that articulate their cultural identities. Both writers also challenge the very notion of "authoritative origins," demonstrate their duplicitous nature, expose the unethical motivations from which they emerge, and condemn the coercive process of identity formation they prescribe. In demonstrating the obviously asymmetrical power relations at work in the processes of cultural identity formation, Clarke and Wah remain, however, aware of the active role that they, as well as other members of their respective cultural communities, play in the imposition of the dominant

culture's identity. Having learned to look at themselves from the dominant culture's point of view, these minority writers have internalized the attitudes and glances of the dominant other. "This 'look', from—so to speak—the place of the Other," Stuart Hall argues, "fixes [them], not only in its violence, hostility and aggression, but in the ambivalence of its desire. This brings [them] face to face, not simply with the dominating [cultural] presence as the site [...] of integration [...] [,] but as the site of a profound splitting and doubling" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 233). Clarke and Wah articulate "split and double" autobiographical personas that are simultaneously positioned at the center and in the margins of the cultural map, both rejecting and desiring the various positions denied to them.

Homi Bhabha's analysis of this "split positioning" is particularly useful here as it illustrates the contradictory forces that splitting generates and the type of knowledge that it produces:

Splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defence and differentiation in the colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place* [...]. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself *productive* of differentiation. Splitting is then a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negation or elision; it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief. (*The Location of Culture* 132)

Bhabha's analysis of splitting suggests that when Clarke and Wah disavow their Barbadian and Chinese identities respectively, they do not simply negate (or erase) their cultural difference as a way of protecting themselves, they also produce it. In other words, their cultural difference and the identity attached to it are produced in the very act that attempts to erase both. This process of disavowal is crucial, Bhabha argues, because it "produces a strategy for the negotiation of the knowledges of differentiation" and "makes a non-sense of the disciplinary meanings of culture itself" (132).

Wah's recreation of his visit to his friend Lawrence's Chinese café illustrates how splitting works. "I hardly ever go into King's Family Restaurant," Wah explains, "because when it comes to Chinese cafes and Chinatowns, I'd rather be transparent. Camouflaged enough so they know I'm there but can't see me, can't get to me. It's not safe. I need a clear coast for a getaway. Invisible. I don't know who I am in this territory and maybe I don't want to" (136). Wah opens this episode with his reluctance to identify as Chinese; he is split between "want[ing] to be there but [not wanting] to be seen there" (136). He feels unsafe in Chinatowns and their cafes because he is afraid of being unmasked; he fears that members of the Chinese community will be able to detect his Chinese ancestry and expose his "impure Chineseness" (137). The repetition of the image of invisibility emphasizes Wah's preference for "racial transpiciousness" (136). Merging the prefix "trans" with the word "conspicuous," Wah creates a word that enables him to identify his racial origin as "beyond the obvious." He looks white, but is "stained enough by genealogy to make a difference" (137). This complex process of simultaneous identification and dis-identification illustrates Fred Jr.'s ambivalence about his Chinese identity and constitutes an attempt at erasing it. However, when Lawrence sees him, he

recognizes Fred Jr. as a member of the Chinese community and introduces him to his cook, who, he claims, is in fact Fred Jr.'s cousin from China. This encounter happens in the safety of the café's kitchen, the Chinese part of the restaurant, where Fred Jr. is protected from the dominantly white gaze of the Canadian community. Yet, back on the street, Wah is relieved to have "all [his] ambivalence covered over [...]"—the racism within [him] that makes and consumes that neutral (white) version of [himself], that allows [him] the sad privilege of being, in this white white world, not the target but the gun" (138). This episode clearly illustrates the contradictory forces at work within the culturally split individual. Wah's deliberate manipulation of the dominant group's cultural script gives him the power to camouflage his Chinese identity while simultaneously attracting attention to it. The very act of erasure produces the cultural difference that it is attempting to conceal.

Clarke's autobiographical recreation of the ceremonial acts that preceded his first day at Combermere School illustrates the Barbadian community's complicity in the shaping of Tom's British identity. The episode simultaneously demonstrates the community's active attempt at erasing the cultural markers that identify Tom as Barbadian and brings to life the very culture that the community is endeavoring to conceal. Clarke remembers that, on his first day of school,

Delcina, the tallest, blackest and most beautiful woman [he] had ever seen, smiled and broke into a hymn. She lifted her operatic voice, trained in the hot broiling sun, as she bent over tubs of many sheets and shirts, with her black hands in the heavy soap suds, for the rich *out the front road*, and she sang on that morning.

The washing, white as snow and ironed like glass, would be carried later in the week to the Marine Hotel. (5)

Delcina sings to celebrate Tom's opportunity to become a "little black Englishman" who, if he does well in school, will have the opportunity to join the ranks of British civil servants and leave the community that nurtured him. This woman who expresses the hopes of a community for one of its own to leave them and join the dominant cultural sphere also ironically embodies the culture of servitude and hard physical labor on which the dominant sphere has established its power. Clarke's detailed description of toiling Delcina in the "hot broiling sun," enables him to inscribe and preserve the way of life that Tom's British education rests upon and aims at erasing.

Tom's transfer from the Barbadian cultural sphere to the British one triggers the process of identity translation. The community actively participates in the translation act as Tom's mother provides the required uniforms and school supplies that the boy needs and "one of the 'uncles'" of the village cut his hair (6). "The finished product," Clarke recalls, "had the impact and the look of a bowl on your head, and all the visible hair wiped clean away with soap and water by the blade of [a] glass-bottle" (6). The reference to "cleanliness," "soap and water," and "glass" echoes Delcina's sheets and shirts washing for white people. Through this hair-cutting ritual, the boy is "cleansed" of his Barbadian identity and readied for entrance in the dominant cultural sphere. "You is a Combermere boy now," the "uncle" announces when he is done cutting the boy's hair (6). Clarke's description of the contents of Tom's school bag further emphasizes the erasure of the boy's Barbadian identity. The bag "was filled with books of interminable pages [...]. There was the shining gold-painted set that contained the compasses; the

Rankin biscuit tin, scrubbed clean and looking like a small silver coffin, with a flying-fish sandwich in it" (6). Clarke's specification that the biscuit tin was "scrubbed clean and looking like a small silver coffin" metaphorically establishes a complex web of forces that all work toward the "death" or deletion of Tom's Barbadian identity. The insistence on the cleanliness of the tin points to the white community as the rest of the passage has shown, but also to Tom's mother's agency in the process of her son's identity translation. She is most probably the one who "scrubbed [it] clean." The presence of the "flying-fish sandwich"—a culinary representation of Barbadian culture—inside a British biscuit tin both accentuates the idea of cultural effacement and the presence of Barbadian culture at the heart of British culture. Clarke's carefully detailed textual recreation of the rituals that preceded his first day at Combermere enables him to demonstrate his community's complicity in the process of cultural translation and to shape the very culture that this translation process is trying to erase. From this recreation, Clarke's readers are offered the privilege to observe the practices and values of the closely-knit, hard-working, and caring Barbadian community that surrounds Tom.

It is important to add yet another layer of complication to these processes of cultural interactions and the multiple forces at work in the translation acts that they reveal. If Clarke illustrates his own active participation and his community's participation in the erasure of his Barbadian culture and identity, he also depicts many attempts at resisting cultural translation. Tom's interaction with his friends, as we have seen earlier, enables him to revert to the use of Barbadian speech and counter the ideological positioning and political identity that the dominant culture imposes on him. The community's articulation of their own historical discourse and fashioning of their own

commemoration rituals for their soldiers also constitute an act of resistance aimed at the colonizing culture. But some of the most vivid moments of resistance occur between mother and son, when Tom attempts to bring “foreign” British culture home. In one such moment, Tom, “a Combermere boy, trained to be a snob, coached to be discriminating” stops “going home to eat and instead ha[s] suppuh and dinnuh” (53). Practicing his identity as a “little black Englishman,” Tom changes his speech and eating habits. Clarke remembers trying out his new language on his mother: “She had just told me, ‘Boy, come and drink this little warm chocolate-tea before it get cold. I put some flour drops in it to help cloid you.’ [...] ‘I would prefer a cuppa toy, Ma,’ I told her. ‘Boy, you gone mad?’” (53). Clarke humorously displays the type of conflict that cultural translation initiates and the contradictory expectations that the boy needs to negotiate. Tom’s teachers, his mother, and his community expect him to become a “little black Englishman,” but at the same time, his mother also expects him to remain unchanged, untranslated, when he reenters the community. The problem, of course, is that such a state (i.e. an untranslated state) does not exist; once the translation process starts, it becomes irreversible. Tom is consequently forced to live in the ambivalence of cultural “in-betweenness” or, as Wah would put it, to “straddle the hyphen.”

### **TRANSLATING STRATEGIES: PUTTING TOGETHER “THE ETHNOPOETIC TOOLBOX”**

In order to explore “hybridity’s implicit ambivalence,” Wah explains in “Half-Bred Poetics,” “the hybrid writer must [...] develop instruments of disturbance, dislocation, and displacement” (73). “The culturally marginalized writer,” he expands in “A Poetics



of Ethnicity,” “will engineer approaches to language and form that enable a particular residue (genetic, cultural, biographical) to become kinetic and valorized” (51). Wah’s insistence on the development of linguistic and formal strategies that make possible valorized and dynamic representations of cultural difference guides my analysis in this section of the chapter. I would like to examine some of the linguistic and textual techniques that Wah and Clarke place in their translation toolbox. I would like to focus in particular on Wah’s use of the “hyphen” and the concept of “faking it” and Clarke’s manipulation of code-switching and voices. Because language constitutes the most effective site for revealing traces of cultural contact, I hope that this examination of Wah’s and Clarke’s translation tools will display the complex functioning of cultural interpenetration and further complicate categories of alterity and definitions of cultural identity. I am particularly interested in examining how these “ethnopoetic” tools function in the autobiographical act of translation and how they can help produce cultural identity.

In “Displacement and Self-Representation: Theorizing Contemporary Canadian Biotexts,” Joanne Saul analyzes the innovative textual strategies that Roy Kiyooka, Daphne Marlatt, Michael Ondaatje, and Fred Wah develop in order to interrogate their belonging to various cultural communities and to work through the complex processes of cultural identification. Focusing on Wah’s use of the hyphen, she explains that “[f]or Wah the hyphen is a space that challenges both notions of sameness and difference in discussions of ethnic and national belonging” (268). She also insists that Wah makes the hyphen audible in order to demonstrate the necessity to “abandon[...] the sense of a static self [...] in favor of a self in flux—continually changing, performing” (268). Wah’s manipulation of the hyphen as a space in which cultural ambivalence is made visible and

audible is indeed crucial to understanding how hybrid identities are produced. It is through the dynamic passage (or movement) from one culture to another that hybrid cultural identities emerge. It is important therefore to read the hyphen, not as a static punctuation sign that both links and separates two distinct elements, but as a permeable boundary that allows the dynamic interpenetration of different meanings. Such a reading of the hyphen offers Wah the opportunity to focus on the multiplicity of meanings that each negotiation of the hyphen produces.

Wah's textual representation of the hyphen is the swinging door that separates the kitchen and the dining room of the Diamond Grill. This door "swings between the Occident and Orient to break the hush of the whole café before first light the rolling gait with which [he] ride[s] this silence that is a hyphen and the hyphen is the door" (16). Every passage through the door, every occasion to "straddle the hyphen," produces a different staging of the process of cultural translation. The passage, as we have seen earlier, can be negotiated quietly, not attracting attention to itself, not disturbing the dominant cultural group, or noisily with a "fast and loud, *WhapBamBoom!*" that "feels so good" (21). These multiple stagings of cultural translation point to the many possible nuances and differences in the meanings of this translation. They emphasize the necessity of recognizing the multiple meanings of the term "Asian-Canadian" and the diverse ways of articulating the identities attached to it. Wah's manipulation of the hyphen destabilizes the dominant cultural group's reading of "Asian-Canadian" that ignores the many facets of that cultural identity, thus forcing individuals of Asian ancestry into one or two positions.<sup>8</sup> Positioning the migrant individual on the hyphen, Wah applies pressure on the cultural master narrative and disturbs fixed notions of cultural identity.

Wah's presentation of *Diamond Grill* as a "biotext" enables him to highlight the importance of "performance" in the production of identity. "A biotext," he states, "perhaps more than other literary genres, seems an innately cumulative performance" (ix). The need for a literary form that makes this "cumulative performance" possible illustrates the innovative take on cultural identity formation that Wah is articulating here. He introduces his life stories as "poses or postures, necessitated, as [he] hope[s] is clear in the text, by faking it" (ix). Positioned on the hyphen, Fred Jr. and his father negotiate their incessant movement between the Canadian and Chinese cultural spheres by developing strategies that enable them to perform or fake belonging. Fred Jr. learns faking it from his father. On the occasion of his father's initiation speech at the Lions Club, a slip of the tongue makes Fred Sr. pronounce soup "*sloup*." He deals with the embarrassment that such a slip produces by

turn[ing] it into a joke, a kind of self put-down that he knows these white guys like to hear: he bluffs that Chinamen call soup *sloup* because, as you all know, the Chinese make their café soup from the slop water they wash their underwear and socks in, and besides, it's just like when you hear me eating my soup, Chinamen like to slurp and make a lot of noise. That's a compliment to the cook! (66)

Fred Sr. fakes belonging to the dominant cultural group by pretending to share the stereotypical assumptions that articulate the group's notion of Chinese culture and identity. He manipulates the derogatory term "Chinamen" to identify himself in a way that will be understandable and recognizable for the white members of the Lions Club. Presenting himself in terms that are familiar to these men, even if it means being self-deprecatory, indicates his determination to belong to the club. This performance is

obviously demeaning for Fred Sr., but it is also empowering because it enables him to remain in charge of the situation. Faking it returns the control that the language's betrayal had momentarily deprived him of. The reading of this episode is also double. Fred Sr.'s audience at the Lions Club, unversed in the realities of life in translation, does not realize that Fred Sr. is faking it. This ignorance ironically reinforces the dominant cultural group's erroneous view of Chinese culture and identity (i.e. their view must be legitimate if even the Chinese confirm it). Fred Jr.'s audience, on the other hand, witnesses the falseness of the entire process. This restaging of his father's initiation speech in front of a different audience enables Wah to illustrate the fact that "English can be faked" and reveal that he "quickly learn[s] that when you fake language you see, as well, how everything else is a fake" (66). Since cultural behaviors, values, and identities emerge from discursive practices, demonstrating that the language used to articulate these practices can be faked reinforces Wah's idea that cultural scripts cannot function as legitimate and original models for the articulation of cultural identities. These scripts can provide a starting point for the performance of identity, but they cannot control it. In *Diamond Grill*, Wah deconstructs and subverts the discursive practices that give power to the dominant group's cultural script in order to shift that power to the performers of that script. This shift empowers the migrant individual because it allows him/her to try on, practice, and constantly produce dynamic cultural identities.

Clarke employs language and textual strategies differently from Wah. He is not so much trying to find new ways of articulating hybrid identities as he is attempting to destabilize the power structures involved in and sustained through language. An important part of his colonial education, he explains, was to learn foreign languages

(Latin and French) and to mimic the speech of “little black Englishmen.” The mastery of authoritative (i.e. imperial) languages such as normative English, French, and Latin was presented as fundamental to the articulation of the Combermere boys’ new identity. This emphasis on proper language acquisition does not simply reveal the schoolmasters’ determination to train linguistically flexible students, it also aims at ensuring that the students fully internalize the ideology transmitted through these master languages. In *The Politics of Writing*, Romy Clark and Roz Ivanic demonstrate the necessity to understand writing and the ways in which it is taught as “a social practice, embedded in social relations within a specific community, [...] with its own complex ideological and conventional practices” (5). Clark and Ivanic’s work is useful here because it reinforces the idea that formal linguistic training has ideological implications. Indeed, “schooling is not ideology-free,” these writers confirm, “and language [...] is the prime carrier of the dominant ideologies and cultural values in which school practices are consciously or unconsciously embedded” (49). Clarke’s autobiography not only reveals the connections between linguistic training and the transmission of ideology but also manipulates the linguistic knowledge that his training has given him to undermine the power of the ideology imposed on him.

He does so by incorporating the different languages (Barbadian speech, French, and Latin) at his disposal into the authoritative language of the British colonizer. This incorporation results in linguistic hybridization and creates a dialogical space in which multiple voices can be heard and diverse meanings articulated. I am, of course, drawing on Bakhtin’s discussion of linguistic hybridization in “Discourse in the Novel,” where he explains that “the intentional double-voiced and internally dialogized hybrid possesses a

syntactic structure specific to it: in it, within the boundaries of a single utterance, two potential utterances are fused, two responses are, as it were, harnessed in a potential dialogue” (361). In “The *Third Space* in Postcolonial Representation,” translation theorist Michaela Wolf examines Bhabha’s take on Bakhtin’s view of hybridization. She suggests that Bhabha agrees with Bakhtin’s idea of the double-voicedness of hybrid utterances, but argues that he “transforms Bakhtin’s definition of the hybrid into an active moment of challenge and resistance to the dominant cultural power” (134). She also explains that “[Bhabha] sees hybridity [...] as a moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal claim to meaning” (134). I support Bhabha’s view of the hybrid as a moment of authority loss for the colonial discourse, but I would like to suggest that Clarke’s “internally dialogized hybrid” is not simply “double-voiced” but *multi*-voiced. This difference is important because it disrupts the oscillation between the poles of the cultural binary (i.e. colonized culture versus colonizing culture) and reveals the ruptures and contradictory forces at work within each cultural pole. In *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, Clarke uses multi-voicedness to destabilize the authoritative power of any language (i.e. not just the colonizing one) and to advocate the manipulation of plurilingualism as an effective way of generating dynamic and complex cultural productions.

Clarke starts his plea for plurilingualism by deconstructing the power of normative English. He recalls believing that learning to mimic what he thought was “proper” British pronunciation was key to joining the class of ruling Englishmen:

We had in our midst the British Major, a “true-true” Englishman, on whom to pattern the strange inflections of spoken English. We could not know, because of

the vast Atlantic which separated us from England, that the speech we were imitating was really working-class London fish-sellers' speech. We, the black aristocracy of an unfree society, exchanged our native speech for English working-class patois! (52-3)

Clarke's ironic presentation of the dominant language as a socially subordinate form of normative British English further emphasizes his notion that the culture and the language that he is expected to internalize are "fake" and constitute a deceptive construction of a far-away reality that distorts his native culture and language. The imposition of "English working-class patois" on the Barbadian boys also provides another illustration of the fact that their colonial education is not meant to empower them completely, but simply to give them the illusion of equality with the members of the dominant culture. Within the dominant cultural sphere, the boys' "English working-class" accent will keep them in the position of "*little* black Englishmen." Autobiographical reconstruction enables Clarke to make these deceptive intentions clear. The Combermere boys do not have the means to question the authority of their masters' English because everything British is presented as superior and authoritative. It is only retrospective analysis that gives Clarke the power to unveil the fraudulent use of what he sees as a substandard form of English in the subjection of Barbadian students to imperial rule.

*Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* resonates with Barbadian speech. The writer incorporates Barbadian words and expressions, distorts syntax, grammar, and spelling, recreates long conversations among Barbadian speakers, and introduces Barbadian humor in order to counter the erasure of his "native speech." Clarke's insertion of Barbadian speech in normative English enables him to make his native language

visible and audible and to confront his British-speaking audience with forms of English that they will find unfamiliar. This code-switching allows him to alienate these readers and to reclaim the power over his mother tongue that British imperial rule had taken from him. The autobiographer's refusal to translate his native speech into formal English, and his choice that it stand against the master language, enables him to draw the readers' attention to linguistic difference and to open a hybrid space in which competing languages can interact. Paradoxically, the insertion of untranslated, "foreign" languages such as Barbadian speech in the master language obstructs traditional interpretation but also suggests new ways of translating out of which new meanings can emerge.

Clarke spends a lot of time describing his classes in Biblical translation. The boys would sit quietly in front of Latin versions of the *Acts of the Apostles* and translate a verse when their name was called. When a student made a mistake the "next idiot" had to try and fix the translation (19). The schoolmaster's emphasis on a single proper translation reveals the rigidity of his teaching method and the students' lack of freedom in the production of meaning. The students were more focused on trying to figure out which word the schoolmaster wanted fixed in the translation than learning to decipher the foreign words on the page. In other words, the students were really learning to translate their schoolmaster's intentions rather than the Latin words in front of them. The ways in which translation was taught at school was not empowering for the students. It enabled the schoolmaster to be abusive and demeaning and deprived students of power. Outside of school though, the boys regained their linguistic agency by developing other productive (and greatly entertaining) uses for translation. They play, for instance, with Latin declensions and create "the new Latin verb, *mary-hairy-co*, *mary-hairy-cit*, *mary-*



*hairy-citis, mary-hairy-camus, mary-hairy-cunt!*" (20). This linguistic hybrid humorously betrays the interests of pre-adolescent boys, of course, but this witty and unorthodox manipulation of Latin also enables Clarke to use a master language in a subversive way. The use of Latin, this example suggests, is not limited to transmitting God's Word. It can be incorporated and have meaning in the daily lives of young Barbadian boys. This manipulation of Latin is a deviation from the norm imposed by the colonial structure because it disfigures the authoritative, pristine, Biblical language and makes it accessible and usable to the members of the cultural minority.

Clarke's manipulation of foreign languages offers him the opportunity to introduce subversive layers of meaning in his English text. These subversive layers become particularly visible through his use of French. Using French enables Clarke to deviate from English grammar norms and demonstrate in a playful manner that meaning can be conveyed even when one does not follow the rules faithfully. He modifies English syntax by having English fit French grammatical constructions: "How many years have you, man?" "I have thirteen, old man!" (48). The combination of the two languages within the same sentence enables him to access a linguistic "Third Space" in which he can mix the different cultures that are being passed on to him through exercises in language acquisition. This "Third Space" promotes the use of linguistic hybridization in ways that affect the master language and incorporate newness into it. The new linguistic hybrid resists categorization (i.e. it is neither French nor English) and undermines the authority inherent in master languages. Clarke's hybrid creation enables him to display the power that the acquisition of master languages has granted him and to show how that power can be used to articulate and promote difference.

Clarke's most interesting and revealing use of the French language though, lies in his constant repetition throughout the autobiography of the verb forms: "*Je suis, tu suis, il suit.*" These repetitions echo the conjugation drills common to French grammar lessons and illustrate the disciplined type of language training Combermere boys receive. The main purpose of Clarke's repetitive use of these verb forms, however, is to emphasize the colonizing effect of this education on the minds of these boys. Playing with his Canadian readers' familiarity with French conjugation drills, the writer seems to be simply alluding in passing to the recitation of the conjugation of the verb "to be." What he is really doing, however, is repeating the conjugation of the verb "follow." Throughout the autobiography, he reminds his readers (at least the ones fluent enough to know the difference between *être* and *suivre*) that the school system that drills knowledge into him does not allow him "to be" but rather teaches him "to follow." Clarke's joke on his readers enables him to point to the coercive nature of his schooling but it also, paradoxically, demonstrates the power that can be derived from such a schooling. Readers who are unable to notice the difference between *être* and *suivre* miss out on a key layer of meaning and this access to that meaningful layer is exactly the type of power that formal linguistic training grants. Inserting and manipulating foreign languages in his autobiography offers Clarke the opportunity to articulate linguistic hybrids that challenge traditional techniques of translation and open the regenerative dimension of language. Languages, the writer suggests, should not be used to fix, limit, and regulate the knowledge that they shape and transmit; rather, they should be used in flexible ways that allow for linguistic regeneration and the production of dynamic forms of knowledge that can be adapted to multiple needs and situations. He illustrates this belief through his

constant emphasis on the creative power of his native tongue. The members of the Barbadian community actively update their lexicon by appropriating and adapting to their needs words and expressions that their interaction with British culture brings. Clarke describes for instance how the name of a British merchant ship came to be used in his community. During the Second World War, the Germans torpedoed the *Cornwallis* in Town's harbor. "For days after," Clarke recalls, "the authorities moved the bowels of the *Cornwallis*, blackened and spoiled, stinking and useless, from the holds and dumped it in the middle of the neighbourhood where the poor lived" (100-1). The Barbadian community, stuck with the "rotting cargo," discovers that although food restrictions have been imposed on them, "food was coming in and out of the harbour, to be fed to those people who were 'contributing to the war effort'" (100). The fact that the Barbadian population actually produced the food that was being sent to the metropolis did not, apparently, count as 'contributing to the war effort.'

If the *Cornwallis* incident gives the Barbadian community another proof of their status as exploited and undervalued people, it also allows them to witness the vulnerabilities of people who have been presented as powerful until then. When the news reached the island that the Germans were attacking, people ran to the hills and the first ones to get there were "the rich people." "During the war," Clarke explains, "the rich people were the white people. After the war, the black people laughed at the white people for getting to the hills first. They were 'blasted cowards,' the black people said. 'More blasted coward than we poor people!'" (100). Being able to mock white people for their cowardly flight returns some power to the community whose gullibility and exploitation were exposed during the *Cornwallis* episode. To mark the importance of this day, the

members of the community start using the word “*cornwallised*” to refer to being “hit suddenly, [...] exposed, [...] [having] an odour, [...] [not being] really up to scratch” (102). The addition of this multi-layered term to the community’s “always-increasing lexicon” inscribes the *Cornwallis* event and the “defeat” of the British colonizers in communal history (102). The appropriation and modification of an English term to fit their needs allow the Barbadian community to exercise linguistic agency in the articulation of historical discourse. They create and use a word that will enable them to remember a particular incident and its various consequences and pass this knowledge on to the next generation, thus preserving this particular experience and the lessons that they have learned from it. Clarke emphasizes here the regenerative dimension of language and its crucial function in the manipulation of spoken language as a form of history. Because the members of the Barbadian community are not the ones who have the power to write history, they need to develop their own linguistic strategies to produce oral forms of their own version of history. This episode also illustrates the potential for autobiographical reconstruction to record global history and make public a local “oral” archive.

Clarke insists on the power of oral language by infusing his text with Barbadian voices. His repeated references to singing, incorporation of hymns’ lyrics, and extensive use of dialogue emphasize the oral dimension of his autobiography. In chapters that are reminiscent of Michael Ondaatje’s chapter “Lunch Conversation” in *Running in the Family*, Clarke saturates his narrative space with the fluid sounds of often unidentified Barbadian voices discussing communal and historical events. These voices enable him to counter or sometimes echo differently the authoritarian British voices that are heard in other parts of the autobiography. Barbadian and British voices respond to each other in an

antiphonal act. The narrator's voice accompanies and orchestrates these two different sets of voices, thus creating a polyphonic narrative structure. The writer's use of musical elements is not accidental; singing is a central part of his native culture and articulating a polyphonic narrative enables him to bring that part to life for his readers. The singing voices of Delcina and other members of the Barbadian community punctuate the life of that community. When Tom's family leave their old neighborhood, Delcina's voice accompanies the move:

"Lord, look how that woman voice reaching us all up here!"

"The day thou gavest Lord is ended," my stepfather said.

He sang tenor in the church choir. "She just sing the fourth verse." And he picked up the hymn with her, from that distance, as she moved into the fifth and final verse, raising his voice in a delightful tenor part—with the carpenter handling the bass line and my mother humming along because she did not know the words [...]

I knew the last verse too. (62)

This passage reveals the power of Delcina's voice and the unity of the community. Every member's voice is welcomed in this impromptu choir. Such freedom to raise their voices and join in the singing of hymns empowers this community whose members are, in every other area of their lives, subjected to the "authoritarian English voice" of schoolmasters and British administrators (9). The passage also points to the community's faith and displays their religious knowledge. They know entire hymns by heart and they can choose from a wide repertoire which hymns are the most appropriate for the events that they are celebrating or commemorating. Clarke's detailed descriptions of the hymns sung in church and at revival meetings enable him to counter the dominant culture's

representation of his community as illiterate and uncivilized by illustrating the power of his community to organize themselves, create a close-knit social network, and develop their own traditions and celebrations. The autobiography also allows Clarke to record and preserve this singing performance that would otherwise be lost.

Clarke repeatedly emphasizes the power and social privilege that having a good singing voice bestows. His voice, he explains “was trained at St. Matthias” Church (125), but it was his admission to “the choir stalls of the St. Michael Cathedral” that really granted him (and his mother) social status in the eyes of the other members of their community. “To be a choir boy at the Cathedral in those days,” he states, “was the next best thing to being in the heavenly host. Or perhaps to being an Anglican minister” (108). Everyone in the community understands that Tom, as a “Cawmere boy” should belong to the dominant culture’s Cathedral choir, but they also expect him to preserve his allegiance to his community and attend services at the Church of the Nazarene during the week. The Church of the Nazarene “was slotted at the lower end of the religious ladder. Only poor people, people who had suffered, who had had the hardest of lives, who were black in a population of black people, only these worshipped at the Church of the Nazarene” (110). The community’s expectations illustrate once again their complicity in the cultural hierarchy that colonial rule imposed on the island, but they also point to the commodification of Tom’s voice. This voice represents the community’s way into the dominant cultural sphere. Because Tom sings in the choir, his family and other members of the community can attend the Cathedral’s service in Town. The fact that they actually do not because they cannot understand Latin is beside the point in a way because what

matters to them is that Tom's voice has opened that cultural sphere for them. His voice has made permeable a cultural boundary that was once impenetrable.

Clarke's complex manipulation of linguistic hybridization and polyphony enables him to undermine the authoritative power of master languages and the cultural creations that they produce and to emphasize the importance of plurilingualism. The autobiographer's creation of a polyphonic narrative structure allows him to bring together the dissonant voices of two different cultural spheres into one common linguistically hybrid space. In that space, Michaela Wolf suggests, "cultures encounter each other and [...] meanings are effectively 'remixed'" (141). This "remixing" of meanings, because it promotes transcultural flexibility, is what produces complex and relevant forms of knowledge and prevents the ossification of culture(s). Both Clarke and Wah develop "ethnopoetic tools" that enable them to "initiate movement and change" in the cultural productions that their texts generate ("A Poetics of Ethnicity" 51). The kinetic dimension of cultural productions is crucial, they suggest, because it allows for the representation of cultural evolution and the revitalization of cultures threatened with erasure by the migration experience.

### **ARTICULATING MODES OF TRANSLATABLE CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

My analysis of Wah's *Diamond Grill* and Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* has illustrated several of the key functions that these writers imagine their texts to perform. These autobiographies demonstrate their writers' need to destabilize the fixed, fictitious, and often unethical and stigmatizing certainties on which dominant cultural scripts are based in order to open the way for the production of diverse and changing

cultures. They also make clear the need for linguistic and textual innovations that can undermine ideologies and power structures ingrained in dominant languages and open a hybrid space where the articulation of complex cultural identities becomes possible. Wah's and Clarke's work emphasizes the importance of recognizing cultural difference as a crucial site for the production of cultures and identities and the articulation of epistemological structures that generate translatable (i.e. transferable and accessible) forms of knowledge. In "Half-Bred Poetics," Wah indicates his frustration with the fact that the minority writer must deal with the "ongoing necessity to educate, report to, and soothe the dominant culture" (75). This pedagogical task is obviously not always a pleasant one, but it is a necessary one and one that migrant writers positioned multiply on the cultural map are particularly apt at undertaking. "For it is from this foreign perspective," Bhabha explains, "that it becomes possible to inscribe the specific locality of cultural systems—their incommensurable differences—and through that apprehension of difference, to perform the act of cultural translation" (*The Location of Culture* 164).

Apprehending difference, Bhabha's analysis indicates, constitutes the key to articulating new forms of knowledge that can help dominant cultural groups to recognize and learn to negotiate with multiple cultural spheres and the diverse histories and identities that emerge from them. In their respective autobiographies, Wah and Clarke articulate detailed textual representations of their marginalized cultural spheres in order to rectify their readers' often erroneous conception of these spheres but also to attract attention to specific aspects of their respective cultures. Both writers are concerned to counter the silencing and/or disfiguring power of dominant modes of cultural production by reconstructing the marginalized cultures they belong to. They are also particularly



intent on rescuing cultures and histories that both dominant and marginalized modes of cultural productions have erased. Wah and Clarke mobilize the autobiographical genre to serve their political intention to amend the historical and cultural representation of their communities in the cultural mainstream. One such example of their concern for the corrective interpretation of the past is their reconstruction and preservation of women's histories. Focus on women's histories enables both writers to demonstrate that dominant modes of cultural production are not the only force responsible for the erasure of histories; the marginalized cultures within which particular histories are inscribed are often complicit in their obliteration. In an interview with Ashok Mathur, Wah explains that he "started the writing [of *Diamond Grill*] in order to confront some of [his] own anger [...] [and] some sorrow, sadness at the past, at the way people have been treated, particularly some of the women in [his] family's history" (99). Wah clearly identifies his intention to use autobiographical reconstruction as a way of uncovering the various discriminatory structures that damaged women and altering the representation of their experiences in family history.

*Diamond Grill* offers Wah the opportunity to shed light on the lives of his paternal grandmother, Florence Trimble, and his Aunt Ethel. He explains that his grandmother was one of the very few white women working at Chinese cafés. "She was the cashier at the Regal [...] [and] was charmed by the dashing Jim Wah," he suggests as a way of explaining their marriage in 1907 (57). Lucky Jim already had a wife in China and he "not only continued to send money back to China, but also, in 1916, sent a couple of the kids [Fred Sr. and Ethel] back to China" (57). This common custom in Chinese culture was completely foreign to white Canadian Florence who, according to her

grandson, “never forgave” her husband (57). Wah manipulates autobiographical representation as a way of conjecturing how his grandfather managed to impose this Chinese custom on his wife: “I don’t know how Grampa Wah talks her into it,” he admits; “maybe he doesn’t” (5). This interpretation of the past complicates the simple reading that one could make of Lucky Jim. He is not only one of the many despised, hard-working, Chinese immigrants who struggle to make a living in an inhospitable country, he could also be a deceptive and manipulative man who imposes his cultural script on his wife. Within the familial sphere, Lucky Jim is the representative of the dominant culture (i.e. the male is dominant in Chinese culture) and his behavior echoes the behavior of the dominant cultural group in the wider context of Canadian culture. Wah’s reconstruction of his grandmother’s experience enables him to trouble the traditional binary that opposes dominant and dominated cultures by illustrating the disruptive forces at work within each cultural sphere. It also allows him to challenge the stereotypical views that associate white skin with power and non-white skin with powerlessness. In this particular situation, Florence’s white skin does not empower her. It is important to note that the disapproval that her mixed marriage triggers in her family and in the dominant cultural group deprives Florence of support. She is left alone and speechless to confront her husband. Her only resistance, Wah suggests, is to “[h]arumph, [...] but to no avail” and to save money to get her two children back (5). Lucky Jim’s love of gambling, however, dooms all of her plans.

Wah’s rendering of his grandmother’s experience paradoxically reinforces some of the stereotypical representations of Chinese men (as sexist and addicted gamblers) that the dominant cultural group depends on. Articulation of this paradox allows him to shift

positions and observe experience from diverse perspectives and, in doing so, to illustrate the authority of his representation. He is not just presenting a one-sided view of his grandfather, one that would uncritically celebrate him as a marginalized immigrant who suffered at the hands of the dominant cultural group; he is also representing him as “[t]hat bastard,” who imposed his customs on his wife and jeopardized the family with his constant gambling (57). The paradoxical nature of Wah’s autobiographical reconstruction enables him to emphasize the necessity of multi-positioning in the deciphering and interpretation of cultural experiences. Only such a dynamic positioning, he suggests, can portray the complex processes at work in the articulation of cultural difference and the knowledge it produces.

Through his treatment of his Aunt Ethel’s experience, Wah points to the oppressive power of the structures that are responsible for history writing. Lucky Jim’s original plan was to send only his first-born son to China, but “when departure day arrives,” Wah recounts, “Uncle Buster goes into hiding. [So] Grampa grabs the next male in line, four-year-old Fred, and, because he is so young, nine-year-old Ethel as well, to look after him” (6). In this unexpected and rapid decision, Lucky Jim condemns his daughter to a lifetime of servitude to her Chinese stepmother and stepsisters and to men. The harshness of her fate embitters Aunt Ethel who presides over family reunions wrapped in a protective veil of outraged silence. “She doesn’t want to talk about [her past in China],” Wah explains (89). The only clues that the younger generations of the family get are Aunt Ethel’s occasional angry bursts:

So when [she] shows the anger she’s carried all these years, all the resentment for the roles she’s been forced to accept, for the curves she was thrown as a young

girl being sent to China, for the men (none as strong as she, yet commissioned by her father to own her), [...] for her father's filial Confucianism and neglect at leaving her alone in China, for a languagelessness impossible to overcome for a woman, thus, for the imposed interruptions and silences of a life so totally intended by others that she can only outlive them all, when her body shrugs against this perpetual masculine writing of her memory and her history, who can blame her for the scornful glance and sad harumph that glances back. (89)

Wah's cumulative description of the various oppressive forces that shape Ethel's life enables him once again to display the complexity of coercive structures at play within one cultural sphere. Chinese immigrant women, Ethel's story reveals, contend with discriminatory power structures not only within the dominant cultural sphere but also within the cultural sphere they belong to. Paradoxically, it is the translation process that multiple migrations impose on her (and make her speechless) that unveils the cultural power structures that incarcerate Ethel. This paradoxical reading peels the layers away and sheds light on the complexity of immigrant women's lives and revitalizes their histories. It also illustrates the necessity and power of imagination in articulating lives that are, for the most part, undocumented.<sup>9</sup> Without imaginative recreation, these women's experiences and history would remain inaccessible to readers who might then continue to think of cultural difference in terms of "traditional" binary oppositions (i.e. dominant culture vs. marginalized culture) without taking into account the various disruptions within each.

Clarke also uses autobiographical reconstruction as a way of revitalizing the history of his cultural community. In an attempt to counterbalance the patriarchal

hierarchical order that structures the dominant cultural sphere, Clarke recreates the matriarchal culture that sustains the Barbadian community. Most of the Barbadian people that he represents are women. In chapter thirteen, Clarke describes in detail the inhabitants of Flagstaff Road, the new neighborhood to which his family has moved. He introduces Sister Thomas who lives next door with a man (everyone calls him "Mr. Thomas" even though "Thomas" is his wife's name), but no one knows whether they are married or not. The villagers, who usually frown upon illicit relationships "held nothing against the 'wife'" because of her status as "the most famous preacher in the Church of the Nazarene down the main road [whose] voice was like honey" (80). Miss Haynes lives next on the road. "She had lived in Amurca," Clarke recalls, and "was mysterious, unknown to us; but she was friendly" (82). The shopkeeper, Miss Bryan, plays an important role in the community because she "kept a double-lined exercise book for her accounts" and "[t]he monetary history of the entire village was kept in this book" (85). Miss Bryan's shop is also identified as a place of social gathering where the members of the community meet and talk about communal and historical events. And of course, there is Tom's mother, Sister Luke. His mother, Clarke recalls, "worked hard. All women in those days worked hard. My mother got up at five and cleaned the pots and pans from the previous night, and cooked a full meal before seven, on a stove made of three big rocks and fuelled by dried rotten sugar cane" (172). The writer recreates these women's way of life in order to pay tribute to them.<sup>10</sup> The fact that many of the men in that community remain unnamed and in the shadow also emphasizes the control that Barbadian women exercise. They are the ones preaching in Church, organizing the community, running the businesses, helping with farm work, keeping houses, and educating children. Clarke's

creation of this matriarchal counterculture also emphasizes its dynamic nature. This is particularly valuable for Canadian readers who, knowing about Great Britain's brutal colonial history, might not be aware of the dynamic and productive aspect of Barbadian culture.

Both Wah and Clarke make a point of articulating various cultural spheres that vibrate with life. Because the cultures that they represent live in their texts, readers are able to observe "live" cultural interactions, experience new ways of handling cultural contacts, and develop new techniques to negotiate cultural difference. *Diamond Grill* and *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* articulate negotiation as a type of knowledge and make it accessible to readers. Wah and Clarke therefore fulfill their roles as community educators, concerned with both reconstituting the many histories of that divided community and teaching their readers ways to handle complex cultural interactions.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I use "original" narrative or cultural script to refer to the set of practices and values that the dominant culture attempts to present as "original" "authentic" and "authoritative." These practices and values set behavioral and identity expectations for the community. It is important to emphasize the fact that this cultural script is shaped by complex, dynamic, and often contradictory forces. Wah's and Clarke's cultural translation allows them to illustrate the complexity of this so-called "original" cultural model and to undermine its legitimacy. I also use the expression "cultural script" to point to the idea that such a narrative invites the performance of identity. Members of the community are encouraged to follow the instructions encoded in the script and perform identity accordingly. When the dominant cultural script is imposed on individuals or communities who do not belong to the cultural mainstream, they are forced into mimicking the performances of the dominant group. This mimicry constitutes a form of translation of the "original" narrative, one that is not always faithful, one that, Homi Bhabha's work reveals, *cannot*, in fact, be faithful. In "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha explains that "[c]olonial 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" (*The Location of Culture* 86). The impossibility of producing a faithful translation betrays the power relations at work in the interaction between the colonizing culture and colonized individuals. The colonized community is given the cultural script that will empower them enough to be almost like the colonizers, but not enough to be as powerful and therefore guarantees their subjected status. The fact that a faithful translation is not possible, however, can also be empowering because it opens the way to "unfaithful" translations, translations that can subversively point at the inconsistencies of the "original" narrative and de-authorize it.

<sup>2</sup> These distinctions are not necessarily as clear cut as suggested here. Gunew emphasizes the complex nature of both the global and the local spheres, but she, too, uses "a reductive schema" in which to imagine "that postcolonialism and multiculturalism are related in terms of the global and the local" (37).

<sup>3</sup> Pratt specifies that she "borrow[s] the term 'contact' [...] from its use in linguistics, where the term contact language refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in context of trade. Such languages begin as pidgins, and are called creoles when they come to have native speakers of their own. Like the societies of the contact zone, such languages are commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous, lacking in structure" (6). Emphasizing this borrowing from linguistics is important here as it points to the effects of cultural interactions on language. It is also interesting to see that the languages that emerge from these interactions are identified as "chaotic, barbarous, lacking in structure" as these are precisely the qualities that Clarke and Wah rely upon to make their acts of cultural translation visible and audible and to claim their right to repossess language and manipulate it freely.

<sup>4</sup> In an often quoted passage, Wah describes how he particularly enjoys going through these doors while waiting at tables and making the passage as loud as possible. "What a way to announce your presence," he exclaims, "[y]ou kind of explode, going through one door onto the customers, through the other onto the cooks. [...] I love to wallop that brass as hard as I can. But my dad warns me early on to not make such a noise because that disturbs the customers, so I come up with a way of placing my heel close to the bottom and then rocking the foot forward to squeeze the door open in a silent rush of air as I come through on the fly" (21). This description enables Wah to represent metaphorically the ways in which he negotiates his racial hybridity. Coming through the doors noisily or quietly represents the two options that Wah has to deal with his mixed-race origins: he can claim his Chinese ancestry or pass for white. Wah's father, Fred Sr., clearly recommends passing in this passage, encouraging his son to move through the door and into the Canadian dining room quietly, invisibly. Wah, on the other hand, in one of the rare moments in the autobiography where he does not hesitate to identify as mixed-race, prefers to make his passage through the door audible. The violence with which Wah represents the passage through the doors also illustrates how violent, and potentially painful, the process of racial identification can be.

<sup>5</sup> Clarke also subverts the authority of British versions of history by contrasting these versions with the versions that the Barbadian community produces. When the Second World War starts, daily assemblies at school offer the headmaster the opportunity to remind the students of Great Britain's triumphant past and awesome might. Describing fighting in the Atlantic Ocean, the headmaster takes advantage of the opportunity to remind the boys "about the Atlantic all over again, and called it 'one of the biggest bodies o' salt water, boys.' The men, who on the other occasions when he enlightened us on the darkness of our history, men who had discovered us, those same men, he told us now, had crossed this very Atlantic Ocean hundreds of years and miles before. And now the Germans were ruling these same waters and waves, and killing fathers, brothers and uncles from our village. And as black Britons we wanted to do something about it" (15). This impromptu history lesson reveals the distorting and appropriating effect of British historical discourse. In this version of history, Barbadian people had no history before British men "discovered" them and they knew nothing about the world until their "darkness was enlightened." This disfiguring version of Barbadian history makes difficult the boys' expected identification with the dominant cultural group. Clarke's ironic conclusion to the episode highlights the impossibility for the boys to identify as "black Britons": "And in all the singing, nobody remembered to pray for the families of the Barbadian seamen lost or dead at sea" (16). This omission of Barbadian soldiers from the prayers of the British community emphasizes the fact that these men were not recognized as "Britons" and illustrates the falseness of British historical discourse.

Clarke uses autobiographical reconstruction to articulate a Barbadian version of history that speaks back to the British version, rectifies it, and fills in its blanks. Revisiting the episode of Barbadian soldiers fighting at sea, Clarke explains: "People in the village counted the number of dead at sea. They memorized the famous battles, and the names of the local dead in the air, serving with the Royal Air Force—for some of our men were now flying in the air like birds, Delcina [one of the most talented singers of the community] said, all over Germany. But those who fought on land took the heaviest toll. When Delcina heard all these tragedies in the news, she raised her voice higher and sweeter, singing the burial of the dead" (40). The Barbadian community develops its own historical discourse and forms of tribute to their dead. These

communal acts of memorization and commemoration bring the community together, establish their worth, and counter the erasing force of colonial rule.

In *Two Shores/Deux rives*, Thuong Vuong Riddick also produces contrasting versions of history out of which subversive criticism emerges. In a series of poems written first in English and then translated into French, Vuong Riddick recalls her migration from Vietnam to British Columbia, via Paris and Montreal. Her poems are like snapshots that allow readers a glimpse into Vietnamese life and culture, its destruction by French and American armies, the difficulty of living in France, the country of the invader that pushed her into exile, her slow adaptation to Canadian life, and her struggles with mastering English. Interwoven in a series of very personal poems are poems entitled "History/histoire" that reconstitute the historical background against which the personal events she reconstructs were being played. The most striking feature of these poems is that Vuong Riddick writes the English version in the past tense and the French version in the present tense. Everywhere else in the autobiography, the poet's French translation faithfully reproduces the tense used in the English version. Although the historic present is a common tense in literary French, I think that one can also read Vuong Riddick's deliberate use of the present tense as an indication that in her "*histoire*" poems, history still lives. The use of the present tense actualizes the events that she describes, thus emphasizing the impact that these events had and continue to have on her life. The fact that these events are actualized in French, the language of the oppressor originally responsible for the destruction of her native country and culture, also forces the French reader to confront this shameful part of his/her history. The contrast between the English and French versions is what catches the French reader's attention. It is in that "in-between" space that an extra layer of meaning is added to the two versions of the poems: these poems are meant to inform and educate both English and French readers, but the French version also confronts its readers with their responsibility in that episode of Vietnamese history. "*Trois générations sacrifiées*," the poet explains in a poem entitled "Spleen," "*Mais personne aujourd'hui/ne voit nos blessures./Si vous preniez une radiographie/de nos âmes/vous pourriez entrevoir/un paysage/incompréhensible à nous-mêmes*" (47). Writing the poems constitutes a way of making the wounds visible, of allowing what the X-ray would not show to be brought to light, and of confronting readers with the responsibility that they might share in the infliction of these wounds. Vuong Riddick's "unfaithful" acts of translation (i.e. she does not faithfully reproduce the past tense of the English version in the French version) reveal her political positioning. When addressing French readers, she makes sure that they feel the burden of this history by presenting it in the present tense.

<sup>6</sup> Believing in the concept of racial purity as the key element defining cultural identity is not characteristic of white people only. When Fred Jr. visits China and tells the tour guide that he is Chinese, the guide "just laughed at [him]" (53). Fred Jr., however, does not "blame him" because "he, for all his racial purity so characteristic of mainland Chinese, was much happier thinking of me as a Canadian, something over there, white, Euro. But not Chinese" (53). Wah shows that both white and non-white people share common assumptions about the concept of pure racial origin, but he only expresses anger at his white teacher: "But stop telling me what I'm not, what I can't join, what I can't feel or understand" (54). This violent lashing out that contrasts sharply with his lenient understanding of the tour guide's racist attitude reveals what is at stake for Fred Jr. in the episode set in the Canadian classroom. In China, he is only a visitor; he does not have to live with people who would not allow him to identify as Chinese, but in Canada, being identified as other by members of the dominant cultural group has social and political consequences that he rejects. He refuses to be made the "target" of white racist attitudes.

<sup>7</sup> In "Half-Bred Poetics," Wah describes another episode in which foreignness was imposed on him. He recalls phoning the U.S. consulate in Vancouver in 1963 in order to apply for a working visa. After he spells his last name, the clerk announces, "I'm afraid you'll have to apply under the Asian quota, sir, and there's a backup of several years on the Asian list" (77). Wah protests that he is Canadian, but the clerk repeats that the rule cannot be changed. Wah goes to the Consulate to talk to the Consul General, who exclaims after having heard Wah's story, "But you don't look Chinese" (77). Wah explains that he is only a quarter Chinese and the Consul General concludes, "Well, that makes all the difference then. If you're less than fifty per cent you can enter the US as a Canadian" (78). In a footnote, Wah indicates that "[t]his piece was mistakenly left out of *Diamond Grill*" (78). This episode clearly illustrates the shaky grounds on which dominant cultural groups articulate the narratives that identify members of the dominant groups and the outsiders. It is important to note, of course, that in this episode, Wah is dealing with an American institution, not a Canadian one. However, the fact that he suggests that this piece should have been



incorporated into *Diamond Grill* indicates that connections between the two countries can be made. Both countries rely on similar strategies to articulate their dominant cultural scripts. The moment at which this episode took place is also important. 1963 is before the institution of multicultural policies in Canada. The reading and interpretation of multicultural origin would therefore be different in 1963 than in the 1970s or nowadays. This different reading and understanding of multicultural origin does not mean, however, that discriminatory attitudes disappear. In fact, Gunew demonstrates in *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, multiculturalism has opened the way for new forms of racism, "where the focus on culture [...] serves to camouflage issues to do with unequal power relations" (8). Gunew explains that multiculturalism introduces minority perspectives in the shaping of a nation, but that it can also serve to confine minorities to a particular sphere that often remains in the control of the dominant cultural group (28).

<sup>8</sup> Wah points to the reductive nature of the definition of "Asian-Canadian" in the dominant cultural sphere when he talks about Miko and Donna Mori, the Japanese waitresses at the Diamond Grill and the tensions that their hiring creates with the Chinese members of the staff. "Chinese have some animosity towards Japanese," Fred Sr. tells his son, "because the Japanese occupied China" (77). The Diamond Grill here becomes the stage for the reconstitution of historical events that are not part of Fred Jr.'s Canadian school curriculum. From his father, Fred Jr. learns that the historical discourse that he learns from his Canadian teachers contains gaps and leaves out parts of history that matter for the Chinese and Japanese communities now living in Canada. These gaps in historical discourse also lead the members of the dominant cultural group to be blind to the linguistic, cultural, and historical differences that exist among various Asian peoples. The Diamond Grill's customers, Wah explains, are completely unaware of the histories of Asian communities and "think that [Donna and Miko] are Chinese" (77).

<sup>9</sup> This is partly true of Roy Kiyooka's mother's life. In *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*, Kiyooka recreates his mother's life stories, focusing particularly on her experiences in Tosa, her "heart's true country" (13). Editor Daphne Marlatt insists in her introduction that this text "cannot be read as documentary [but as] a creative retelling that has been carefully worked, a blend of both mother's and son's vision and voices" (7). Kiyooka, unable to understand his mother's native Tosa-ben dialect, relies upon translator Masutani to access his mother's memories. His other sources for the autobiography are the contents of Mary's steamer trunk. Along with the kimono that her son George was wearing when he returned from Japan, letters from her beloved father and her brother, Mary cherishes "a thick book that's all about Tosa [...]. It's about famous people like Hirobumi Ito the famous Meiji prime minister and Ryōma Sakamoto whose statue stands on the bluff in Katsurahama Park. [...] My father Masaji Oe is spoken of as the last great master of the Hasegawa school of Iai and his friendship to the Yamanouchi clan is duly noted. Oh it's chockfull of all manner of things including old wives' tales and folk songs—all that makes Tosa unique" (15). The only problem with this book is that Mary is the only one who can read it and wants to. Of all her children, only George and Mariko can speak and read Japanese, but they are not interested in Tosa's history and its culture. Roy Kiyooka's creative autobiographical reconstruction preserves this disappearing cultural past and eases the pain associated with its disappearance. Imagination in this case is the only way to prevent the erasure of Mary's past.

<sup>10</sup> This function of the autobiography is particularly clear when Clarke comments that Delcina, the most powerful singer of the community, was "the tallest, blackest and most beautiful woman [he] had ever seen" (5). Associating black skin with beauty, height, and talent enables him to counter the debasing effect of colonial discourse. His representation of the Barbadian community illustrates the beauty and value of his people. Clarke also devotes an entire chapter to his grandmother, where he retraces her harsh life, her sense of pride, her generosity, and her love for her grandson. He writes to pay tribute to the woman whose "life faded as her words" and who was only remembered by those who "loved her" (165). Autobiography enables Clarke to prevent the fading of his grandmother's life and to make amends for the fact that her old age and public signs of affection embarrassed him.

## CHAPTER THREE: TRANSLATING THE FAMILY ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on family memoirs written by the children and/or grandchildren of immigrants to Canada. Canadian readers are particularly attracted to this genre as the recent publication of texts by Lisa Appignanesi, Denise Chong, Michael Ignatieff, Roy Kiyooka, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Michael David Kwan, Elaine Kalman Naves, Michael Ondaatje, Anna Porter, and Fred Wah among others, indicates. Such texts are valuable to this study of the ways in which migrant writers translate migration experiences because the questioning of origins and authority actually constitutes one of the central features of the genre. Family memoirs are articulated around the writers' quest for origins (of narratives and identities) and their struggles to establish their own authority and the authority of the personal stories that they reconstruct. Like several of the writers studied in Chapters One and Two, family memoir writers also rely on hybridization to develop dynamic textual strategies to translate the past. Instead of manipulating linguistic hybridization, however, they mix different generic forms together in order to address the many complexities that their quest for origins and authority entails. These hybrid techniques—a mixture of autobiography, biography, historiography, ethnography, and fiction—enable them to retrieve their family stories, interpret them in both the context in which they were originally produced and the context of their reception, and illustrate the complex processes involved in these acts of translation.

My objective in this chapter is to continue to explore the issues developed in the previous chapters through the study of the migrant family memoir genre. Focusing on

Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir*, Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, and with references to Christopher Ondaatje's *The Man-Eater of Punanai: Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon*, I would like to examine the techniques that these writers develop to articulate their quest for origins and authority, the type of identities that emerge from their textual reconstruction of the past, and a few of the functions that they imagine for their texts. My study will start with an analysis of the genesis of the genre and an exploration of some of its key features. I will then frame my discussion in the theoretical context from which it emerges and proceed with the close reading of my corpus.

In "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects," Caren Kaplan outlines the potentially subversive power of autobiographical forms. Writing in the early 1990s, she argues that although "autobiography now *appears* to be as entrenched as the novel, for example, in the canon of Western literature[, it] does not erase marked signs of tension in the critical discourse" (115).<sup>1</sup> She attributes these "marked signs of tension" to the work of feminist writers who manipulate autobiography in ways that challenge traditional generic expectations and forms. These writers' manipulation of autobiography creates what Kaplan calls "out-law" genres. "As counterlaw, or *out-law*," she explains "such productions often break most obvious rules of genre. Locating out-law genres enables a deconstruction of the 'master' genres, revealing the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution, and reception" (119). She suggests that these out-law genres indicate the necessity of developing "a variety of reading and writing strategies [...] as the law of genre intersects

with contemporary postcolonial, transnational conditions” (119). In other words, generic transformation (or creation) constitutes a response to specific cultural, social, and political situations and reading and writing strategies need to be developed to analyze such a response. The migrant family memoir genre emerges at a time when migrants who came to Canada before and after the Second World War are aging and starting to disappear. The emergence and recent development of the genre illustrate the need for younger generations to preserve these migrants’ stories and inscribe them in the nation’s historical record.

Kaplan focuses her exploration of the potentially subversive power of “out-law” genres on the prison memoir, *testimonio*, ethnography, and biomythography.<sup>2</sup> Her analysis of *testimonio* and ethnography in particular, makes points that can be useful for the present study of migrant family memoirs because it identifies some of the problems that confront the writers of these memoirs. “Testimonial literature,” she explains, “because it usually takes the form of first-person narrative elicited or transcribed and edited by another person, participates in a particularly delicate realm of collaboration” (122). The production of family memoirs is based on collaboration among writer, family members, and other witnesses. Unlike the autobiographies studied in Chapters One and Two (with the exception of Wah’s *Diamond Grill*), the texts examined here replace the notion of a single writer with “two aspects of an authorial function: the ‘speaker’ who tells the story and the ‘listener’ who compiles and writes the narrative that is published (“Resisting Autobiography” 123). Family memoir writers are indeed positioned as the “listeners,” but they are also the “speakers” as the stories that they are listening to are partly theirs and they are the ones writing (telling) the stories. The splitting of the

“authorial function” is important because it identifies the biographical and autobiographical functions that the memoir serves and opens up the issue of authority. In family memoirs, the focus shifts from the telling of an individual’s story to the telling of a family story. Family memoir writers retain their central position in the narrative, but they do not stand there alone. Rather, they position themselves in a large web of relationships among their relatives and friends and act as autobiographers (i.e. they are recounting the story of their own lives) and biographers (i.e. they are recounting their relatives’ life stories). This dual positioning as autobiographers and biographers explains the use of the term “auto/biographer” in which the virgule identifies the two levels of the auto/biographical process at work in these memoirs. This dual process also demonstrates that family memoir writers are not the sole storytellers of the family history and that they need to share authorial control with others. The ways in which they negotiate this aspect of collaborative storytelling constitute an important feature of family memoirs because they illustrate the power dynamics at work in the familial structure and the influence of these dynamics on the interpretation process. In other words, these power dynamics explain whose translation of the past is presented as “authoritative” and why. Producing an “authoritative” version of family history is important because, unlike Choy, Clarke, Hoffman, and Verdecchia, family memoir writers are not writing primarily for themselves, but for and in the name of their family. The writing process enables these writers to reclaim certain identities through the “appropriation” of stories and experiences that are not necessarily their own to start with (i.e. they *inherit* the migration experience and the history attached to it) but become so after the writing of the memoir. Their

version of family history therefore has to be “objective” enough (“authoritative” enough) that other family members can vouch for the validity of the account.

“Ethnographic writing” in the autobiographical context, Kaplan argues, “shares issues of authorship and power with testimonial writing,” but it also “challenges the traditional hierarchy of objective scientist and native informant” (125). Here, Kaplan points to the potential for autobiographical forms to undermine traditional (institutional) forms of knowledge (i.e. “objective science”) by redirecting authority toward the personal (i.e. “the native informant”). Like ethnographers who read the lives of other cultures and draw on their formal training to interpret their observations and shape them into forms of knowledge, family memoir writers read their parents’ and/or grandparents’ experiences in a different historical and cultural context and translate their observations in their texts. Although many family memoir writers are highly educated and engage in historical research to ground the family stories they receive, they emphasize the authority of the personal. This emphasis enables them to authorize family versions of history that often challenge or correct official versions and to present these personal versions as valid and relevant forms of historical knowledge. This prizing of subjective knowledge (acquired through the migration experience and its connection to history) over objective knowledge (acquired through formal training) constitutes a key feature of migrant family memoirs and affects the ways in which family memoir writers articulate their texts.

Family memoir writers are particularly careful to ground the authority of the personal inside the familial context as well as outside. They often feel the need to go back to the countries of origin of their families in order to identify a starting point for their task and authorize their translations of their parents’ experiences. They frequently involve

their own children in their reverse migration and do extensive memory work and research both at home and abroad. Research, both historical and legal, is often necessary as the stories that constitute their family history have been passed down from generation to generation and frequently exist in multiple versions. They become romanticized, no longer part of real experience. Or they seem like an archaic dialect, not for current use. These stories therefore challenge their adult narrators who want to acknowledge their cultural debt to their ancestors and preserve family history while at the same time connecting it with their personal experience and the experience of their audience. Research also enables migrant writers to ground their authority as storytellers and history interpreters.<sup>3</sup> To justify their rendering public of the family's private history and to claim their place in the public sphere that allows them to do so, migrant writers need to establish credibility with their desired readership, a public increasingly concerned with cultural diversity and the central place of the migration experience in Canadian history. Because these writers are much younger than the people whose stories they tell, and grounded in Canada rather than the countries of origin of their families, they need to authorize themselves as responsible recipients and interpreters. These stories are also about individuals who suffered major dislocation and these narrators must therefore recognize the key constituents of personal and cultural identities across the ruptures caused by migration, time, and distance. Finally, because these stories derive from personal and family memories, but include and are addressed to much wider communities, they need to be embedded among other versions of history of their time and place. To claim authority on all counts, many migrant writers depend on such recognizable forms of verification as archives, family documents, and published histories.

However, in spite of such extended research, authority, in a majority of these family memoirs, comes to rest where autobiography, and not history, places it—in the personal.

In “The *Third Space* in Postcolonial Representation,” Michaela Wolf brings ethnography and translation together by suggesting that “the ethnographer and the translator are usually the ‘first readers’ of the other culture” (139). She explains, however, that the translation processes that the ethnographer and the translator engage in seem different because

the ethnographer first interprets the social discourse of the informants by trying to find out what they mean by what they say; then s/he systematizes and textualizes her/his interpretation for a target audience [...] [while] the translator [...] is already faced with a written or encoded text, which s/he must decode, interpret and reconstruct in her/his language. (139)

Although ethnographer and translator are confronted with source texts of a different nature, both need to find ways of representing the foreign (or strange) to their target audience. The ways in which they represent the foreign, Wolf argues, not only interprets the foreign culture to their target audience, it also illustrates the expectations and cultural assumptions of that target audience. The process of translation, in other words, is double. Ethnographer and translator articulate both foreign and home cultures in the same interpretation act. Wolf’s combination of ethnography and translation is important for this study of migrant family memoirs because it encourages a flexible understanding of “source text” and underlines the relevance of the product of translation for the reading audience. Reading migrant family memoirs enables the Canadian public to learn about



life in other countries and cultures, but it also establishes their own connection to this “foreign” past.

Unlike traditional translators (i.e. translators who work from a written source text in a foreign language to be translated into their mother tongue), family memoir writers do not start their act of translation with a written text. Rather, they are confronted, very much like ethnographers, with mostly oral and/or visual information that has been disseminated through the generations of the family and that they must interpret, compile, and render in written form. Memories, conversations, pictures, objects, films, and stories often constitute the source materials that they are working with. They piece these elements together in order to articulate what is often the first written version of family history. This first account constitutes a form of ethnographic writing in the sense that it recreates lives set in cultural, historical, and social contexts that the writers’ readers cannot access outside this particular text. Seen in this light, the family memoir simultaneously produces both the “source” (i.e. *first* written and therefore publicly accessible) text and its translation. However, family memoir writers draw their knowledge and an important part of their authority from the source materials from which their texts emerge. These source materials, although not written texts, therefore constitute the starting point of the translation process. The elusive nature of the source (or sources) that family memoir writers are working from illustrates the difficulty of the translation task. In particular, it raises the issue of fidelity as the written product cannot be compared against a specific written source text. Many family memoir writers address this issue through the particular care they take to present themselves as trustworthy.<sup>4</sup> Gaining the reader’s trust is important here because the validity and relevance of their relatives’

experiences are at stake. These writers therefore engage in complex negotiations that enable them to establish themselves as reliable translators.

So far, my discussion has established that the migrant family memoir genre emerges at the intersection of autobiography and biography and draws on techniques borrowed from ethnography, historiography, and translation in order to represent personal and collective versions of the past. This generic hybridity highlights the many levels on which family memoir writers must operate in order to negotiate their complex quest for “origins” and “authority.” This hybridity also identifies the many possible social actions that the genre can perform. Translating family stories that articulate a reality that is both strange and familiar and passing it down the generations constitutes one of the central motives for family memoir production. The transmission of such history has become increasingly important in the Canadian context where knowledge about “cultural difference” is prized. The migrant family memoir genre produces and disseminates this type of knowledge as its generic hybridity enables it to address and reflect the many complex processes involved in the interpretation of cultural differences and their inscription in the national historical discourse. The ways in which family memoir writers recreate their family stories enable them to demonstrate the relevance of private, individual stories for the nation’s future generations. As storytellers situated at the juncture of past and future generations, family memoir writers are embedding themselves in their extended family and in the cultural and historical contexts in which they are writing and asking questions about their own sense of identity. Their methodology is unusual in that they have a vested interest in certain kinds of truths, in particular the discoveries or explanations that validate their childhood understanding of their ancestors

and that give their own children some engagement with and pride in their old-world inheritance. Their approach, therefore, to this combination of stories and documentary information is both curious and well-informed, syncretic and predetermined. Above all, it positions their version of the family story as authoritative within the histories of community and nation, privileging the personal and disturbing traditional hierarchies of knowledge. In their family memoirs, migrant writers often challenge received histories of their countries of origin and of Canada by inserting their family histories into the public forum. This insertion of the private into national versions of history complicates both private and public understanding of events and of the stories that give meaning to historical events.

Many autobiography theorists have explored the genre of the family memoir, but very few of them have approached it with questions emerging from translation theory. Timothy Dow Adams and Linda Haverty Rugg have worked on family memoirs and other forms of family auto/biography, but their focus has been on the generic diversity through which family (hi)stories are presented. Their research has established that non-linguistic forms such as pictures, films, dance, and music can be “read” as auto/biography.<sup>5</sup> For example, in “‘Carefully I Touched the Faces of my Parents’: Bergman’s Autobiographical Image,” Linda Haverty Rugg explores the ways in which family stories can be told collaboratively in the photographic medium.<sup>6</sup> Her article identifies the power struggles that emerge from collaborative work and is useful for a study on family memoirs as the translation process often places auto/biographers at the center of power struggles among relatives and friends. Haverty Rugg’s research also

establishes new generic possibilities for the articulation of auto/biographical identity and complicates the very possibility of a clearly defined concept of origins.

Autobiographical research in genealogy and adoption narratives also contributes to my work on family memoirs as both areas focus on the quest for origins. This ties in with my own questions about the concept of origins in the process of generational translation. In "Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree," Julia Watson demonstrates the importance of identifying one's origins in order to "install particular families in the privileged world of those who can trace their origins and attest to the coherence of their stock" (299). This drive for recognition and coherence from which power can emerge seems particularly important for the study of family memoirs written by the descendants of immigrants. If genealogical ordering helps people establish "descent," then the quest for origins in these family memoirs and the reverse migration that often accompanies this quest can be seen as attempts at establishing "descent" where it is most in question.

Autobiographical research on adoption narratives also offers an interesting perspective on the quest for origins. In "Performing the Search in Adoption Autobiography: *Finding Christa* and *Reno Finds her Mom*," Jill R. Deans challenges the normative aspect of the birth narrative in the construction of autobiographical identity. She suggests that the obligatory "birth scene" of autobiographical narratives reinforces the concept of essential selfhood and only allows for one acceptable form of birth narrative. This birth narrative is not available to adopted children because the facts of this narrative are often kept in sealed records. Jill R. Deans's examination of two films that recount the quest of adopted children for facts about their biological parents demonstrates

the constructed (i.e. non-essential) nature of identity, challenges the concept of origins, and undermines its importance in the formation of identity. In “Race/Identity/Culture/Kin: Construction of African American Identity in Transracial Adoption,” Sandra Patton examines the relationships of transracial families in order to identify the ways in which adopted children develop their identities as African American in their white families. Patton’s examination ties in with my work on family memoirs as the members of a transracial family, like the members of a transcultural family, are keenly aware that identity is socially and culturally constructed and that biology has little to do with it.<sup>7</sup>

All this research intersects with my questions about family memoirs, but it does not specifically study the writing of family memoirs as an act of translation. Only a handful of theorists have considered the work of auto/biographical reconstruction involved in family memoirs as translation work. Angelika Bammer was the first to identify the relevance of this topic in her 1994 essay entitled “Mother Tongues and Other Strangers: Writing ‘Family’ across Cultural Divides.” In this essay, Bammer explores the ways in which “family” translates across cultural divides. She analyzes Spiegelman’s *Maus* and asks “how, that is, in what language [...] literally and culturally” the family history is told (96). Bammer’s essay raises key questions for the study of family memoirs by migrant writers, but it only identifies the translation process as a central element of family storytelling without actually focusing on the idea of translation as a mode of auto/biographical production. In *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*, Susanna Egan devotes a chapter to the “Dialogues of Diaspora” where she examines the ways in which migrant writers translate their experience of

displacement across the geographical, linguistic, familial, and cultural divides that migration creates. My work in this chapter will draw on this earlier study and add to it as I will be looking at different texts (except for Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*) and incorporating translation theory in my approach. Egan's collaborative work with Gabriele Helms also constitutes a key resource for my present study. In "The Many Tongues of *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*," Egan and Helms analyze the very complex translation process through which *Mothertalk* came to life. Their work is valuable here because it establishes the difficulty of accessing an original source text, identifies the power struggles that what they call "serial collaboration" in translation can create (50), and demonstrates the relevance of generational translation by migrant writers in the Canadian context. My work in this chapter will further their research by exploring similar issues in different texts and cultural contexts.<sup>8</sup>

### EXPLORING "TRANSGENERATIONAL HAUNTING" AND ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY

Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes*, and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* clearly show the writers' struggles with establishing authority, their difficulty in identifying and articulating "origins" for their narratives and the identities that emerge from them, and the social actions that they see their texts perform. Establishing authority (or at least clearly positioning oneself in the collaborative writing process) constitutes a key feature of the migrant family memoir genre. The three writers under consideration here often have to establish their own authority against (or in relation to) the authority of some of their relatives. They must, however, remain careful not to

undermine their relatives' authority to the point where these relatives would no longer be credible as the content of the auto/biography depends mostly on their contribution. The collaborative nature of the auto/biographical enterprise is key here as these writers and their relatives are all producing translations of the past. The writers' versions, however, are the only "official" ones, the ones that their relatives can check and hopefully approve of. Because they relate differently to the various "translators" of the past in their families, Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje need to be aware of their own biases in the writing of family stories. Certain biases emerge from the auto/biographers' relationships with some of their relatives. Appignanesi, for instance, tends to position herself as her father's daughter and this position affects her opinion of her mother's versions of the past. Ondaatje's intense personal quest for his father shapes his reconstruction of the familial past. Other biases result from the fact that these auto/biographers are telling family stories that are partly theirs. They have formed their own versions of these stories and this previous knowledge and ownership of the stories can sometimes lead them to favor their own view of an episode to the detriment of their relatives' views. Occupying the dual position of auto/biographers sometimes proves challenging in this case and forces Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje to negotiate between their privilege as autobiographers and their duty as family biographers.

The personal motives driving the auto/biographical act also complicate these writers' claims for authority. Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje all translate their family stories in order to preserve the past and interpret the information it contains. They shape the knowledge they gain from this translation experience into a form of historical narrative meant to complement and/or amend official versions of history. In addition to

these motives, each of them has his/her own particular reasons for writing. In *Losing the Dead*, Lisa Appignanesi relates how her parents, Hena and Aron, survived the Holocaust and brought their children to Canada after the Second World War. Her mother's diagnosis with Alzheimer's disease, twenty years after her father's death, triggers the need for auto/biographical writing. She writes to preserve her parents' memories, to answer her children's questions about their past, and to understand what she calls the "transgenerational haunting" that her parents have passed down to her (8). Appignanesi describes this "transgenerational haunting" as the memories that have been transmitted to her through family stories, memories that are not necessarily her own, but that she has internalized nonetheless. The autobiographical journey allows her to track down the origins of these memories and offers her the opportunity to "bury" them properly, thus laying to rest the ghosts of the past. Appignanesi's autobiographical act, however, inscribes itself in a moment of crisis and serves one major purpose. She writes because her mother's memory is disappearing and with it her identity and that of her daughter which is also situated in these memories. With this family memoir, she hopes to prevent the erasure of memories and identities and to reconstruct a mother-daughter relationship that disease is eroding. Appignanesi's production of the memoir emerges from very personal needs and constitutes an act of reparation and self-preservation.

In *Honey and Ashes*, Janice Kulyk Keefer tells the immigration story of her grandparents, Tomasz and Olena, and their daughters, Natalia and Vira, who left Ukraine for Canada before the Second World War. Memories (her own and her relatives'), inherited stories passed down through the generations, an older generation that can answer questions, and family documents and photographs help shape her knowledge of



the past. Like Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer is haunted by the “transgenerational” memories that she grew up with and sees the auto/biographical process as a way of interpreting inherited stories, understanding documents and photographs, and paying tribute to her dead relatives by preserving and passing on their experiences. She writes for her children “who are strangers to [their past], and for the dead, whose lives would otherwise become invisible as air” (4). Unlike Appignanesi who focuses primarily on her relatives’ actions and feelings as recorded in the stories they tell, Kulyk Keefer is much more interested in recreating the world from which her relatives’ stories emerge and which she calls, “the Old Place.” Her auto/biographical recreation of this world, along with historical research, enables her to shape familial history by re-locating “transgenerational” memories in the social and historical contexts of pre-war Eastern Europe and present day Canada. She sees the recreation of the world she knows only through stories as essential to the reclaiming of her own Ukrainian identity.

*Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje differs from the two previous family memoirs because it focuses on experiences that the auto/biographer shared with his relatives: he was a part of the past that he is recounting in the memoir. Unlike Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer, he does not need to retrieve memories and stories that he has only inherited. Many of the memories and stories he is compiling were his to start with. Ondaatje’s family memoir also differs in that it does not focus on the immigration experience of the writer’s ancestors. Although migration is part of the Ondaatje family history,<sup>9</sup> his family memoir does not relate the migration stories of his relatives; rather, it focuses on the family story before the migration, when all the family members still lived in Sri Lanka. Like Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer, however, Ondaatje struggles with

“transgenerational” haunting and turns to the auto/biographical process as a way of confronting and understanding the past. In his mid-thirties, dreams of Sri Lanka trouble Ondaatje’s Canadian nights and make him realize that he “[has] slipped past a childhood [he] ha[s] ignored and not understood” (16). Auto/biographical creation enables him to go back to Sri Lanka and to his childhood memories to observe, with the eyes of the fiction writer he is, what the past was like. His “fictional” take on the auto/biographical process, however, does not mean that Ondaatje writes without any personal agenda. His auto/biographical journey is very much a quest for his absent father and the despair underlying the auto/biographer’s exploration of the past underscores the playfulness that fiction writing introduces in the memoir.

With these important preliminary elements in place, I would now like to turn to the close reading of these three family memoirs. I will first examine the different ways in which Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje deal with the complicated nature of their source “texts.” This examination will once again trouble the concept of “fixed” and/or “legitimate” origins and illustrate the complex negotiation processes these writers engage in in order to establish their authority. I will then examine some of the social actions that these writers imagine their texts perform.

### **Confessing Lies—Transmitting Lives: the Difficulty of *Losing the Dead***

In *Losing the Dead*, Appignanesi reluctantly takes on the role of family translator because of the very complicated nature of the source “text” she is confronted with and her confrontational relationship with her mother, Hena. Appignanesi’s source materials include the rare memories that her father, Aron, shared with the family when he was still

alive, her brother's early childhood memories, Hena's many stories of the past, and her own memories. Competing translations of family history emerge from these source materials and at first lead the auto/biographer to reject the auto/biographical task. Her mother's constant habit of lying also contributes to her refusal to engage in the auto/biographical process. Hena's propensity for lying is rooted in her war time experiences. She is a Polish woman of Jewish descent, who, as Hitler's measures against Jews amplified, managed to disguise her identity and the identity of her family through elaborate stories. Hena was hiding in plain sight as she was blonde and could therefore pass for non-Jewish. For years before the family could safely escape to Canada, Hena crafted different identities and life stories for herself and for her family—identities and life stories that kept them invisible as Jews and safe. This habit of storytelling, however, continued after the family had immigrated to Canada and transformed Hena into a chronic liar and not simply a "liar by necessity." Hena's lies in Canada are often as innocuous as slightly embellishing the truth or lying about the weather, but some of them also seriously complicate the life of the family. One such lie, for instance, transforms Polish born Appignanesi into "a 'petite Parisienne', born in France, like [her] mother" (32). Such a lie has serious implications for Appignanesi because it denies her Polish ancestry and will later complicate her own search for identity. Ashamed of her mother's constant lying and the difficult social negotiations it often requires (i.e. many of Hena's interlocutors notice that she is lying, thus embarrassing the daughter), Appignanesi spends most of her life resenting Hena and covering up her stories. She is therefore not looking forward to having to delve into Hena's complicated webs of "lies," as she calls her mother's many stories, in order to articulate her family's past.

In fact, Appignanesi first tries to acquit herself of the translation task by assigning it to her mother. Unwilling to confront her family's complicated past, she attempts to entice Hena into reconstituting familial history. This task, she reasons, will enable Hena to record a past that Alzheimer's disease is erasing, but more importantly, it will prevent her from craving the constant attention of her daughter and grandchildren. Annoyed at her mother's constant nagging for attention and "rambling" about the past, Appignanesi explains that "[her] daughter Katrina and [herself] reasonably decide that since she is so immersed in a misty past, it might be nice for her and the children, if she could write it all down" (78). Confronted with the task of recording personal stories, Appignanesi takes a traditional approach to autobiographical reconstruction. She turns to the person whose life stories the autobiographical account will reconstruct and directs the autobiographical quest with fairly common questions such as "what her house looked like, her school, her friends, the war years" (78). This approach not only betrays the writer's traditional take on autobiography, it also illustrates her desire to control the narrative that Hena could produce. Her text at this point has clearly established that she does not sanction Hena's fabricated versions of the past. Her attempts at directing her mother's autobiographical narrative and the fact that she has undermined the legitimacy of her mother's stories constitute yet another indication that her approach to autobiography is traditional. Although she does not present it as such, her attitude is similar to a confessor's whose role is to hear about the sinful (or illegitimate) actions of the confessing individual, and with God's power, to absolve the sinner. Appignanesi's presentation of Hena's stories as "lies" de-authorizes these stories and places Hena in the position of the "sinful" chronic liar. Appignanesi sets up her mother's act of storytelling like a confessional act; writing

about her past will give her a chance to “confess.” However, since the confessional act rests on the premises that the one who confesses will tell the truth and the confessor will show understanding and grant forgiveness, the exchange is doomed to fail in this case. Appignanesi already knows that her mother will not “confess” what she knows to be the “truth” and Hena will not answer the questions of a confessor who has already judged her “guilty.” Hena refuses to allow her daughter to impose her own interpretation of herself and her stories; rejecting her daughter’s appeal to a traditional autobiographical form to reconstruct her experience enables her to claim more control over the ways in which this experience will be received and understood.

Hena’s stubborn refusal to cooperate and position herself as a confessing subject whose account adequately fulfills her confessor’s requirements forces Appignanesi to revise her approach to autobiographical reconstruction. In particular, it leads her to realize that the value of her mother’s stories does not lie in their factual accuracy but in the type of knowledge that they transmit. By ignoring her daughter’s request for a pre-shaped written account of her past, Hena shows her that the act of *telling* stories is more valuable than recording the truth and accuracy of these stories. Hena’s insistence on a live audience for her stories (not simply a reader) demonstrates her sense that these stories do more than provide factual information about the past of her family. They concern the listeners (Appignanesi and her children) as well as the teller, because they reconstruct a past that shapes them all. This insistence on an audience also suggests that Hena wants to pass on ways of telling stories as well as the stories themselves. By refusing to answer specific questions about her past, Hena shifts the emphasis of the confessional structure from telling the *truth* to *telling* the “truth.” Hena wants to be free to

flesh out the facts of her past in a series of stories that she can pass on to her children and grandchildren. This shift illustrates the potentially subversive use of the traditional confessional structure.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Hena shows her daughter that authority and legitimacy can be derived from “lies” if one focuses on the functions of storytelling and not on the validity of the stories’ content. Hena forces her daughter not only to reevaluate her view of confessing and telling the truth, but also to position herself in the two positions that she has rejected all her life: the listener to her mother’s “lies” and the translator of these “lies.”

Now ready to take on the task of translating the complicated and competing stories that constitute her family past into a narrative that can be read and transmitted not only to her children but also to Canadian readers, Appignanesi needs to develop a radically new approach to the autobiographical act. The widely different expectations of her two acknowledged audiences make the development of this new approach necessary. Appignanesi cannot rely on the fact that her Canadian readers, unlike her children, will recognize the value and authority of Hena’s “lies” and must therefore find writing techniques that will enable her to legitimize the type of knowledge that can be extracted from such “lies.” One of these writing techniques, key to the family memoir genre, is to engage in a complex negotiation process with the other family storytellers in order to establish her authority over the narrative. When she starts transmitting the “lies” that constitute her mother’s version of the family past, Appignanesi tries to position herself, in opposition to Hena, as a reliable narrator. She claims at the beginning of her family memoir that “every family has its division of psychological labour. In mine, my mother was the liar, my father the silent, inscrutable one, while I was the truth-teller. Or at least,

the truthknower" (30). This claim clearly establishes that although she is the interpreter and transmitter of "lies," she also knows the actual version of the events (or reality) that these "lies" are covering up. She sees the auto/biographical act as an attempt to negotiate between lies and truths in order to shape an accurate and acceptable account of the past (i.e. not just webs of lies). Appignanesi's negotiation between the lies and the truths that constitute Hena's source "text" demonstrates that translation presumes a subject who does not simply copy or repeat a "prior" text but one who intervenes and mediates between two (or more) versions of a "text." This emphasis on the translator's agency in the interpretation process leads Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier to suggest that what matters most in the translation process is no longer the "accuracy" of the target text, but "the appropriateness of a translator's choices, the strategies used to render one language in terms of another, the inclusions and exclusions" ("Translation as a Method for Cross-Cultural Teaching" 312). This particular view of translation contrasts with the view of theorists who believe that fidelity is always due to the source text (i.e. Walter Benjamin, James Boyd White among others). Appignanesi's translation of her mother's experiences is in many ways faithful to Hena's "original" stories since the auto/biographer incorporates her mother's "lies." She does, however, mediate between her mother's version of the past and her own by choosing to incorporate multiple versions of the same stories and by including historical information that explains the necessity of her mother's "lies." Appignanesi's intervention through the translation act enables her to give her mother's versions of the past (i.e. the "original" or "source" texts) an authority that Hena's constant lying had jeopardized. In other words, the translated text authorizes the illegitimate source texts.

Because reconstructing her family past means divulging the lies that enabled her family's survival, Appignanesi's concern with objectivity and authority is obvious. She wants her readers to understand that she does not approve of her mother's constant habit of lying, but she also needs to present these lies as essential to survival and therefore as an integral and *authoritative* part of an objective version of familial history. To ground her authority and present herself as objective, Appignanesi interviews different people who shared her parents' war experiences and does extensive research, both personal and historical. In her quest for authority and objectivity as an auto/biographer, Appignanesi has to shift positions frequently and this constant shifting often complicates her quest. When positioning herself in relation to her parents, Appignanesi tends to suggest that she is the most reliable of the three. She does the same thing with Stanley, her brother. She acknowledges at first that when she approaches Stanley for information about the familial past, she is "struck both by his ability to recall vivid detail and by the fact that his remembering [does not] always coincide with [their] parents'" (183). This discovery enables both children to side with each other in their rendering of a familial past that differs from their parents' reconstruction of that past and reinforces Appignanesi's opening claim to reliability.

The fact that Stanley is older than the auto/biographer and has actually shared their parents' war experiences also emphasizes the possibility for the children's version of familial history to be considered accurate. However, when Stanley's rendering of a particular event does not coincide with Appignanesi's understanding or interpretation of that same event, she does not hesitate to question her brother's position, arguing that he has vested interests in the position he chooses to occupy. To be fair to the



auto/biographer, she recognizes that she also has vested interests in the positions that she occupies and justifies her decision to agree or disagree with certain versions of the past depending on her motives at any particular moment. For instance, when Appignanesi and her brother discuss the possibility of Hena having had affairs, a possibility that even their father had suggested, Appignanesi refuses to believe her brother, who could actually have been an eye witness to some of these potential affairs. She explains her refusal to believe her brother—and her father—by arguing that the two males of the family were simply jealous of the attention that Hena was getting and by suggesting that her mother was more interested in flirting with men than engaging in adulterous relationships with them. “I am a daughter” (162), she claims to justify this positioning. Appignanesi’s identification as her mother’s daughter as a way of justifying her bias affects the readers’ view of the auto/biographer’s objectivity and authority in the sense that this positioning demonstrates the auto/biographer’s subjectivity. However, the auto/biographer’s decision also demonstrates the authority of the personal. By presenting the different versions of the event available to her and by choosing to oppose them with her own version—which she recognizes might not be objective—Appignanesi inserts the personal into the text and shows how it impacts on other versions of the event. In doing so, she displays rather than conceals the many possible translations of past events and demonstrates that it is the very display of these multiple translations that makes the personal visible. This insertion of the personal and its presentation as authoritative in a certain way also allow the auto/biographer to emphasize that exposing the truth is not necessarily the most important aspect of the auto/biographical act.

Appignanesi's complex negotiations to position herself as reliable family storyteller and to validate some of the illegitimate source materials that constitute her mother's version of the past also enable her to authorize her father's voice. Aron, "the silent, inscrutable" member of the family (30), speaks rarely and when he does, his accounts of the past are received with suspicion. Appignanesi reconstructs two instances in which her father directly contributes to the articulation of the family past. In these two instances, she preserves the original suspicious reception of Aron's stories in order to emphasize the importance of the context in which stories are received, to illustrate the traumatic nature of Aron's experiences, and to demonstrate the authorizing function of the family memoir. She opens her auto/biography with an account of her father's delirious last days in a London hospital. Aron, in his last hours, is transported back to wartime and imagines nurses and doctors to be Nazi officers determined to kill him. Appignanesi portrays herself as the dutiful daughter attending to her father on his deathbed, trying to convince him of the true identity of his caretakers. This opening enables the auto/biographer to position herself as "truthknower" and her father as a seemingly unreliable source of information. That Appignanesi would open her auto/biography with an account of her father's unreliability can seem surprising, especially as she clearly indicates that she and Aron always shared the same revulsion for Hena's constant storytelling. This unexpected positioning at the beginning of the auto/biography functions at multiple levels. Appignanesi, by describing how her father spent his last days traumatized by his memories, pays tribute to her father's suffering and demonstrates how haunting such traumatic memories are. She also indicates that although

Aron was “the silent, inscrutable one” (30), he had stories to tell, but he never did or never could tell them.

This point becomes particularly relevant and poignant as, later on in the auto/biography, Appignanesi recalls an instance when her father did attempt to speak of his experience during the war and was not believed. Aron, while helping his grandchildren with a school project on the Second World War, had explained to them how to recognize edible faeces. The children, incredulous, had simply laughed at him and he “turned pale, ceased to speak and soon left the room”(128). This particular episode enables Appignanesi to understand why her father remained silent about his wartime experiences. “If you speak,” she explains, “not only are you forced to remember, but you meet with the incredulity of listeners” (129). She then refers to Primo Levi and describes how he has explored this issue in his writing. Appignanesi, by connecting Aron’s experience to Primo Levi’s, grants it an authority that Aron cannot claim for himself through the act of storytelling. Aron might not have been able to tell his own story, but someone else, with a similar experience, has done so and the authority derived from that act of storytelling can be transferred to those unable or unwilling to speak.

The opening of the auto/biography, if it positions Aron as a seemingly unreliable storyteller, also establishes Appignanesi as a reliable listener and interpreter of stories. She presents herself as the person able to decipher her father’s delirious stories and to replace them in their appropriate context, while providing a version of what is “really” happening. She articulates here her method for the shaping of the family memoir: she listens to the many versions of the past that run in the family, repositions them in the adequate historical context, and supplements them with her own version of the past and

the results of her historical research. In order to establish the authority of her family's storytellers and the legitimacy of their different versions of the past, Appignanesi combines the many source materials that she is originally confronted with. Although she turns to historical research to ground her family stories in a specific historical context, the authority (of individual storytellers and of narratives) emerges from the translation act that brings together the many disparate pieces that constitute the source materials.

***Honey and Ashes: Claiming her Place in "the Old Place"***

Kulyk Keefer's translation of her family history emerges from a personal desire to claim her own place in the distant past in which her relatives' memories are embedded. She writes the life stories of her grandparents in order to re-create the world they came from and claim this world as a site for the articulation of her Ukrainian-Canadian identity. She relies on the memories of her grandparents, Tomasz and Olena, her mother, Natalia, and her aunt, Vira. Although she has heard most of their stories while growing up, the present telling or remembering of these stories brings a new light to the family history that they shape because they are now written down and will make public the auto/biographer's positioning in the family's past. Kulyk Keefer's writing down of her relatives' stories preserves them from disappearance, incorporates them in the public sphere, and can therefore validate the experiences that they describe, not only for the descendants of Olena and Tomasz, but also for their community. As the reconstruction of her family's past requires interviews with older members of the Ukrainian community who knew her grandfather, Kulyk Keefer's work contributes to the shaping of a communal narrative. Such a Ukrainian historical narrative fills a void that the narrator herself has experienced

and provides a continuous history for the Canadian Ukrainian community to identify with. Kulyk Keefer realizes that claiming her place in the Ukrainian-Canadian community requires her positioning in her Ukrainian-Canadian family first. She needs to make her grandparents' Ukrainian past her own and she needs to "acquire" this past publicly in order to be able to claim belonging to the community later. Auto/biography offers Kulyk Keefer the opportunity to establish the family connections necessary to her own inscription in the Ukrainian community and its history.

To transfer the validity of her family's past experiences into the public realm, Kulyk Keefer needs to compare and contrast her private stories with the official documents that outline the lives of her relatives. As an academic, Kulyk Keefer is trained to read texts and documents in a critical way. However, from her grandmother, Olena, she has also learned to respect documents for their power to establish identities and rights and to validate experiences. Kulyk Keefer's positioning as Olena's granddaughter does not conflict with her positioning as an academic in the sense that both positions enable her to respect the authority of documents. Her positioning as Tomasz's granddaughter, as I will show later, will contradict her academic point of view and force her to negotiate an alternative positioning for her self. As an academic and as Olena's granddaughter however, she finds documents most useful in the attribution of identities and the rights attached to them. She remembers particularly that legal documents ensured Olena's inheritance of her father's house and fields, which, in turn, allowed her independence and the freedom to choose her own husband. All her life, Olena draws from these documents her very strong sense of identity and her right to act as an independent woman. Kulyk Keefer shares her grandmother's strong belief that these legal papers were "document[s]"

that validate[d] Olena's very existence" (53). Kulyk Keefer clearly views documents as validating tools that have the power to establish rights and identities and she uses them as a way of authorizing her relatives' private stories and claiming her place in the history that these documents outline. The fact that she is now in possession of these documents enables her to retrace her history back to the Ukrainian fields on which her grandmother's identity and rights depended and to claim her own place in that history.

Kulyk Keefer also values documents because they can provide information that the storytellers of her family do not know or cannot remember. In her autobiographical quest, Kulyk Keefer often finds that documents rectify information. For instance, the legal documents pertaining to the death of Olena's father reveal a story slightly different from the family story. In the story that Kulyk Keefer had inherited, Olena owed her independence to the lawyer who had drawn up her father's will. The documents tell a different story. They show that it was Olena's brother who actually talked to the lawyer after promising his father to make sure that Olena would inherit the family home that he himself should have had. This documented story does not contradict the essential information of the family story, that Olena inherited her father's house and fields. Rather, it adds a new dimension to it, casting light on the intervention of Olena's brother, who died not long after, a character that the private version of the story had erased. The documented version of the story returns this brother and his goodness to Olena to family history. In a similar way, documents can provide information that memory cannot restore. Kulyk Keefer's mother is unable to tell her daughter where she used to live when she first arrived in Canada. The blank in the personal story is filled when the auto/biographer goes to her mother's school and browses through the old registration cards filed in the

secretary's office (121). Written on the cards are all the addresses that her mother has been unable to remember. Such information grounds family records in specific facts, but, maybe more important, it contributes to Kulyk Keefer's imaginative reach; when the Canadian-born autobiographer can visit the dilapidated rooming houses in which her grandparents first lived in Toronto, she gains new insights into their immigrant past.

When telling her grandfather's side of the story and identifying herself primarily as Tomasz's granddaughter, Kulyk Keefer is confronted with contrast between personal and subjective stories and public and so-called objective history. This confrontation complicates her dual position of objective narrator and family storyteller. She chooses to privilege family stories above public history because of the particular nature of the truth that they alone can convey. As the story goes in the auto/biographer's family, Tomasz knew of the death of his newly born son because he dreamed about it on his way to Canada. A letter was waiting for him upon his arrival in Canada, confirming his premonition. However, "documents in Latin and Ukrainian, Polish and English [...] tell [the auto/biographer] a different story" (61). According to these documents, baby Ivan died in September 1927, three and a half months after Tomasz had already entered Canada. By quoting the official documents in her text, Kulyk Keefer recognizes the authority of the documented story and rectifies the erroneous facts passed on through the personal story. However, she does not dismiss the now inaccurate personal story. Preserving that dream is important for establishing the kind of man Tomasz was. Memory that is incorrect in specific detail is absolutely true to the intensity with which Tomasz experienced the death of his infant son when he himself was thousands of miles away from his family. Kulyk Keefer allows her contradictory pieces of information to stand

side by side in her text to show that "perhaps there's no such thing as a true story, just the echoes between different versions" (62). Her own history not only allows for contradictory versions, it demonstrates that the documented story and the personal story need to be interpreted together because meaning emerges from the interaction of these two source texts. Like Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer lets contradictory versions of the past stand side by side in order to present a fuller picture of the past. Both auto/biographers also choose to privilege their personal understanding of a situation while acknowledging to their readers that their positioning might not necessarily be the most objective. This subjective positioning, which seems to contradict both auto/biographers' desire for authority and objectivity, reinforces the impact of the personal on the rendering of history. Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer therefore pass on a multidimensional story to their children and community as well as a way of decoding and interpreting information. They teach their audience to go through the same translating process they have had to go through to provide them with the multiple and conflicting truths that both the documented and the personal stories reveal. Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer demonstrate here that translation, in Mary N. Layoun's words, "bears with it a charge, not only for translators and those from whom they come but also for those *to* whom they come" ("Translation, Cultural Transgression and Tribute, and Leaden Feet" 272). In *Losing the Dead* and *Honey and Ashes*, Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer encourage their Canadian readers to recognize that they, too, need to engage in the translation process required to make these stories familiar. As part of their national past, these migration stories need to be contrasted with and incorporated in public versions of history. The audience for whom the target text is intended becomes involved in the translation process and needs to learn



the negotiating process that translating requires in order to be able to use the knowledge that the family memoir produces.

### ***Running in the Family in the Name of the Father***

In *Running in the Family*, Michael Ondaatje articulates the autobiographical process around his quest for an absent father who died when he was still a young boy and left him with many unanswered questions. This textual search for the absent father complicates Ondaatje's recreation of his family history in their country of origin because it forces him to deal with two competing source "texts." On the one hand, the family narrative originates in the multiple versions of family history that his many relatives and family friends produce. This original site for production of the family narrative is multiple, unstable, and dynamic. On the other hand, the family narrative and Ondaatje's own identity are closely connected to the father. The absent father constitutes a fixed point of origin, "the north pole" to which the auto/biographer always returns (146). This ambivalence between unstable and fixed sites of origin lies at the heart of Ondaatje's auto/biographical project and complicates the task of translation because it forces the writer to negotiate between an innovative interpretation of family history (one that promotes flexibility, uncertainty, and polysemy) and a more traditional interpretation (one that is male-centered and fixed).

Unlike Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer who rely heavily on historical research and documentation to ground their authority and demonstrate the legitimacy of the versions of history they articulate, Ondaatje undermines the authorizing power of official sources and emphasizes the legitimizing power of fiction. The three writers achieve similar end

results (i.e. authorizing private versions of history through the manipulation of generic hybridity), but use slightly different techniques. When Ondaatje engages in historical research, he does not take the information he gathers in history books or official records more seriously than family stories and legends. In fact, he often manipulates his auto/biographical reconstruction of the past as a way of de-authorizing stable source materials such as history books, maps, and official documents. Ondaatje's act of translation of the family past is deliberately unfaithful to the historical documents that he consults. All of his resources have a similar status: they are all pieces of artwork that he metamorphoses in the auto/biographical process in order to create a new piece of art. Drawing on the theatrical talent he inherited from his mother, he sees family stories and sources of information as "a frozen opera" that he brings back to life in the autobiography by "touch[ing] them into words" (16). The autobiographical space gives him the opportunity to stage memory and to present the flamboyant Ondaatje history as a vivid and dynamic performance.<sup>11</sup> The production of the story is more important to Ondaatje than the accuracy of the history his performance of the past is shaping. Where Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer use official documents and history books to ground their family history (even if their personal story often contradicts the version they find in documents and books), Ondaatje satirizes or even invents the information he finds in official documents and books—when he does not invent the "official" documents and the history books altogether.

Ondaatje's innovative writing techniques illustrate the many ruptures that fissure his family and that multiple migration experiences have paradoxically magnified and obscured. His creative inclusion of maps, pictures, and multiple voices, his bold

collapsing together of time-space frames, and his focus on *spaces* of narration instead of *times* of narration, enable him to translate the diversity present in his source “texts.” The incorporation of the voices of many of his female relatives (his Aunts Phyllis and Dolly, his grandmother Lalla, his mother Doris, his sisters Gillian, Susan, and Jennifer) and the insertion at the center of his text of poems about marginal people like servants and a cinnamon peeler allow Ondaatje to share authorial power with others. The auto/biographer’s inclusion of multiple storytellers in his reconstruction of the family past prevents him from claiming the position of main storyteller. He must constantly move from the position of listener to that of storyteller and, unlike Appignanesi, Ondaatje does not seem to need to impose his authority on the stories that he is receiving. Ondaatje’s shifting position is particularly clear in the chapter entitled “Lunch Conversation,” where the reader is thrown into the middle of a conversation between unidentified storytellers. The listeners—Ondaatje and his reader—rely entirely on the storytellers for facts and explanations. This chapter, through a juxtaposition of written and spoken narrative, clearly demonstrates the auto/biographer’s dependence on the authority and knowledge of other storytellers. At the end of his text, Ondaatje openly acknowledges this dependence on others and the “surrendering” of personal authority that goes hand in hand with it, when he claims that “a literary work is a communal act. And this book could not have been *imagined*, let alone conceived, without the help of many people” (175). Here, Ondaatje once again differentiates himself from Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer who tend to privilege their own view or understanding of events. Ondaatje seems to care less about whose version of the past is more authoritative and objective and

more about the fact that the past relies on collaborative work in order to be translated into the present.

Ondaatje's treatment of maps can be read as his take on the process of translation at work in recording the past. A map traditionally records a geographical reality as perceived by the traveler, explorer, and/or conqueror. A map, in other words, constitutes a particular translation of "source" elements (i.e. geography, topography, natural resources, settlements, infrastructure, etc) into a document that can be read and interpreted by people at home and/or other travelers. Ondaatje repeatedly claims that maps and the translated reality that they represent need to be questioned because they serve the interests of the people, mostly conquerors, who drew them. He describes traditional maps as "false maps," the type of maps that are "on [his] brother's wall in Toronto" (53). These maps are "false" because they only record the history of the conquerors and fail to translate the history of the natives of the land the map outlines. Ondaatje incorporates both "false" maps and untraditional maps in *Running in the Family*. The inclusion of both illustrates the commitment he shares with Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer to let multiple translations stand side by side in the text. Instead of privileging one take on Ceylon, Ondaatje includes both "false" and untraditional maps in order to make the process of translation visible, destabilize the authority of both translations, and raise questions about the very possibility for an "original" for these visual representations of the island.

The map that opens the 1993 McClelland and Stewart edition of *Running in the Family*, does not identify the island but simply indicates the north. The scale, minuscule and unclear, does not allow for an accurate reading. The contours of the island and the

main rivers are outlined, cities, national parks and mountains are identified, but the inside of the island remains “empty,” ready to be filled with the auto/biographer’s stories. In contrast, the map in Christopher Ondaatje’s autobiography, *The Man-Eater of Punanai: A Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon*, clearly indicates the main cities and rivers, represents the geography of the island in various shades of coloring, and identifies the oceans surrounding the island, thus allowing for a global positioning of Sri Lanka and a conventional reading. The maps in both autobiographies, along with the different writing techniques, suggest their authors’ differing views on authority and ways of interpreting history. Where Michael Ondaatje encourages flexibility of interpretation and emphasizes the role of imagination in translating the meaning of the past, his brother seems to privilege accurate information and interpretation based on facts. Both brothers have two different “source” texts in mind for their respective translation of the family history. Michael’s source text includes memories, stories, and historical facts that can all be modified in order to fit the story that he has in mind, while Christopher’s source text includes memories, stories, and facts that can all be verified. The two different source texts yield two different translations. Christopher Ondaatje revisits several episodes that appear in *Running in the Family* and gives his version of what happened, providing facts that his brother’s imaginative rendering had warped or omitted. Christopher Ondaatje, who thinks that his brother “even when he exaggerated certain facts, remained truthful to their spirit” (37), intervenes in the familial recreation of the Ondaatje past in two important ways. First, he positions himself as more reliable and more knowledgeable than his brother. His reliability and knowledge emerge from the facts that he relies on “real” (not invented) written accounts of the past and on his personal memories of his father,

which are more numerous than Michael's because he is older and spent more time with Merwyn Ondaatje than his younger brother did. Second, because he writes in a more traditional form than his brother, his autobiographical style sharply contrasts with Michael Ondaatje's use of innovative narrative techniques in his rendering of family history and therefore allows him to claim a more conventional form of authority over the familial narrative.

Michael Ondaatje's treatment of maps enables him to interpret and undermine the ways in which they are traditionally used. Ondaatje entitles one of his chapters "Tabula Asiae." Echoing the familiar "tabula rasa" allows the writer to suggest two possible interpretations for map reading. The reference to "tabula rasa" encourages readers to notice that the European travelers that originally mapped Ceylon did so assuming that they were drawing on a blank slate, ignoring the history and culture of the place and therefore failing at representing both. Ondaatje objects to this act of colonial translation that results in the erasure of colonized populations by criticizing the maps hung on his brother's wall for their omission of the history of native people. He also laments the fact that such maps record only the multiple invasions of European nations without giving any information about their impact on the island and its native inhabitants. The reference to "tabula rasa" also gives the auto/biographer, at the beginning of a chapter whose title indicates the possibility for writing on a blank slate, an opportunity to articulate new ways of map making and interpreting. These ways could allow for the incorporation of the many different "source" texts available to the translator (i.e. the history and culture of the native populations and the histories of the various conquerors of the island). However, although he has the opportunity to fill the "empty" space with new etchings, he

reproduces the very same practice he has been criticizing. At the end of the chapter, Ondaatje introduces his ancestor “arriving in 1600” and places him “at the centre of the rumour. At this point on the map” (54). This introduction and central positioning of his ancestor on the map of Ceylon marks the starting point of his family history and connects it to the history of the island. However, while Ondaatje’s central positioning of his male ancestor on the map reveals the connections between personal and national histories, it also reinforces the traditional use of maps that his chapter deconstructs. Where his innovative writing techniques emphasize the concept of de-centering authority by disseminating it throughout various stories, voices, and perspectives, his positioning of his male ancestor on the map at “the centre of the rumour” does the opposite.

This shift in narrative technique brings the readers back to the auto/biographer’s other source “text” (i.e. his absent father) for his recreation of the family history and to the constraints that this source “text” imposes on the translation task. The auto/biographical project enables Ondaatje to map his family past. His innovative writing techniques and his own analysis of mapmaking suggest that he wants to map an untraditional story, one that takes into account the many waves of migration, the various histories, voices, and perspectives involved in the shaping of history. This mapping project, however, needs to be articulated around “the north pole” and this requirement necessarily affects the map that he creates. Although his innovative techniques challenge and undermine the colonialist (and also traditional and patriarchal) mapping of history and the erasure of diversity that goes with it, the necessity to include the “north pole” indicates the impossibility of erasing these traditional readings and use of the map

completely. His technically innovative translation of his family history will have to contain traces of the traditional history in which the family past is grounded.

Faithfully inserting elements of his second source “text” into his recreation of the family past, Ondaatje incorporates his absent father’s voice into the text. Unlike the other voices that contribute to the articulation of the family past, however, the father’s voice has a particular authority. The son illustrates this authority by placing the father figure at the center of his auto/biographical reconstruction. From the very beginning of the text, one of Ondaatje’s objectives is to recreate his father’s life and to place himself in that life. He tries to connect to the father whose memories still haunt him in a number of ways. The first chapter opens with a dream of the father and moves on to describing the auto/biographer in a drunken state that enables him to connect most closely to the alcoholic Merwyn. Most of the auto/biographer’s time while researching his family history is spent questioning relatives and friends about his father. His opinion of people also seems to depend on their connection to his father. He says of his Aunt Phyllis for instance that he is “especially fond of her because she was always close to [his] father” (18). The majority of the autobiography is about his father and his father’s side of the family (16 chapters devoted mostly to his father and his father’s family, 6 chapters devoted mostly to his father and mother, 4 chapters devoted mostly to his mother and his mother’s family, the other chapters are mostly about himself and his siblings and other stories). Christopher Ondaatje also notices his brother’s partiality and describes *Running in the Family* as “a love letter to the father [my brother Michael] never knew” (38). Michael Ondaatje’s penultimate chapter, entitled “Final Days/Father Tongue,” ends with a direct address of the son to the absent father and a sense that at the end of his quest, the



auto/biographer still does not really know who his father was (172). Because of this lack of knowledge, attending to the father's voice, instead of providing information and adding layers of meaning to the translation the way the other voices often do, opens gaps in the narrative, thus obscuring meaning. The father's voice makes the translation process more difficult as it refuses to lend itself to interpretation. Ondaatje's translation of his family past is therefore necessarily incomplete, mapping out only certain parts of his family history, and leaving key elements out of the picture, just like the map that opens his auto/biography.

## **THE MIGRANT FAMILY MEMOIR AND SOCIAL ACTION**

The act of transgenerational translation that Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje engage in when gathering, recording, and transmitting the events of the past enables them to articulate several forms of social action. The family memoir contributes to redefining ethnographic study and the type of knowledge the discipline produces. Through the writing of their family memoirs, Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer in particular also help theorize the reclaiming and representation of hyphenated identities. Finally, the works of the three writers examined in this chapter insert private histories into public versions of history and present a new take on historiography.

### **The Family Memoir as a Form of Auto-Ethnography**

In "Traveling Cultures," the opening chapter of *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford examines the "dangers of construing ethnography as fieldwork" (20) and introduces his broader agenda to "rethink cultures as sites of

dwelling *and* travel [and] to take travel knowledges seriously” (31). He suggests that the view that too often presents the “field” as “a home away from home where one speaks the language and has a kind of vernacular competence” minimizes “the sites and relations of translation” involved in the process of ethnographic study (23). This approach to ethnographic study grounds the “fieldworker’s” authority in the cultures that s/he records and interprets, in his/her fluency in the language(s) and cultural practices of the “field,” and in his/her long-term living experience with the people whose lives s/he is recording. The “fieldworker’s” authority emerges, in a sense, from the fact that, for his/her audience, s/he can almost be construed as “native informant.” This understanding of ethnography does not take into account the asymmetrical power relations at work in the situation, the subjective nature of the study, the types of interactions at work in the “field,” and/or the language(s) in which these interactions are conducted. Redefining ethnography, Clifford suggests, is necessary to represent more accurately the many voices that contribute to shaping the anthropologist’s final inscription of the cultures s/he observes. Making visible the translation process that makes these many voices audible, Clifford explains, “aims not to assert a naïve democracy of plural authorship, but to loosen at least somewhat the monological control of the executive writer/anthropologist and to open for discussion ethnography’s hierarchy and negotiation of discourses in power-charged, unequal situations” (23). The “modernization” of the discipline also constitutes, for Clifford, another reason for the redefinition of ethnographic study. Now that “fieldworkers” work in urban centers, libraries, hospitals, hotels, etc, and rarely in small villages, the transitional nature of their involvement in the cultural practices they observe and record needs to be theorized. The anthropologist’s authority needs to emerge,

not from his/her grounding in the “field,” but from his/her ability to transport and transfer (i.e. translate) information from one medium to another as well as from one site to another.

Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje all return to their respective countries of origin in order to research their family histories, document their quest for roots, and get a sense of their relatives’ cultures and past lives. This reverse migration to a “field” located in a country of origin that is paradoxically “foreign” to them (except for Ondaatje who was born and had lived in Sri Lanka) enables these writers to experience, to a certain degree, the translation process involved in migration. Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer both comment on the foreignness of Poland and the Ukraine respectively. The countries that were once homes to their families are now foreign, and the only familiar places are the Westernized hotels they are staying at and the occasional fast-food restaurants where they can find coffee and clean bathrooms. Unlike traditional anthropologists who are often fluent in the languages spoken in the “field,” Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer both rely on translators to navigate their foreign homelands. The need for translators illustrates their alienation from the places they have come to probe to find clues that might enable them to interpret the past that they have inherited. Both Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer observe the people around them in order to identify differences and similarities that might allow them to trace their relatives’ and their own ethnic identities. The fact that the people they encounter also identify them as different and observe them as such reverses the probing gaze that the auto/biographers impose on Polish and Ukrainian people and marks them as “foreign” in their “original” countries. This reversal of the gaze that displaces the auto/biographers from the position of “viewing subject” to that of “viewed

object” illustrates the subjective nature of historical and cultural reconstruction, emphasizes the visual aspect of the ethnographic task, and makes clear the necessity to translate this visual experience into a linguistic one. Appignanesi’s and Kulyk Keefer’s position as “foreign viewed objects and viewing subjects” in their “original” countries makes clear the “sites and relations of translation” involved in their ethnographic study.

In transit and unable to understand the languages and behavior of the people they meet and the documents they peruse, Appignanesi and Kulyk Keefer cannot claim the authority of traditional anthropologists. They must come up, instead, with other forms of interpretation to help them decipher and make sense of what they observe. They rely on their knowledge of family stories and earlier research, their translators, archival research, museum and location visits, their sense of observation, and their imagination to put together a picture of their relatives’ past. They also depend on such varied media as documents, video-taped interviews, video-recordings, books, photographs, and films and are dependent on fax machines, photocopiers, email, the telephone, and all forms of transportation to conduct their research. Their auto/biographical reconstruction incorporates these elements of their research, thus making visible the multi-layered process of translation at work in the recreation of their relatives’ past and “original” cultures. This process of translation illustrates the complex nature of cultural reconstruction; and it thoroughly implicates the auto/biographer as both subject and object, researcher and informant, thus complicating distinctions between “source” and translation.

### **The Family Memoir as a Tool for Reclaiming Ethnic Identity**

Kulyk Keefer intends her reverse migration to Ukraine to ground the ethnic part of her hyphenated identity on what, she hopes, will be evidence more “concrete” than family stories. She goes back to Ukraine, determined “to meet [her grandparents] on their home ground” (253). The enterprise proves difficult, however, as Kulyk Keefer’s grandparents’ house has been destroyed and the only place where the auto/biographer can find a house similar to the one Tomasz and Olena would have had is in an open air museum. She walks into that house and feels that “out of time, out of place [she] ha[s] found [her] grandmother’s house” (255). Kulyk Keefer relies on imagination to make the replica house her grandmother’s house. She draws on the knowledge that she has extracted from family stories and her personal experiences of place to articulate the version of the family house that she recreates in the memoir. She translates past memories and present experiences into the textual representation of a specific site in which she can connect with her ancestors’ past and reclaim her ethnic identity.

Kulyk Keefer’s use of the replica house is problematic because it suggests that the auto/biographer seems to be looking for “physical” (or concrete) elements that might prove that the family history that she inherited through stories existed. She desires to ground the Ukrainian part of her identity on something more concrete than stories. This desire might emerge from the fact that she has always experienced her ethnic roots through storytelling. She hopes that finding evidence that confirms the realities depicted in family stories might establish this missing “concrete connection” to her Ukrainian past and identity. She longs for something that might demonstrate that her Ukrainian heritage is an essential part of her identity, not something reconstructed from stories. The problem

with her textual recreation of the replica house is that she presents this house as the key element that demonstrates that her Ukrainian heritage is an essential part of her identity. Standing in the replica house, she exclaims, "I am in the Old Place, just as when I was a child, when words alone, the timbre of a loved voice, could make what I imagined real for me. *This is no imagining*: this is here and then, there and now, all at once no borders anymore" (256 my emphasis). Here, Kulyk Keefer clearly contrasts the reality that family stories shape and the reality of her experience in the replica house and suggests that her experience authorizes her claim to her Ukrainian identity in a way that stories could not. The problem with this interpretation of the experience is that it does not recognize the constructed nature of the replica house. When Kulyk Keefer feels that she is exchanging the reconstructed status of her Ukrainian identity for a concrete confirmation that this identity is an essential part of herself, she is ignoring that this confirmation comes from a replica. The house that she feels "authenticates" her Ukrainian identity is a "fake."<sup>12</sup>

In this episode, Kulyk Keefer is also attempting to bring past memories and present experiences together in order to establish continuity between family history set in Ukraine and her own Canadian life. She clearly places herself at the juncture of past and present, but instead of presenting the auto/biographical space as the site that makes this collapsing of time and place possible, she insists that the replica house itself establishes the connection. "This is no imagining," she claims, emphasizing her interpretation of the replica house as a validating tool that clearly establishes continuity between the Ukrainian part of her family history and her Canadian present. But again, this interpretation ignores the fact that reconstruction is a crucial element in establishing historical continuity. The replica house was reconstructed in the open air museum in

order to recreate an element of the past that was missing from the present-day Ukrainian context and thus to establish continuity in the country's history. Kulyk Keefer's longing for a concrete form of validation of her Ukrainian identity leads her to overlook the fact that this part of her identity can only be reconstructed, whether from stories or replica houses. Overwhelmed by this particular experience, the writer is momentarily distracted from the auto/biographical project and forgets to adopt the critical distance that would enable her to see that the replica house is not the concrete proof that she is Ukrainian, but simply another element that helps her reconstruct, and therefore reclaim, her Ukrainian identity.

Appignanesi approaches the reclaiming of her hyphenated identity differently. Her reverse migrations to Poland (she visits her homeland on two occasions) force her to confront her Polish Jewish identity. Unlike Kulyk Keefer who goes back to Ukraine in the hope of finding "proof" that might "authorize" her as a "true" Ukrainian, Appignanesi is not interested at first in grounding the ethnic part of her identity. She recalls growing up in Canada and being not only ashamed but also confused about her ancestry. The family's displacement to Québec, transforming Polish-born Appignanesi into "a '*petite Parisienne*,'" (*Losing the Dead* 32), a "fiction of birth," made official through school records, conflicts with her desire to be like her Canadian schoolmates, with the result that Appignanesi rejects her Polish roots. Until her father's death in 1981, she "had no interest in Poland at all" (73). The fact that her parents constituted a living link to the past and the family's Polish home might partly explain Appignanesi's initial disinterest in Poland. While they were alive and able to remember, her relations with them complicated her sense of Polishness. She also did not need to become the guardian and transmitter of

family history. She was not confronted with the fact that, as Eva Hoffman puts it in *After such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, she was “in effect a receptacle of a historical legacy” and that “its burden ha[s] a significance and weight that need [...] to be acknowledged” (x). The disintegration of the familial unit, however, threatens Appignanesi’s living connection to the original homeland, impresses on her her responsibility to preserve and transmit her family heritage, and triggers her first reverse migration to Poland. She travels to her native country in an official capacity in order to explore various forms of Polish artistic reconstruction of memories of the Second World War and the “nation’s memory of Jews” (*Losing the Dead* 77). Appignanesi’s inability to speak fluent Polish and the discomfort that the revelation of her Jewish ancestry creates in her Polish hosts resuscitate her ambivalent feelings toward her Jewish Polish identity. She remembers her adolescent attempts at being “thoroughly honest and upfront” about her Jewish ancestry (62) and realizes that her family’s displacement to Canada has granted her the freedom to hide or recover convenient parts of her ancestry and to represent this ancestry in any ways she wants. Her presence in Poland complicates the reconstruction of her Jewish Polish identity because it connects her to the history of this country and impacts the lives of the people she encounters there. The auto/biographer’s first reverse migration to Poland brings the complicated politics of identity reconstruction to the surface and introduces the problems that her textual reconstruction of her mother’s life will later create.

Appignanesi’s “mother’s gradual and growing dotage [...] send[s] the auto/biographer] back” to Poland a second time (77). On this second reverse migration, Appignanesi hopes to re-articulate Hena’s disintegrating identity and ground her



disappearing memories in history by looking for clues that would document and therefore confirm her mother's stories about the family's Polish past. These clues, Appignanesi believes, would connect herself and her own children to their Polish roots for good, even after Hena's memory is entirely gone. Interweaving the versions of history collected from personal exchanges, history books, video-taped interviews, memories, and imagination, Appignanesi recreates her mother's native town of Grodzisk, her father's native Pruszków, and the various war-time family homes. She carefully articulates the intricacies of Jewish Polish life in pre-war Poland, and takes her story through the experience of war. Appignanesi's textual creation illustrates the various ways of life available to the Jewish Polish community and the complicated relationships of this community with the Gentile population. This work of historical reconstruction also enables the auto/biographer to position her family in the Jewish Polish community, highlight her connection to this community, and attribute new meanings to this particular belonging. She writes her grandparents into being and describes their contribution to their respective communities. She explains, for instance, that her maternal grandfather, David Lipszyc, was a rabbi and teacher who "had studied in Warsaw before the First World War and become involved with one of the mainstream Jewish political parties, the Mizrahi" (38). Sent to Grodzisk to set up an elementary school, Appignanesi's grandfather "set up [...] a *heder metukkan*, a new improved heder, which incorporated contemporary educational ideas" (39). Two of Appignanesi's mother's surviving Grodzisk friends support Hena's "narrative of a community in which her father was a highly respected elder, a giant of a man sought out for his talmudic as well as practical wisdom, a democrat who paid little heed to hierarchy" (39). Appignanesi's connection to such a

prominent man in Grodzisk's Jewish community establishes a sense of continuity in a family history that displacement and exile to Canada have disrupted. It also challenges the auto/biographer's reservations about her own identity as a Jewish Pole. "Jewishness [...] carried a shameful taint," she explains, "[w]e all internalize the discourse of the master, the coloniser, the aggressor. Jews, blacks, immigrants—all carry within them that little nugget of self-hatred, the gift of the dominant culture to its 'lesser' mortals" (35). Her autobiographical work of historical reconstruction enables her to develop a counter narrative that responds to the "discourse of the master" and resignifies the experience of being Jewish. Through this counter narrative, Appignanesi is able to connect herself not only to a "tainted culture" but also to the educated, democratic, and generous community that her maternal grandfather had helped to create. This counterbalancing act of identification does not "dissolve the bitter aura of shame," but it offers Appignanesi an alternative way of identifying as Jewish (35). The auto/biographer's reconstitution of her parents' past enables her to articulate the defiled history that is part of her Jewish Polish heritage. It also gives her the opportunity to sketch her Polish homeland and provides her Canadian readers with a reconstruction of the Second World War from a Jewish Polish perspective. The memoir introduces the auto/biographer's Canadian readers to a world that has now disappeared and brings back to life and fleshes out the lives of extinguished communities. In doing so, the memoir inscribes itself in the revisionist movement of history re-writing, a movement that enables the victims to develop their own version of the past.

### **The Family Memoir as a Form of Historiography**

Family memoirs by migrant auto/biographers are interesting precisely for the academic care with which many migrant narrators position their family stories in relation to received histories. Nonetheless, for these children and grandchildren, their family stories have an authority that public history lacks. Because these stories are part of what they inherit, because they seek connection with the characters in their inherited stories, and because these stories contribute so significantly to their own personal sense of identity, these narrators use autobiography as the explanatory frame for historical information. Official history becomes a footnote or appendix and not infrequently a contradiction to the authoritative memories of personal experience transmitted from generation to generation. Their translation processes privilege auto/biography as providing an authoritative methodology for the re-writing of history.

Like Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer sees autobiography as a powerful tool for the reshaping of public history. She constantly finds herself "at the border between story and history" (163) and refuses simply to privilege one over the other; rather, she tries to weave them together as often as possible. The private stories that she inherits from her relatives often challenge or even contradict the public version of history that her research reveals. This contrast between public and private versions of history persuades her to review and adjust both private and public records of the past. "Stories speak one language: documents another," she notes (52). Autobiography, her text demonstrates, can fill in the gaps of public history, connect European history to Canadian history, and rescue and preserve private testimonies and memories. Kulyk Keefer's research into her

family's past reveals the bias with which history is often written. She notices, for instance, how little attention nationalist histories of Poland give to the Polish-Ukrainian war. These histories value the Polish victory over Ukraine rather less than the Polish victory over the Red Army in 1920, and therefore do not describe it in as much detail. However, for Kulyk Keefer, whose grandfather fought in the war on the Ukrainian side, this episode of Polish and Ukrainian history is important to her understanding of Tomasz and therefore also of herself. As Kulyk Keefer imagines Tomasz's motivations for joining the Ukrainian forces, and his actions during the conflict, she fills in the gaps left by the published histories of Poland, exercising, in this case, imagination based on mere snatches of family narrative and her own sense of what must have been likely, given what else she knows.

Kulyk Keefer finds the teaching of history as biased as the writing. She recalls how her Ukrainian schoolteachers depicted Ukrainians as oppressed people fighting for their rights. She also remembers how they taught her to revere Bohdan Khmelnytsky for his involvement in the creation of the "first autonomous Ukrainian state since the Mongol invasions" and his heroic behavior during the liberation of the country from Polish tyranny (200). However, as an adult researching for this family memoir, she discovers alternative versions to this history, one of which is given to her by a Jewish friend, who calls her Ukrainian "hero" "The great Killer of Jews" (200). The other version of this history she finds in a novel entitled *Wartime Lies* that describes Ukrainians not as oppressed people but as "wild animals" committing crimes against humanity. These contrasts with the Ukrainian history lessons on which Kulyk Keefer had grown up do more than simply reveal the multiple perspectives from which history can be viewed;

they seriously complicate her own position as a Ukrainian. Her use of multiple versions, contrasting documents, memory, and imagination begins therefore in her very personal need to acknowledge the possibility of shame in her heritage.

Kulyk Keefer's struggle with this possibility of shame is evident all through her text and illustrates the contradictory forces at work and power relations at stake in the reshaping of personal and public histories. The fact that Ukrainian people were both the oppressed and the oppressors at different times in history only makes her struggle more difficult. Although she recognizes that positioning herself as a Ukrainian means that she needs to take responsibility for and accept as part of her heritage the atrocities that some of her people have committed, she tends to privilege her belonging to a victimized group more. She repeatedly claims her place among the victims of cultural, linguistic, and racial discrimination, thus trying to direct her readers' interpretation of her family history and elicit their sympathy. This particular positioning can be explained partly by the understandable preference to be identified with a potential victim than a potential oppressor, but it leads the auto/biographer to lose her critical distance for a moment and brush with cultural and historical appropriation. The auto/biographer's momentary loss of critical distance is particularly visible when she attempts to liken her experience to Anne Frank's by suggesting that

though she was German and Dutch and I, Canadian; though she was from a Jewish and I a Ukrainian family, we were the same somehow except for the other voice I heard when reading her diary, the voice of History with a capital H, meaning something you can't undo or wish away. What happened to the Franks could have happened to us; Anne's death could have been my own. (194)

Kulyk Keefer's suggestion that what happened to Jewish people during the Second World War could have happened to any other group is not enough, despite the suffering in her family, to convince this reader of her right to claim the same victim position as a Jewish person. Her strong desire to be identified as victim is too obvious here and requires more than the simple effusions of a teenage girl feeling empathy for another teenage girl whose life she is reading about. The auto/biographer's difficulty in balancing her experience and her theoretical position upsets the balance between the contradictory forces of reality and imagination. When she claims that Anne Frank's experience could have been her own, Kulyk Keefer tries to connect her family history to the wider historical narrative to which Anne Frank's text belongs. Although I can understand Kulyk Keefer's attempt at connecting her family history with wider historical narratives in order to grant it an extra layer of legitimacy, I think that she is crossing the line in this instance between connecting with history and appropriating it. She recuperates memories that do not belong to her through "projection" and "identification" by manipulating what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory."

Hirsch defines postmemory as "a space of remembrance [...] broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification and projection. It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as one's own, or more precisely, *as experiences one might oneself have had*, and of inscribing them into one's own life story" (*Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* 8-9, emphasis mine). Hirsch clearly suggests that children and grandchildren of trauma survivors are the ones who can usually claim to have postmemories, because they often grow up with these memories or

“transgenerational hauntings” as Appignanesi calls them. Kulyk Keefer clearly did not grow up with such memories; her grandparents certainly faced adversity, but they were never confronted with circumstances as traumatic and life threatening as the circumstances of Appignanesi’s parents or Anne Frank’s family. This crucial difference makes her use of the concept of “postmemory” suspect, because it reveals the fine line between reconstruction and appropriation. Kulyk Keefer’s strong desire to be identified as a victim of history and her textual efforts to make this desire come true illustrate the contradictory forces that shape the historiographic process and reveal the difficulty of articulating “objective” versions of the past. The auto/biographer’s struggle with this particular aspect of her family past emphasizes the necessity to examine both public and private versions of history critically as neither can provide a “legitimate” and “authoritative” translation of the past. Both need to be read together as they respond to each other, shaping a multi-layered account of the past.

Kulyk Keefer’s claim to the victim identity also contrasts with Appignanesi’s view on that identity. During her visit to Poland, Appignanesi goes to the Jewish cemetery in which her grandmother is buried and looks for her grave. While she is there, she imagines her parents walking in the cemetery thirty-five years earlier in a way very similar to the way Kulyk Keefer imagines her grandmother moving about in the replica house in the open air museum she visits in Ukraine. Both women are looking for remnants of the past and imagining how their relatives evolved in the environment in which they themselves are now standing. Two major differences mark these similar experiences. The first one is that Kulyk Keefer does find a replica of her grandmother’s house; she is, in a way, successful in her quest for remnants of the past. Appignanesi’s

quest, however, fails as she cannot find her grandmother's grave. The second difference is crucial as it exemplifies clearly the two auto/biographers' very different positions. Where Kulyk Keefer grounds the reality of her Ukrainian identity in the existence of a "fake" Ukrainian house, the reality of Appignanesi's Jewish identity is emphasized by the absence of her grandmother's grave. When asked how she feels "as a Jewish" person standing in a Jewish cemetery in Poland, Appignanesi is unable to answer the question, arguing that she does not "seem to have feelings as a group. All the question does is trap [her] in the dynamic of 'otherness'" (200). Her reaction is different from Kulyk Keefer's. Where Kulyk Keefer desperately wants to belong to "the dynamic of otherness," Appignanesi feels "trapped" in it. The privilege of desiring the victim position belongs only to the one who never actually had to experience it and makes Kulyk Keefer's desire for and claim to this position even more troubling.

Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi both turn to history to document and validate the family stories that they inherit. At the same time, however, the family histories that they recreate often compete with or challenge the official versions of historical events that legitimize them. Like Austin Clarke who subversively uses his colonial education to undermine the power of colonial rule, Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi manipulate the power of historiography to destabilize its product. Ondaatje's auto/biographical reconstruction also aims at invalidating official historical discourse, but his approach is not historicist like that of the two other writers. Ondaatje's reading of maps establishes that he considers official history as the dominant group's narrative whose main function is to silence (or erase) the (hi)stories that precede it. He confirms this view of official



history as an oppressive, erasing force in one of his descriptions of the 1971 Insurgency.

He explains:

When the government rounded up thousands of suspects during the Insurgency of 1971, the Vidyalankara campus of the University of Ceylon was turned into a prison camp. The police weeded out the guilty, trying to break their spirit. When the university opened again the returning students found hundreds of poems written on walls, ceilings, and in hidden corners of the campus. Quatrains and free verse about the struggle, tortures, the unbroken spirit, love of friends who had died for the cause. The students went around for days transcribing them into their notebooks before they were covered with whitewash and lye. (70)

This passage explains why Ondaatje does not turn to official history for validation of his family stories, but draws authority from private stories instead. The prisoners' poetic creations constitute the type of history that the auto/biographer values. These poems emerge from individual experiences of historical circumstances and tell the stories that official history often "whitewashes." "Truth disappears with history" (42), Ondaatje tells us, but the prisoners' poems survive because of individual acts of resistance. The power of historical narrative lies in the personal, in the ability of individuals to leave their marks to be read by future generations. With this passage, Ondaatje also emphasizes the artistic nature of historical reconstruction. The prisoners' experiences are recreated through poetry inscribed on walls and ceilings. The artistic quality of this form of historical reconstruction is key to the auto/biographer, who, throughout his text, insists on reading history in architectural structures, engravings on churches' stone floors, gravestones,

maps, and photographs. His focus on non-written forms of history further destabilizes the power of official written historical discourse.

In *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje reverses the interpreting process that Kulyk Keefer and Appignanesi use. Where the two of them turn to history to explain their family histories, Ondaatje turns to family stories to explain official history. Doing research about his ancestors in St. Thomas' Church in Colombo, Ondaatje reads the church ledgers to find information about the first Ondaatje to have come to Sri Lanka and his descendants. "We had not expected to find more than one Ondaatje," he explains, "but the stones and pages are full of them. [...] It seems [...] as if every Ondaatje for miles around flocked here to be baptised and married" (56). Here the auto/biographer communicates the results of his archival research, but an important part of his recreation of the lives of some of the Ondaatjes he discovers on the ledgers' pages emerges from his own family stories. From the information contained in the ledgers, he is able to reconstitute the lives of Simon Ondaatje and his four brothers and describe their occupations and contributions to the community. He goes on, however, to describe the eating habits of the brothers and the topics of their private quarrels and how these quarrels affected their dining habits. This is not the type of information that ledgers provide, but it is reminiscent of other family stories that Ondaatje tells. He complements archival research with the knowledge that he has acquired from his family history and creates a history for these four brothers that must be partially fictitious. The fictional character of his historical reconstruction does not concern him as he asserts at the end of the auto/biography that "in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (176). This attitude contrasts sharply with Appignanesi's whose main concern is to draw on

historical facts to legitimize her mother's "lies." Ondaatje sees as much (if not more) value in a "lie" than in a fact. This fictional approach to history writing is creative and useful in destabilizing official discourses, but it does not contribute to articulating an authoritative alternative vision of history that can compete with official versions of history. Describing his own approach to historical reconstruction, Ondaatje emphasizes the importance of stories and constant storytelling in historiography:

we will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them all as if assembling the hull of a ship. No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in. In this way history is organized. (19)

This approach demonstrates the translator's unreliability. Ondaatje clearly indicates that storytelling perverts the source stories and keeps transforming them. His method for historical reconstruction, if it keeps the stories alive (and therefore, paradoxically, fulfills history's role), does not produce a reliable alternative form of historical knowledge. The knowledge to be extracted from Ondaatje's treatment of history does not lie in the form of history that he reconstructs, but in his demonstration that official historical discourse often conceals the actions of complex, dynamic, and wildly entertaining characters.

My study illustrates that the concept of translation is central to the migrant family memoir genre. Family memoir writers explore the complicated source materials (stories, memories, letters, photographs, objects, documents, interviews, history books, and archives) that initiate and inform the auto/biographical quest. Drawing on autobiography, biography, historiography, ethnography, and fiction, they develop a method of

investigation that enables them to decipher these multiple source materials and articulate their meanings in their textual reconstruction of the family past. The generic hybridity of their texts also illustrates the complicated power negotiations in which family memoir writers engage in order to legitimize private versions of history and manipulate them to complement and/or destabilize official versions of history.

Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje are all confronted with multiple source “texts.” Their auto/biographical work allows them to weave together the many versions of their relatives’ past and to position themselves in complex power relationships in order to claim their place in family history, authorize their voices, and articulate particular identities. Such multi-layered work produces a text that becomes in a sense both the source (because it includes the “original” versions of memories and stories of the past) and the target (because it is a compilation of original materials and their translation into the present Canadian context) texts. This hybrid text can serve multiple purposes. Kulyk Keefer, Appignanesi, and Ondaatje design their family memoirs to preserve their family histories and to transmit experiences of migration, cultural and linguistic differences, and hyphenated identities to their children. Using the family memoir as a particular form of historiography, these Canadian writers explore the migration memories that haunt them; the Ukrainian, Polish, and Sri Lankan histories in which these memories are grounded inform their Canadian present and contribute to the Canadian future of their families. The family memoir also allows Kulyk Keefer, Appignanesi, and Ondaatje to insert private memories into the public historical discourse in order to educate their Canadian readers about the history of their specific communities and the connections between that history and Canada’s past. This insertion of the personal into the public rendering of Canadian

history enables these migrant writers to intervene in the articulation of the nation's past and emphasize the necessity to read and interpret history from multiple perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of autobiography have evolved since the early 1990s and the generic forms that Kaplan identifies as "out-law" in this article would not be considered "out-law" any more. Kaplan herself suggests that "autobiography has a specific history of debatable origins, ambiguous parameters, and disputed subject matter" (115). This history of debate, ambiguity, and dispute over what constitutes autobiography illustrates the fertile ground for discussion that autobiography constitutes. These problems also emerge, I think, from the fact that maybe more than any other literary genre, autobiography is used to shape and interpret narratives about experience, memory, and identity. Because these parameters are unstable and context-dependent, articulating specific norms and forms to regulate their textual representation is difficult. In the opening chapter of *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson retrace the long and complex history of generic definition and opt, in the end, for what they call a "working definition of autobiography" (14). This definition, "rather than specifying its rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory" (14). This working definition focuses on understanding autobiography as a narrative strategy in which the autobiographer needs to develop techniques that enable him/her to engage with memory (private and public) in ways that make sense in the contexts in which s/he is writing (i.e. the autobiographer needs to be aware of the expectations of his/her audience). This practical understanding of autobiography is important here as the writers of migrant family memoirs are indeed confronted with very particular contexts and need to develop specific textual strategies and methods to articulate their family histories.

<sup>2</sup> I would consider these "out-law" genres simply as forms of autobiography. The potential for subversion is a characteristic of the autobiographical genre.

<sup>3</sup> The writers of family memoirs engage in the act of translation at multiple levels. Their texts illustrate the written aspect of translation, but they also contain the oral aspect as these writers often receive the information to be translated in oral form, thus placing them in the position of interpreters. The different terms that I use in this chapter to refer to these writers: auto/biographers, family translators, and interpreters all indicate the multiple functions that the act of writing implies. These writers are at all times writing about themselves and their families, retrieving and transmitting information that must be preserved, and interpreting (i.e. making sense or giving meaning to) this information.

<sup>4</sup> This is not necessarily true of all family memoirs. Fred Wah, for instance, presents himself as a "poser" and a "faker" at the beginning of *Diamond Grill*. His auto/biographical reconstruction of his family past is in many ways more playful than the memoirs studied in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

<sup>5</sup> Susanna Egan, in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*, has also demonstrated the generic hybridity of family memoirs such as Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* or Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* among others.

<sup>6</sup> See also Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* for an in-depth study of the transmission of memories through the generations and the presentation of this transmission in texts and photographs.

<sup>7</sup> In "Mothers, Displacement, and Language," Bella Brodzki analyzes mother-daughter relationships in the autobiographies of Nathalie Sarraute and Christa Wolf and also establishes that culture and social norms are more powerful than biological factors in shaping identity.

<sup>8</sup> Research in sociology and anthropology also intersects with the questions that I explore in this chapter, but these disciplines approach the preservation of family history differently from the way I wish to approach it in this chapter. Research in sociology often focuses on the economic and social consequences that the immigration experience has on the familial unit and on the community, but does not explore the kinds of narratives that migrant families produce about their experience of migration. Research in anthropology focuses more on the stories of the migrant family, but the writers of these stories are often anthropologists, not members of the family whose story they tell.

<sup>9</sup> Ondaatje emigrated from Sri Lanka to England and then to Canada. All his siblings also migrated from Sri Lanka to England, and/or Canada, and/or the United States. His mother left Sri Lanka and finished her life in England.

<sup>10</sup> When Hena insists on focusing her daughter's attention on the process of storytelling, she is trying to show her the limitations of the confessional structure. She is, in a sense, pointing out what Leigh Gilmore identifies as being inherent to the confessional structure: "the very act of confessing seems almost to conspire against the one bound to tell the truth. That is, in telling the *truth*, autobiographers usually narrate, and thereby shift the emphasis to *telling* the truth" (*Autobiographics* 121). Hena cannot tell the truth because reconstituting the truth requires engaging in storytelling and setting in motion the very process that transforms facts into "lies."

<sup>11</sup> Ondaatje's focus on the performative aspect of the lives and identities of the people his family memoir is recreating connects his work to Wayson Choy's and Guillermo Verdecchia's autobiographical reconstruction. Like Ondaatje, Choy manipulates the metaphor of the opera to bring the past back to life. He remembers his fascination with the Chinese opera and describes how, as a child, he would spend hours re-enacting the operas he had seen. This particular game enabled young Sonny to internalize key aspects of Chinese culture and perform his Chinese identity, in the same way as re-enacting the Western movies he saw allowed him to become familiar with aspects of Western culture and experiment with the North-American part of his identity. Choy's incorporation of these childhood games in the autobiography emphasizes the importance that performing, pretending to be someone else (either a Chinese King or warrior or a cowboy), has in shaping the boy's multiple identity. Similarly, Ondaatje's descriptions of his mother's staging of the children emphasize the impact that performance has in shaping identities and shifting power. Ondaatje's mother trained her children to perform in a certain way when their father got drunk. Ondaatje recalls that "whenever my father would lapse into one of his alcoholic states, she would send the three older children [...] into my father's room [...] The three of them, well coached, would perform with tears streaming, 'Daddy, don't drink, daddy, if you love us, don't drink,' while my mother waited outside and listened" (144). This performance, Ondaatje suggests, enabled his mother to pass on to her children her flair for acting (i.e. to help them shape an identity similar to hers), but it also allowed her to regain some of the power that Merwyn's inebriety had taken away from the rest of the family. These acting moments taught the children that different identities could accommodate different situations and that these different identities could generate power. Instead of helplessly and fearfully witnessing their father's alcoholic trance, the children could act and possibly change the course of events. Performing was not, however, necessarily empowering for the children. Ondaatje's older brother and sister remember being embarrassed by these scenes and wishing that their mother had not manipulated her children in this way to regain control over the situation. This episode illustrates the complex power relations at play in performance. Like Verdecchia, Ondaatje demonstrates the political nature of autobiographical performance and its potential power for action. Performing certain identities in front of particular audiences (a stereotypical Latino male for Verdecchia or the distressed children of an alcoholic father for Ondaatje's siblings) elicits a reaction that often shifts the power relations that were originally at work between performer and audience. Verdecchia's performance as Wideload deprives the audience of their power of translating him in their own terms (i.e. shaping his Latino identity through stereotypes) and the Ondaatje children's performance as victims of their alcoholic father enables their mother to reclaim the upper hand in the situation created by Merwyn's behavior.

<sup>12</sup> This particular episode will be re-examined in comparison with Anna Porter's treatment of historical sites in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR: WRITING HOME: REPATRIATING MEMORIES AND SHAPING INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* and Anna Porter's *The Storyteller: Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* and examines these writers' recreations of "homes" and "homelands" and the functions that they imagine these recreations perform. With this study, I would like to suggest that Chong's and Porter's autobiographical reconstruction of their families' original homes and homelands contributes to the articulation of a national concept of "Canada as home" and produces relevant knowledge about the ways in which patriotic discourses function and shape national identities. The translation process, as the analysis in this chapter will show, operates on two levels. Like the family memoir writers studied in Chapter Three, Chong and Porter use personal memories, family stories, photographs, and historical research to interpret their family histories and transmit them to the public. Like Appignanesi, Kulyk Keefer, and Ondaatje, Chong and Porter explore the complex source sites from which their family histories and personal identities emerge. Their autobiographies, because they focus so clearly on reconstructing homes that are no longer theirs but still influence what they understand home to mean, also invite readers to examine how and why certain translations of homes and homelands are constructed. This invitation highlights the potential of Chong's and Porter's texts to articulate forms of knowledge that readers can extract and translate into the Canadian context. In particular, Chong's autobiography illustrates the many forces at work in the articulation of multiple translations of home

within migrant families and the nations they call “home” and Porter’s makes visible the connections between patriotic discourses and the formation of national identities.

In “Other than Myself/my Other Self,” Trinh T. Minh-ha discusses the writing process of anglophone and francophone Third World writers of the diaspora and observes that because these writers are

[l]iving in a double exile—far from their native land and far from their mothertongue—they are thought to write by memory and to depend to a large extent on hearsay. Directing their look toward a long bygone reality, they supposedly excel in reanimating the ashes of childhood and of country of origin.

The autobiography can thus be said to be an abode in which the writers mentioned necessarily take refuge. (10)

Trinh’s observation, although it applies to Third World writers of the diaspora, provides an excellent starting point for my discussion of the concept of home in Canadian migrant autobiography because it introduces and criticizes three of the most widely circulated ideas about home and the exiled writer. First, Trinh’s comment about the writers’ “double exile” is important as it establishes the idea that exiled writers often live and write not only in a country that is not their country of origin but also in a language that is not their mother tongue. Trinh’s focus on the fact that these writers live and write in translation at the very beginning of her observation brings this aspect of their work to the foreground. Her opening comment goes against the general critical tendency of superseding the linguistic issue with other concerns, as we have seen in Chapter One, and emphasizes the importance of language in the issues at stake in discussing the concept of home. The importance of the linguistic issue appears clearly in Isabel Huggan’s memoir, *Belonging*:



*Home away from Home*, where she recreates her experience of migration to France and opens her autobiography with:

In the country where I now live, there is no word for home. You can express the idea at a slant, but you cannot say *home*. For a long time this disconcerted me, I kept running up against the lack as if it were a rock in my path [...]. But at last I have habituated myself and can step around it, using variants such as *notre foyer* (our hearth) or *notre maison* (our house) when I mean to say home. More often, I use the concept *chez* to indicate physical location and the place where the family resides, or the notion of a comfortable domestic space. However, if I wish to speak of 'going home to Canada,' I can use *mon pays* (my country) but I can't say I am going *chez moi* when I am not. (1)

Huggan's experience with the lack of a linguistic equivalent for the word "home" in French demonstrates the difficulty of translating not only words but also the concepts they are referring to. The challenging nature of the translation process needs to be taken into account in a discussion of the concept of home in migrant autobiography because it reminds readers that the use of English in the shaping of the home in the auto/biography influences its creation and its functions.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Trinh addresses the exiled writers' reliance on "memory" and "hearsay" in their effort to bring back to life a past that no longer exists. Through the use of the passive voice ("they are thought") and the adverb "supposedly," Trinh distances herself from the commonly shared idea that the exiled writers' reconstruction of "a long bygone reality" is often imbued with nostalgia and its validity undermined by the unreliability of the writers' sources. Distancing herself from this romanticized view of the task and

production of exiled writers enables her to suggest that not all of these writers write to assuage their nostalgia for their country of origin and/or childhood. This particular position also allows her to suggest that the unreliability of “memory” and “hearsay” should not necessarily be the only focus of critical attention. Trinh’s suggestion invites alternative readings of the exiled writers’ task and creation, readings that would examine more closely the sources for these writers’ textual production and the functions that they see their texts perform. We have seen in Chapter Three that family memoir writers do indeed depend heavily on “memory” and “hearsay” for the crafting of their texts, but we have also demonstrated that they often counterbalance this dependence with comprehensive historical and archival research. This counterbalancing auto/biographical act enables migrant writers and/or their descendants to ground their stories in public history and to use this public history as ballast for their own personal, and sometimes nostalgic, need for the reconstruction of “a long bygone reality.” My work in this chapter will attempt to address the second part of Trinh’s suggestion and examine some of the functions that migrant writers imagine their textual reconstruction of homes and homelands performs.

The idea that migrant writers use the autobiography as “an abode in which [they] necessarily take refuge” constitutes the third most commonly shared idea about exiled writers’ textual reconstruction of home that Trinh’s analysis destabilizes.<sup>2</sup> Her diction indicates her disagreement with the general critical tendency to see exiled writers as dis-empowered individuals in need of a place of “refuge” and to read their texts as the place they “necessarily” turn to to “take refuge.” This reading of the works of auto/biographers is too limiting as it confines these writers to only one position: that of dis-empowered

writers burdened by their status as exiles and it confines their texts to only one function: that of abode in which they can “take refuge.” Trinh’s criticism of this commonly received idea of home in migrant auto/biography again invites alternative readings that would explore the possibility that exiled writers might be writing from a position of power and that their textual reconstruction of home might perform multiple functions depending on the audience it addresses.

In this chapter, I am interested in responding to Trinh’s concerns by examining 1) the role that language and storytelling play in the shaping of home in Canadian immigrant autobiography, 2) the functions that auto/biographical creations of home by migrant writers perform, and 3) the audiences these writers address. My focus on the role of language and storytelling in the construction of home will enable me to engage with some of the complexities of the translation process at the linguistic and conceptual levels. It will also reveal the distinctions between different understandings of home and provide insight into the meaning of home in the Canadian context. My interest in the pragmatic uses of the concept of home and the functions it can perform will challenge the commonly accepted view that migrant writers are constructing “long bygone realit[ies]” that can often trigger nostalgia and that necessarily provide refuge and solace. This focus on the pragmatic aspects of home in migrant auto/biography will also enable me to demonstrate that migrant writers do not necessarily consider their status as exiles disempowering. Rather, it often allows them to occupy multiple positions and draw power from this pluri-locality. Finally, my attention to the types of audience that these writers address through their construction of home will reveal the intersection of the private and public interests involved in the construction of home in Canadian immigrant

auto/biography. The ways in which migrant writers create home in their auto/biographies also shapes Canadian notions of home.

My analysis of the issues outlined above will draw on and update the discussion that Salman Rushdie started in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Rushdie, basing his analysis on his own experience as an exiled writer, convincingly demonstrates that migrants do not necessarily write from a dis-empowered position, in a language that enslaves them, about “long bygone realities.” Instead, he sees migrant writers as occupying a privileged position because their experience of migration has taught them to approach reality from different perspectives. This particular position, Rushdie argues, “is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy [as] if literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then [...] our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles” (15). The migrant writer’s ability to view reality from multiple angles is particularly useful in the Canadian context as the migrant writers whose texts shape their original homelands are also shaping Canada as home for a multitude of different people and their construction of the Canadian home must therefore be flexible.

Transferring Rushdie’s discussion of the manipulation of English by British Indian writers to the Canadian context can also be productive. Rushdie addresses the issue of writing in translation and the appropriateness of English to discuss Indian themes. He argues that British Indian writers do not have the option of simply rejecting English and that they must, instead, modify the language to make it fit their own purposes. This pragmatic attitude does not mean, however, that the use of English becomes unproblematic for these writers; rather it becomes a site in which other struggles

can be made visible. “Perhaps,” Rushdie suggests, “we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free” (17). Probing the linguistic dimension of a text for insight into what is happening at other levels is in keeping with the work that I have done in the previous chapters and will remain in the foreground in this chapter. Thinking of language and storytelling as empowering tools for achieving freedom will connect with and, maybe further, the discussion that I started in Chapter One. In that chapter, I explored the ways in which language migrants deal with the dis-empowering effects of having to learn and master English and analyzed their textual reconstruction of this journey from linguistic disability to linguistic mastery. In this chapter, I will explore the potentially empowering and freeing results that linguistic mastery can generate.

Rushdie’s warning about the dangers of “internal exile” constitutes another idea that I find particularly relevant for my discussion of home in Canadian immigrant autobiography. Rushdie discusses the pitfalls of adopting a “ghetto mentality,” and exhorts British Indian writers not to forget that there is a world beyond their community. Failing to do so, he argues, would trap these writers (and their communities) in the worlds that their texts have created and therefore exile them from the world that extends beyond their cultural borders (19). Rushdie’s warning about “internal exile” is relevant here because it reveals concerns with audience. This warning implicitly reminds British Indian writers that they are not simply writing for their community. Similarly, Canadian migrant auto/biographers are not just writing for their familial and cultural communities;

they are also addressing the nation. Examining whether these writers are aware of their wider audience and whether they accommodate them in specific ways therefore constitutes a key aspect of the present discussion.

This discussion about the concept of home in Canadian immigrant autobiography is timely. In just the past two years, three anthologies of stories about home by Canadian and immigrant writers have been published in Canada. In *When your Voice Tastes like Home: Immigrant Women Write*, published in 2003, editors Prabhjot Parmar and Nila Somaia-Carten have gathered personal narratives and testimonies by immigrant women from all walks of life. Their project, funded partly by the federal government, emerged from their involvement with social organizations that provide help to newly arrived immigrant women. These organizations help immigrant women by providing them with orientation sessions, language education, and emotional support. In spite of the many different forms of help available through these organizations, Parmar and Somaia-Carten felt that most of their own work consisted of listening to these immigrant women's stories. Because many immigrant women felt that being listened to and understood was the most useful and productive way of receiving support, Parmar and Somaia-Carten decided to ask some of these women to contribute stories and testimonies to an anthology. The publication of these stories, they felt, would widen the audience these immigrant women had had so far, inform Canadian readers about the experience of being a newly arrived immigrant in their country, and encourage exchange and understanding between new residents and long-term citizens. The publication of this anthology was clearly intended to promote interaction between new Canadians (or Canadians to be) and

long-term Canadians and contribute to the articulation of the changing concept of Canada as home for a diversity of people.

*Passages: Welcome to Canada*, published in 2002, is another anthology concerned with emphasizing the importance of the experiences of immigrants in the shaping of Canada as home. Through the contributions of well-known immigrant writers such as Danny Laferrière, Anna Porter, Nino Ricci, Ken Wiwa, and Moses Zneimer among others, this anthology aims at exploring the ways in which immigration is shaping the values that articulate Canadian society and identity. In his preface to the anthology, Rudyard Griffiths explains that

[i]n the coming decade, the majority of Canadian citizens will be first- and second-generation immigrants. This majority will consist not of a single monocultural group as did, say, the earlier waves of Anglo-European immigration, but of people who have come to Canada from the world over [...]. The only common thread binding these disparate cultures and individuals together will be the experience of being immigrants. At the most basic level, what it means to be Canadian will be extended to what it means to be an immigrant. (viii)

Griffiths's comment reinforces the topicality of the interest in the notion of home in the Canadian context and outlines the wide range of possible readers for books and studies about this topic. The fact that the contributions by Michelle Berry, Ying Chen, Alberto Manguel, Danny Laferrière, Anna Porter, Shyam Selvadurai, and Ken Wiwa originally appeared in *The Globe and Mail* demonstrates the public appeal of the issues raised by discussions of home in Canada and the possibility of conducting these discussions in popular forums.

This recent trend in textual productions discussing the concept of home in Canada started with *Writing Home: A PEN Canada Anthology*, edited by Constance Rooke and published in 1997 by McClelland & Stewart. Famous Canadian figures, such as Margaret Atwood, Wayson Choy, Adrienne Clarkson, Timothy Findlay, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Yann Martel, Rohinton Mistry, Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje, P.K. Page, Nino Ricci, and Carol Shields among others, contributed to this anthology. In their various pieces, the writers muse about the meanings of home, playing with the expression “writing home.” Some of them write about times when they lived outside of Canada and their pieces can be read as letters written for an audience back home in Canada. Others write about how and when Canada became home for them, thus inscribing Canada as home in their pieces. Others still play with both understandings of the phrase “writing home,” suggesting that one does not exist without the other, especially when the writer is a migrant writer.

The contributions in this anthology demonstrate the importance of understanding home as a fluid concept, a concept that does not necessarily ground the individual in a particular place. Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, editors of *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, also emphasize the necessity of articulating a fluid concept of home. They suggest in their introduction that “the ethnic absolutism of ‘root metaphors,’ fixed in place, is replaced by mobile ‘route’ metaphors which can lay down a challenge to [...] fixed identities” (10). We have seen in Chapter Three, with the example of Kulyk Keefer’s reclaiming of her Ukrainian identity, that the concept of “roots” can sometimes challenge the articulation of identity because it attempts to fix identity in a specific location and to reinforce the concept of fixed origins. The fact that Kulyk Keefer uses the museum replica of a Ukrainian home to try to root herself in the



past illustrates the close connection between home and identity and emphasizes the importance of the “route” metaphor to discussions of home.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah explores the concepts of “fixed origins” and “writing home.” In this work, she effectively demonstrates the limitations of the concept of “fixed origins” by reminding her readers that such a concept rests on the ideology of return (to the original home) and arguing that such an ideology cannot be taken for granted. “Because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’,” Brah explains, it might be more fruitful to think about a migrant writer’s “homing desire” rather than his/her “desire for a homeland” (180). This shift in focus is useful for my present discussion because it, too, challenges common assumptions and traditional understandings of what home is for migrants and incorporates flexibility in the ways in which home can be conceptualized. Replacing the commonly assumed migrant’s “desire for a homeland” with the notion of “homing desire” is particularly relevant for Canadian migrant auto/biographers.

First, the notion of “homing desire” allows critics to take the position of the migrant writer into account. Not all migrant writers have necessarily experienced migration first hand; many of them have simply inherited the experience. The different generations of an immigrant family will often have different views and understandings of home and homeland. Many of the migrant auto/biographers considered here, as we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, are the descendants of immigrants and do not therefore think of the country from which their family originates as their homeland. And although many of them do engage in reverse migration as a part of their auto/biographical quest, this migration cannot really be seen as a “return” home since the trip to the country of

origin is often the first one for them. They also do not entertain the idea of “returning” to the original homeland to settle; they simply go back to visit with the clear intention of returning home to Canada. However, if their actions do not exemplify their “desire for a homeland,” they certainly demonstrate a “homing desire.” Many of these writers inherit stories and memories from their relatives and need to find a place for recording and preserving these fragments of the past. They are confronted with a situation that requires them to shape a narrative that will incorporate and make sense of stories and memories. The auto/biographical act enables them to create a narrative that will house the past and therefore meet their “homing desire.”

Second, the notion of “homing desire” does not ground home in a specific geographical location in the same way as the concept of “desire for a homeland” does. Although the idea of “returning home” is implied in the expression “homing desire,” the specific location of this home is left much more open and is not necessarily understood in geographical terms. The fluidity involved in the concept of “homing desire” enables critics to take many different elements into account. The word “homing” incorporates the ideas of movement and journeying in the notion of home, thus challenging the idea of fixedness that often accompanies traditional understandings of home and incorporating the concept of pluri-locality. If one can feel at home in the “homing” movement, then home can be located in different places at different times. The use of the word “desire” also opens up helpful dimensions for the discussion of home in Canadian immigrant auto/biography as it brings to the foreground the emotional dimension of the homing process, without, however, reducing this dimension to its negative components such as nostalgia and/or grief. Identifying the relevance of feelings such as longing, craving, and

needing, but also imagining and fantasizing, in the articulation of home emphasizes the importance of the personal and the necessity of imagination in the shaping of this home. This focus on the emotional dimension of the homing process is important because it authorizes the subjectivity and potential partiality of the auto/biographical act. It also demonstrates the usefulness of fiction in shaping worlds and realities that often do not exist any more, but that are still necessary to the functioning of individuals and their families.

To summarize briefly the issues that are necessary to frame my present discussion: my work in this chapter will respond to Trinh's concerns about the neglect of the linguistic issue, the general assumption that migrant writers write from the disempowered position of exiled writers in order to assuage their nostalgia, and the common view of the autobiography as the migrant writer's abode. Analyzing the role that language and storytelling play in the articulation of home in Canadian immigrant auto/biography, examining the functions that this reconstructed home can have, and identifying the audiences that this reconstruction is targeted at will enable me to address Trinh's concerns and to manipulate some of Rushdie's and Brah's key theoretical concepts about home. In this analysis, I would particularly like to keep in mind Rushdie's emphasis on the importance of identifying and addressing audiences beyond the borders of the communities one is writing for. I would also like to work with Brah's more mobile and fluid understanding of home, by attending to the notion of "homing desire" in the texts that I will be examining.

I have selected Chong's *The Concubine's Children* and Porter's *The Storyteller* for my present discussion because these two writers occupy different positions in relation

to the experience of migration. Chong is the granddaughter of immigrants and reconstructs her grandparents' and mother's experience of migration from China from the perspective of a third-generation narrator. Porter recalls and records her own experience of migration from Hungary to Canada via New Zealand and England. The social positions of these writers' families are also varied and this crucial aspect of immigrant identity needs to be taken into account as the social and financial situations of a family influence the nature and stability (or instability) of their home. Chong's grandparents, Chan Sam and May-ying, migrated from China for financial reasons and remained extremely poor in Canada. They settled in various Chinatowns on the West Coast of Canada and lived in squalor for most of their Canadian life. A large part of their Canadian income was sent back to China to support the Chinese part of the family and build the family home that would house everyone eventually reunited in China. The return home powered Chan Sam's imagination, but never in fact occurred. In contrast, Anna Porter's family and their experience of immigration were quite different. Porter comes from an aristocratic family. Her grandfather, Vili, published magazines and owned houses, estates, orchards, and shares in various Budapest businesses before the communist regime took over the country after the Second World War. Porter was born during the war and grew up in communist Budapest. She did not experience the luxurious living conditions that her grandparents and parents had enjoyed before the war, but she grew up with stories of these luxurious years and these stories very much influenced her own understanding of home.

## DENISE CHONG'S *THE CONCUBINE'S CHILDREN*: BRINGING THE FAMILY HOME

In *The Concubine's Children*, Chong examines how her grandfather, Chan Sam, her grandmother, May-ying, her mother, Winnie, and their Chinese relatives translated “home” across geographical, cultural, and gender divides. The auto/biographical process enables the writer to reconstruct these various translations and, by re-contextualizing them, to attribute meaning to the competing versions of home that ran in her mother's family. Auto/biographical reconstruction also allows her to bring together the multiple versions of family history that exist on both sides of the Pacific Ocean in order to reestablish the historical continuity that migration had interrupted. This auto/biographical act of translation helps bridge the chasm between the Chinese and Canadian sides of the family and their vastly different experience of migration.

Chan Sam immigrated to Canada from Chang Gar Bin, a small village in Kwangtung province and May-ying was sold to him as a concubine by her previous owner. May-ying joined Chan Sam in Canada in 1924 and started working as a waitress in one of the Chinese cafés in Vancouver Chinatown to pay back the money that Chan Sam had borrowed to purchase her. The couple had two daughters, Ping and Nan, and May-ying and her two Canadian daughters went back to China with Chan Sam to visit his Chinese wife after a few years. The whole family lived together in Chang Gar Bin for a couple of years. However, when May-ying was pregnant with her third child, she convinced Chan Sam to take her and the unborn baby back to Canada. May-ying's two Canadian-born daughters were left behind in China with Chan Sam's wife, Huangbo.

Back in Canada, May-ying gave birth to a third daughter, Hing, who later re-named herself Winnie, and became Denise Chong's mother.

Chong's memories of Winnie's stories about growing up in dilapidated rooming houses in various Chinatowns, sacrificing herself for a Chinese family that she had never met, enduring her alcoholic mother's psychological and physical abuse, and the pain emerging from these stories initiated the auto/biographical process. Chong hoped that investigating the past would offer her mother the opportunity to come to terms with some of the pain that it created. In particular, Chong remembers some of her mother's erratic behaviors<sup>3</sup> and explains that "they would serve as notice that there was still hurt there in need of repair" (235). This "need for repair," visible through Chong's growing up years, becomes even more apparent when she is doing research for the memoir and interviewing her mother. Winnie, she explains, "first spilled [...] a mud puddle of emotion" (xii). The auto/biographical project therefore offers the possibility not only to recreate and interpret the different translations of home produced in the family but also to expose the emotional damage that these translations have generated, and potentially to repair some of that damage.

Chong started working on *The Concubine Children* in 1987 when she lived in Hong Kong. She remembers that "it was passing faces in the crowds in China that stirred awake a curiosity from [her] early childhood. The photograph of the two young girls, [her] mother's two sisters, that lay among the pile in the cedar chest kept coming to mind. A feeling that [she] had to stand on the same soil dogged [her]" (238). She felt at the time that she could not leave China to go back home to Canada without having first visited Chang Gar Bin, the village where her grandfather had been born. She also felt that she

could not engage in this reverse migration without her mother, but was surprised to find stiff resistance in Winnie who had “no inclination to brave her complicated feelings about the past” (238). For Winnie, going to Chang Gar Bin meant discovering for the first time the place that her parents had called home and reminding herself that her childhood in various Canadian Chinatowns had been sacrificed to the preservation of the Chinese home and family. The fact that Canadian Chong would go to Chang Gar Bin as a visitor to China, the country that her grandparents had considered home two generations earlier, also illustrates the ruptures that migration has imposed on the family.

When he had agreed to take pregnant May-ying back to Canada, Chan Sam had come to terms with the idea that another generation of immigrants would be needed to secure the future of the Chinese family at home. The tradition of immigration in his family had started with his father and he had hoped to end this tradition and finally bring the family together under the same roof. The difficult financial reality of his situation prevented him from reaching this goal and he was forced to accept that his family would be separated for yet another generation (47). The separation lasted even longer than he had imagined as it was the fourth generation of immigration (literally, since Denise Chong had actually migrated from Canada to China at that time) that would finally gather the whole family under the same Chinese roof. “In Chinese,” Chong explains, “home and family are one and the same word. The character is a pig under a roof, a symbol of contentment” (45). The fact that the Chinese character for home and family is one and the same word emphasizes the importance of this act of gathering the two halves of the family under the same roof. The reverse migration of Canadian-born and English-speaking Chong ironically brings the Chinese character to life. The members of a

generation that cannot call China home are the ones that are able to bring the family together.<sup>4</sup>

Chong's reconstruction of the familial homing process in *The Concubine's Children* is articulated around the Chinese character for home and family and targeted at several audiences. The auto/biographer's focus on home and family illustrates her desire to show respect to her grandparents' and parents' mother tongue by examining these concepts through different linguistic lenses. Tracing and reconstructing the concept family/home through the auto/biography enables Chong to pay attention to the meaning of the Chinese character while producing her family history in English. She is, in a sense, using translation at the conceptual level, reminding her readers that even though in English home and family could be two very different concepts, in Chinese, they are irremediably linked and need to be examined together. Her auto/biographical reconstruction of home therefore intersects with complex familial relationships and the power struggles they rest on. In order to reconstruct the different homes that in English house her family's past, Chong needs to deconstruct and examine these complex familial relationships, which complicates her role as narrator. Although Chong is dealing with only one family, she is dealing with several family units: the Chinese part of the family—Chan Sam, Huangbo, their son Yuen, and May-ying's daughters, Nan and Ping; the Canadian part of the family—Chan Sam, May-ying, and Hing; May-ying's new family after she leaves Chan Sam—May-ying, Guen, Hing, and Leonard. These separate but entangled familial units are grounded on different power structures and reconstructing their history requires positioning, but Chong can only rely on her own limited memories of some of these people and her mother's biased version of the past. Because she “felt



strongly that the book should be a 'family project;' [...] [and because] above all [she] wanted to be true to the individual lives of the family[,] it seemed that the most fair and honest way to do that was to tell the story as an omniscient narrator" (xiii). Chong's positioning as an omniscient narrator grants her the relative freedom to examine familial relationships and the concepts of home attached to them from a multiplicity of perspectives. This narrative freedom also enables her to reconstruct the same concepts of home from different perspectives, thus demonstrating the fluidity of such concepts.

As an omniscient narrator, Chong achieves several purposes and can address a wide audience. Labeling this auto/biography a "family project," she is very clearly drawing on and addressing her mother and the rest of her family. Writing as an omniscient narrator demonstrates her intention to avoid appropriating stories that do not belong to her only. It also shows her intention to avoid being too subjective when her own limited memories and her mother's biased version of the past constitute her main sources. This positioning as an omniscient narrator indicates her awareness of the desires of a wider audience interested not only in the complex politics of familial relationships but also in the historical value that such family histories present. Such a positioning also enables Chong, a well-known Canadian economist, to perform the reliable role of historian and objective informant that Canadian readers would expect from her.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Chong writes to pay tribute to her grandparents and explains at the very end of her auto/biography that: "if they could hear from the grave, [she] would tell [her] grandfather and [her] grandmother that [she has] seen, for their dead eyes, the fruit of their labors" (266). Chong clearly indicates that her auto/biographical reconstruction has enabled her (and the rest of her family) to achieve what Chan Sam and May-ying never managed to

achieve: bringing the family together under the same roof. This achievement, she suggests, could not have happened if she had not felt “that those who were in their graves were somehow behind [her]” (xiii). Chong’s imagining Chan Sam and May-ying as a potential audience for her auto/biography explains further her decision to write as an omniscient narrator. This self-effacing position shows respect for the people whose lives, hardships, and experiences have shaped the narrative and places them at the heart of the auto/biographical project.

Chong enlists her mother’s help in the telling of the past and in doing so enables Winnie to make public stories that she has until then only shared in private. The daughter’s homing desire triggers the public re-telling of Winnie’s history and unveils her own repressed homing desire. The auto/biographical reconstruction of Winnie’s past brings to life a translation of home and homelessness that has not previously been sanctioned in the family. For Chan Sam and May-ying, life in Canada was temporary: they considered Chang Gar Bin as the original, and therefore real, home of the whole family. Even after they separated, a part of May-ying’s income was still remitted to the family in China. Both Chan Sam and May-ying lived in China before and after their migration to Canada and had ties in Chang Gar Bin. Chan Sam’s wife and son were there and May-ying’s Canadian-born daughters lived there as well. The connection to the Chinese homeland was real for both of them and their determination to make and save enough money to support Huangbo and the children and build an extravagant family home demonstrated their firm intention to return home at some point.<sup>6</sup> For Hing though, whose fate in Canada had been sealed by the wrong prediction of a Chinese fortune-teller, this connection to the Chinese homeland was only a myth. May-ying, pregnant

with Hing while the Canadian part of the family is visiting China, consults a fortune-teller who assures her that her baby will be a boy. May-ying negotiates her return to Canada, knowing very well that if her unborn baby is indeed a boy, she will need to surrender him to Huangbo, who will become his first mother. Refusing to continue to occupy the last position in the hierarchy in her Chinese family, May-ying obtains her return to Canada in exchange for her first two children. She considers this price worth paying to have the power to rule in her own dwelling and enjoy the privilege of giving birth to a son of her own. In exchange for wages, Chan Sam gives his concubine permission to return to Canada and later to stay there while he goes back to China to build the family home. Unaware that her life in Canada has cost her mother so much, Hing grows up in various Canadian Chinatowns, unable to feel at home or to identify with her parents' connection to the Chinese homeland.

Her parents' dedication to the Chinese homeland and family confounds Hing for whom China is only a far away land she hears about when she goes to the movie theater and watches newsreels about war in China (152). She does not have direct access to her parents' original home and therefore lives her connection to China through translation. Her very limited knowledge of her parents' country and their reluctance to explain the family's complicated situation make her attempt at interpreting what is going on difficult. Hing is so disconnected from her parents' homeland and her Chinese relatives that she has difficulty talking about China and her sisters. When May-ying keeps her daughter out of school one winter because she cannot afford to buy her warm clothes and boots, she tells Hing to tell her teacher that she could not attend class because she was going back to China to visit her family. When Hing returns to school in the spring, the teacher asks her

to tell the class about China. This is a particularly embarrassing moment for the child as “Hing, who knew nothing of her parents’ birthplace except that there was another mother and two sisters there and that her father had gone there to build a house, [had to make] up a story as best she could” (92). Living at the border between Canadian culture and Chinese culture, Hing/Winnie is asked to perform an act of translation that she cannot produce. Both her mother and her teacher assume that the child is familiar with her “original” homeland and expect her to understand and explain it. Neither her parents nor her Canadian teacher realize that Hing/Winnie’s sense of home is different from Chan Sam’s and May-ying’s. Because she has never set foot in China and travels back and forth between the Canadian and Chinese spheres, Hing/Winnie’s “original” home is not the one that the adults around her imagine. Her own translation of home, however, remains unspoken for years.

As a young adult entering nursing school, Winnie is offered her first opportunity to articulate her own version of home when she has to fill in a psychological questionnaire in which she needs to answer a question about her home life. Meeting with Miss Pearson, the director of nursing afterwards,

Winnie saw, too late, that her ink had flowed too honestly on the questionnaire.

To questions about her home life and whether her parents were happily married, she had spilled the truth. To a question about whether she was happy being a girl, she answered according to how she thought her mother felt, that she would have made everybody happier had she been born a boy. “Did you do well in high school?” Miss Pearson asked with a doubting tone. “I did all right,” Winnie said, with characteristic Chinese modesty. (167)

This passage illustrates, of course, Miss Pearson's inability to read Winnie's responses outside of her cultural context. Most importantly, however, it reveals that Winnie, for all her acclimatization, is still living in translation and makes clear the difficulty of telling such a story in a Canadian context because it is, effectively, so Chinese. The episode might also point to Winnie's unfamiliarity with the generic expectations of the entrance questionnaire/interview. Not realizing that one of the purposes of such a series of questions is to evaluate the emotional stability of future nurses, Winnie reads in Miss Pearson's questions a genuine interest in her family life and responds accordingly. Misinterpretation on both sides rules the entire exchange and has negative consequences for Winnie who will be labeled as a troubled young woman who needs to be watched.

The auto/biographical genre offers Winnie a second chance to articulate her translation of home as well as an opportunity to make sense of that translation and the experiences it articulates by bringing it into contact with the other versions of home that circulate in the family. The auto/biographical text therefore functions as a mode of resignification in which past events can be examined and interpreted in relation to multiple versions of family history. The reverse migration involved in the auto/biographical process allows Winnie to access the "original" Chinese home that she had only experienced through translation as a child. Chong's and Winnie's reverse migration to China enables them to investigate the history of the Chinese side of the family and to supplement the translation that their side of the family has shaped over the years. When the auto/biographer and her mother meet Chan Sam's and Huangbo's son, Yuen, Winnie's sister, Ping, and their families for the first time in Chang Gar Bin, the family is reconnected through photographs. Although they have never met before, they

recognize each other because over the years Chan Sam and May-ying have sent pictures of the Canadian side of the family to the Chinese side.<sup>7</sup> Winnie, meeting Ping, “hug[s] her sister [...] for the first time. Through tears, both sisters fumble[...] for photographs. Mother [has] the one of her sisters, and another of herself and Leonard posing with their mother. Ping unwrap[s] yellowed cellophane from the one she [has] brought for this moment. She point[s] to the baby in the arms of a young mother: ‘This is me’” (244). These pictures are important because they clearly connect strangers and establish their belonging to the same family. These pictures also authorize the different translations that previous generations in the family have articulated around them. The fact that the reality presented in the pictures can be confirmed demonstrates the validity of the stories contextualizing these pictures. For Winnie, confirmation of the reality that her own pictures present is invaluable; for the first time of her life, she encounters the siblings that she has missed and imagined and discovers the place that her parents had longed and sacrificed for.

Their presence in Chang Gar Bin enables Chong and her mother to reconstitute Chan Sam’s version of home, a version that both of them have only known through stories until that time. These stories start coming to life when mother and daughter see the house that Chan Sam spent most of his time in China building and that May-ying’s wages paid for. The impressive size of the house strikes Chong and Winnie:

Across a cement courtyard stood an imposing two-story house, with a surrounding second-floor balcony. [...] The porticoed entrance was the grand entranceway; it was thrice our height, its cinnabar twin portals hewn from massive timbers. With each step we took, more detail came into focus. Above the smaller doorway was a

bas-relief of flowers. Sculpted in the half-moon above one window was a vase of flowers, above another, a chicken with grain. Everything was faded and in need of repair, but the workmanship was still to be admired. (245)

Chong prefaces this description of the family home by observing that “it was as if we were viewing an enormous painting” (245). This observation emphasizes the unusual sight that such a house provides in the remote and poor village of Chang Gar Bin, but it also develops further the metaphor of bringing visual representation to life through the act of auto/biographical writing. The familial home that had taken on mythic qualities in the minds of the Canadian relatives first appears to them in the form of a painting, a visual representation emphasizing the myth they had shaped in their imaginations. The auto/biographical quest allows for this mythic representation to come to life and in doing so, strips this representation of its mythic quality to incorporate it into the realm of the real.<sup>8</sup> This incorporation is necessary for the process of interpretation to begin.

While in Chang Gar Bin, Chong and her mother are able to piece together the fragments of history that constitute Chan Sam’s version of home. Left on the walls of the Chinese family home are the remnants of the gigantic murals he commissioned because

he wanted something to reflect the experiences of his father and himself of going abroad. [...] Relying on Chan Sam’s descriptions, the artists painted three scenes in the main reception room. Two were the sojourner’s first sights upon his arrival in Gold Mountain: one was San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge, the other was a Vancouver landscape of sea, mountain and towering Douglas firs. The third scene hinted at the life of luxury in Gold Mountain: a couple in a roadster, its top folded

down, motored by a coral-colored mansion on a wide, winding boulevard lined with palm trees. (86)

These murals, which can be read as an autobiographical visual narrative,<sup>9</sup> introduce hybridity and myth in the Chinese family home. Although the house is meant to become the home of a reunited Chinese family, it incorporates signs of life abroad in North America so that it is a hybrid home in its very conception. Chan Sam builds the Chinese family home with Canadian tools, furnishes it with Canadian furniture, and decorates it with Canadian items and murals representing the life of his family in the United States and Canada. Chan Sam translates the family's life in North America through the use of stereotypical images of success and financial prosperity. Painting the sordid reality of life in squalid rooming houses in Vancouver's Chinatown would not have demonstrated Chan Sam's worth as a good husband and father. Revealing that his Canadian family was living in desperately poor conditions in order to support the Chinese side of the family and pay for the construction of the extravagant family home would have destroyed the commonly held beliefs that life in Gold Mountain was luxurious and abundant and that worthy Chinese immigrants became incredibly rich and successful. In order to avoid losing face in his own family, village, and clan, Chan Sam paints an "unfaithful" translation of his life in Gold Mountain on the walls of his family home. This "unfaithful" translation, however, is necessary for Chan Sam as it enables him to regain a sense of identity and self-worth that his status as a poor Chinese immigrant in Canada has deprived him of. In Chang Gar Bin, he has the power to re-assert his own identity and does so by drawing on the familiar narrative strategies that are available in his community. The use of stereotypical images of North American success links Chan Sam and his family to the



other villagers and inscribes their family's experience in the community's history. By incorporating the experience of the dislocated family into the Chinese family home, Chan Sam also brings together the two halves of the family, at least in the imaginary realm, thus establishing continuity in the family story.

While Chong's auto/biography invites such a positive reading of Chan Sam's struggle to establish his version of home, the text also criticizes this translation by investigating and revealing the national and personal consequences of Chan Sam's fictitious (and "unfaithful") autobiographical representation. When Mao's Cultural Revolutionaries see the ostentatious home that Chan Sam has built for his family, the reprisals on his family are devastatingly harsh:

Chan Sam's *mau tin*, for which he had sacrificed years of his life overseas and which he had purchased to provide for the future security of his family, was confiscated. Huangbo was spared death, but there was more to come. The Work Team entered Chan Sam's house and removed all papers, letters and photographs that it could find. [...] What the authorities were looking for were the deeds to the *mau tin* he owned and "evidence" that his family was "counterrevolutionary." The house was evidence enough. (186)

The house that was meant to stand as evidence of Chan Sam's success and prosperity in Canada and of his worth as a husband and father becomes, with regime change, evidence of his and his family's disrespect for national values. The same house that had incorporated in its construction Chinese and Canadian values now constitutes a threat to new Chinese values. Chong is not suggesting that Chan Sam should have foreseen that building an extravagant house could have negative consequences in the future. Rather,

she uses this episode to point out her grandfather's vanity and pride and imply that a less ostentatious house could have demonstrated Chan Sam's worth and success without endangering his family. This implication is never explicitly voiced in the auto/biography, but the pregnant silences of Chan Sam's son, Yuen, his daughter, Ping, and his wife, Huangbo, along with the auto/biographer's interpretation of this particular episode, clearly indicate the presence of these thoughts.

More importantly, however, the confiscation and partial destruction of Chan Sam's family home by Mao's Cultural Revolutionaries illustrate the connection between national history and family history. These Revolutionaries, empowered as the new architects of national history, destroy or confiscate Chan Sam's and his family's memories. The many narrative forms (photographs, letters, murals, paintings, etc) that shape the family home and history become irrelevant, offensive in fact, for the articulation of a new national historical discourse. The private version of history is silenced in favor of the public one. The auto/biographical telling of this episode then reverses this act of national censorship by re-inserting the destroyed elements of Chan Sam's home and family history into a narrative that encompasses both the private and public versions of their history. The auto/biographical text therefore appears as a more objective translation of family history because it brings together the multiple versions of history that exist within Chan Sam's family and official versions of historical narratives. Chong's particular positioning as an omniscient narrator (and her constant effort at presenting herself as a "faithful" translator) also reinforces this desire for objectivity and contrasts sharply with the position that the Chinese side of the family occupies.

While Chong and her mother are in Chang Gar Bin, Chan Sam's son, Yuen, and Winnie's sister, Ping, recount the Chinese version of family history. Chong reports:

There was a presumption that my grandfather would have told the Chinese side of the family everything of importance about the Canadian side. [...] Our Chinese relatives were not interested in what Mother could add about what had happened in Canada. It seemed the last word on the family history was comprised of my grandfather's words from Canada, along with what happened to the Chinese family at home. For us, knowing that they were living with an incomplete version of the Canadian family's history was no more unsettling than looking at the surreal western scenes overhead on the porcelain panels that my grandfather had commissioned. (253)

Yuen's and Ping's conviction that their father was a reliable translator explains why they consider his version of family history as the authoritative one. Based on Chan Sam's translation of the family history, Yuen and Ping have developed their own version of the past in which their father was a hero who led a difficult life in Canada because of his alcoholic and gambling concubine. Unaware (and maybe even unwilling to become aware) of the existence of an additional and/or alternate version of family history, Yuen and Ping rehearse the narrative that has sustained their lives and identities for so long. Yuen and Ping, who have lived through trying circumstances, both personal and historical, ground their identities and sense of self-worth in the image that they have of their father. As Chong recalls, "Yuen's words paid high tribute [to Chan Sam]: 'He was a model father and husband. I'm very much like my father. [...] My sons are the same'" (254). This identification with the heroic father and grandfather provides Yuen and his

sons with a sense of continuity that immigration and various waves of national history have disrupted. Like Chan Sam, Yuen and his sons manipulate the mythic narrative of home and family as a survival strategy, one that paradoxically grounds them in reality and preserves their identities.

Confronted with such an “unfaithful” translation of the Canadian family’s experience, Winnie is forced to read between the lines of the narrative that Yuen and Ping are producing for her. Deciphering her siblings’ translation of the family’s past against the light that her own version of this history casts, she is able to understand that Yuen and Ping draw strength and pride from this narrative and decides against rectifying their interpretation of the past. She also realizes that her own version of family history, and particularly the role that her mother played in that history, was not completely accurate either. Where the child had only seen the incompetence and cruelty of her mother, the adult Winnie is now able to read the determination and courage of a young woman living under trying circumstances. She is finally able to realize that she was not the only one to suffer in the family. And if indeed “her mother’s money had been siphoned from her to the family in China,” she had ultimately had a better life than her Chinese relatives (254). In this revised version of her life story, Winnie realizes that her alienation from the Chinese family and being raised in Canada were in fact “the best gift of all.” Her newly acquired knowledge of the fate of her Chinese family leads her to recognize that although she had felt alienated and homeless while growing up in various Chinatowns, she had in fact been at home. This distinction is key for Winnie whose auto/biographical quest finally enables her to *declare* that Canada is home.

Discovering with her mother that Chan Sam (and to some degree Winnie) had mistranslated May-ying and her contribution to family life, Chong uses the auto/biography to articulate an alternative version of her grandmother's life. This new version, she hopes, will counter Chan Sam's translation, which depicts May-ying as an alcoholic gambler, and amend Winnie's version of family history, which presents May-ying as an abusive and selfish mother. Chong's auto/biographical project clearly brings May-ying's character into focus as the title of the auto/biography and the presence of her picture on the front cover suggest. In her text, Chong recreates the character whose central contribution to family history was written out of Chan Sam's narrative and undermined and/or misunderstood in Winnie's version of the past. With the care of the objective historian, but relying strongly on imagination,<sup>10</sup> Chong articulates her own alternative version of May-ying's experience and unveils a dimension of her identity different from the ones shaped by the narratives of her relatives.

Chong opens the auto/biography stating that "May-ying stayed with her family until she was perhaps four; she could remember her mother trying to apply the first bandages to bind her feet. [...] Because of [her] cries of protest [though], her feet were unbandaged" (6-7). This early episode of strength and rebellion triggers Chong's depiction of May-ying as an independent woman. Sold for the first time around the age of four to a woman she would serve until she was seventeen, May-ying learns early on that her life has little value. When she is seventeen, her mistress sells her to Chan Sam. All her attempts at rebellion fail and, deciding against suicide, she leaves China for Canada where she meets her new husband and works as a waitress to support his needs. May-ying compensates for the powerlessness of her situation by treating Chan Sam with resentful

contempt and by creating alliances with Chinese café owners and other waitresses. Developing a network of social connections enables May-ying to shape an identity for herself beyond her role as Chan Sam's concubine. It also allows her to be known and appreciated for her qualities as a hard-working, committed, charming, and talkative waitress. These qualities guarantee her employment even in extremely difficult economic conditions during the Great Depression. Her employability gives her power over Chan Sam whose age (he is twenty years older) often prevents him from getting work. May-ying becomes the sole income earner of the family and this position, if it enslaves her to Chan Sam and the family (because she has to support them), also grants her the freedom to make her own decisions in her personal life. Chan Sam is too desperate for the money that May-ying earns to forbid her to do what she wants and even decides not to oust her from the family when she starts her own family with Guen (124). May-ying's financial power (all relative in these particular conditions) enables her to choose the circumstances of her social, emotional, and sexual lives. Her freedom to select her own activities, friends, and lovers comes gradually as she slowly extricates herself from the hierarchical structure of the Chinese family and home. May-ying's slow emancipation results in two translations of home that now compete in the family: the one that Chan Sam articulates and the one that his concubine starts developing.

When Chan Sam returns home to Chang Gar Bin for another visit after the previous one with May-ying and their first two daughters, May-ying moves to Nanaimo's Chinatown with Winnie and creates her own home there. Chong explains that

[t]he simplicity of life in Nanaimo suited May-ying. Children could play on the street without fear of cars, and though merchants' wives would not socialize with

waitresses, they didn't mind if their children were friends. No one was ever going to have to beg for their next meal, for food was plentiful and fresh. [...] But what made it easy for [May-ying] to live there was having her own people there, men who came from Poon-ye, a county neighboring hers in China. [...] May-ying had ready-made friends, and help if she needed it. (58)

Chong's textual reconstitution of Nanaimo's Chinatown as a small and safe environment in which food is plentiful, friends readily available, and social discrimination muted compared to Vancouver's Chinatown, articulates a view of May-ying as simply practical.<sup>11</sup> The fact that there are men from "a county neighboring hers in China" also illustrates the impact that successive waves of imposed displacement (from her parents' home to her buyer's home and then from her buyer's home to Chan Sam's home) have had on May-ying. Connecting with people from a county close to her own in China enables her to shape a space in which her homing desire can be fulfilled and her sense of displacement and alienation from Chan Sam's family and home ideals alleviated. May-ying's experience of a safe and comforting home does not last long however, as when Chan Sam returns from Chang Gar Bin, he moves the family back to Vancouver. "There were pragmatic reasons to choose Vancouver over Nanaimo," Chong explains, but these reasons "supported his own prejudice that Nanaimo's one-street Chinatown was more May-ying's territory than his" (96). Chan Sam's decision to move back to Vancouver clearly illustrates the two competing notions of home in the family. Unable to find work in Nanaimo's Chinatown and unwilling to accept May-ying's power there, Chan Sam relocates the family.

The power struggle at work in these two competing notions of home reaches its climax when May-ying leaves Chan Sam to live on her own with Winnie. She continues to remit most of her wages to her husband, but she now decides where she lives, how she lives, and with whom. This bold and courageous claim of her independence is evidenced through her further embracing of drinking and gambling, her cutting edge way of dressing like a man, and her promiscuous sexual behavior. Although these life choices have negative consequences for Winnie and for May-ying's health, Chong chooses to interpret her grandmother's actions as a political gesture. Commenting on May-ying's decision to dress in three piece-suits, she explains that "it was as though [May-ying] was making the statement that she was taking her rightful place in a man's world; that a woman who made her own living, who didn't depend on a man for support, should be respected" (123). This political interpretation of May-ying's actions shapes her as a feminist whose seizing of power enables her to protest the positions and roles Chinese society and tradition have incarcerated her in and to compensate for the powerlessness that she has had to endure. Ironically, the very life in translation in Canada that places her at the margins of Canadian society also gives her the power to gain control and independence in Chinatown. Where translation dis-empowers her in the Canadian community, it empowers her in the Chinese community. As a matter of fact, she can extricate herself from the rigid structures of Chinese family and tradition because these structures are destabilized in Canada. The male head of the Chinese family loses a lot of his power in Canada and this loss provides an opportunity for his wife and/or concubine to claim more rights for herself. Where Chan Sam would have had the support of villagers, his clan, and other members of his family in Chang Gar Bin, he is left alone to



confront May-ying in Canada. In the end, it is ironic, of course, that the place that May-ying cannot call home and where she will lead a nomadic existence until her death, actually constitutes the site of her (relative) liberation and empowerment. This relative empowerment results from processes of migration that destabilize the culture of origin, enable May-ying to claim for herself in Canada a freedom inconceivable to her in China, and allow her daughter, after decades of feeling dislocated as a Chinese, to see herself as Canadian.

Chong manipulates the auto/biographical genre to historicize the trajectories of the different members of her family. This historicization enables her not only to inscribe individual and familial histories in Canadian and Chinese histories but also to contrast the multiple translations of home available on both sides of the family. These contrasts illustrate the complex processes of layering and negotiating at work in the articulation of the concept of home. In Chong's text, these complex processes result in the creation of multiple translations of home that favor hybridity and pluri-locationality.

### **ANNA PORTER'S *THE STORYTELLER*: SHAPING AN IMAGINARY HOMELAND**

In *The Storyteller*, Anna Porter reconstructs her familial past and the various events of Hungarian history that led to the exile of her family to New Zealand in 1956. She anchors the family history in her grandfather's stories about their ancestors, their connection to various Hungarian heroes, and their place in Hungarian history. From the stories that her grandfather, Vili Rácz, tells her, Porter learns that the different generations of her family have always played an important role in the key episodes of Hungarian history. Porter

grows up with family stories that shape her identity as the child of a privileged and powerful class. She relishes the fantastic stories about Vili's duels, his romantic escapades, his extraordinary strength and talent, the many balls that her mother and aunts attended before the Second World War, the fabulous ballgowns they wore, their many suitors, and the descriptions of the family's houses, orchards, and businesses. These family stories, along with stories about the Ráczes' heroic ancestors (almost all of whom are named Vilmos like Porter's grandfather), enable little Anna to develop a strong sense of national identity.<sup>12</sup> Because the Rácz family comes from a line of Hungarian heroes who have always demonstrated their loyalty to the Hungarian people, little Anna does not question her right to a socially privileged life. Even though her family lives in post Second World War communist Budapest, little Anna understands that, like their many ancestors, they need to resist the communist oppressor until "true" Hungarian people are in charge of the country again and the family can regain the privileges that they are entitled to.<sup>13</sup>

In "Nation and Self-Narration: A View from Québec/Quebec," Bina Toledo Freiwald analyzes the political, critical, and autobiographical discourses "implicated in the mutual articulation of subject and nation" and examines the complicated processes at work in the attempt to articulate a distinctive national identity in Québec/Quebec (18). She explains that the *québécois* nationalist claims for sovereignty and national identity rest on the idea that the "*Québécois de souche*" constitute "(true) nationals" who should have the power to decide who can be admitted into the collectivity (18-9). She proceeds to demonstrate that this particular site (i.e. the "*souche*") for the articulation of national identity does not make room for a diversified and more inclusive concept of collective

identity that incorporates the history and identity claims of other groups such as First Nations, immigrants, and anglophone Quebeckers. She turns to autobiographical texts to illustrate how personal narratives can help “reconstruct a more ambivalent narrative of nationness, one that perceives the nation as, [Bhabha calls it] a space ‘marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations’” (24). Toledo Freiwald’s argument is relevant in the present discussion of *The Storyteller* because both she and Porter aim at deconstructing and destabilizing patriotic discourses that shape national identity and promote particular constructions of a homeland. Porter is indeed using auto/biography as a way of “reconstructing a more ambivalent narrative of nationness.” She employs various textual strategies that enable her both to illustrate and undermine the power of language and stories in articulating national identity and shaping a homeland.

Porter’s complex reconstruction and deconstruction of the competing patriotic discourses that she encountered while growing up make clear the ways in which storytelling can be mobilized for the articulation of individual and national identities. Her repeated emphasis on interruption, mixed narrative forms, and the illustration of disruptions within apparently homogeneous entities, demonstrates her determination to find different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between individuals and the nations they belong to. Porter’s commitment to disentangling the many threads of various political powers that tend to naturalize individual and national identities particularly emphasizes the importance of what Brah calls “multi-locationality” (197). Multiple positioning, Porter’s auto/biography demonstrates, is key to articulating a national narrative of home that rethinks the concept of fixed origins (thus complicating the idea of

the “*souche*” as a site of articulation for national identity) and incorporates linguistic, social, cultural, and political diversity.

Porter’s use of two distinct narrative perspectives indicates her commitment to questioning the articulation and manipulation of patriotic discourses and the ways in which such discourses shape national identity. Focusing her autobiographical reconstruction on Vili’s many stories, she addresses two different audiences: her childhood persona, little Anna, for whom the stories were originally intended, and an adult Canadian audience to which her children belong as well. This dual narrative perspective enables her to contrast different views of patriotic discourses and critique the creation and manipulation of these discourses from multiple positions. It also allows her to examine her grandfather’s stories more objectively than she had as a child and to destabilize them. However, unlike Chong whose position as an omniscient narrator enables her to avoid taking sides in her reconstruction of family history, Porter clearly marks her allegiance to her “childhood hero,” Vili (5). She uses auto/biography as a means of probing the ways in which patriotic discourses function, but not as an opportunity to criticize her grandfather’s social and political bias overtly. She leaves this critical task to her readers, expecting them to extract the subtle clues she introduces in her text and to interpret them accordingly.

For example, Porter points to the inconsistencies of Vili’s lessons by destabilizing his teachings with little Anna’s interventions in the storytelling process. While listening to a story about Petöfi, a young Hungarian poet who fought for the creation of an independent legitimate Hungarian State and claimed freedom of speech for all people and freedom for the serfs, little Anna asks Vili about serfs. Vili explains that serfs are “people

who were owned by someone else.” “Owned?” little Anna wonders, “Like Jinny [the family dog]?” “Like Jinny,” Vili replies, “but more useful. They tended the vineyards and planted and tilled and harvested” (150). Having learned from other family stories that freedom is what matters above all, the discovery that the Rácz family owned serfs shocks little Anna. Vili tries to reassure her by explaining that “her great-great-grandfather was a good owner. He made sure [serfs] were all fed and clothed” (150). Still uneasy, little Anna interrupts again: “Like children?” (150) and Vili avoids answering the question by getting back to his Hungarian heroes and their quest for an independent Hungarian State. This exchange illustrates Vili’s difficulty in answering little Anna’s complicated questions in a language and with examples that the child can understand, but it also exhibits the family’s social bias. The Rázcses belong to a class of people who acclaim and support young Petöfi in his struggle for freedom and an independent Hungarian homeland, but they also belong to the class that enslaved their manual labor. This exchange is disturbing for little Anna because she expects Vili Rácz and his family to be on Petöfi’s side, supporting freedom, but not on the side of the oppressor as well. From this exchange, she learns to question the stories that are being passed on to her and realizes that stories serve specific purposes depending on who is doing the storytelling. The exchange also displays one of Porter’s methods for the deconstruction of ideological discourse. Little Anna’s interruption of Vili’s story illustrates the necessity to question the content of stories. Porter uses little Anna’s epiphany as an opportunity to destabilize Vili’s construction of the ideal Hungarian homeland.

Porter’s consistent effort to establish the importance of determining the purposes of stories does not, however, mean that she attributes little power to Vili’s stories. Quite

the contrary. Growing up with a clear sense that she “was to be a young Vilmos. [a famous Hungarian hero] Fearless,” little Anna is aware of the responsibilities that come with her belonging to a line of Hungarian heroes (60). Vili often explains that “being who [they] were, [they] had a number of obligations he took seriously, and he expected [her] to do the same. ‘The old families,’ he said, ‘are responsible for keeping the memories. It’s our shared memories that make us a country. The stories we tell and our language’” (55). Vili clearly equates storytelling and home making and instigates little Anna’s active participation in the storytelling process that articulates the family’s view of the nation. Vili presents storytelling as a social and political responsibility. Through his sessions of (hi)story telling, he passes on to little Anna his desire for a homeland, as well as his homing desire. As we have seen earlier, Avtar Brah suggests that “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a ‘homeland’. This distinction is important, not least because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’ (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 180). Brah’s distinction between “desire for a homeland” and “homing desire” has been particularly useful in differentiating among the forces at work in the articulation of home in Chong’s autobiography, but Porter’s combination of these two concepts complicates the functions that Brah identifies. Although little Anna’s family still lives in Hungary, they are a family in exile, forced to “live in translation” (i.e. they have to learn to use the “communist” version of Hungarian and translate their political and social ideals into communist ones). Multiple waves of invasion have displaced the family from their original homeland, Erdély (Transylvania). The rise of the communist party has led to their removal from their house in Buda and their relocation to

an apartment in Pest, and the shift in political leadership has dislocated them from their social position of heroic aristocrats and placed them in the category of “class enemies.” Porter’s narrative politicizes the geography of Hungary and Budapest and the family home in order to illustrate the various political shifts that have led to her family’s geographical and ideological exile within the homeland and their sense of alienation from that homeland.<sup>14</sup> Because of their particular position (i.e.: they did not actually leave the country), the family does not “inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of ‘origin,’” rather, they would like to see their place of origin returned to them; they would like to see Erdély and the rest of Hungary returned to “true” Hungarians (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 193).

No longer feeling at home in their home, the Rácz family relies on storytelling to keep their version of the homeland alive. Home for the Ráczes becomes what Brah calls “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (192). Like Chong’s grandfather who used mythic recreation to represent his supposedly glorious past in Gold Mountain, Porter manipulates storytelling as a way of articulating mythic versions of the Hungarian homeland and the glorious experiences of her ancestors. Although she grows up in Budapest, little Anna knows that her family’s original home is in Erdély where the Magyars, along with six other tribes, settled on the Transylvanian plains. “Most Hungarians,” Porter explains, “still think of this land as their own, despite the fact that it is now part of Romania.”<sup>15</sup> When I think of it as Erdély, it is a deceptively pastoral place with straw-roofed houses and warlike people, the birthplace of heroes like János Hunyadi, who beat back Sultan Mohammed’s armies from the gates of Europe and whose castle is in Erdély” (19). Porter openly acknowledges the romantic nature of her

imaginary version of Erdély, emphasizing the fairy tale quality of the place and its inhabitants. If the Hungarian homeland is fictional, however, it is not fictitious. The fact that “most Hungarians still think of this land as their own” demonstrates the power of myth in shaping realities of the mind. Imaginary recreations of Erdély constitute, to adapt one of Rushdie’s expressions, “Hungaries of the mind.”<sup>16</sup>

Porter’s reverse migration to Erdély enables her to contrast her “Hungary of the mind” with the visible remnants of the mythic homeland that Vili’s stories have created. When she and daughter Julia visit Hunyadvár, the Hunyadis’ castle where many episodes of Hungarian history and family bravery are set, she is struck to see the products of her imagination come to life. “And suddenly,” she exclaims, “like a painted backdrop, a stage set, there it was. Exactly as I had imagined it: Hunyadvár. High on a green hill, seven red turrets rising from stone towers, long slits for the archers’ arrows, narrow windows overlooking the valley. The Hunyadis’ stronghold” (347). Porter presents the castle as “a painted backdrop, a stage set” in order to indicate the incongruity of the Hungarian castle in the surrounding modern landscape. Her use of theatrical terminology also emphasizes the idea that even though it now stands in front of her in real life, the castle’s main purpose for her is still to provide a stage on which her memories and Vili’s stories can be performed. As Porter and Julia enter the castle, they are offered a guided tour in Romanian. The castle that once staged central episodes of Hungarian history has now become part of another nation’s history and in this new context, its story seems to have lost its relevance (Porter and her daughter are the only two visitors). Porter and Julia turn down the guided tour and choose to visit the castle on their own instead in order to be free to use imagination and memory to recreate the life that the castle once held. Mother



and daughter stage the elements of Vili's stories in the physical environment in which they stand. This episode indicates the importance of storytelling in fleshing out the skeletons of the past and bringing to life a version of history that can no longer be told in the new political context in which the remnants of this past stand.<sup>17</sup> Porter and her daughter prefer to hear their own "original" version of that history rather than the translation that the guide would offer.

This episode also demonstrates the primacy of stories over fact, of the invisible over the visible. Where a guided tour would have provided the visitors with concrete data: dates, events, genealogy, and formal descriptions of the environment, Vili's stories provide a personal connection with the historical site and an opportunity to rehearse the past. This visit enables Porter to check her daughter's knowledge of the family's version of Hungarian history: "But have I ever told you about Vilmos's great black stallion?" "Yes," Julia responds, "but go ahead anyway" (349). Mother and daughter are engaged in the act of transmitting and preserving history, not because they are learning about Hunyadvár but because they are sharing the stories they already know about the place. The historical site does not constitute the origin of the content of the stories or validate its "truth," rather it provides a starting point for the storytelling process.

Porter's privileging of fiction and myth over historical facts demonstrates her preference for unfixed origins. Vili's stories "had many tellings" and thus provided little Anna with changing narratives of origin (55). Vili offers at least two versions of how the Hungarian homeland was created. In one version, seven tribes settle on the Transylvanian plains and are united into one nation through the magic power of the *táltós* (18). In another, two handsome Hungarian princes are led into Erdély by a mysterious stag (19).

Even the familial narrative of origins has several tellings. Vili tells little Anna that he met his future wife, Therese, on a road in the Hungarian countryside (13). Little Anna's aunt Sari gives her a different version and explains that her parents met at a banquet where her mother was serving (13). Another aunt, Leah, tells yet another story. In this third version, Vili and Therese met at a ball (14). Porter presents the three versions of the way in which Vili and Therese met one after the other, without any other narrative intervention but to announce whose version she is about to render. This presentation gives equal value to each version and attributes equal authority to the three storytellers. Like Ondaatje, Porter accumulates stories in order to emphasize the idea that she is not translating her family story from one "original" source text but rather from multiple and competing versions. This establishes early on the necessity of developing a flexible understanding of "origins" and incorporating multiple voices in the tellings of (hi)stories.

If Vili's many tellings of family and Hungarian (hi)stories help little Anna articulate her Hungarian identity, develop a flexible understanding of the concept of origin, and establish her connection to the mythic Hungarian homeland, they also have other useful functions. Vili's stories provide little Anna with tools for entertainment, narrative repair, and political action. Little Anna and her cousin Kati constitute Vili's privileged audience. Both girls know their grandfather's stories by heart and use this shared knowledge playfully. Little Anna sometimes resents the fact that she is not the only recipient of Vili's fantastic stories, but she admits that sharing these stories with her cousin has one certain advantage:

The only good part of her knowing the same stories was that we could play story-games, starting at some point in one of our grandfather's stories and taking turns

changing them a little, adding new details, even new people. The rules were that each of us had to carry the story to a crucial moment, then pass it over to the other to resolve and continue. If you lost the thread of the story, you lost. (88)

The children's game reveals that both girls have internalized Vili's lessons: the stories do not have one specific starting point and they do not need to be factually accurate. Like Ondaatje who insists that family stories should go through many retellings and transformations, Vili's granddaughters are not completely faithful to the "original" versions of the stories they have received, but they are faithful to the storytelling method that Vili has passed on to them. Their story-games enable little Anna and Kati to practice their storytelling skills, thus preparing them to take on their responsibility for "keeping the memories" alive and helping preserve the Hungarian homeland, its language, and its values (55).<sup>18</sup>

Little Anna is also particularly active in reenacting key episodes of Hungarian history. She especially enjoys playing Turks and Hungarians with her friend Alice: "We would race toward each other on a signal, and whoever got farther into the other's territory won. The loser would have to be the Turk for the day, and the winner got to successfully defend a castle, usually Eger, and pour very warm water on the other's head. [...] Sometimes we had beheadings, but only when the Turks got too uppity" (96). The two girls entertain themselves with their knowledge of Hungarian history and manipulate different versions of the stories they share depending on the needs of their game. The games also enable them to practice and perform both their Hungarian identity and the identity of the enemy other. Becoming the other, if only for the game's purpose, allows them to develop the ability to shift positions and observe situations from different

perspectives. This ability comes in handy at school where both girls have to live in translation and pretend to be good communists.

Little Anna is introduced to the realities of living in translation on the first day of school. She enlists Vili's help to fill out the first-day questionnaire. The questions, Vili explains, are meant to recognize potential class enemies and therefore require the ability to read between the lines and identify the communist audience's expectations.<sup>19</sup> Filling out this questionnaire constitutes little Anna's introduction to learning a "foreign" language (i.e.: state rhetoric) and practicing "being alien," (an experience that will come in handy when the family moves to New Zealand and little Anna actually becomes "alien"). Vili had already explained to his granddaughter that

Governments [...] developed their own special language. For example, when the wartime government officials said they loved Wagner, they meant they were Nazis and held special positions in addition to their official roles. When the Arrow Cross held clean-up operations, they were really hunting for Jews and dissidents. When the communists talked of cooperative farming, they meant they were taking the land from the peasants and giving it to people they thought they could trust more. (145)

Little Anna knows that language can be manipulated to serve specific purposes. She notices her grandfather's elisions of certain words in his conversations with friends and understands that these linguistic modifications are meant to protect them in the dangerous political climate of the time. From Vili's version of Hungarian history, little Anna also understands that linguistic resistance is key to preserving her Hungarian identity and her version of the Hungarian homeland. She knows that one of the most devious ways the

many oppressors of her people used to annihilate Hungarians was to kidnap Hungarian children and school them in the oppressor's language and values. Over time, these Hungarian children would forget their mother tongue and Hungarian identity. Starting school in communist Hungary therefore has political implications for little Anna. Vili explains that she will have to learn to live in translation because schooling, even in a communist system, means that she will have a chance to go to university. He therefore recommends that she "appear to love communism" because "[i]t's how the country had survived for more than half its history: playing along" (148). Little Anna is instructed to learn to manipulate communist rhetoric and values in order to pass for a communist while at the same time preserving her "true" Hungarian identity and resisting identity translation.

Porter's rendering of little Anna's experience with censorship and the "life in translation" it imposes on her and her family shows that the migration of the family starts long before the overseas move to New Zealand. The writer's reconstruction of the Rácz's domestic space in the auto/biography enables her to point to that long history of "internal" migration. Porter's recreation of her family home parallels the various stages of Hungarian history. With each wave of foreign invasion, Hungary loses some of its territories and these losses are echoed in the progressive reduction of the Ráczes' living quarters. Many generations of Ráczes lived on an estate in Erdély until General Haynau's reign of terror in 1848. Vili's grandfather was killed then and his wife, Petronella, and their son, Györgi, were forced into exile. They moved to Kula, a small village (now in Yugoslavia), where they lived in a large farmhouse that looked like a castle (363-67). Vili grew up there until he moved to Budapest as an adult and bought the large house in Buda

from which the communist regime expelled the family, relocating them in Pest. Every visit of the police after that marks further reductions of the Ráczes' domestic space. One bedroom is given to a couple when Vili is sent to jail. After Puci divorces Jenő once her parents have safely left for New Zealand, she and little Anna have to move to one bedroom and surrender the rest of the apartment to a lawyer and his mother. When the Russians enter Budapest during the 1956 Revolution, their bedroom is damaged by the attack. They are homeless and have to leave the country. Porter politicizes her textual representation of the family home in order to articulate a national allegory that illustrates the impossibility for the Rácz family to identify with the communist version of a Hungarian nation. This representation also speaks to the vulnerability of national identity to history, and the need for translation to explain the vanished social status of the family, their identity as "true" Hungarians, and their place in Hungarian history.

Little Anna's actions at school reflect her complex political positioning (i.e. she pretends to be a good communist while preserving the political ideals that her family believes in). In her own way, she subverts the translation that communist rhetoric imposes on her by incorporating elements of her "original" political beliefs in the pieces of communist propaganda that she is asked to create. For her debut parade as a young communist celebrating the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution, little Anna has to make and carry the school banner. The banner, Porter explains, was "a pretty red flag with a building in the middle. The building didn't much resemble our school, because I drew it to look more like a castle, adding turrets and even a small gargoyle" (157). Drawing a castle to represent her communist school enables little Anna to subvert the power that she has been given in order to assert her own political allegiance. She might be part of a

parade that celebrates the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution, but she is also carrying a flag that represents the very symbol of what that revolution aims to destroy. She employs the communist oppressor's language in order to articulate and assert her own version of the Hungarian homeland. Her act of resistance allows her to demonstrate that the revolution that she is "celebrating" has not been entirely successful.

Little Anna's deviation from the communist norm in school increases in proportion with what is happening at home. After the police search the family apartment and exile Vili and Therese to the countryside, little Anna surreptitiously draws mustaches on the pictures of various leaders hung in public spaces at school. After Vili is arrested, she expresses her anger and openly claims her political allegiance by writing a composition about her family history and reading it in class. Her composition

included the first Vilmos at Nándorfehérvár, the second Vilmos who gave Lightning [the horse] to king Mátyás, the Vilmos who looked after Rákóczi's horses. I ended with the last of the Erdély Ráczes, who was shot during supper. I wrote about Vili's wars and how he was awaiting trial in Budapest on some charges that everyone knew were false. And I said I would never forgive Comrade Rákosi for that. (257)

Little Anna makes public her own version of Hungarian history, inscribes her family history into it, and claims her identity as a "class enemy." Her overt criticism of Comrade Rákosi also marks her political allegiance to pre-communist Hungary. With Vili in jail, she publicly takes on the role of translator whose role is to rectify the meaning of the version of history that is being articulated and transmitted at school. She also adds to the narrative that her grandfather has passed on to her by incorporating his own life

experiences to the family (hi)story. By inscribing him in the family's version of Hungarian history, little Anna officially grants him the status of Hungarian hero in an attempt to contradict the image of Vili that communist rhetoric is shaping. She presents her version of Vili's life as a counter narrative meant to repair the communist master narrative that damages his identity and reputation. This counter narrative, because it reveals the fraudulent knowledge that state rhetoric creates, also destabilizes the language and version of history that children are learning at school.

Porter's autobiographical reconstruction counterbalances little Anna's version of Hungary that clearly establishes her allegiance to Vili's political beliefs by incorporating versions of the Russian homeland that inspire the articulation of the communist Hungarian State. Describing the Russian lessons she took at school, Porter recalls:

We had progressed from the Russian alphabet to reading and conversation. The new Russian teacher [...] liked to tell us in Russian about the bravery of the Soviet people. "They have endured such horrors, such deprivation, yet they never succumb, never give up. They fought the Germans barefoot in the snow, firing their guns even as they fell." Stalingrad was the charnel house of the war. Did we know that more Russians had been killed than all the dead of the combined armies of all the other nations fighting in the war? (261)

The Russian teacher, like Vili, likes to tell stories about the heroic actions of her people. Their bravery and persistence echo the bravery and persistence of Hungarian heroes. Porter's representation of the Russian homeland that threatens little Anna's version of Hungary strangely resembles Vili's version of the Hungarian homeland. With this resemblance, Porter suggests that competing patriotic discourses actually emerge from



similar stories that articulate stereotypical identities of brave individuals ready to sacrifice themselves to defend their country. Bringing this similarity into focus allows Porter to complicate little Anna's one-sided representation of the "enemy" and present the Russians not only as invaders who usurped Hungarians' power to rule themselves but also as valiant people who, like the Hungarian people, are determined to protect their freedom and identity. By highlighting this similarity, Porter also humanizes Russian enemies and brings them closer to Hungarian heroes. She shifts the focus from national identity to individual identity thus emphasizing both the connection and disconnection between the two.

Porter clearly illustrates the (dis)connection between individual identity and national identity through her reconstruction of the 1956 Revolution and little Anna's experience of this historical moment. Little Anna's personal encounter with national history debunks the myth of heroic behavior on which patriotic discourse is based. Excited to see "true" Hungarians rise and take arms against their communist oppressors, little Anna places the Hungarian flag outside her window and joins the crowds of revolutionaries, determined to play her role in the liberation of her country. She witnesses first-hand the horrors of the violence perpetrated against the "comunist enemy." She sees the mutilated bodies of dead men hanging in public squares and notices that "[a] small boy was passed overhead from hand to hand, his pale face turning this way and that, as if searching for someone. 'The son of an AVO man!' they were shouting. 'Death to the bastards!'" (313-14). Little Anna who had been quite excited the day before to see the toppling down of Stalin's statue, now distances herself from her "fellow combatants" by

contrasting her worry for the little boy with the angry cries of the insurgents. She leaves the scene of the rebellion and attempts to go home. However,

Somewhere along the way a man [...] gave me a heavy gun with a long snout and a handful of long black bullets. I don't remember carrying it into our doorway or trying it on one of the Corvin's windows. What I remember is the sharp pain in my shoulder where the gun kicked back and smacked me against the wall. I sat there for a long time, *wanting* to think about Vilmos and King Mátyás, Hunyadi and a bunch of other heroes, while some of our neighbours came and went. (my emphasis, 314)

Little Anna's personal experience of the physical aspect of ideological combat leaves her physically hurt and emotionally disturbed. Indicating that she "*wanted* to think" about Hungarian heroes suggests that she could not, that these stories of heroic deeds had somehow lost their power to elicit patriotic enthusiasm or simply soothe in the present circumstances. When confronted with butchery, little Anna is unable to manipulate the stories that shape her national identity to make sense of her individual experience because these stories do not fit the reality of that experience.<sup>20</sup> She understands, what Vili discovered while he was in jail, that "[t]hat barrier between *us* and *them* has blurred. *I* no longer know who *we* are" (my emphasis, 294). Vili realizes that the dynamics at work behind the articulation of patriotic discourse and national identity rest on the illusion of a homogeneous group of people identifying themselves against an Other that they can exclude and differentiate themselves from. Living through a turbulent episode of Hungarian history (and not merely hearing about it through stories) leads Vili to examine

his view of Hungary and understanding of Hungarian identity and to question the simplistic connection between self, “I,” and nation, “we,” that he had assumed until then.

In her analysis of Minnie Bruce Pratt’s essay, entitled “Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart,” Brah examines Pratt’s careful deconstruction of the normative social, political, and cultural discourses that shaped her sense of home and the intricate politics involved in the articulation of her white, middle-class home in the southern United States. Pratt’s narrative, Brah explains, is key to articulating new ways of thinking about home because it “continuously interrogates and problematises the very notion of a stable and essential identity by deconstructing the narrator’s own position” (205). This textual strategy, Brah suggests, enables Pratt to discover “the tenuous nature of her security and sense of belonging” and “to learn about the processes which sustain social relations and subjectivities” (206). Leigh Gilmore also examines Pratt’s essay in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* and takes Brah’s analysis in a slightly different direction by suggesting that Pratt’s critical study of home constitutes an act of “revisionary politics” because it emphasizes the importance of articulating alternative versions of truth that can be cast against the “truth” of normative discourses (i.e. the discourses that the dominant group articulates] (238-39). Both analyses make clear the political power of “writing home” and its potential for social change. Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children* and Porter’s *The Storyteller* reconstruct family stories deeply embedded in national histories and, in doing so, engage in acts of “revisionary politics.” Their texts are vehicles of private and collective memories and, as such, function as preservers of a cultural heritage that matters for the individuals whose stories they are

reconstructing but also for the communities and nations to which these individuals belong. These autobiographies join a corpus of historical texts that shape the histories of the various nations in which Chong's and Porter's family stories are set. This addition of individual voices to public versions of history challenges the authority and version of "truth" that these normative discourses create. These autobiographies are also particularly relevant for their Canadian audience because they highlight the connection between individual stories and national history. Chong's conscientious historical reconstruction of life in the various Chinatowns of the West Coast of Canada and in Chang Gar Bin allows her to educate her Canadian audience about a particular moment of Canadian history and encourage a rethinking of the ways in which Canada deals with immigrants. Porter's careful deconstruction of the articulation and functions of patriotic discourse provides her Canadian readers with tools for the analysis of competing nationalistic discourses that emerge from different parts of the country. In the end, these autobiographies manipulate personal memories to articulate new ways of homing individual and national identities. In doing so, Chong's and Porter's autobiographies demonstrate, as Rushdie argues, that migrant writers do not simply "describe, from a distance, the world that they have left," instead they actively aim for social change as "redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it" (*Imaginary Homelands* 13-4).

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<sup>1</sup> In "On Language Memoirs," Alice Yaeger Kaplan associates the loss of the family language in the process of migration with the loss of the original home. She claims "[t]hat language equals home, that language is a home as surely as a roof over one's head is a home, and that to be without a language, or to be between languages, is as miserable in its way as to be without bread" (63). Here Kaplan underlines the connections between language and the shaping of reality. Migrants feel most at home in their mother tongue because reality makes sense in that language. As we have seen in Chapter One, Eva Hoffman is quite distraught to discover the arbitrary relationship that exists between signifier and signified when she is first learning English. The linguistic displacement and sense of homelessness that Hoffman experiences at that time emphasize once again the necessity to take language into account while discussing the concept of

home. Different languages will express and shape "home" differently. With Isabel Huggan's memoir for instance, we have seen that the English concept of "home" cannot be translated into French. Such a simple and general question as "Where is your home?" does not have a direct equivalent in French. This question asked in English allows for a wide range of possible answers. The person answering it could indicate the location of her present dwelling, or the neighborhood she lives in, or the place she is from; she could even answer the question at the metaphorical level and say such things as "home is where my friends are." Asking the question in French would limit the range of possible answers as there is not any equivalent for the word (and therefore concept of) "home." If the person asking the question wanted to know where the other person lives at that moment, she would have to ask: "*Où habitez-vous?*" If she wanted to know where the other person is from, she would ask: "*D'où venez-vous?*" or "*De quel pays/région/ville êtes-vous?*" If she wanted to take the question to the metaphorical level, she would have to ask: "*Où vous sentez-vous chez vous?*" These specific questions are possible in English of course, but the fact that an English speaker has the option to ask a less targeted question gives more freedom to her interlocutor to interpret and answer the question the way she wishes to. This freedom, however, might also create a difficulty for her (especially if she is a language migrant) as she might feel that she needs to read the inquirer's intention in asking the question before she can answer. In French, the more targeted questions not only establish the inquirer's intentions clearly, they also reveal the ways in which home is conceptualized. In French, home is articulated at three different levels: the geographical level, the historical/political level, and the emotional/metaphorical level. The question: "*Où habitez-vous?*" elicits answers indicating specific geographical locations (such as an address, the name of a neighborhood, a region, a city, or even a country). The question "*D'où venez-vous?*" encourages one's interlocutor to talk about her origins, her roots, her history, while the question "*Où vous sentez-vous chez vous?*" invites confidence about her feelings. The same specific options are available in English as well of course, but the fact that for French speakers these are the only available options to speak about home indicates a certain rigidity in the ways in which home is conceptualized and understood. When Isabel Huggan discovers that she cannot use the concept "*chez*" to indicate that she is "going back home to Canada," she also discovers the political aspect of the issue. Had she used the expression "*chez moi*" to indicate her intention of going back home to Canada, she could have offended her French interlocutors by suggesting that she had not felt at home in France. Since this is obviously not the case, she is left with only one alternative: using the word "*pays*" to indicate her return home. She needs to shift from the emotional/metaphorical level to the political level and the language marks her as foreign and clearly indicates her political allegiance to her French interlocutors. These relatively rigid boundaries between different semantic levels are blurred in the English term "home." These boundaries probably appear somewhere else in English and examining how these boundaries are rendered in a text in English therefore constitutes an interesting and new focus for the study of home in immigrant auto/biography.

<sup>2</sup> Critics such as Roger J. Porter and Alice Kaplan emphasize the idea that migrant writers use their textual creations as abodes. See Porter's "Autobiography, Exile, Home" and Kaplan's "On Language Memoir." In *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World in Movement*, editors Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson introduce the discussion developed in their volume by suggesting that the "most common" idea about migrant writers writing about home is that they find themselves "at home in the story of their lives" (10). This common view of the autobiography as the migrant writer's home allows Rapport and Dawson to establish the guiding principle of their collection: home is no longer a fixed place. Instead, they suggest, home lies in movement and it is "in the motion of narrative that people are at home" (34). The essays they have gathered in this collection proceed to demonstrate that home is indeed mobile and relies on narrative motion to be established. I am not arguing that this view of home is inaccurate, (and Trinh is not either), but I think that this discussion now needs to move ahead. Instead of focusing on identifying "where" home is, critical attention should be given to the functions that the reconstructed home performs and the audiences that autobiographical recreations of home address.

<sup>3</sup> Chong particularly remembers a time when her mother, angry that her children had forgotten to empty the garbage can, turned it upside down, and forced them to clean up the mess. She also recalls a time when her mother started to beat her for a reason that she cannot remember. In each case, Chong specifies that her mother froze when she realized what she was doing and was distraught to recognize May-ying's behavior in her own (235). Chong's incorporation of these examples of parental abuse in her text demonstrates how the damage done by one generation can be passed down in the family. By emphasizing the fact that her mother was able to identify the source of her own abusive behavior, restrain herself, and therefore control

the outcome of the incident, Chong also makes sure to picture her mother in a positive light. Winnie is clearly presented as a victim of abusive behavior whose past scars have led her to become a perpetrator herself.

<sup>4</sup> This bringing together of the family occurs in more ways than one. When Denise Chong and her mother first go to Chang Gar Bin, they bring with them a few gifts to pay respect to their unknown relatives. When they return to Chang Gar Bin a few years later with Wayne (Chong's brother), they make sure to bring Western goods such as a washing machine, a television, and a motorcycle. In bringing these gifts to their relatives, Chong, Winnie, and Wayne perpetuate the tradition that Chan Sam started: furnishing the Chinese family home with Canadian (Western) goods. They also bring Ping a copy of her Canadian birth certificate, which enables her to get a visa and the possibility to go back "home" to Canada.

<sup>5</sup> Chong's inclusion of dates, statistics, and detailed summaries of historical events demonstrates her firm dedication to her role as an historian. Her text does not simply reconstitute family history; it also sketches an overview of Canadian and Chinese histories during the time period that her family history covers.

<sup>6</sup> May-ying's intention to return to Chang Gar Bin to live disappears after her separation from Chan Sam, and although she still has two daughters there and is therefore connected to the place and financially bound to the Chinese side of the family, she dreams of being lucky in her gambling in order to "win big ... and bring [her] two daughters over from China" (110).

<sup>7</sup> The first thing that Chong and her mother notice upon entering the Chinese family home is a series of old photographs of Winnie. "As I looked about the room," Chong recalls, "I saw under glass on one wall old photographs of my mother. In one, she was wearing the dress [...] that her mother bought her for graduation day at Strathcona School, in another, her nurse's uniform. There was one of her and my father on their wedding day" (245). Hung on the walls of the Chinese family home lies the history of the Canadian side of the family. The fact that the Chinese side of the family knows about the Canadian side of the family demonstrates Chan Sam's privileging of the Chinese home and family and his sense that the true place of his widespread family is in China. The house in Chang Gar Bin is therefore the one that contains the history of both sides of the family.

<sup>8</sup> What is happening here is in a sense the opposite of what Michael Ondaatje does in *Running in the Family*. Where Ondaatje manipulates storytelling and imagination as a way of reconstructing the myth of 1920s Ceylon, Chong works on deconstructing the mythic familial Chinese home that years of storytelling and imagination have shaped. Chong is able to deconstruct the myth because the house and the people around whom the myth has been articulated are still alive and able to testify. Their presence grounds their stories in reality and removes the mythic veil they had been cloaked in. Ondaatje, on the other hand, finds little physical evidence to support the validity of the stories and memories that he has inherited. He therefore chooses to capitalize on the fictional aspect of his story and shapes an account that plays with and emphasizes the mythical dimension of his family history. The writer's reason for writing also plays an important role in these textual decisions, as we have seen in Chapter Three. Ondaatje, in keeping with his reputation as a fiction writer, wants to write a good story. Chong wants to write a good story, but she also seeks to interpret and understand her family's past in relation to national and international versions of history. Her privileging of accuracy and physical evidence is therefore essential to her task. Positioned as the family historian, Chong needs to retrieve her family's past from the mythic dimension to inscribe it into public historical narratives and grant it a reality that her relatives (her mother in particular) need to make sense of their past.

<sup>9</sup> Chan Sam uses the walls of his family home as a canvas on which to draw the story of his life. When Chong and her mother visit Chang Gar Bin, they are surprised to discover "on a side wall [...] a larger-than-life double portrait of a woman and a man. The woman's face was plain, but kindly. The man's was the likeness of the photograph of my grandfather that had disappeared from the bottom drawer of the cedar chest in Prince George" (245). The presence of Chan Sam and Huangbo on the wall of their house is not unusual, but the size of the representation seems to be. There is no trace of the concubine in this house; no marks of her contribution to the household; no mention of the fact that her money is paying for the construction and decoration of this house. The Chinese family home is very clearly Chan Sam's home, not May-ying's, and the disappearance of his picture from his Canadian daughter's chest demonstrates his privileging of his Chinese family.

<sup>10</sup> Chong has only very few memories of May-ying and she recognizes that she grew up afraid of her grandmother, unable and unwilling to have meaningful conversations with her. Winnie's conversations with her mother were also limited as she explains to her daughter, "My Mom only talked to me when she

wanted to bawl me out" (230). This situation demonstrates that Chong has very little personal material on which to base her auto/biographical reconstruction of her grandmother. The absence of personal evidence suggests that Chong relies heavily on imagination to shape a character that she thinks will fit the life circumstances she knows about and her own desire to understand who her grandmother truly was. Bringing together many strands, using historical information, and demonstrating some degree of detachment, Chong's text enables a new reading of the concubine. This new reading counterbalances Chan Sam's and Winnie's versions of May-ying as it presents a more forgiving portrait of the woman.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, TheatreOne in Nanaimo commissioned Denise Chong to write a play version of *The Concubine's Children*. The play was staged at the Port Theater in Nanaimo in March 2004. Chong's decision to have the play staged in Nanaimo seems to indicate her emphasis on May-ying's importance to the auto/biography. Most of the action in the text takes place in Vancouver Chinatown and Chang Gar Bin. Nanaimo Chinatown is only a secondary setting, but the fact that it was home for May-ying makes it important and places the concubine at the center of the stage.

<sup>12</sup> As an adult comparing her sense of identity with that of her Canadian-born daughters, Porter claims that her daughters "are true Canadians. Unlike their grandmother and me, they never question their identities" (343). Porter clearly connects strong (and "true") sense of identity with the land of one's birth. In Canada, her daughters have the freedom to reclaim their Hungarian heritage by attending "the annual Toronto Hellicon Ball, a grand Hungarian affair that resists all efforts to adapt to modern times" or by engaging on a reverse migration to their mother's homeland (343). Porter and her mother, on the other hand, question their hyphenated identities. They might not be "true" Canadians in the sense that Catherine and Julia are, but they cannot be "true" Hungarians in Canada either. It is important to understand what Porter means by "true" Canadian and "true" Hungarian. I think that her definition of a "true" Hungarian is a person who is connected to a long line of Hungarian ancestors, has Hungarian blood, can speak Hungarian, knows Hungarian history, and considers Erdély (Transylvania) as his/her homeland. Fred Wah's definition of what a "true" Canadian is might explain why Porter questions her hyphenated identity. Talking about the problem of racial purity in Canada, Wah suggests: "That could be the answer in this country. If you're pure anything you can't be Canadian. We'll save that name for all the mixed bloods in this country" (*Diamond Grill* 53-4). Unlike her daughter, Porter is strongly connected to her Hungarian past and might consider herself a "pure" Hungarian, thus making her take on Canadian identity more complicated.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that although Vili and his family are presented as intelligent and educated individuals who repeatedly take action to protect and help the oppressed (Vili and his family risk their lives sheltering Jewish people during the Second World War), they nonetheless belong to a class that could not possibly have seen the rise of communism favorably as it meant the end of their privileges. When Puci, Anna's mother, marries Jenő, a Party member, in order to get Vili out of jail, she expresses her resentment of her new social conditions by arguing that "in the old days, there had at least been a few people to envy, but now we were all equally poor" (273). Puci's argument reveals her social bias; she can see social envy as a positive element only because she has belonged to the class that elicited envy.

The Ráczes' version of a Hungarian homeland rests on the premise that all Hungarians share their social and cultural values, their political beliefs, and their view of the past. It is with this "imagined community" in mind that the adults of the Rácz family educate their children and articulate their sense of a Hungarian nation. When history reveals that not all Hungarians actually fit in that particular representation of Hungary, the illusion of homogeneity is ruptured. The family's social displacement (from aristocrats to "class enemies") illustrates the heterogeneity of Hungarian society and forces the reader to examine the ways in which competing forms of patriotic discourses are shaped. Both the Ráczes and the communist regime, in their effort to articulate and preserve competing patriotic discourses, engage in what Bina Freiwald Toledo calls "a paradoxical national project" (20). In "Nation and Self-Narration: A View from Québec/Quebec," Freiwald Toledo deconstructs the *québécois* nationalists' effort to shape a *québécois* national identity and explains that this effort rests on the premise that all *québécois* share the same ancestry and language and that they need to unite to resist the homogenizing force of Canadian national politics. She identifies this effort as "a paradoxical national project" because "rebellious against what are seen as the forces of homogenization from without ('les canadiens' who have denied the collectivity its identity), it demands homogenization from within" (20). Porter's autobiographical reconstruction, by contrasting the Ráczes' version and the communist version of the Hungarian homeland, illustrates this paradox and invites the critical deconstruction of patriotic discourse.

<sup>14</sup> I will develop the contrast between the Ráczes' version of the Hungarian homeland and the communist version a little later in the chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Brah explains that home as "a mythic place of desire [...] is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (192). Porter heeds Vili's command to "go back home one day and see his Erdély" (342). Years after she had left Hungary and settled in Canada, via New Zealand and England, Porter takes her youngest daughter to "the birthplace of our stories, a journey to my grandfather's heartland" (344). At this point, Erdély is presented as a "heartland," not a "homeland," and as the place from which family stories originate. The connection of the family to Erdély is presented as more distant than it had been while little Anna was growing up. The geographical, political, and temporal disruptions in family history modify the notion of "homeland," reinforce Erdély's mythic quality, and limit its existence to the realm of the imagination.

<sup>16</sup> Rushdie uses this expression when he explains that Indian writers' "physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that [they] will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that [they] will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities and villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (*Imaginary Homelands* 10).

<sup>17</sup> Porter's visit to Hunyadvár echoes Kulyk Keefer's visit to the open-air museum in L'viv. These autobiographers, however, manipulate this visit to preserved historical sites differently. In Kulyk Keefer's reconstruction of her experience in the open-air museum, it is the replica of an old Ukrainian house that gives life to her memories and family stories. Kulyk Keefer's rendering of the experience clearly illustrates the power of imagination to bring memories to life, but she limits that power to her childhood and claims that, as an adult, in the replica house, "there is no imagining" (256). The replica house seems to confirm and contain the source of the auto/biographer's memories and family stories. The replica house validates Kulyk Keefer's desire for a clear and stable point of origin.

Porter's treatment of her visit to Hunyadvár is different as she clearly portrays the castle as devoid of life (she and her daughter are the only visitors) and it is Vili's stories that bring life to it. Like an empty stage, the castle does not have any meaning in itself. Hunyadvár does validate the "truth" of Vili's stories, but it does not constitute a stable source for the stories. The stories can be staged elsewhere. At best, the castle constitutes the stage on which the original performance of the stories took place. For Porter, the source of meaning lies in the stories themselves. Porter and her daughter use Vili's stories as a way of interpreting what they see in the castle. The stories give sense to their experience of the castle; it is not the castle that gives meaning to their family stories and memories.

Kulyk Keefer's experience in the replica of her grandmother's house could be read in a similar way. She is indeed discovering a house just like the one her grandmother used to have and now has a concrete stage on which she can reconstruct her mother's and aunt's stories. She can recognize what she sees in the replica house because she has imagined it from the stories she has heard, but she chooses to privilege the site over the stories as a source for an origin that gives meaning to memories.

<sup>18</sup> When the police search the Ráczes' apartment and decide to exile Vili and Therese to the countryside, little Anna's sense of home is shattered. Porter explains that "Vili's absence was a nightmare that wouldn't end. The place felt empty, abandoned. Even the streets had changed" (221). Without the storyteller, home does not feel like home any more. Tellingly, "Kati and [little Anna] stopped playing [their] story-games" (221). The absence of storytelling in the Rácz family reflects the fragmentation of their home. Little Anna continues to turn to stories for comfort, but she writes them down on paper or simply recites them silently to herself. The oral dimension of the storytelling process disappears and illustrates the silencing effect of communist censorship on the family.

<sup>19</sup> The situation of the Rácz family echoes the situation of Chan Sam's Chinese family during the Cultural Revolution. Both families are labeled "class enemies" because of their material possessions and experience geographical and social dislocation. The impact of this dislocation, however, is emotionally more painful for Chan Sam's family as their wealth is all very relative and they suffer the abuse and disdain of the villagers. The members of the Rácz household live in precarious conditions as well, but many people still respect them and treat them kindly.

<sup>20</sup> In her study of the "limits of autobiography," Leigh Gilmore cites Foucault and comments that historical discourse often elevates human behavior, so that butchery, for instance, becomes battle (36). Porter's autobiography recreates the same events that history books present, but her access of these events through memories and personal experience enables her to complicate her historical rendering. The personal aspect



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of the experience allows her to emphasize what history books omit or modify thus providing, in a sense, a more nuanced account of the events.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has enabled me to read contemporary Canadian migrant autobiography through the lens of translation. This focus on translation has generated questions about the concept of fixed, authoritative, and legitimate origins (or sources), the technical difficulty of crafting linguistic and generic strategies that can translate the complexities of multi-layered migration experiences, and the pedagogical, social, and political functions that translating migration experiences can serve. I have brought these questions to four different sites of investigation: the linguistic, the cultural, the familial/communal, and the national contexts. Chapter One explored the complicated processes of self-translation that language migrants are engaged in. The study revealed that language migrants often manipulate linguistic hybridization in order to represent identity translation, educate their readers about the difficulties of “living in translation,” and promote a plurilingual approach to reading migration experiences. Chapter Two examined aspects of cultural translation and demonstrated the necessity of deconstructing the “original” and authoritative cultural models from which dominant cultural groups draw their political power. This deconstruction unveiled the coercive nature of dominant cultural scripts and emphasized the need to articulate more flexible definitions of what constitutes culture and cultural identity. Chapter Three analyzed the genre of the migrant family memoir and illustrated the complex power negotiations that the re-writing of personal, familial, communal, and national history requires. Relying on generic hybridity, family memoir writers also demonstrate the importance of learning to write and read history from multiple perspectives. Chapter Four studied the ways in which migrant writers reconstruct homes and homelands and the functions that they imagine these

reconstructions can have. This study also underlined the indispensability of questioning the articulation and functioning of patriotic discourses and the types of national identities they fashion. All four chapters revealed the extremely complicated negotiations involved in the process of linguistic, cultural, and generational translation that migrant writers engage in in order to recreate their migration experiences, interpret their past, and articulate their hyphenated identities. The notion that migrant autobiography produces forms of knowledge intended to correct homogenizing dominant discourses also runs through all chapters.

Migrant auto/biographers translate narratives of the past across linguistic, cultural, generational, and national divides. Because their texts deal with issues of language, culture, history, home/homeland, and national identity, this thesis leads me to rethink the relations between self and nation. When they are articulating their personal and familial migration experiences, migrant auto/biographers are also constructing the nation, adding to its cultural capital and affecting the identity attached to it. In *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, Smaro Kamboureli examines the various official policies and forms of knowledge that the Canadian cultural and political mainstream produces about ethnicity and the experience of immigration. Her analysis demonstrates that, when dealing with cultural and ethnic diversity, the Canadian mainstream does not attempt to challenge the classic binary division: center vs margins. She recognizes that official policies, discussions conducted in the media, and some academic textbooks contribute to legitimizing marginal cultures and discourses, but suggests that a more radical approach is necessary to address the problems that cultural and ethnic diversity create. She explains that it is

[o]nly by deconstructing both sides of the Us and Them paradigm [that we can begin] to address, and move beyond, the historical categories that have given rise to the existing paradigm in the first place. The goal [...] is not to construct a reality of comfort, but rather to view comfortable positions with suspicion; [...] not to capitalize on the currency of diversity, which would amount to fetishizing minoritarian identity, but to resist designing boundaries that would discipline diversity [...]. The goal, then, is mastery of discomfort, a mastery that would involve shuttling between centre and margin while displacing both. (130)

I would like to suggest that the processes of translation articulated in migrant autobiography constitute a useful tool in achieving the goal of “mastering discomfort.” Translation is a practice that aims at confronting linguistic, cultural, generational, and national forms of difference that generate “discomfort” and articulating ways of interpreting and composing with this difference. Because the translation process is never complete (i.e. something always gets lost in the translation, exact equivalence does not exist, etc), a dose of discomfort is always present and therefore prevents the articulation of “comfortable positions” from which to observe difference. Migrant autobiography and the linguistic and generic strategies it develops therefore constitute a crucial site for the production of a form of knowledge that can destabilize the Canadian mainstream’s discourse and generate ways of dealing with cultural and ethnic difference in Canada.

In “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” Homi Bhabha also discusses the necessity to examine the ways in which national narratives and identities are articulated and to “rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization” (162).

Apprehending difference, Bhabha suggests, is key to developing new forms of knowledge that can offer insight into and address the problems that the multicultural nation encounters. Reading Canadian migrant autobiography through the lens of translation constitutes a form of that type of knowledge. Because it constantly calls into question the assumptions underlying the formation and maintaining of various communities, the ways in which these communities interact, and the discourses they produce, this reading practice generates a counternarrative that can be read alongside the master narrative of the nation. Reading these two narratives simultaneously demands constant “shuttling between centre and margin” and helps prevent the construction of homogenizing pedagogical, social, and political discourses.

I explained, in the introduction, the personal reasons that led me to do this research and would now like to go back to the personal to conclude. Exploring the works of migrant autobiographers has enabled me to think through the opacity of my own migration experience. I find solace and encouragement in the fact that other migrants experience similar difficulties and joys, but most importantly, I draw from the experiences of others ways of dealing with my own. Approaching migrant autobiography through the lens of translation provides me with tools that enable me to read and interpret experience from different linguistic, cultural, and national perspectives. This flexibility forces me to revisit and alter the conclusions I draw constantly; living in translation prevents fixity. This unstable state is particularly useful when teaching in the contact zone. In the summer of 2004, I taught a third-year World Literature in English course at Simon Fraser University. The course, entitled “Writing Childhood across Geographical and Cultural Divides,” examined childhood narratives by Austin Clarke, Jill Ker Conway,

Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Anna Porter, Marjane Satrapi, and Fred Wah and explored how these writers deal with issues of power, hyphenated identities, cultural multiplicity, conflicting views of home, and clashing notions of national identity. I approached and organized the course with the same method I used in my thesis and was delighted to observe its productive results. The students who, for the majority, had their own migration experiences to tell, responded positively to the use of “creolised theory” and reading questions borrowed from translation studies. They felt that this approach enabled them to pay attention to their personal experiences while reading texts critically. Several of them also emphasized that they could apply this interpretative method in other disciplines. From this experience I learn that teaching in translation is a creative practice that makes possible the transmission of forms of knowledge that can be constantly tested and recontextualized in order to reflect and articulate the complexity and diversity of the migration experience.

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