



Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin

Copyright statement

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

Liability statement

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

Access Agreement

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Behind Their Eyes:

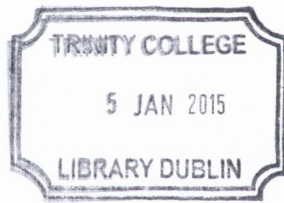
Identity in the Work of Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwock Kim

Meadhbh Hand

B.A. (Intl.), M.A.

A Thesis submitted to the School of English, University of Dublin, Trinity College, in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 2014



Thesis 10818

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the Library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

Meadhbh Hand.

Meadhbh Hand

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
List of Illustrations.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Summary.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One	
The Raw and the Cooked: Hunger and Food Pornography.....	23
Chapter Two	
Home Thoughts From Abroad: Chinatown, Asia and America.....	65
Chapter Three	
The Weight of Memory: Postmemory, Memory and History.....	97
Chapter Four	
The Divided Tongue: Languaging, Bilanguaging and Codeswitching.....	143
Chapter Five	
Generation: Family, Influence and Inheritance.....	171
Conclusion: Border Thinking, Border Crossing.....	199
Bibliography.....	205

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 "The Chasm"	131
Figure 2 Suji Kwock Kim's Signature	161
Figure 3 Li Po Epigraph.....	162
Figure 4 M.C. Escher "Drawing Hands"	182
Figure 5 <i>The Winged Seed</i> , 144.....	186
Figure 6 <i>The Winged Seed</i> , 145.....	187

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Philip Coleman, for his encouragement and support of my research.

During my third and fourth year I was fortunate to benefit from a School of English studentship, for which I am thankful. Thanks also to Prof. Stephen Matterson, Dr. Melanie Otto, Dr. Sam Slote, Dr Tom Walker and Ms. Diane Sadler for their support during my time in Trinity. Thanks to the staff of Trinity College Library. I'm deeply grateful for the support of Dermot Coonan and the staff of the Student Counselling Service.

My interest in Li-Young Lee began while I was an undergraduate in U.C.D. I am grateful to the School of English, Drama and Film for the time spent there as an undergraduate and Masters student. Special thanks are due to Dr. Nerys Williams for first introducing me to Lee's work and to Dr Ron Callan for his attentive supervision of my Masters thesis.

The four years spent in Trinity could have felt much longer were it not for the good company of a number of friends and colleagues including Triona Kirby, Megan Kuster, Alex Runchman, Eve Cobain, Keel Geheber, Ruth Doherty, Dara Downey, Dolores McLoughlin and Niall Gillespie. Thanks to Bora Im for her insights into Korean life. Thank you to Eun Jee Do for her patient, but sadly doomed efforts to teach me to speak Korean.

I am very appreciative of Gillian Groszewski's careful reading of and astute suggestions for my thesis, and for her always excellent company.

Outside Trinity's walls thanks to the friends who knew when to ask how the PhD was going, and when to ask how I was doing: Neil Doherty, Gráinne Wall, Sheila Convery,

Karen Hanratty, Louise Sliney, Linda Sweeney, Caitriona Ní Dhúill, Barry McCrea, Joanna Roberts, Amber Rockwell, Roseanne Smith, Clodagh O'Brien, Kathryn Keating, Ross Kelly, Anne Mulhall, Karen Kelly, Peter Sweeney, Larissa Nolan, Susan Miller, Eucharía Counihan and everyone at the Dublin Buddhist Centre.

Thanks to my extended and immediate family, especially to my siblings, brother- and sister-in-law, niece and nephews: Nick, Nathalie, Vivienne, Ronnie, Ronan, Aoife, Mia, Page and Jude.

Finally to my parents, Tom and Margaret, whose love and unwavering confidence in my abilities is humbling.

Summary

The introduction to this study outlines the theoretical framework for comparing the work of Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwock Kim. Using Walter Mignolo's theories about "border thinking," which he outlined in *Local Histories/Global Designs*, alongside Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a basis for approaching Kim's and Lee's work, I demonstrate how the poets may be considered as embodying the role of border thinkers. Marianne Hirsch's definition of "postmemory," is explored, and its relevance to Kim's and Lee's work established. Short biographies of both poets are outlined. A brief overview of the position of Asian American poetry within Asian American literature is also offered.

Chapter One considers the ways in which Lee and Kim use food imagery in their work. Frank Chin labels some Asian American writers as "food pornographers" who exoticise their cultural cuisine in order to get published and profit financially (Wong 55). Asian American writers face a dilemma when writing about food; they need to make accessible foodstuffs which may be unfamiliar, and even repulsive, to non-Asian readers without alienating them or exploiting their own cultural heritage. This chapter examines the way in which food creates the possibility for social interactions which may expose perceived racial or cultural differences. The impact of hunger and famine is also explored and Lee's and Kim's portrayals of them within their work are assessed.

Chapter Two examines the importance of place for the poets and the impact that the experience of displacement has had on their work. It takes into account the significance of Chinatown in both the Asian American, and non-Asian American imagination. Chinatown is often a site of intersection for mainstream American culture and more ghettoized Asian culture but it can be where the Asian American visitors feel

their loss of place most keenly. The significance of the poets' parents' countries of birth in their imaginations, and thus their work, is explored. Kim's visits to Korea, Lee's trips to China and Indonesia, and both poets' reflections on Chinatown are discussed.

Chapter Three assesses the impact of postmemory, memory and history on the poets' work. Lee's and Kim's families were displaced to the United States due to war and political unrest in their countries of birth. In trying to deal with these events the poets share characteristics of what Marianne Hirsch has termed "postmemory." Kim's use of historical events as the subject matter for poetry, and her attempts to make the historical personal, are discussed. Lee's attempts to create a mythic testimony to his family in his poetry and his memoir, *The Winged Seed*, is examined.

Chapter Four explores the influence that loss of language has had on the writers' work. The importance of language in both poets' work assessed. Kim's selective use of Korean phrases within her work is debated. Lee's theories about language as hindrance to, as well as vehicle for communication is examined. His depictions of silence within his work is explored. Being a "guest in language," as Lee puts it (Zhou 131), can give the poets greater creative license to use English in new and innovative ways.

Chapter Five assesses the importance of family within Asian and Asian American culture, and within both poets' work. Lee's relationship with his father, and his struggle to assert his own identity is discussed. Kim's poems exploring motherhood are examined. Both poets' use of allusion to non-Asian literary figures to create a literary lineage is considered.

Finally, the conclusion affirms the ways in which Lee and Kim are adept as border thinkers and border crossers, and suggests possible future avenues of research.

Introduction

It is something of an accepted cliché of Asian American literary criticism to begin by lamenting the lack of attention paid to Asian American literature in general, and to Asian American poetry in particular. While Asian American literature is beginning to receive the consideration it merits, Asian American poetry still lags behind in terms of critical attention. Asian American fiction has attracted more literary criticism in recent years, with the work of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan subject to books of critical essays on their work. However, Adrienne McCormick noted, “[n]o book-length study of any single contemporary poet or group of these poets exists” (63). Even texts which purport to promote Asian American literature often overlook poetry. One example of this is in the edited collection of essays entitled *Asian American Literary Studies*, the introduction of which boasts of the breadth of subjects covered within its covers: “ten chapters that explore fictions, autobiographies, sociological issues, films, drama, performance, dialects, politics, and history” but, significantly, no poetry (Huang 10).

Part of the reason for this may be due to the way in which Asian American studies has come to be defined as perpetually in a state of flux. Eric Hayot claims that the field of Asian American studies “has come to think of itself [...] as a crisis, a catachresis” (908). Other critics have noted that Asian American literature, unlike other literary fields, must continually revise its parameters as new groups of immigrants arrive; it is always “about-to-be” (Koshy 315). However, this does not fully explain why poetry is neglected more than fiction or memoir. In spite of several anthologies of Asian American poetry, study of it is still largely confined to specialised Ethnic Studies journals or to ethnic-themed issues of literary studies journals such as

MELUS or special themed issues of *PMLA*. A consideration of the reasons for this lack of critical attention would include examining the position of Asian Americans within American society today, and also of the place of poetry within literature. Although this is beyond the scope of my study the lack of focus on Asian American poetry in spite of its importance within Asian American, and American, literature offers a background as to why I believe this research is important. Because of the limited critical attention paid to Asian American poetry this study will focus almost entirely on poetry.

For my research I have chosen to compare on the poetry of Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwok Kim. I believe comparisons can be made between their work because it is created at the intersection of borderlands, border thinking and postmemory, terms which will be explained in greater detail after brief biographies of both poets. Li-Young Lee was born in Indonesia to Chinese parents in 1957. Lee's father was the son of gangster, according to Lee, and his mother was the granddaughter of the first republican President of China. His mother's choice of husband horrified her family. For a time Lee's father was Mao Tse-Tung's physician, before the family fled to Indonesia.

Lee's father was imprisoned by Sukarno as a political prisoner when Lee was a small child, accused of being a Western spy because of his contacts with Western academics. While in jail he was tortured and it was during his imprisonment that he converted to Christianity. The family escaped and lived in several Asian countries where his father preached to large gatherings. They moved to America when Lee was about seven years old. His father became a Presbyterian Minister and the family settled in East Vandergrift, a socially deprived coal-mining town in rural Pennsylvania.

One of Lee's brothers remained in China with his maternal grandparents and another brother died in infancy while the family lived in Indonesia, losses he explores within his work. He has published four collections of poetry, *Rose* (1986), *The City in Which I Love You* (1990), *Book of My Nights* (2001) and *Behind My Eyes* (2008). His prose poetry memoir, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, was published in 1995. Lee's work has won a number of awards including the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Award (for *Rose*), William Carlos Williams Award (for *Book of My Nights*), as well as Fellowship of the Academy of American Poets.

Lee's poetry collections can be seen as an ongoing attempt to understand the past and to deal with its effects on his present life in America. *Rose*, can be read as an elegiac work to his father's memory with almost every poem in the collection featuring a father figure. Many of the collection's poems explore the condition of being a migrant and the struggle to understand the events which led to migration. *The City in Which I Love You* continues the exploration of displacement. This second collection places more emphasis on the figure within the poems as a father and husband, rather than as a son in the first collection. Lee's third collection *Book of My Nights* can be seen in similar terms to his first collection, as a memorial to his two lost brothers. The poems of this collection are meditative, influenced by dreams and sleeplessness. *Behind My Eyes* again engages with displacement and childhood memories as well as exploring temporality and language. Some of the poems in this most recent collection show Lee engaging with being seen as a public representation of diaspora. Lee's memoir, *The Winged Seed*, recalls episodes from his early childhood in Indonesia and his family's life in Pennsylvania. Like *Rose* it is reflective of his grief for his late father.

Suji Kwock Kim was born in New Jersey in 1969 to Korean parents. Her parents were advised by her kindergarten teacher to speak to her only in English in order to aid her language acquisition and assimilation into preschool. She studied Korean while at Yale and attended university in Seoul as a Fulbright scholar in order to continue her language studies, and to explore her family history. Kim's only poetry collection thus far, *Notes from the Divided Country*, was awarded the Walt Whitman Award in 2002 and was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize 2004. Her poem "Sonogram Song" won the Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize in 2012. She is the co-author of the play *Private Property* (1998) which was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Her poems have been adapted to choral settings and translated into a number of different languages, including Korean.

Although Kim has not published as extensively as Lee her work has been recognised as representing an important new voice in Asian American poetry. A new collection, *Disorient*, was due for publication in 2012, according to Kim (Sheridan). However, it has not yet materialised and attempts to contact Kim to confirm a publication date were unsuccessful. The new collection plans to include poems about the aftermath of the Korean War. Kim visited North Korea in 2007 and some of the planned collection is a response to this visit. The new collection will also include love poems, and poems about "landscape and nature, [...] intertwined with the fates of my family, the seasons, and the landscape" (Sheridan). Although disappointed that the collection was not published in time to be included in my research, I believe that the work Kim has published thus far allows sufficient scope for discussion in the context of this study.

Kim's collection is arranged in four parts. The first section is composed of five poems connected with maternity, as well as linking the speaker/poet to Korea. Section two traces Korea's history from Japanese occupation, to wartime events and post-war recovery. The historic events are linked to Kim's family members. The third and fourth sections have less unified subject matters. Both sections contain poems linked to specific locations, "The Road to Skye" and "Leaving Chinatown" in section three and "The Korean Community Garden in Queens" in the fourth section. The final section also contains two ekphrastic poems, "Between the Wars" and "The Robemaker". If there is a unifying theme in the last two sections it is that they are poems which are less directly linked to Korea and to family than the opening two sections of the collection.

There is an important distinction in Kim's and Lee's life experiences in that Kim was born in America to newly arrived immigrant parents, while Lee was born in Indonesia to Chinese parents. Lee writes with some memory of his family's life prior to arriving in America. He recalls actively trying to adapt to American life, learning to speak the language, and dealing with cultural differences and prejudice in school and the wider community. Kim's experience was different, with the choice about language being denied to her as a child when her parents followed the advice of her teacher. However, in common with many Asian Americans both face stereotyping based on their race. The differing circumstances of Lee's and Kim's early lives will allow for meaningful comparisons between their work. Lee's and Kim's gender differences will also add to the points of comparison between the two poets' work. Kim's poems explore themes around mother-daughter relationships (in common with many other Asian American female writers), whereas Lee's poems' focus tends to be on father-son

relationships. Kim explores the experience of motherhood in her more recent work, while Lee's work reflects on his role as a father and husband, challenging traditional ideas about masculinity in the process.

Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwock Kim can be considered to be of the same generation, born just 12 years apart. The promotion of Asian American literature began in the 1960s and early 1970s so Kim and Lee can be seen as among the first generation to grow up with access to this literature. Although Asian American literature may have been produced since Chinese immigrants began arriving in large numbers in the 1800s, it only began to be published widely and recognised as a discipline with the advent of Ethnic Studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first anthology of Asian American literature was published in 1974. *AlIIIEEEE!!! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, was edited by Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong. In its polemical introduction the editors explain that its title is the noise that "the yellow man" makes when wounded in American films and on television (xi). "Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his AlIIIEEEEE!!!" (xi). The publication coincided with the development of ethnic studies departments in universities and was as much a political act as a literary one. Another anthology was published the same year, *Asian American Heritage: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, but lacking the polemic overtones of Chin's anthology it does not seem to have had the same impact. However, both collections can be seen as having: "set the stage for the first-generation Asian American poets and those that followed" (V. M. Chang xv). More anthologies were published, including *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American*

American literature (8). “Fake” Asian American literature, according to Chin, shows Christianity as the answer to some of the perceived inferiorities of Chinese culture. It depicts Chinese men as weak, sexist and brutish. Chin argues that “the only form of literature written by Chinese Americans that major publishers will publish (other than the cookbook) is autobiography, an exclusively Christian form” (8). Chin also posits that such authors “write to the specifications of the Christian stereotype of Asia being as opposite morally from the West as it is geographically” (8). Although critics such as King-Kok Cheung have denounced Chin’s argument as a sexist reaction to the success of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, nonetheless its importance within Asian American literature cannot be understated. The public appetite for Asian American memoirs may also explain why Li-Young Lee, the son of a Presbyterian Minister, was commissioned to write what he terms “A Remembrance,” *The Winged Seed*.

Literary critics have long observed the ways in which many American poets adopted an Asian aesthetic within their work. The influence of Asia on the imaginations of American poets, from Ernest Fenellosa, to Ezra Pound and later the Beats, has been studied. The wider artistic community has also been influenced by interpretations of Asian aesthetics, as was demonstrated by a 2009 exhibition in the Guggenheim gallery “The Third Mind: American Artists contemplate Asia.” The organiser of the exhibition declared that “[t]he use of Asian art and thought to inspire new forms of artistic expression is one of the greatest forces in modern and contemporary art in America. It is also the least appreciated” (Munroe 21). While the Asian inspiration behind art might not have been fully appreciated, as Munroe claims, the influence on literature has been subjected to repeated examination.

These connections between Asia and America, “literary bridges” and “cultural bridges” as Josephine Nock-Hee Park terms them, are more usually discussed from the perspective of American artists looking East to borrow from Asian traditions (3, 95). However, as Park argues, and I will show, Asian American poets also make use of these bridges. Alluding to both American and Asian influences in their work, allows Asian American writers to resist and subvert Orientalism, as well as creating distinct Asian American poetics. Park notes that:

The kinds of coalitions they made were crucially shaped by an American Orientalist past, and nowhere was this pressure more evident than in their poetry. Asian American poets face a uniquely perplexing legacy: they were heirs to an avant-garde shot through with Orientalism. Though they could and did forcibly decry fantasies of the Orient, their avant-garde poetics were themselves a part of an American revolutionary lineage. (95)

While Kim and Lee’s work is less radically avant-garde than other Asian American poets such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Myung Mi Kim, they also make use of a similar network of connections to other writers and influences. Park’s and Jonathan Stalling’s studies show the particular bind placed on Asian American poets who choose to resist using ostensibly Asian influences, instead drawing on American or transnational sources within their work.

Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn argues that “[l]iterature in general is transnational and comparative, and authors collaborate and influence each other. Asian American literature in particular crosses national borders and Asian American subjects are influenced by entry, expulsion and movement” (9). Asian American literature is frequently studied as reflecting movement across borders, with the writers who

produce it seen as being in a “continuous narrative of Asian American entry, re-entry, expulsion, remigration, and movement across and between borders [...] partly captured in the phrase ‘flexible citizenship’” (Lim et al 1).

It could be argued that the most effective way for Asian American poets to resist the accusation of Orientalism is to use multiple allusions to transnational sources, to create what Romana Huk would call a “new global poetics” (759). Expressing anxiety about the ways in which new categorisations of poetry are emerging, which move away from nationalised literature Huk questions why critics appear to wish:

[t]o move from terms like, say, “cross-cultural” (or even “transnational”), that retain at least some traces of writing’s sitedness and specific, historied movements over borders, to words like all-engulfing “Americas” or “world” or “global” poetics that permit not intra-national, national, or discreet group identifications or projects aside from the largest, impossible ones? What gets elided in these constructions of negative totality (we are all women/men without countries and that is our “new collective”)? (770)

I do not wish to disconnect Lee or Kim from either their Asian or American influences or to ignore the importance of nation on their work by drawing attention to their transnational influences. Rather I acknowledge that their use of these sources is a way of connecting to a wider community of poets. Like Huk, I hope my study recognises the “sitedness” and “historied” nature of Lee’s and Kim’s, work as well as the movements their works make through networks of allusion.

By using transnational sources and allusions the poets hope to attempt to escape “culture-of-birth determinism” (Ramazani 35). Ramazani observes that “cross-

cultural dynamics are arguably among the engines of modern and contemporary poetic development and innovation” (3). Lee’s and Kim’s work can be understood in Ramazani’s terms as creating poetry which operates “as a language that can mediate seemingly irresolvable contradictions between the local and global, native and foreign” (6). Their repeated use of transnational sources in their work offers them a way to try to escape the narrowly defined expectations of some readers.

Concerns of exploiting a public bias in favour of Orientalist literature may colour the ways in which Asian American writers use allusions to their cultural heritage. Asian American literary works can be seen as a direct response to and engagement with the problem of Orientalism and: “poets of the Asian American movement were emphatically anti-Orientalist” (Park 19, 95). Kim and Lee’s work is no exception to this. Their work situates them as resisting Orientalist labels while simultaneously celebrating their transpacific connections. To this end, both poets allude to canonical literary figures within their work. Kim’s work can be seen as nationalistic – celebrating both America and Korea. Lee seeks a more global, shared human experience, and his work often portrays the hostility experienced by displaced people.

Writers of Asian American prose face the same pressures to either conform to or resist Orientalist expectations as poets do. Jeffrey F. L. Partridge describes Chinese American writers as being placed in a “literary Chinatown:”

an imagined community, not in Benedict Anderson’s sense, but in Edward Said’s Orientalist sense: it is a community imagined by others—for their own purposes and their own pleasures. All ethnic American writers must write either with or against the grain of a ghettoizing principle, but for the Chinese

American writer this ghetto has a distinctly exotic flavour that sells well if entertained and embellished, but sell poorly if contradicted. For the Chinese American writer who wishes to move beyond the horizon of literary Chinatown, the expectations of readers and publishers are a distinct hindrance. (2007, ix)

While restricting his focus to Chinese American literature, Partridge's conclusions could be applied to the wider field of Asian American literature. Focussing on the expectations of readers and publishers, he notes that:

[d]ue to the oft-repeated themes of immigration and assimilation, Chinese American literature can fall into the category of family-assimilation saga, a kind of Chinese American *Bildungsroman*, which suggests the recording of family history and with it the development of personal (most prominently, female) and communal identity. (2007, 42)

While it may be more obvious to see how this may apply to Asian American prose by authors such as Gish Jen, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, elements of it can also be applied to Asian American poetry. Both Lee's and Kim's work explores their families' histories, and aspects of immigration and assimilation, and the way in which their work is presented to the public is often coloured by the expectations Partridge outlines.

The subjects of the chapters can be thought of as border or borderland moments within the lives of the poets where Asian, American and transnational aspects of their identities are manifested within their work. Anzaldúa defines borderlands as "whenever two or more cultures edge each other" (19). As Asian Americans, Lee and Kim can be thought of as inhabiting these borderlands. Anzaldúa explains that borders:

are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (25; emphasis in original).

As poets, Kim and Lee navigate these borderlands, using the uncertainty and ambiguity as a source of inspiration. For Lee and Kim, traversing these borders becomes a place in which “something begins its presencing” within their work, where their “border thinking” is enunciated (Bhabha 5; Mignolo). Mignolo describes “border thinking” as “more than hybrid enunciation. It is a fractured enunciation in dialogic situations ... it offers new critical horizons to the limitations of critical discourses within hegemonic cosmologies” (x). He further explains that:

the key configuration of border thinking: *thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies*. Border thinking, in other words, is, logically, a dichotomous locus of enunciation and, historically, is located at the borders (interiors or exteriors) of the modern/colonial world system (85; emphasis in original).

Kim’s and Lee’s situation as Asian diasporic poets places them in these borderland positions, speaking from the position of Asian Americans who are frequently seen as being unable to be American enough.

The position of Asians within America has been described as “[p]erceived by whites as perpetual house guests at best and invading vermin at worst” (Wong 43). In part due to America’s historic wars with Asian countries, Asian Americans have been perceived as being un-American, and have often been the subject of scrutiny in a way

other immigrants were not, as a kind of enemy within. To be viewed in this way, becoming the “local personification of a war ten thousand miles away,” (Zia 14) has implications for Asian Americans regardless of whether the war being waged is in the country of their birth or in another country in Asia. While other immigrants could sometimes evade their ethnic origins by changing their names and passing for another nationality, this option was not possible for Asian Americans, beyond displaying signs and badges during World War II stating “I am not Japanese.” As both citizens and guests, settled and diaspora, Asian and American, “neither black nor white” (Takaki) these poets can be thought of as occupying the kind of dichotomous position that Mignolo outlines. Their work, even when it professes not to be about the position of Asian Americans or diasporic people is still perceived in this way.

Mignolo’s theory of border thinking is informed by both Anzaldúa’s ideas about borderlands and W.E.B. Du Bois’s idea of “double consciousness” (Mignolo 84). Both Kim and Lee live and write with an awareness of race and as diaspora they embody these positions within their work. In addition to occupying these border thinking positions both poets choose subject matter for their poems which allows them to explore border positions. Lee publicly declares a desire to be thought of as a poet, rather than labelled “Asian American poet,” yet his work frequently returns to examine the diasporic condition in spite of his public disavowals. Shirley Geok-lin Lim observes that Asian American works of literature, especially works which win national literary prizes: “should be read not simply as Asian American cultural production but also as an American production ‘authorized’ by a mainstream non-Asian American readership mediating between that different ethnic identity and itself” (in Partridge, 2007, 48). Since its first publication Lee’s work has been framed by his ethnicity, as

can be seen from the foreword to his first (award winning) poetry collection, *Rose*. In his foreword Gerald Stern links Lee's talent to:

a pursuit of certain Chinese ideas, or Chinese memories, without any self-conscious ethnocentricity [...] Maybe Lee – as a poet – is lucky to have had the father he had and the culture he had. Maybe they combine in such a way as to make his own poetry possible. Even unique (9).

Although Stern's foreword also compares Lee's work to non-Chinese influences such as William Carlos Williams, Rainer Maria Rilke, and T.S. Eliot, Lee's ethnicity is an inescapable factor in the presentation and the reception of his work.

His most recent poetry collection, *Behind My Eyes*, most openly engages with issues of diaspora as can be discerned from the poem titles alone "Self Help for Fellow Refugees," and "Immigrant Blues" as well as within other poems whose titles may be less evocative but whose subject matter undoubtedly shares these concerns. Lee professes to linking homelessness to Christianity and the expulsion from Eden, perhaps as a way of disavowing the need to explore these issues in his work. By making these diasporic issues more generally a part of the human condition Lee seeks to avoid being labelled as "Asian American." However, in addition to Christian influences, his poetry also reflects a Buddhist Confucian sensibility, and he has acknowledged the importance of the *Vedas* as an influence on his work, along with poetry from the Western canon and the classical Chinese poems his parents recited.

Kim appears less concerned with aligning the concerns of diaspora with a broader common humanity than Lee does. Her work visits other Asian heritage, influences and subject matter, rather than focussing solely on Korean American experiences. In so doing she disrupts the tendency of previous generations of Asian

Americans whose survival often depended on distinguishing themselves as originating from one particular Asian country rather than another. Although Lee's work to some extent recognises the affinity between differing Asian American diaspora he is careful to link their experiences to a wider diasporic and human experience, rather than a uniquely Asian one.

In addition to writing as border thinkers, both poets also write from the perspective of "postmemory." Hirsch describes postmemory as a kind of memory which: "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (Hirsch 22). Both poets' experiences as diasporic poets whose families fled Asia due to violence and conflict, can be seen in this way. Lee's work frequently explores the identity confusion between a father and son, leading him to ask: "Is this my father's life or mine?" (*Rose* 52). He seeks to understand his father's experiences in order to assert an independent identity. In this way his work fits in with the work of other postmemory writers.

Postmemory is most often applied to children of survivors of the Holocaust, however: "it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" (22). This description can be applied to Lee and Kim, both of whom grew up with some awareness of their families' stories of survival and traumatic events which happened in early childhood or before their birth. Kim attempts to reclaim her family history within her work and Lee seeks to understand his father's experiences and come to terms with their impact on his identity within his work. Just as the two poets' work is often framed ethnically, it is

also presented as a reflection of their families' histories. Lee has spoken of his desire to create a testament to the story of his family's migration through Asia to America, and his prose poetry memoir *The Winged Seed* is an attempt to do this. Kim's work also seeks to recover a family history lost with the division of Korea.

Hirsch distinguishes the difference between memory which is directly experienced, and postmemory, which is can be considered an indirect form of memory: "[p]ostmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch 22). The gap between direct experience and imaginative reconstruction of history can be seen in both Lee's and Kim's poetry. Many of Lee's poems, and especially his memoir, come from an attempt to try to explain and understand his father's personality. He stops short of imagining his father's actual experiences of torture, instead dealing with the aftermath, his poetry and memoir resonate with the characteristics of postmemory as outlined by Hirsch. Applying this term to Lee's portrayals of memory seems appropriate, therefore. Lee's father's imprisonment occurred when Lee was too young to understand fully the circumstances. Through some of his work he attempts to come to terms with his father's formidable personality and past experiences, and to fill in the blanks left by his father's absence. Lee tries to put himself in his father's place in some of his work, seeking an answer to the question: "I wonder what it would have been like" (Williams quoted in Yukins 224). However simply by: "having to ask this question and supply an imagined response, alienation from—and perhaps betrayal of—the founding trauma is made evident" (Yukins 224). In addition to sensitivities about asking his father directly about his experiences for fear of upsetting him, Lee

also acknowledges that his cultural conditioning to honour his father and mother prevented him from questioning either parent.

The term postmemory can also be applied to aspects of Kim's work. Kim could only have heard about experiences which led her parents to migrate to America long after they occurred. Because of the partition of Korea her family lost contact with a large part of their extended family.¹ Much of her work explores her family's history which she strives to recreate based on stories she has been told, or has imagined. Like Lee's work, Kim's also seeks an answer to "what it would have been like" to have endured the same experiences as her extended Korean family. While Lee embraces a form of testimonial mythmaking in relation to his family history, Kim's poems seek to shock the reader. Her work is more cinematic and visual, and at times borders on grotesque. She highlights the artifice of her explorations of Korean wartime experience through her use of epigraphs and the historical notes she provides with her poetry.

Borderlands can be seen as places of fertility and abundance, as well as disputed territory. The Demilitarized Zone in Korea (DMZ) represents the embodiment of this model. Plants and animals which might otherwise be seen as pests are able to flourish, without competing with humans for space to survive. However, the fertile nature reserve is made possible precisely because of the tensions around the geographical border. The DMZ is both a site of natural abundance, and of potential destruction with armed forces monitoring each other across the contested space. Lee's and Kim's work can be viewed in similar terms, as a place where their position allows them to cross-fertilize from different transnational sources and

¹ I use the term "North Korea" to refer to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and "South Korea" to refer to the Republic of Korea.

allusions. However, like the DMZ, their work becomes a site of tension, with the outside observers, readers and publishers, reading their work for signs of either a confirmation or rejection of their ethnicity, while the poets themselves may seek to produce work which transcends race and escape these categorisations. The contested area of the DMZ is similarly held hostage to the past, just as the past inflects Kim's and Lee's work through the effects of postmemory. Anzaldúa's borderlands allowed her to create a new space where two cultures merge to form a new consciousness, and Kim and Lee also use the position to create something different.

Being part of a postmemory generation can place the writer in a similar position to the border thinker. Being between one generation which directly experienced traumas and displacement, and the next generation which lives a more stable life places the poets in a "dichotomous" position in which they speak from the position of "border thinkers." The poets' attempt to honour the experiences of the preceding generations without allowing it to overshadow their new lives in America. Added to this is the complicated history of violence and torture which this middle generation wish to acknowledge and honour in order to avoid becoming consumed and obsessed by it. Their efforts to honour and understand these violent events from the perspective of a relatively comfortable and secure life in America place them in a strange borderland – between generations, between a violent past and more promising future, between continents, between mainstream American and Asian cultures. The ways in which the poets operate in these borderlands can be seen in the themes which typify their work: food, location, memory, language, and family. Through exploration of the different topics about which these poets write I hope to examine aspects of Asian American literature, identity and culture. The places within

their work where these borderlands exist form the basis for the thematic chapters of this book. The position which Kim and Lee occupy, the intersection between borderlands, border thinking and postmemory, makes a comparison of their work appropriate. In addition to their differences in gender, their differing early experiences mean that they have interesting counterpoints within their poetry.

The five subjects which comprise the chapters of this dissertation offer ways in which identity is elucidated and negotiated. The first chapter explores Lee's and Kim's use of imagery of food within their work. Food can be seen as one of our earliest experiences of cultural identity. It may also be one of the most accessible ways for outsiders to experience Asian culture. However, for Asian American poets writing about food can be problematic. Frank Chin used the term "food pornographers" to describe Asian American writers who he felt exploited the perceived exoticness of their cultural cuisine in order to offer publishers palatable work with commercial appeal (Wong 55). Food can be a site where power is exercised, either through the ability to adapt available ingredients into appetising meals, or by withholding food from others. Both poets' families' experiences of hunger are also explored. The places in which food is served, bought and sold can become sites of intersection where identity can be expressed.

A desire to sample Chinese food helped to make early Chinatowns into tourist sites for American visitors. Chapter Two assesses the importance of place within Lee's and Kim's work, through their portrayals of Chinatown, Asia and America. As children of displaced families, the poets' relationships with America and Asia are important themes within their work. Lee believes that feelings of homelessness are part of the human condition, expressing doubts that he will ever feel at home anywhere. While

Kim seems less concerned with feelings of homelessness than Lee, she feels compelled to visit and write about Korea. However, for the poets their visits to Asia, and their creative responses seem to affirm their place within America.

Kim's and Lee's trips to Asia were partially motivated by the need to come to terms with, and explore, the memories that had been passed on to them of their families' histories. The subjects of postmemory, memory and history form the basis for the third chapter. The effects of trauma on Lee are evident within his memoir and some of his poetry, which expresses a need to keep revisiting past memories along with a reluctance to do so. Kim's portrayals of historic events in Korea attempt to personalise the experiences of war, but also highlight the artifice of her creativity. Both poets' work appears haunted by the traumatic experiences of previous generations and the losses their families endured.

One form of ongoing loss is the inability to speak the language of their parents. As poets raised in an English-speaking country, by parents whose first language was not English, both poets have a special understanding of the significance of language. The ways in which Lee and Kim utilise their different relationships to language are explored in Chapter Four. While Lee retains the ability to speak Chinese, he realises that with the passage of time he has fewer people with whom to speak it. Kim's decision to learn Korean as an adult contributes to her selective use of Korean phrases within her work. Lee's beliefs about the limitations of language as a form of communication colours his work, which seeks to depict silence as well as speech.

The final chapter concerns family - a theme which could be seen as underpinning all other themes within this dissertation. Family has a particularly important role within Asian, and therefore Asian American, culture. As well as

discussing how family relationships are portrayed in both poets' work, this chapter shows the ways in which Lee and Kim seek to create a literary lineage through their allusion to, sometimes direct quotation of, poets from Asian, and especially non-Asian literature. Lee's desire to assert an identity independent of his domineering father, and to be thought of as a poet, rather than "Asian American poet" means he seeks alternative literary father figures.

The title for my dissertation was suggested by Lee's latest poetry collection, *Behind My Eyes*. I chose this title because of the way in which it captures the ideas of ways of seeing the world, of being seen by others, and of eyes as racial markers. It also suggests the Emersonian idea of becoming a "transparent eyeball" (R. W. Emerson 26). Both poets allude to Emerson within their work, so it seems fitting to allude to him in the title to this study. In doing so I remind the reader that behind Lee's and Kim's "I's" there is a literary lineage from America as well as Asia.

Chapter One

The Raw and the Cooked: Hunger and Food Pornography

Perhaps it was easier for me, an immigrant poet—from [...] the “first generation”—to ground my work in an old-fashioned minority discourse, fraught with the themes of racism, sexism, assimilation, and postcolonialism. I colored my poems with mega-Chinese-food tropes and deconstructed my cleaver-wielding grandmother with bliss. (Marilyn Chin in V. M. Chang xiii)

Living in hunger for a stretch of time, with no assurance to the end of that condition, does something peculiar to the imagination (Lim 301).

Asian American literature is packed with images of food. Little wonder, given the important role Asians have played in feeding America. From farm labourers, fishermen, cannery workers, to restaurant workers – almost all aspects of eating in America rely on Asian or Asian American labour and have done so since the first Asian immigrants arrived there (Xu 12). Asian Americans’ labour in food production began largely as a matter of necessity rather than choice. As one critic puts it, almost since their first arrival in America Asians realised that “the fastest way to a racist’s heart might be through his stomach”(Wong 56). Food is an obvious site for exercising power, the ability to control the distribution of food and the means to produce it are vital to the survival of any group, but perhaps particularly so for minority groups. Paradoxically, refusing to eat can be a way of exerting control and power when all

other means are closed off. Using food imagery may have a particular appeal for poets as there are links between food, taste and poetry. The tongue is an organ of both taste and speech, and while the poets may no longer speak the language of their countries of birth they can continue to enjoy the food.

Although writing about food is not unique to Asian American literature, it does pose particular challenges for Asian American writers. When using food as a metaphor, or describing a family recipe, Asian American writers risk being accused of becoming “food pornographers,” who deliberately exoticize family recipes to appeal to non-Asian readers and therefore sell more of their work (Frank Chin in Wong 55). The writer must decide in how much detail to explain or describe the food for a non-Asian reader who may be unfamiliar with, and perhaps even repulsed by, the food in question. In some cases, such as Li-Young Lee’s delight in eating fish eyes and duck brains, the description of food may be deliberately provocative, intending to cause disgust, however doing so risks pandering to racist stereotypes of cultural difference. Others describe the food in mouth-watering detail, almost in the style of a recipe book, but do so at the risk of creating “food pornography.”

Asian American poets who use food imagery in their work include Linh Dinh, Cathy Song and Mong-Lan. Mong-Lan’s *Love Poem to Tofu & Other Poems* is an unapologetic celebration of food and other appetites. Her erotic poems anthropomorphize food, and explore it as a mobile way of affirming ethnic identity. She links her poetry to a nineteenth century Vietnamese poet, Ho Xuan Huong, whose poems about food were laden with double-meanings and sexual innuendo; in doing so Mong-Lan challenges stereotyping about Asian women as sexually submissive and links her work to an older poetic tradition. Mong-Lan shows how food can transmit

memories, and how the experience of eating the same food can be altered by eating it in different locations. In contrast to Mong-Lan's appetising descriptions of Vietnamese food, Linh Dinh is unafraid to play with racist stereotyping of Asian consumption of what to some would be considered not only unappetising, but also taboo. In "Earth Café," he playfully explores the taboo of eating dog meat, in a stanza which considers substitution of one kind of meat for another. "A Pekinese is ideal, will feed six, / but an unscrupulous butcher / will fudge a German shepherd, / chopping it up to look like a Pekinese" (27). The stanza also plays with the idea of another food taboo, that of cannibalism, revelling in the discomfort which this is likely to provoke in the reader. Filipina American writer Jessica Hagedorn also uses racist assumptions about Asians in choosing the provocative title, *Dogeaters*, for her 1990 novel. Food as a marker of identity has been used in the fiction by diasporic Asian authors such as Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri and Maxine Hong Kingston. Food can be a way of retaining a connection to a culture or country left behind, and knowledge of how to cook can be a material asset easily transported from one side of the world to the other. Writing about a successful Vietnamese-owned restaurant chain in the United States, V. H. Pham notes the financial value of recipes observing that "lack of material possessions as poor refugees further underscored the value of the recipes stored in Helene's [the restaurant founder's] memories, as they made her restaurant successful"(24). Whatever way they choose to write about food, "[i]f there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food" (Eagleton 25). Foodways, the way in which food is produced, cooked and consumed, can be a marker of cultural difference, but talking about food can be a way of making that culture accessible to outsiders – after all, everyone has to eat. Food can be thought of as a borderland because

although eating is a universal human activity the differing ways of cooking and consuming food can distinguish between “us” and “them,” insider and outsider. By creating opportunities for social interaction, through trips to grocery stores, restaurants or shared meals, food plays a significant role in bringing different ethnic groups in contact with each other. Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwock Kim explore these interactions in their work.

Xu notes the importance food plays in identity formation, stating “[e]very manipulation of the edible is a civilizing act that shows who we are, what values we uphold, how we interact with one another, and why we do food differently from others” (3). To further extend this observation, every manipulation of the edible into a written work shows who the poets are, how they see themselves and how they wish to be seen. Both use influences, one could say ingredients, from their Asian backgrounds. However, alongside these Asian influences are other inspirations. Lee’s work has biblical allusions as well as being influenced by the work of T. S. Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Suji Kwock Kim places direct quotations from other sources within her work, and cites those sources in notes included with her poems. By including transnational influences in their work, they may hope to avoid being subjected to “culture-of-birth determinism,” which would see their work only in terms of their ethnic origin (Ramazani 36). For Lee, alluding to other poets’ work is a way of affirming his own place as a poet, and assuming a cultural inheritance. Both Lee and Kim borrow from and allude to other writers within their work. However, they do so with different intentions. For Lee, it is a way of acknowledging his literary influences and seeking to assert his right to be considered alongside them. Kim lays bare many of the sources by including them in notes, instead of relying on the reader’s

knowledge of literature to fill in the blanks. Her use of diverse sources follows the Korean tradition of *P'ansori* which incorporates differing idioms into song.

As well as being inspired by the pleasure of eating, these writers also acknowledge the reality of hunger in their work. Lee's memoir, *The Winged Seed*, portrays periods of hunger experienced by his family or those around them. Kim reflects on the wartime and more recent famines endured by her father and extended family in Korea. The experiences of their parents and their extended families left behind in Asia, also colours their writing, through the effects of postmemory. Both poets appear to have heard stories, or imagined the experiences, of family members who have been denied food. Lee and Kim attempt to pay tribute to these experiences in their poetry.

This chapter will examine the ways in which each poet uses food imagery in their work, and how these poems can demonstrate that Lee and Kim are border thinkers. Beginning with an assessment of Lee's use of food in his work, I will then turn to Suji Kwock Kim. The second section of the chapter will explore imagery of hunger and lack of food or appetite in both poets' work. Marilyn Chin's quote suggests that the way in which Asian American poets use food tropes has changed from the "mega-Chinese food tropes" and "cleaver-wielding grandmother" when she began to write. Today's Asian American poets may be more cautious about embracing this kind of imagery, and their use of food imagery may be more sophisticated. However, like earlier Asian American poets food imagery continues to play a significant role in their work.

Many of Lee's poems use food as a subject for exploring human relationships, mortality and identity. His poems and memoir show how food can be used as a way in

which to exert or confirm power. Withholding food can be used to punish and control others, and Lee shows how his abusive grandfather manipulated his family in this way. In a related but contrasting way, he shows that giving the best portions to one person can confirm their status within the family or community. As well as an expression of power, Lee's work shows how food can be used to express love and belonging to a particular ethnic group. Eating as a group can strengthen relationships but can also highlight the loss of members of that group. An ability to eat, and relish, food which to other consumers might be repulsive confirms both cultural knowledge and a will to survive in difficult circumstances (Wong 25). The importance that is placed on being able to provide a meal for others is shown by Lee in recalling how his mother's cooking pot was one of the few belongings that survived the circuitous journey to America. Both Lee and Kim show the interactive aspect of buying, preparing and eating and how these interactions can lead to reflections on family relationships, identity and both personal and wider historic events.

"Persimmons" could be considered Lee's best known poem and has been widely anthologised. In the poem the central image of the fruit "becomes the locus from which he articulates an immigrant's analysis of his own experience between two cultures and his critique of the intolerance of the mainstream culture"(Xu 114). Using this image, Lee explores family relationships and reflects on the passing on of culture between generations. The poem reveals the speaker's dichotomous position as it exposes the experience of being an outsider in mainstream culture. Lee's speaker's inability to speak English without confusion places him as an outsider, however his insider knowledge about "Chinese apples," which he withholds from his classmates, means he is not entirely without power in the classroom. Persimmons become the

trigger for a memory of the difficulty he experienced as a child in distinguishing between certain similar-sounding English words, and the punishment inflicted by his unsympathetic teacher. His confusion between the words “persimmon” and “precision” is shown to be logical as he explains the precision required to select, peel and eat the fruit. The other words which confuse him are also shown to have an understandable rationale to his confusion, “*fight and fright, wren and yarn*” when he explains: “Fight was what I did when I was frightened, / fright was what I felt when I was fighting” (Rose 17). He reveals that his mother made birds out of yarn, leading to his confusion between “*wren and yarn.*” “Yarn” also connotes storytelling, weaving and fabrication, something which Lee does through his poetry.

The child in the poem experiences a form of revenge as he watches his teacher and the other schoolchildren tasting the fruit “Knowing / it wasn’t ripe or sweet, I didn’t eat / but watched the other faces” (Rose 18). Here, the speaker’s pleasure is in *not* eating, rather than eating. In waiting and watching the schoolchildren’s faces, the speaker shows the cultural knowledge he possesses. As noted by Xu, the children’s experience of eating the unripe and bitter fruit may further add to the speaker’s alienation as they are disgusted at the “Chinese apple” and those who would eat it (116). Xu argues that the speaker’s enjoyment of the fruit “testifies to his Asianness, as though it were an innate knowledge, a bodily memory” (118), however, the poem makes clear that this is knowledge that has been learned by the speaker from his parents. This illustrates how cultural understanding can be transmitted from one person to another, something which the insensitive Mrs Walker fails to grasp. Rather than correcting her student’s mispronunciations, the poem suggests, she could learn from him by allowing him to show the class how to peel and eat the fruit. Disgust and

suspicion of Asian food is noted by Lee who uses the imagery of the fruit to explore cultural knowledge, alienation and familial closeness and ultimately, mortality. Lee recalls being teased about his family's eating habits by a child who asks: "*They say you keep snakes and grasshoppers in a bushel on your back porch and eat them. They say you don't have manners, you lift your plates to your mouths and push the food in with sticks*" (*The Winged Seed* 86; emphasis in original). The child Lee's response is to chase after the child, rather than try to correct or explain the cultural misunderstanding. Lee humorously shows that suspicion of unfamiliar food is reciprocal when he mentions his family's "permanent bewilderment at meatloaf" (*The Winged Seed* 69).

Lee relies on the use of a central symbol in "Persimmons" which he uses as a basis to explore several themes at once (Zhou 119). In the poem, the fruit is used as a way of considering the nature of language, sexual intimacy and a father-son relationship. The poem itself is like the fruit, with layers which Lee peels back to reveal "the meat of the fruit." Although the poem may at first appear loose and organic in its structure, with seemingly unrelated memories jumbled together, there is an underlying structure based on word associations. It begins with the memory of his childhood confusion between the words "persimmon" and "precision." This is followed by the explanation of how to choose, peel and eat the fruit, something which requires precision. The vocabulary is suggestive and the choice of the words:

'bottoms,' 'lay,' 'skin,' 'suck,' 'swallow,' 'eat,' 'meat,' and 'heart,' transforms these instructions into an erotics of consumption that proves the speaker capable of adult sexual pleasure and thus works against the stereotype of Asian men as feminized, or even asexual, beings. (Yao 9)

The sexually suggestive language leads to another memory, of a lover undressing. The removal of clothes echoes the peeling and consuming of the fruit. His attempts, and failure, to teach his lover to speak Chinese recalls his childhood struggle to learn English. The outdoor, interracial, sexual encounter also carries an inherent pun on the idea of forbidden fruit.

The punning continues later in the poem when the speaker recalls “My mother said every persimmon has a sun / inside” (Rose 18). The use of the word “sun” in the same line as “mother” creates a pun on “son.” The word sun is repeated in the birdsong “each morning a cardinal / sang, *The sun, the sun*” (Rose 18; emphasis in original). “The sun” is once again associated with the word “son” when the speaker recalls a moment spent with his ageing father. Although many readers may not be aware, “sun” is also the meaning of Lee’s name, as is revealed in *The Winged Seed*: “my name, which said one way, indicates the builded [sic] light of the pearl, and said another, the sun” (46). So there is an added significance to “sun” as the name chosen for him by his father after a recurring dream he had before Lee’s birth of the sun as “a blazing house, wherein dwelt a seed, black, new, dimly human” (45). The image of the persimmon “unifies the series of otherwise disparate episodes from his life” (Yao 5). The poem contains imagery of the removal of layers to reveal hidden treasures underneath—the fruit skin peeled to reveal its meat; Donna removing her clothes; two persimmons “wrapped in newspaper;” and three scrolls in a box under some blankets. The reader is invited to remove the layers and unravel it, as the speaker does with the scrolls. Lee encourages the reader to read between the lines and see beyond the visible to the hidden structure and meaning beneath.

In "Eating Alone" and "Eating Together" Lee mourns for his recently deceased father. The speaker pulls onions from the garden and recalls his father picking a rotten pear from the ground to show him how a "hornet / spun crazily, glazed in slow, glistening juice" ("Eating Alone", *Rose* 33). As he cooks for himself the ingredients of his meal are described, along with the loneliness he feels as though it were an integral part of the recipe: "Shrimp braised in sesame / oil and garlic. And my own loneliness. / What more could I, a young man, want" (33). The closing statement, a rhetorical question phrased as a declaration, and its placement after the description of the food suggest loneliness as a flavour, or accompaniment to the meal. The line recalls an incident in *The Winged Seed* when Lee's grandmother tells him that "Memory is salt" adding flavour to life (136). However, like salt, too much memory or loneliness can spoil the flavour. "Eating Together," which appears in the same collection, describes a similar meal, but this time one which will be eaten with "brothers, sister, my mother" but the absence of the father is foremost in the speaker's mind (49). The way in which his mother eats reminds the poet of "the way my father did / weeks ago" before his death, when "he lay down / to sleep" (49). Unlike the young man in "Eating Alone," the speaker's father is "lonely for no one" (49).

These poems could be termed "sizzling wok" poems, poems by Asian American poets which describe ingredients sizzling in oil. An example of this is "Leaving Chinatown" in which Kim writes:

Green *platanos* searing in oil, saffron rice boiling,

black beans simmer with *sofrito*, chili, red onion

until steam clouds the room, tasting of sea-salt (*Notes from the Divided Country* 43).

Interestingly an earlier version of “Leaving Chinatown” appeared in *Poetry* magazine in 1995 under a different title, the more location-specific “On Pike Street.” The street name, in common with other New York Chinatown street names, is not as suggestive to the reader of its location as the revised poem’s title. The title also carries with it the suggestion of fish adding to the food theme of the poem. The earlier version reads “Spiced plantains heaving in oil, the smell of beans / Rising in generous shawls of steam,” only three ingredients listed in contrast with the nine in the later version. However, in both versions the food is not what would be typically thought of as Asian food, instead seeming more likely to be Cuban or Central American, perhaps leading to the title “Leaving Chinatown.” Kim’s poem therefore subverts the “sizzling wok” poem standard by describing food from a different ethnicity.

In Lee’s poem, “The Cleaving,” the poem’s speaker confronts his own ethnic identity when he goes to a Chinese butcher store (*The City in Which I Love You* 77-87). The mundane chore of grocery-shopping is transformed into an artistic self-examination, of identity, ethnicity and the craft of poetry. Lee sees the work of the poet as a spiritual one, to find a greater collective significance to personal experience. For Lee, an ever-present awareness of mortality infuses everyday experiences with greater meaning. At the same time, he recognises that writing poetry is *work*, requiring effort and time to create a suitable form to convey the poet’s feelings. “The Cleaving” demonstrates his poetic beliefs that all humans are exiles, displaced from their spiritual home. The poem explores identity and the ways in which it can be

expressed – through work, food, and physical appearance. The title of the poem, with its double meaning of clinging to, and separation from, is suggestive of the tension at the heart of being an exile in a foreign land. This may be how some members of the Asian diaspora feel about their cultural heritage, the feeling of belonging to their own ethnic group which can place them apart from the mainstream culture. Partridge notes that “the poem vacillates between the act of rejection and the process of assimilation. Eating in this poem may begin with the butcher’s chopping block, but it is ultimately about communion”(103). In a similar way the immigrant must decide between rejecting or retaining old ways of doing things and acquiring new skills or languages. The butcher’s filleting of the carcasses, with some parts of the animal discarded, and others highly valued, echoes this.

Lee seeks communion with immigrants in the poem but also with other poets, as the poem appears to be influenced by Eliot and Whitman. He acknowledges a desire to be thought of among the company of these poets, rather than simply labelled according to his ethnicity. Citing influences including Pablo Neruda, David the Psalmist and Federico García Lorca, he declares that he aspires “to be shoulder to shoulder with Whitman, Dickinson, and all the other poets”(Cooper and Yu 62). While acknowledging that adopting the label “Asian American” can be an act of empowerment, if the writer or artist self-identifies as “Asian American,” he expresses discomfort with being categorized apart from other poets, as “minority poets”(62).

The speaker sees a familial resemblance in the butcher’s facial features and the way in which he gossips with the other customers. While noting the similarities in their appearance, rather than limiting the similarities to those of Chinese ethnic origin, Lee broadens it to include immigrants from many backgrounds, not solely Asian. The

poem equates the work of the poet with that of the butcher, with the speaker approaching the counter to “recite” his order which is transcribed by the butcher. The speaker observes “my reading a kind of eating, my eating / a kind of reading” implying that his writing is a kind of butchering (*The City in Which I Love You* 82). The butcher, who the speaker faces across the counter as he carves the meat, may in fact represent the work a poet does. The speaker “recite[s]” his order, which the butcher “scribbles” and “chops it up quick” (77). The butcher writes in “light-handed calligraphy” and could be the speaker’s grandfather “come to America to get a Western education” but who is so homesick that “he sits in the park all day, reading poems / and writing letters to his mother” (78).

The way in which the butcher carves up the duck carcass is similar to a poet finding a form for his work, deciding on line length, meter and stanza breaks. The butcher divides the carcass “into six [...] then quarters ... with two fast hacks” (78). The use of the word “foot-thick” could be a reference to the poetic term “foot,” a unit of poetic measure (79). The comparison between the butcher and poet continues as Lee describes how the butcher “spells / his message, manifold, / in the mortal air” perhaps reflecting a poet reading his work aloud (85). The butcher’s mystic action which “coaxes, cleaves, brings change / before our very eyes, and at every / moment of our being” reflects the work of the poet (85). Just as a poet’s placement of a line break can alter the meaning of the words on the page by changing its context, the butcher’s division of the animal into different parts can change the way in which it is consumed. The actions of the butcher (and the poet) are god-like, both have the power to transform and create with skill. The butcher’s blade marks the surface he works on, as the poet’s pen marks the paper. Lee makes the comparison between

manual labour and writing poetry elsewhere in his work. In "Furious Versions," the writing of poetry is described in similar terms to building

I wait
in a blue hour
and faraway noise of hammering
and on a page a poem begun
[....]
Know him by his noise.
Hear the nervous
scratching of his pencil,
sound of a rasping
file (*The City in Which I Love You* 15, 29)

Read in this way, the butcher's offering of the duck's brain to the speaker is analogous to the reader being offered the finished poem for consumption.

Lee plays with the imagery of unfamiliar, "repulsive" food such as the duck's brain, and revels in it, even raising the possibility of cannibalism. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong reads this kind of eating, of "like eating like," and of eating what to some palates would be considered unappetizing or even inedible, as "the ability to cope with the constraints and persecutions Asian Americans have had to endure as immigrants and racial minorities" (25). Lee's speaker's focus is not on the taste of the duck's brain, but rather on the appearance and texture, and the act of eating his "homunculus" or "little man" (79, 80). Lee's speaker's ingestion of the duck's brain may be a comment on America's absorption of immigrants. The butcher divides the duck's brain, a violent act, before he offers the delicacy to the speaker to eat.

Immigrants brought to America's shores by acts of violence may be consumed by America, and absorbed into it. The act of eating the duck's brain is indeed one of communion, but it is preceded by an act of violence. The brain is absorbed into the speaker, and the sacrifice is given meaning because of the creativity that results from its absorption.

In the poem "The City in Which I Love You" Lee also addresses the violence faced by immigrants: "The woman who is slapped, the man who is kicked, / the ones who don't survive" (54). Speaking about "The Cleaving," Lee observes that "living in America is a violent experience, especially if you do feel like the other. And I think assimilation is a *violent* experience" (Piccione and Rubin 54; emphasis in original). The speaker's choice of eating duck's brain may have added significance. Ducks are migratory birds, with generations of birds following the same flight paths and returning "home." Eating the duck's brain, where the generational memory of this flight path may be thought to reside, is a violent disruption of generational memory. In "For a New Citizen of these United States" the speaker argues against his friend's desire to erase his non-American past from his memory (*The City in Which I Love You* 41-42). Arguing ironically that "birds, as you say, fly forward" the speaker leaves unspoken the fact that migrating birds eventually return to their point of departure (42). The migratory paths used by the birds are passed on from each generation to the next, through collective memory. By eating the duck's brain in "The Cleaving" the speaker ingests the bird's memory terminating the generational, collective memory. Ingesting the duck's brain has cultural symbolism too. Xu links the speaker's act to a Chinese legend:

Yue Fei, a general during the Song dynasty, who defeated foreign invaders but was unjustly punished by the emperor under the advice of a corrupt courtier. Afterward, everywhere the courtier went, people spat and threw stones at him. Hated and chased by people, he could find no better refuge than inside a chicken's skull. Since then the Chinese eat fowls' brains with glee. (121)

By describing the duck's brain as "my man," and eating it, Xu argues, Lee asserts "the speaker's ethnic authenticity" (121).

Although the portrayal is of "like eating like," the effect, while unsettling, is not frightening or repulsive. The intent appears to be to contain multitudes, in a Whitmanesque gesture. In fact, Whitman's presence is subtly alluded to through the poem's subject matter. Whitman's ghost seems to be as present in "The Cleaving" as it was in Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California." In "Song of Myself" Whitman's speaker, like Lee's, watches a butcher working: "The butcher-boy puts off his killing clothes, or sharpens his knife at the stall in the market, / I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down" (Whitman 47). Lee's opening lines recall this: "I could stand / amused all afternoon" (77). The lines put Lee's speaker, in Whitman's speaker's place, and by proxy, put Lee in Whitman's place. By doing this Lee assumes an American lineage of poets that includes Whitman, Eliot and Emerson. In Ginsberg's poem, Whitman is seen "poking among the meat" (Ginsberg 59). The poem also references another of Lee's influences, "Garcia Lorca, what were you doing by the watermelons?" (59). Ginsberg's poem sees his speaker "shopping for images" in the supermarket, something which Lee's speaker does at the Hon Kee grocery (59). Although Ginsberg directly addresses Whitman in his poem as "dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher," Lee's approach is more circumspect, yet ultimately

bolder (59). Ginsberg's speaker can only follow or walk with Whitman, uncertain of their destination: "Where are we going, Walt Whitman?" (59). By contrast, Lee's speaker puts himself in Whitman's position, watching the butcher at work. The familiarity with which Ginsberg addresses Whitman, "lonely old grubber" contrasts with Lee's subtler allusions to him (59).

The poem, beginning as it does with a link to the speaker's heirs, and then alluding to poetic heirs throughout, assumes a literary inheritance. Lee does so with confidence, achieving what Christopher Ricks describes as "great instances of allusion [. . .] where that to which allusion is liable ceases to be any kind of liability and becomes a source of energy and gratitude" (12). Lee's engagement with *The Waste Land*, and with Whitman, is deliberate. In a 1995 interview Lee expresses insecurity at whether he thinks of himself as a poet, acknowledging that he still seeks his father's approval even after his death:

I don't feel like a poet. David, the Psalmist, was a poet. Milton was a poet. Li-po was a poet. I'm working hard to be a poet; that's the way I like to think of it. . . . I guess my father is going to have to materialize and tell me, 'You're OK [sic] now. I think you're a poet now.' (Lee and Ingersoll 42-43).

By alluding to some of his poetic influences Lee seeks this paternalistic approval, as well as perhaps seeking approval from American readers.

Partridge draws a distinction between Lee's speaker's desire to "devour this race to sing it" and Whitman's "I sing the body electric" (122). He argues that Whitman's declaration "celebrates the physical body [...] its reproductive and hence life-affirming powers" whereas Lee "celebrates the Chinese immigrant body by declaring his desire to devour it as though it were food" (122). Partridge argues that

this is a desire to celebrate the struggles and successes of Chinese immigrants “to survive hardship and to swallow—in order to overcome—racist oppression” (123). This reading is rather narrow in view, given that the poem celebrates not only Chinese immigrants, but also a broader cross-section of humanity. Later in the poem the speaker compares the butcher’s features to “Shang / dynasty face, / African” and “Bedouin,” “Jew,” “Asian,” “Cambodian,” “Vietnamese,” and indeed “Chinese” (86-87). Lee celebrates common humanity but also acknowledges the longing that humans have for spiritual nourishment. He acknowledges Whitman’s significance to him as an influence, citing “Song of the Broad Axe” as a particularly important poem. Lee admired the poem for its movement from a description of the axe to an exploration of democracy, something which “astounded me with the movements a poem could make, [...] Whitman didn’t make sense to me until quite late; as a matter of fact he began to make sense to me during the writing of the longer poems, where I do that kind of meditating” (Heyen and Rubin 26). The similarity between a broad axe and cleaver is noteworthy, and cannot be entirely coincidental. “The Cleaving” is among Lee’s longer poems so it seems likely that Whitman’s influence would be felt here.

The speaker’s insistence that his “reading [is] a kind of eating” is followed by a list of all that he would eat which includes the butcher, the fish that he removes from the tank. The speaker concludes that “I would eat it all / to utter it,” he would eat/read all of these things in order to transform them into poetry (83). This reading/eating “while the butcher spells / his message, manifold, / in the mortal air” again unites the work of the butcher with that of the poet (85). The work the butcher-poet carries out is revealed in almost mystical terms as he “coaxes, cleaves, brings change / before our very eyes” (85). The speaker reflects on the “terror the butcher /

scripts" before the butcher and speaker merge on the page as he (the butcher) is portrayed as "diviner / of holy texts [...] this Chinese / I daily face / this immigrant, / this man with my own face" (86, 87).

Allusions to Eliot are also evident in the text. The speaker in "The Cleaving" reflects on:

The deaths at the sinks, those bodies prepared
for eating, I would eat,
and the standing deaths
at the counters, in the aisles,
the walking deaths in the streets,
the death-far-from-home, the death-
in-a-strange-land, these Chinatown
deaths, these American deaths. (*The City in Which I Love You* 83)

This passage recalls Eliot's walking-dead crossing London Bridge in *The Waste Land* and the clairvoyant's warning of "death by water." The "chug chugging" in Lee's poem echoes "Jug jug jug jug jug jug" in Eliot's (line 204, 1242). Other points in the poem appear to echo *The Waste Land*, the use of "O," to start lines "O, nothing is so / steadfast it won't go" and "O, the murderous deletions, the keening / down to nothing, the cleaving" may recall Eliot's frequent use of "O" at the beginning of lines "O City city," "O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter" and "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag" (lines 259, 199, 128). In *The Waste Land* a speaker whose ethnic identity is mistaken clarifies it by declaring "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch [sic]" (line 12, 1236). However, rather than favouring one ethnic identity over another, Lee's speaker embraces the uncertainty of identity, using it as an opportunity

to highlight the fact that all Americans are ultimately from elsewhere. Drawing attention to the common misidentification of one Asian origin for another, the speaker identifies his Asian face as “this one / with the Cambodian face, Vietnamese face, this Chinese / I daily face,” rather than disavow one Asian country of origin in favour of his true origin (87). The history of Asians in America is punctuated with incidents of distancing from other Asian Americans, often as a matter of survival – during World War II Chinese in America wore badges and displayed signs in their workplaces saying “I am Chinese” to avoid misidentification as the enemy Japanese (Zia 40). During the Cold War, this was reversed as Chinese Americans became the Asian Americans to fear (44-46). Fomenting division between different races, creating “ethnic antagonism,” was a tactic used to prevent farm workers and other labourers from uniting and striking to demand better working conditions (Takaki 30; 271). The speaker acknowledges the hatred that facial markers of Asian ethnicity can evoke “that wide nose to meet the blows / a face like that invites” (*The City in Which I Love You* 81).

Lee’s allusion to Eliot’s work has additional resonance because they both may be considered poets of exile. In a letter to Mary Hutchinson in July 1919 Eliot refers to himself as “*metic*—a foreigner,” seeing himself in the Ancient Greek tradition of the foreigner who is allowed to reside because of a special skill, but unable to become a citizen (Pollard 41). Lee’s skills as poet, and the butcher’s skill in his craft give them an important place in their community but they remain exiles. Lee’s butcher-figure functions in a similar way to Eliot’s Tiresias. Eliot’s footnote explains Tiresias’s role “although a mere spectator and not indeed a ‘character,’ is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest [. . .] the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What

Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem” (n4, 1242). The butcher similarly “melts into” a number of different personas in Lee’s work – as grandmother, grandfather, Jew, Asian, Cambodian and so on. Tiresias “serves as a conditional point of stasis, through which the multiple perspectives in the poem surface, momentarily cohere, and quickly dissipate” (Pollard 60). The butcher’s shifting gender and ethnic origin, in the speaker’s eyes, places him in a comparable role.

The link between the butcher as Tiresias and as the writer may be amplified by Wilson Harris who “looks to Tiresias as a figure of the writer. He writes that ‘Tiresias is the embodiment of death as well as life, masculine as well as feminine . . .’ (“Writer” 49 in Pollard 297 note 23). Lee’s butcher’s androgynous, multi-racial appearance and his skill at his craft, killing and carving animals show him to be a “point of stasis,” and “the embodiment of death as well as life, masculine as well as feminine.” However, unlike the dead observed in *The Waste Land*, the deaths that the butcher presides over have a restorative purpose by helping to sustain life and providing nourishment to his customers. The action of the butcher offering the delicacy of the duck’s brain to the speaker has Christian resonance, mimicking a priest offering communion to a believer. This has significance in the death/life dynamic, with the Christian belief that Christ’s self-sacrifice allows believers to have eternal life after death. There is a quasi-cannibalistic element to the Christian consumption of bread representing Christ’s body. The crossover between the work of the butcher and the work of the poet shows the butcher as embodying the writer’s role.

The poem engages with another American literary figure by quoting Emerson’s observation that the Chinese “managed to preserve to a hair / for three or four thousand years / the ugliest features in the world.” The allusion is to a letter Emerson

wrote in 1824, in which he calls this the Chinese Empire's "Mummy's reputation, that of having preserved to a hair for 3 or 4,000 years the ugliest features in the world" (Tilton 127). Emerson expresses the belief that unlike other nations, the Chinese have done nothing to "promote the wealth and civilization of other lands," saying "all she can say at the convocation of nations must be—'I made the tea'" (127). His letter compares China unfavourably to other civilizations including "Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Palestine, polished Greece & haughty Rome" who have contributed to the arts and institutions. Even "miserable Africa" has contributed by providing labour to cut "wood and draw water" — the fact that this labour was not provided voluntarily is not noted by Emerson (127). Lee's poem in its appreciation of the butcher's skill and work, and its listing of other nationalities and races contrasts with Emerson's narrow, and relativistic appreciation of nationalities.

Emerson appeared to revise his opinion of China later in life, when he made a speech at a banquet celebrating a Chinese Embassy visit to Boston. In his speech he recognizes China's contributions such as "block-printing or stereotype, and lithography, and gunpowder, and vaccination and canals [...] its useful arts, —its pottery indispensable to the world, the luxury of silks, and its tea, the cordial of nations" (E. W. Emerson 472). It is interesting to note that Emerson's observations take place at a banquet, once again food being used as a point of interaction. However, his contrasting views may also be due to the context in which they occur. The earlier negative opinion was expressed in private correspondence whereas his more laudatory remarks were intended for a public audience.

While a visit to the butcher causes Lee to reflect on ethnicity, a restaurant visit is the occasion for Suji Kwock Kim's speaker's reflections in "Skins" (*Notes from*

the Divided Country 62). Like Lee she engages with other writers in her work, and this poem concludes with quotes from Emily Dickinson, William Shakespeare and George Herbert. In contrast with the celebratory tone of Lee's poem, Kim's poem focuses on the double consciousness of being Asian in a predominantly non-Asian environment. The restaurant where the interactions take place becomes a kind of borderland where distinctions between insiders and outsiders are blurred. The speaker in the poem is simultaneously both an insider and an outsider, as a patron of the restaurant she could be perceived of as an insider, yet as an Asian American she can be mistaken by other patrons for one of the waitresses. She exposes the social pretention of everyday interaction, where the speaker pretends not to see herself mistaken for one of the restaurant staff, while the *maitre d'* in the restaurant pretends not to see her at all. Seeing the elderly Asian busboy, she feels guilty for her own position of privilege. Kim recognizes a social fact of life that many Americans "pretend not to see." In *Eating Identities* Xu notes that most Asian immigrants end up in low-paid, manual labour, and that "[i]t rarely enters into the American consciousness that tens of thousands of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans continue eking out a living in ethnic ghettos with neither health care nor pension plans"(7). Although her poem does not explicitly identify the busboy as Asian, his appearance in the poem is just after the speaker has been mistaken for one of the staff, so it seems likely that he is. Feelings of anger, guilt and frustration resonate in the poem.

The final tercet is composed of a line each from Dickinson, Shakespeare, and Herbert. Like Lee, she shows that she can adapt transnational influences to her work. The last line of the poem is defiant, almost triumphant in tone "So I did sit and eat." It recalls Langston Hughes "I, too, Sing America" whose speaker is sent to the kitchen to

eat, away from the white diners, “But I laugh, / And eat well, / And grow strong”(370). Like the watching child in “Persimmons,” access to food can be an assertion of power. Though the *maître d’* pretends not to see the speaker, and she is mistaken by another diner for a member of staff, by eating food in the restaurant she can assert her right to be there, exercising power through consumption. The juxtaposition of the three quotes appears to show a resolution in feeling at the end of the poem. A further exploration of the origin of the quotes may change the interpretation. The first line, from Dickinson, is defiant and angry and demands recognition “Dare you see the soul *at the White Heat?*” The line which follows is taken from *Coriolanus*, a play where hunger and access to food are central to the plot. Kim quotes “Anger’s my meat,” the full quote is “Anger’s my meat, I sup upon myself, / And so shall starve with feeding” (Shakespeare 4.2, 52-53). This continues the tone of defiance from the preceding line. However, the longer quote suggests the self-destructiveness of this level of anger.

These feelings appear to be resolved by her closing quote from a religious poem by Herbert. Herbert’s poem is in the form of a dialogue between a speaker and “Love.” The poem describes feelings of guilt and shame which prevent the speaker from receiving communion, or entering heaven (depending on interpretation). “Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back / Guilty of dust and sin” (Herbert 1-2, 346). The speaker’s reluctance and feelings of guilt and shame are overcome by “Love” in the end, allowing the speaker to “sit and eat.” Kim’s combination of these three quotes suggests that the destructiveness of anger can only be overcome by love. While the tone may be defiant, it is also pragmatic, in order to avoid being consumed by anger, the speaker must rise above it to survive. Seamus Heaney believes “that Herbert’s work exemplifies the redress of poetry at its most exquisite” (16). Arguing

that the “redressing effect of poetry comes from its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances,” Heaney’s assessment could be applied to Kim’s poem (4). The speaker’s freedom to eat in spite of the unwelcoming gazes of other customers, restaurant staff and her own guilt is a form of redress. Kim’s ability to use the situation as a form of creative inspiration is more significant than the act of eating. Writing the poem gives the speaker a more meaningful form of redress unavailable to her in the context of the restaurant and makes visible to the reader all of the things that the speaker is forced to “pretend not to see.”

In “Monologue for an Onion” Kim explores poetry writing using the metaphor of chopping onions (50-51). Like Lee’s comparison of the work of the poet with that of a butcher or builder, Kim shows the mental and emotional effort of the poet in trying to express clearly their ideas. Just as chopping onions induces tears, trying to see and articulate in writing ideas and emotions results in tears of frustration, “as the table fills / With husks, cut flesh, all the debris of pursuit” (51). The line suggests a table covered with pages of drafts of poems. The “[p]oor deluded human” continues to try to get to the heart (51). The poem uses violent language to show the intensity of feelings of the poet’s work “peeling away my body,” “cut flesh,” “Hunt,” “stopless knife” and although chopping onions may be considered mundane and harmless, it cleverly illustrates the near self-harm inflicted by the poet “driven by your fantasy of truth” (51).

The poem shows the impossibility of achieving the kind of transcendence suggested by Emerson: “I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me” (R. W. Emerson 26). Instead Kim

implies that the poet can never achieve that kind of clarity because their vision is always clouded:

You must not grieve that the world is glimpsed
Through veils. How else can it be seen?
How will you rip away at the veil of the eye, the veil

That you are, [...] (51)

While Emerson stood on “bare ground,” in Kim’s poem we see “the ground sown with abandoned skins” (R. W. Emerson 26; *Notes from the Divided Country* 51). The clarity and unity accomplished by Emerson eludes Kim’s speaker who is left with her “Yellow peels, my stinging shreds. You are the one / In pieces” (51). The use of the word “yellow” could be a reference to the derogatory term for her race, or to the yellow paper on which her work is composed. The poem explores identity and the poet’s attempt to uncover it, which are frustrated by the speaker’s denials “I am pure onion – pure onion / Of outside and in, surface and secret core” (51). But if the poem is read as an internal monologue, with the poet and the subject as the one person, then this assertion of unity and wholeness is quickly unravelled, peeled away like the skins of an onion, and left “in pieces” (51).

The instability of identity is clear, as the poet seeks to get to the truth but instead is altered by the process: “You changed yourself: you are not who you are” (51). Kim’s exploration of division and unity is reflected in the title of her collection *Notes from the Divided Country* which acts as comment on the political state of her country of birth, Korea, as well as an ironic comment on the country which is her

home, the *United States* of America. The final stanza of the poem shows the perils of this divided state:

And at your inmost circle, what? A core that is

Not one. Poor fool, you are divided at the heart,

Lost in its maze of chambers, blood, and love,

A heart that will one day beat you to death. (51-52)

The line break between the two stanzas further emphasizes the state of division. The division may be within the subject or between the subject's identity and its creative expression.

"Translations from the Mother Tongue" describes two traditional Korean activities being carried out by the speaker's mother, but in her American home (15-16). The poem suggests a way of understanding Kim's work, and a possible explanation for her repeated use of quotations from other sources. *Khimjahng*, making *khimchee*, is a task usually undertaken as a family each autumn, with jars of pickled cabbage set aside to ferment for months, sometimes even years. A staple of the Korean diet, it is eaten with nearly every meal, and is considered so important to the Korean lifestyle that a shortage, or increase in price, of ingredients can lead to political unrest (Tong-hyung; D.T.). The mother in the poem, however, must undertake *khimjahng* alone, "without your sisters, an ocean away, or your mother" (15). The noise of the task is captured in the opening stanza, "Chora of hands splashing water [...] Chora of knives hacking [...] / steel beating against wood boards" (15). Kim's use of the word "chora" here is interesting, recalling both Plato's and Julia Kristeva's use of the term. Kristeva defines *chora* as:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on his body [. . .] by family and social structures (Kristeva and Moi 93).

The speaker's mother's actions are an attempt to retain a link to her country of birth, but are altered and limited by her current circumstances. The actions are "neither a model nor copy" of the *khimjahng* she would have participated in in Korea (Kristeva *Revolution in Poetic Language* 26).

Kristeva notes Plato's identification of the receptacle or space as "mother and wet nurse" (127 note 14). Kim's use of the word in a poem about generations of mothers and daughters is thus loaded with additional significance. Placed alongside Kristeva's views on the maternal in works of art it seems particularly apt:

I think that in the imaginary, maternal continuity is what guarantees identity [...] The imaginary of the work of art, that is really the most extraordinary and the most unsettling imitation of the mother-child dependence. [It is] its substitution and its displacement towards a limit which is fascinating because inhuman. The work of art is independence conquered through inhumanity. The work of art cuts off natural filiation, it is patricide and matricide, it is superbly solitary. But look back-stage, as does the analyst, and you will find a dependence, a secret mother on whom this sublimation is constructed (Kristeva and Moi 14).

The speaker in the poem's attempts to "look back-stage" for the mother behind her own mother's *p'ansori* and *khimjhang*, is blocked because of their separation from the motherland. However, the poem itself is also a work of art, placing the speaker/poet

in a position which both honours and cuts off the maternal. The speaker, watching the mother's actions, is aware that she too is separate from the mother, and may one day perform the actions of her mother on her own.

The use of the word "chora" takes on additional significance if read in relation to Derrida's essay on "Khōra" which links the word to a network of meanings. Derrida's interpretation of Plato's use of the word includes defining it as referring to "'place,' 'location,' 'region,' 'country'" as well as "'mother,' 'nurse,' 'receptacle,' 'imprint-bearer'" (Derrida and Dutoit 93). The geographical element that this brings to Kim's poem may also be underlined by the similar words Chora/Khōra/Korea. Derrida's interpretation also draws attention to the link between the word and displacement:

this strange mother who gives place without engendering can no longer be considered as an origin. She/it eludes all antropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, and all truth. Preoriginary, *before* and outside of all generation, she no longer even has the meaning of a past, of a present that is past. *Before* signifies no temporal anteriority. The relation of independence, the nonrelation, looks more like the relation of the interval or the spacing to what is lodged in it to be received in it. (124-5; emphasis in original)

The poem's preoccupation, a concern with linking the mother's actions to a Korean matrilineage, and the impossibility of doing so due to the circumstances fits with this interpretation of the word. Here the daughter observes, receiving the coded information shared by the mother as she works in the kitchen and undertakes traditional Korean cultural practices. However, her ability to decode the mother's practices is impaired by their joint separation from the preceding generations in Korea.

Both p'ansori and khimjhang are intended to be collective, collaborative work rather than one that is "superbly solitary" but in the speaker's mother's case, because of her separation from her extended family, she works with just her daughter for company. The poem recognises the importance of the continued maternal links to creative production, and the unsettling effects of the break of this link. Although the mother continues to carry out the creative practices handed down through generations of women in her family, the change in context means that the role of the daughter has been altered. She does not appear to be an active participant in the process, instead observing the mother's actions and recording them in poetic form. Instead of the more collective activity of Khimjahng, the daughter engages what can be thought of as a more inward creative act of poetry writing.

The physical pain caused during the making of kimchee reflects the pain of being separated from her homeland. Handling the strong spices and other ingredients stains and blisters her fingers, and brings tears to her eyes, while her "mouth waters, starved for the taste / /of home" (15). The sound of the mixing of spices with the cabbage is captured as "Slap. Slur," which could also be a reflection of racism and hostility faced by the speaker's mother in America. Using skills and a recipe handed down through generations, she creates a taste from home in her American kitchen. The clay pots are buried, like her memories of her family. Although buried, and hidden from sight, they reappear as both a comfort and source of pain "Buried in fall, dug up in spring, soured, spiced, / to nourish and to burn" (16). The ingredients which preserve the kimchee are "the element that destroys and saves;" just as moving to America allowed her to survive, it damaged her connections to her family in Korea (15). However, survival does not come without a price. The final stanza could be a

description of the effect of migration on the next generation, steeped in American soil and changed by the experience, disconnected from the preceding generations, it is “the covenant of autumn, its hard blessing”:

what survives cannot survive unscathed, not fallen

burr or shoot, not fists of spore or snarled taproot.

Dig the furrows deep, sow the *hahngari* in rot.

Steep them in the element that destroys and saves. (15)

Like seeds, the clay pots (*hahngari*) of kimchee are buried in American soil, just as this new offshoot of the family tree is rooted in America.

The second part of the poem concerns another Korean tradition, *P’ansori*, or storysinging. Sometimes described as a “one man opera,” a solo singer performs a variety of different characters within one performance (Pihl 227), and has been compared to African American blues music. Accompanied by a drummer, and responding to encouragement from the audience, the singer tells the story through song and spoken word (227). The physicality of the *khimjahng* and the rhythmic beating of the knife chopping against the board is the only percussive accompaniment to the mother’s song. Like the making of kimchee, this is another activity which is altered by the new environment. Interestingly the song begins with a description of food sold in the village market, food which would not be easily available in America. She sings: “Street peddlers hawk *makkoli*, *soju*, soup boiled with sea bracken, / shark fins, dried squid, ginseng roots pickling in jars” and of a market where treats are readily available: “There are sweet rice-cakes and pears piled like sand bags” (16). Far from an idealised and nostalgic picture of the past, the militaristic imagery of “sand bags” and “soldiers,” “gunfire, a city bombed to rubble, / and starved dogs gnawing

the bodies of the dead” are captured in the mother’s song. She is aware of the violence left behind, as well as the love. The effects of postmemory may be seen here, as the speaker attempts to understand the mother’s trauma and convey it through the poem. The daughter listening to the song, tries to link her mother to her grandmother but because of the distance in time and space, cannot know if the link is there, she wants “to know what survives, what’s handed down / from mother to daughter, if anything is” (16). Pihl notes that in some regions P’ansori is passed down from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law as part of a shamanistic ritual (228). Because of the speaker’s lack of knowledge of her grandmother, however, she finds it difficult to link her mother’s performance to the previous generation. The speaker’s mother’s performance takes place without an accompanying drummer, and her only audience is the speaker. The speaker may lack the knowledge of a larger Korean audience and may be unable to prompt the mother’s song as they would.

Kim’s poetry collection concludes with a page and a half of notes, which tell the reader that some poems “adapt quotes from the Bible, Korean folk songs, Montaigne, and *Hamlet*” as well as using reported speech. Unlike Lee, Kim does not depend on the reader’s knowledge of other poets and writers to recognise the allusions. Where Lee’s use is subtle and requires the reader to unpick the work to find the hidden references, Kim makes explicit to the reader where other writers’ influences can be seen, often by using direct quotes in quotation marks. While some of the notes gloss Korean words used in the poems, other notes explain from where particular lines are taken. The sources cited are diverse – Dickinson, Herbert, particular Shakespeare plays but also a “Guggenheim Museum catalog,” with each section of the book beginning with an epigram. In borrowing lines from other poets,

writers and everyday life, Kim acts as a p'ansori story-singer, who makes: "abundant use of humorous sayings and idiomatic phrases [...] borrowed lines of Chinese poetry and classical allusions to decorate its sentences" (Pihl 228). The p'ansori performer had to adapt to suit ordinary peasants, but also members of the aristocracy: "songs also incorporated refined expressions suited to their tastes and even mimicked fiction of the written language" (228). Kim adapts the Korean cultural form to create her own American version.

Where Lee uses other poetic influences as a way of joining a wider community of poets, Kim uses allusion in this way too, but also uses it as a way of linking to her mother, her grandmother, and Korean culture. However, by using transnational sources, and more mundane influences such as reported speech and museum catalogues, she makes her work accessible to an audience unfamiliar with its Korean roots. In her use of varied sources and her adaption of a traditional Korean cultural form, Kim does something which other exiled writers do. "Whether described as metics, rootless men, or castaways, these poets share an anxiety about the perceived inferiority and disintegration of their cultural heritages, and it spurs them to transform and reorder the concept of tradition"(Pollard 43). "Translations from the Mother Tongue" expresses anxiety about the loss of cultural heritage but also adapts the tradition of P'ansori into a new idiom. In doing this Kim attempts "to construct a tradition as a cultural home"(Pollard 43). The ability to remember and reproduce recipes from country of birth in country of residence shows an ability to survive, and to retain links to cultural identity. While the ingredients may taste different depending on the location in which they are consumed, they link the cook and eater, to their family history and to the country left behind. The way in which recipes can be

adapted to suit changing tastes, shows an ability to adapt to surroundings and create food with what is available.

Kim's insistence on including the citations or the allusions is a way of providing the reader with something which Kim cannot access – a certainty about origin, a list of ingredients. "In *Translations from the Mother Tongue*" the observing daughter cannot locate the sources of her mother's singing style and recipe beyond a shadowy past in Korea, something which is shown to be a source of frustration to the listener. "I listen for your mother in your voice and cannot know / if I find her," Kim writes, and "Tell me if this is true. I want to know what survives, what's handed down / from mother to daughter" and later "I want to know what cannot be handed down, the part of you / that's only you" (16). By giving the reader access to her own sources Kim ensures that they are spared the confusion and frustration of the daughter, disconnected from her Korean family. Revealing for the reader, her own work's secret mothers, as well as highlighting the parts of her work which were not handed down and are "only" Kim.

Viewing Kim's poetry as a form of P'ansori acknowledges the importance of the oral storytelling tradition within Asian American literature. In both Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir, *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan's fiction, and Lee's *The Winged Seed*, storytelling is a way of passing on memories from one generation to the next. That some of Kim's work has been adapted to choral settings suggests a consciousness on her part of the oral and performance element of poetry. Trinh T. Minh-ha reflects on the importance of orality in the transmission of memories and history between generations of women, using some of the same language that Kim uses in "Translations from the Mother Tongue": "The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted

and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures” (121). Trinh’s description of the way in which storytelling can be both simultaneously destructive and creative is similar to Kim’s description of *Khimjahng*: “Her words are like fire. They *burn* and they *destroy*. It is, however, only by burning that they lighten. Destroying and saving, therefore, are here one single process” (132; emphasis in original).

Relationships between mothers and daughters are a familiar trope within Asian American literature. Amy Tan’s fiction frequently returns to explore the tension between American born daughters and their Asian American mothers. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* also explores the topic. The tension between “Maxine” in *The Woman Warrior* and her mother is sometimes magnified in relation to disagreements about food, and clashes between what Maxine considers appetising versus her parents’ ideas of acceptable food.

Kim’s work is populated by mothers preparing food for their children. In Lee’s work the father figure is both a spiritual nurturer, and a consumer of food. In poems such as “Leaving Chinatown” (or “On Pike Street”), “Middle Kingdom,” and “Translations from the Mother Tongue” the mother figures are characterised by their culinary skills, or limitations. Wong notes the influence that *The Woman Warrior* has had on Asian American literature, in particular for female writers, remarking “the enormous popularity of *The Woman Warrior* may have somehow induced younger Asian American women writers to favour [sic] the mother-daughter relationship—its bittersweetness, its taxing yet inspiring duality—as a subject” (35). And Kim’s poetry, it would seem, follows this path. Lee also explores family relationships within his work, but tends to focus on masculine relationships, in the role of son, father and husband. Lee’s father figures’ culinary efforts are beyond mere physical nourishment, instead

extending to a spiritual fulfilment as he visits parishioners to bring them communion. Although he is concerned for their physical well being also, making arrangements for them to be fed, his involvement is primarily motivated by concern for their spiritual needs. However, in poems like "Eating Alone," Lee shows that preparing a meal is not women's work alone. In this poem, and in others such as "The Gift," Lee shows that masculinity can include a more caring side. Family relationships within Kim's and Lee's poetry will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter Five of this study.

As well as celebrating food, Kim and Lee write with an acute awareness of hunger. This may in part be due to their own experiences, as the postmemory generation, hearing about the experiences of their extended families for whom food shortages may have been life-threatening. Living in America, a supposed land of plenty, they may feel guilt at the readily available food when those left behind in their countries of birth struggle. However, as Lee's work shows, not everyone in America is well fed. Kim's reflections on hunger relate directly to wartime and periods of famine in Korea.

One of Lee's earliest memories of living in the United States is of a train journey his family took from Seattle. Travelling in the same carriage was a teenage mother with a crying baby. The child was unable to breastfeed (presumably the mother's supply had diminished due to her own malnourishment) and Lee's mother showed the young mother how to feed the child by chewing cookies into a paste and then passing the chewed cookies into the baby's mouth. The Lee family leave the mother and child sleeping on the train, donating a box of cookies from their own meagre food supply (*The Winged Seed* 14-16). This was to be the first of many

instances in which Lee and his family came to the aid of the more vulnerable members of American society.

Through his father's pastoral work, Lee often encountered people who were spiritually, and physically malnourished. As a teenager Lee volunteered for Meals-on-Wheels, delivering meals to "the shut-ins" who were unable to care for themselves (*The Winged Seed* 67). His father attempted to provide spiritual nourishment, with his words and by bringing communion to them in the form of saltine crackers and grape juice (67). He also organised carers to feed his elderly parishioners who are incapable of feeding themselves. Lee's recollection of these visits with his father portrays people forgotten by their families whose survival is entirely dependent on strangers. He describes two bed-bound parishioners, Mrs Black, and Bernie Flick. Mrs Black relied on the care of a "mentally handicapped 'case' from a special education program who, trained as a geriatric aide [...] a case of the helpless helping the worse off" (71). It became clear that this arrangement was not working when Lee and his father visit and discover the meal delivered by Lee the previous day was untouched "Either she had not come, or Mrs Black refused to eat" (80). Bernie Flick is considered lucky, because unlike Mrs Black, "[a]t least Bernie can sit up" (72). He was less dependent on others for nourishment because his family had moved his bed "into the kitchen so Bernie could be in arm's reach of the refrigerator. Bernie slept by the oven" (72). Neither Bernie nor Mrs Black should have had to depend on strangers because Lee notes, Bernie had "children all grown and with litters of kids" while Mrs Black "had six children and countless grandchildren" (71, 81). Their pitiful situations are in stark contrast to the way Lee recalls taking care of his dying father later in the memoir.

Lack of food, or the inability to cook is linked to abandonment, madness and deviant behaviour in the text. When Lee and his siblings go to stay with their paedophile grandfather, his lack of cooking utensils is almost as shocking to the children as his perverse behaviour:

And when Yeh Yeh [grandfather] commanded that Fei [Lee's sister] sleep with him one night when Auntie wasn't there, I swore in my heart of hearts I'd chop the old man up and feed him to the birds, and never go home. But I didn't. There were no knives in the kitchen. There was nothing, no food, pots, pans. We drank from the tap with our hands (175).

Interestingly the punishment the young Lee would mete out to his grandfather would be to feed him to the birds, a reversal of the natural order and of the speaker eating the duck's brain in "The Cleaving." The child Lee's desire to reverse the natural order reflects the grandfather's perversion of what is the natural order of family relations, his incestuous behaviour in place of acting in the best interests of his grandchildren. The lack of knives and other utensils leaves the children powerless, unable to arm themselves against their grandfather, or to look after themselves by cooking. This lack of pots and pans is in contrast to Lee's mother's "black cooking pot [which] we carried through seven countries" (*The Winged Seed* 88). Its journey is a sign of the importance she places on being able to cook for, and nourish, her family.

Other descriptions of his grandfather's sadistic behaviour show him withholding food as a way of punishing his family when Lee's father was a boy. An elaborate charade took place at mealtimes when the grandfather was present, as related to Lee by his father:

For he considered our eating a lack of filial piety. We were to defer to him in everything. [...] since any food put in our mouths was looked upon as food taken out of his, our times with him resembled a strange kind of playacting. After the maid had set the food on the table, plates and plates of deliciously prepared meats and vegetables, my father would smile and ask, his voice full of merriment, "Shall we eat?" and we had to answer, "No thank you, Father, we've eaten." Then he would act genuinely surprised, even though it was the same routine each time and he'd ask, "Eaten? Are you sure? Why not have a bite with your father?" At which we were to insist, "No thank you, Father. We're too full, but you should go ahead and enjoy yourself." (156; emphasis in original)

Disposal of the leftover food was supervised by the grandfather in order to ensure that his family did not take any of it, and they were abused when he discovered that they had been given food by his mother: "he beat them all with a stick, screaming like a madman, *Do I not provide for you that you should eat from another's kindness?*" (157). The family managed to survive because the father was often away on business, rarely home for more than three days at a time. The association of food with madness is present elsewhere in Lee's memoir, with inmates in the mental hospital that Lee's father is transferred to as a political prisoner begging the Lee family for food on their visits.

Like Lee, Kim appears to have heard stories of food shortages from her father. In "Fragments of the Forgotten War: for my father," the speaker describes a time of starvation and its effects as the people fled south on foot:

When food ran out we ate cattle feed,

ate bark, ate lice from our own bodies

until our gums bled,

until we could only shit water by the time we got to Pusan. (31)

The speaker also remembers a boy with a “gash that ripped his stomach,” who chewed his arm as a way of coping with the pain, “biting down and down until you saw bone glinting through” (31). The speaker is still haunted by his memories of this boy, “who didn’t live through the night,” and whose body is eaten by wild dogs, “his whole face an ‘exit wound’” (32). The extreme and disturbing image of a child with an open stomach-wound, self-cannibalising in a futile attempt to cope with pain is a haunting illustration of the effects of war. The only living things which appear to thrive in the hellish place are the flies which feed on the carcasses “I think of a carcass foaming with maggots, the bone black with hatching flies” (32).

Kim’s “Middle Kingdom” plays on the idea of the “sizzling wok” poem, but subverts the usually appealing ingredients by describing a cannibalistic meal created by a desperate mother to feed her starving children.

Mother chopped pieces

of her heart into the skillet.

Brother and I heard oil sizzle

Until we huddled in shame.

The scarcity of food is clear from the first stanza’s opening lines “Gruel, crumbs on a table / Of ice” (13). Unlike Lee’s celebratory quasi-cannibalistic description of “like devouring like,” Kim’s poem imagines the sacrifice and desperation of starvation.

Pushing the imagery further, the mother seasons the meat with her tears,

She cried if we ate

and cried if we refused to eat.

warning, *You'll go hungry*. (13)

The title, "Middle Kingdom" suggests that the setting of the poem is China, not Korea. However, the poem has a mythic, fairytale quality, with "secrets lost in hissing woods" and "Giant ghosts" and a house that is "spell bound" (13). The unreal quality may be a reflection of the experiences of food deprivation on the mind, affecting cognition and causing hallucinations. The comparison between the people the family might have become, and who they are "dwarfed by our other selves, / dwarfed by who we never became" suggests they are reducing in size rather than growing (13). The speaker's mother's only recourse is to prayer, which is "hated" by the speaker because the prayers do not change their situation. Out of deference to her mother, she mimes praying "pretending to say grace, pretending to pray, / / so as not to frighten her" (14).

Though using imagery of food in poetry is not exclusive to Asian American poetry, its use is more heavily loaded with cultural and historical meaning. Food here is used as a way of expressing identity, of linking the poets to their countries of birth, and to their families. Having the skills to produce appetising meals, and the poetic skills to describe the food, shows an ability to survive and thrive wherever they find themselves living. The human interactions associated with buying, preparing, eating and sharing food provide opportunities to the poets to explore identity and can bring them face to face with racism and stereotype. For Kim and Lee it is this interactive element of food which is the subject of some of their work. Both poets highlight the learned nature of food production and consumption, showing how recipes and food knowledge have been passed on from one generation to the next, and adapted to their changing needs. Asian Americans have been contributing to the American table

since their arrival. This has meant that food which was once considered exotic is no longer perceived as such. However, some foodstuffs continue to be less mainstream, and even repugnant, to readers. In using imagery of less appetising food stuffs the poet risks alienating readers, or reinforcing stereotypes. Lee appears less hesitant than Kim in describing food of this sort, freely admitting to being a lover of fish eyes, and describing quasi-cannibalistic eating in “The Cleaving.” Imagery of food and hunger abound in both poets’ work. By alluding to other poets’ work, Lee seeks to affirm his role as a poet. Kim’s use of a variety of sources resonates with the Korean art of p’ansori while also operating in a similar way to Lee, to affirm her place within a wider community of poets.

In this chapter I have outlined the ways in which Lee and Kim use food imagery in their poetry and the transnational allusions within their work. The next chapter examines how location influences their work as they move from Chinatown, to Asia and America. Early twentieth-century tourists were encouraged to visit Chinatown where they could “wander in the midst of the Orient while still in the Occident” (Takaki 247). Part of the attraction of Chinatown for many visitors is the chance to sample Chinese food. The *San Francisco Chronicle* assured prospective visitors in 1917 that although “they may not be familiar with the Chinese method of ordering [...] it is the policy of the management to aid visitors in selecting a repast without going to any great expense” (Takaki 248). As the next chapter shows, for Asian American visitors to Chinatown the experience can be just as alluring, yet equally unsettling.

Chapter Two

Home Thoughts From Abroad: Chinatown, Asia and America

Historically what often attracted visitors to Chinatown was a search for the exotic and a desire to sample Chinese food. “No enclave businessmen enjoyed greater success attracting culinary tourists in search of inexpensive exoticism than Chinese restaurants in the Chinatowns of New York and San Francisco” (Gabaccia 102). Chinatown has often served as a site of intersection for mainstream American culture and more ghettoized Asian culture. It may be a tourist destination to the non-Asian visitor but it can be where the Asian American visitors face their own ethnic identity and may be where they feel their loss of place most keenly. This chapter will examine the importance of place for Lee and Kim and also assess the impact that displacement has had on their work. It will take into account the significance of Chinatown in the Asian American imagination. Both poets’ visits to the lands of their and their parents’ birth will be explored. Although Suji Kwok Kim is Korean American, the idea of Chinatown, or a Korean equivalent, is still pertinent. For both poets Chinatown can be viewed as a liminal space, a contested site “from which *something begins its presencing*” (Bhabha 5; emphasis in original). For Kim and Lee that “*something*” differs. While Lee seems to find the encounters that Chinatown brings unsettling, one could say “unhomely,” Kim finds much to celebrate in Chinatown and similar boundary sites. Kim’s portrayals of Chinatown celebrate the survival of immigrants while honouring the struggles they have endured. The significance of the poets’ countries of birth in their imaginations, and thus their work, will be examined. Lee and Kim visited their parents’ and their

own birth-countries as adults. The creative results of these visits, their relationships with China, Indonesia and Korea, and their efforts to come to terms with what has been lost, as well as gained, will also be examined.

Chinatown can be seen in terms similar to Anzaldúa's "Borderlands" – "Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (19). Chinatowns can be thought of as borderlands given that they are a space in which different races and cultures coexist. Although Chinatowns are usually seen as ethnic enclaves, and therefore not strictly as "borderlands," because of their attraction of visitors from the majority culture they allow for the possibility of shrinking the space between individuals. However, Chinatowns can also further widen that space by confirming visitors' expectations of otherness.

On a smaller scale Lee's and Kim's very presence in America means they inhabit a borderland, as they daily negotiate being part of a minority group.¹ Lee's family's relocation to a working class area of Pennsylvania from more intellectual and educated background in Indonesia and China, places him in a liminal space between cultures, classes and races. Their negotiations of these spaces, and their dialogue with their pasts by return trips to the countries of their parents' births colour their work. Like the buffer zone that is the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea, this space can be contested, a place of tension, observation with the potential for unrest (or self-doubt, disillusionment and alienation). However, just as the DMZ has become a nature reservation, filled with abundant plant and animal life (K. C. Kim),

¹ However, it is worth noting that a recent study has shown that Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority in the U.S. today. (Cohn et al.)

the borderlands within Lee's and Kim's lives and work can also be a place of fertile creativity and opportunity, allowing the possibility for creative freedom that may not be possible for other poets. Some of the places where these borderlands can be said to be most prominent in their work, and in the work of other Asian American poets, are places in which American and Asian cultures meet, in their interactions with predominantly non-Asian majority and in their visits to Asia.

Mignolo argues that diaspora, or exiles, exist in a kind of "location-in-movement" rather than "location-in-land," and that:

[e]xiles 'have' to leave the territory where they belonged and, consequently, are located in a particular kind of subaltern position, and that subaltern position creates the conditions for double consciousness and border thinking. To be in exile is to be simultaneously in two locations and in a subaltern position" (Delgado, Romero and Mignolo 15).

This sense of dislocation can mean that the diasporic poet may not feel fully at home anywhere, leading one Asian American writer, Jessica Hagedorn to claim that she feels most at home at airports: "Where do we live now—here or there? [...] I have a sense that I'm almost happiest [...] in an airport, in between flights" (Prendergast 29). For Lee questions of origin and home are something he deals with constantly and he admits that "in my most pessimistic moods I feel that I'm disconnected [...] that I'll never have any place that I can call home" (Moyers 32). Sometimes perceived as "permanent house guests in America," Asian Americans are frequently subjected to scrutiny about where they are "from," with their answers often proving unsatisfactory to the questioner, and leading to further questioning "but where are you *really* from?" (Wong 6; emphasis in original). For Lee, this question has no simple

answer. Returning to Indonesia as an adult, and, with his mother, visiting what had been her home in China, Lee realised that, in a sense, there is no place like home. Rather than directly confronting the way in which Asian Americans are viewed in America, Lee instead asserts that all humans are exiles and that language, and failed attempts to communicate, add to our sense of displacement and confusion. Lee's feelings about visiting China and Indonesia are perhaps similar to those expressed by John Yau:

What would someone who is Chinese or Afro-American or Latino return to in this country, in its history? What would they be nostalgic for? In my case, my parents left China. They could never go back to live there, so the notion of return seems to me both an impossibility and a repressive illusion (Freitag in Sielke and Kloeckner 306).

Confusion over the source or object for nostalgia, is something which Lee expresses when recalling seeing his father's grave with its Chinese characters in a cemetery where many of the other graves are marked with American flags.

However, Lee finds a community in poetry, as does Yau:

Being Chinese American and living in, but not belonging to, this homogenous community [his parents belonged to], and [...] being interested in poetry and imagining that there was a community of poets that I and anybody else could belong to [...] poetry became this wonderful possibility (Freitag in Sielke and Kloeckner 306).

Like Yau, Lee feels a sense of home and connection through poetry:

The closest thing to home that I've actually felt is reading poems that I love, not my own [poems], poems that I love, the great rest at the end of a poem,[...] I feel a sense of home there or arrival or something...I can't explain it (Brown).

Lee and Kim become part of this community of poets, not only by writing poetry but also by alluding to the wider community of poets and writers within their work.

Though Kim does not express the same levels of disillusionment and self-doubt as Lee, she is nostalgic for, and desirous of, establishing a connection with the family members left behind in North Korea. While this is difficult due to the political situation, she can imaginatively reclaim the connection by writing about them in her work. By doing so, she and Lee, may be influenced by their positions as part of a postmemory generation. Their trips to Asia may be partly motivated by a desire to fill in the gaps in the narratives of trauma which have been passed on to them by their parents, and a desire to see for themselves the effects of the violence which their countries of origin have suffered.

In his memoir, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*, Eric Liu recalls a childhood visit to Chinatown in New York with his Chinese born parents². Enjoying the sights and sounds as visitors, the family's visit comes to an awkward end when they have a chance encounter with Eric's grandmother who lives there. This unplanned meeting reminds the Liu family that they are not as far removed from Chinatown as the other sightseers: "the realization that her daily routine was our tourist's jaunt, that there was more than just a hundred miles between us, consumed the backs of our minds like a flame to paper" (103). On his family's return to their "own safe enclave," Liu recalls: "I made myself take a shower" in spite of the fact that

² The title appears to be an allusion to both James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* and the novel *Native Speaker* by Chang Rae Lee.

it was “perhaps later than I’d ever stayed up” (104). Liu’s desire to wash after the Chinatown encounter suggests a need for purification, as though the visit has left contamination on his skin. The visit to Chinatown is clearly very unsettling for Liu, even before the encounter with his grandmother. He views the family home in a largely white neighbourhood as a “safe enclave,” which is how Chinatowns often were viewed by their Chinese residents. Although Liu’s reaction to his Chinatown visit is an extreme one it illustrates the unexpected responses that trips to Chinatown may provoke for the Chinese American visitor. For the Asian American poet this vacillation between living as both visitor and resident, between being at home and being a guest, a resident and a tourist, which may be experienced in America at large may be felt most acutely in Chinatown (or its Korean equivalent). “In the end, then, we see the Chinatown we want to see. But in the end, Chinatown sees us, too. And knows what is false about our representations” (108). The tension between authenticity and falsehood, between being an American “tourist” to Chinatown, or being perceived as a resident of Chinatown can be a nexus for creativity. Liu’s reaction appears to spring from experiencing the uncanny, or the return of the repressed.

The potential for chance encounters that Chinatown makes possible is explored by Lee in “Furious Versions,” where the father figure in the poem meets a man he last saw in China, who he helped after the death of the man’s wife. The meeting resonates with “the sadness of ten thousand miles” but the fact that the man “remembered / the sound of another’s footfalls” well enough to call him “after twenty years / on a sidewalk in America” is the kind of miraculous coincidence that only seems to happen in Chinatown (*The City in Which I Love You* 23-24). Lee’s speaker has his own imagined chance encounter in Chinatown:

America, where, in Chicago, Little Chinatown,
who should I see
on the corner of Argyle and Broadway
but Li Bai and Du Fu, those two
poets of the wanderer's heart.

Folding paper boats,
they sent them swirling
down little rivers of gutter water.

Gold-toothed, cigarettes rolled in their sleeves,
they noted my dumb surprise:

What did you expect? Where else should we be?

(The City in Which I Love You 23-24; emphasis in original)

The men make paper boats recalling the practice of Li Bai who, according to legend, would make paper boats of his completed poems sending them downriver to an uncertain destination. The emphasis was on the creative act rather than on the finished product. The act of floating the boats downstream shows the way the artist surrenders control of his/her work on its completion and publication. He/she cannot be sure of the way in which it is received, so sending the poems out into the world is an act of faith.

Li Bai, also known as Li Po, was called a "Banished Immortal" due to his travels throughout China (Hinton and Po xi). In his later life Li Bai was exiled due to war and his connections to a corrupt prince (xxii). Earlier in the same section of the poem, Lee notes that the speaker and his father "wandered" but "unlike / Paul, we had no mission" (*The City in Which I Love You* 23). The boats also recall the uncertainty faced

by migrants as they left their homelands with Lee's own family's escape from Indonesia happening by boat. Lee's name-checking of the two poets is a rare overt acknowledgement of his Chinese cultural influences in his work. Although in interviews Lee recalls his parents' ability to recite classical Chinese poetry, in his work he rarely draws attention to this influence. Both Chinese poets, like Lee and his father, had nomadic periods. Lee's imagining of them in Chinatown, with the question: "Where else should we be?" suggests that modern wandering poets would naturally end up in America, and in Chinatown. "Furious Versions" could be seen as a wanderer's poem, with episodic shifts from the past to the present day, and from distant places "Bandung, 1958" to "Chicago to Pittsburgh" (13, 14). From the broader cityscape of Chicago, Lee specifies the location of the sighting of Li Bai and Du Fu at "the corner of Argyle and Broadway" (23). This specificity affirms Lee's speaker as someone with geographical knowledge of the city, a local. The poem repeatedly affirms its place and occasion as "here" and "now."

The three questions "who should I see," "what did you expect" and "where else should we be" could be questions posed to the American majority about the presence of ethnic minorities in their midst. The tensions between ethnic enclaves and their majority neighbours can colour the way in which they are perceived. Chinatown evokes differing responses depending upon the perspective of the visitor or resident. Michel Laguerre defines six different responses to Chinatown varying from "new home in a foreign land or home away from home" to "site with potential voters" and "spectacle, a living museum, and a marketplace to purchase exotic gifts" (14-15). No matter how it is viewed, according to Laguerre, Chinatowns or other ethnic enclaves are always born as "contested sites, contested by both the Anglo community, which

does not want the ethnics to permanently occupy an area of the city, and by the enclave's residents, who do not want to be incarcerated in segregated settlements" (10). They may remain contested sites long after they have been established and throughout their existence (11). Chinatown can also be viewed as a "seemingly static place that habitants must struggle to escape from" as well as representing "home and family" (Rocío G. Davis 172). Lee's three questions of perception, expectation and location speak to how Chinatown may be viewed by its non-residents. Visitors to Chinatown come as tourists in search of spectacle and excitement, with expectations of having an authentic Chinese experience. The sighting of Li Bai and Du Fu on an American street corner seems an appropriate place for them to be. Argyle and Broadway is the centre of the New Chinatown area of Chicago, but its residents include Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese expatriates, as well as American born ethnically Chinese. The area was designated as an area of national historic interest in 2010. Lee and his family moved to the area long before it became Chinatown because it was one of the few affordable places they could find and he recalls a time when it was still an undesirable neighbourhood, until gradually Vietnamese restaurants began to open and the "prostitutes" and "drug dealers" moved out (Brown).

In *The Winged Seed*, Lee recalls another chance encounter which makes him question his identity and his family's history. Eating in a Chinese restaurant, "in the South side of Chicago" the owner recognises his mother and recalls hearing Lee's father preaching in Hong Kong (75). He recalls accurately the story of how the Lee family escaped, something which leaves Lee feeling "filled with a mixture of sadness and disgust, even shame" (75). Hearing his own family's story from "a fellow immigrant, as lost in America as we were," left Lee feeling "confusion and anger [...]"

almost ready to disavow everything” (76). Perhaps, like Liu’s family’s encounter with their Chinese grandmother, this meeting reminds Lee of how far his family has travelled, disrupting an ordinary meal by bringing them back to past uncertainties. The anger may be that even when they eat together as a family their past as refugees intrudes, uninvited, and they are reminded once again that they are living in a “city I call home, in which I am a guest” (*The City in Which I Love You* 51). “What makes a person want to disavow his own life?” Lee asks (*The Winged Seed* 76). Julia Kristeva posits that “settled within himself, the foreigner has no self. ... ‘me’ is elsewhere, ‘me’ belongs to no one, ‘me’ does not belong to ‘me,’ ... does ‘me’ exist?” (Kristeva *Strangers to Ourselves* 8; ellipses in original). Lee’s bewildered desire “to disavow his own life” relates to this foreignness and his identity as a refugee, but also a need to escape his father’s long shadow.

Lee’s poems frequently explore the tension and confusion of establishing his own identity as separate from his father’s (which will be explored in more detail in a later chapter). The confusion between his father’s life and his own extends to an uncertainty between his childhood and his imaginary life. As noted by Benzi Zhang:

In Kristeva’s terms, the unloved child’s “searching for scraps of haunting memory” can be considered as a quest for a father(land): “No obstacle stops him, and suffering, all insults, all rejections are indifferent to him as he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams.” The search for a father(land) indicates a desire to go back where one belongs and to renew one’s (re)membership of a communal home (20).

But the possibility of return is disrupted by the complicated relationship that Lee and Kim have with their parents' countries of origin, not least because of the political system and the relationship between the US and China and Korea. For Lee, there was a reluctance to visit, due to the fear that he would feel no connection with China or Indonesia once he got there. Although his parents viewed China as "home," a place to which they would one day return, Lee and his siblings viewed it differently, as a place that they had fled. Speaking about the experience of visiting both China and Indonesia, Lee reflected that he did not feel at home in either place: "I went back to Indonesia: that's not my home. I went to China, where my people are from and that's not my home either" (Brown). Kim's desire to visit her parents' countries (as they are now two separate nations), has led to her repeated applications for permission to travel in North Korea, having previously spent time in South Korea as a Fulbright scholar. Both poets had family left behind when they fled to the US, Lee's brother remained in China, and in Kim's case, her paternal family were in North Korea and their whereabouts (or indeed, whether they still survive) are unknown.

Lee's referral to the city as the "city I *call* home" suggests an almost self-conscious appropriation of the title "hometown." But it is clear that the city in "The City in Which I Love You" is not a place of refuge, as he describes the vandalised churches and boarded up buildings, and it is a "policed / city" (51).

my birthplace vanished, my citizenship earned,
in league with the stones of the earth, I
enter, without retreat or help from history,
the days of no day, my earth
of no earth, (56)

The lines suggest the dilemma of any refugee but it is in keeping with Lee's outlook that all humans are exiled, that this is a situation as old as the earth itself. However, it also reflects on the particular experience of living in an adopted country, a country which may share an undercurrent of violence with the country from which they have fled. Referring to this poem, Lee observed "I think living in America is a violent experience, especially if you do feel like the other. And I think assimilation is a *violent experience*" (Piccione and Rubin 54; emphasis in original). The poem begins with an epigram from *The Song of Songs* and is obviously modelled on the work, with its tone of spiritual and sensual longing and desire. It owes much to *The Waste Land* also, in its almost apocalyptic vision of urban desolation. It appears to be an assertion of individuality, while also questioning the certainty of identity: "was not me" and "none of them is me" and a confirmation of otherness "your otherness is perfect" "Your otherness exhausts me" (54, 55). Identity is termed in negatives, defined by what or who the speaker is not, "they are not me forever" (55). Lee claims that the poem is a quest poem, and one which concerns:

the realization of my identity and that identity as the universe. I am perfectly convinced that is what I am, the universe. [...] The poetry comes out of a need to somehow—in language—connect with universe [sic] mind; that is a mind I would describe as 360 degree seeing (Marshall 125).

The poem's assertion of extreme individuality is paradoxically the ultimate expression of American-ness, and a way of claiming a sense of belonging.

In "Restless" Lee explores the tension of being born in one country, only to live and die in another, "and where you live is where you'll be buried / and when you dream it's where you were born" is something which the speaker "can hear in your

voice" (*Book of My Nights* 58). The binary nature of this divided life, with its clearly demarcated zones of day and night, here and there, before and after, suggests the difficulty of reconciling both aspects in a satisfactory way, "your day is hostage to your nights" (58). The poem is full of pairings of binaries reflecting the divisions within the person addressed by the poet's speaker: "that's why you're divided: *yes* and *no*" (58). Lee's use of italics in these and other opposing words in the poem suggests they are intended to be spoken in another language: "I can hear by what you say / your first words must have been *mother* and *father*" (58). In fact, "mother" and "father," or some variation, are probably most children's first words. Lee reminds the reader in this way of the commonality of human experience, in spite of differing countries of origin. If the person the speaker addresses was "born in one country" then the words he first spoke would have been words from that country. The division suggest the gap between here and there, then and now. It is reflective of the position of the exile, for whom their origin is always in opposition with home. The dreams he has are of the country of his birth, according to the speaker.

However, as well as suggesting earthly dwelling places, Lee's poem suggests expulsion from a biblical Garden of Eden. His use of words such as "fate," "heaven," "god," "begotten" and especially the line "And the apple tree" resonate with the suggestion of this greater mythic human displacement (59). The tree is suggestive also of family trees "the entire lineage alive / in every leaf and branching" (59). Lee expresses an affinity with the book of Exodus in interviews, associating his own family's exile with a greater religious significance and seeing parallels between his family's escape from the dictatorship in Indonesia and Moses leading the Israelites from Egypt. By linking his family's narrative to a greater mythic story Lee gives his

family's suffering a deeper meaning than mere misfortune: instead of random bad luck, his family's escape narrative is one of chosen people being lead out of slavery and into religious freedom. In this way Lee's father takes on an even larger significance in his mind, as a Moses-like figure. In interviews Lee acknowledges the need to find a greater significance to his family's displacement and the desire to create a testament to their loss. The tension between where "home" is, and was, is something Lee and Kim explore. This sense of bilocation, or bi-transplantation, colours the way in which they view both America and the lands of their, and their parents' birth.

Given the circuitous route by which the Lee family came to live in America, place and the idea of origin, have special significance for him. Although his parents continued to hold on to the belief that they would one day return to China, Lee had no memories of China and no connection to it other than through his parents. Instead of locating "home" as a geographical location on earth, Lee believes that the "home" that he, and all humans, are displaced from is the heavenly home to which he will one day return. While this may be a long-term comfort to Lee, he must still deal with the reality of feeling displaced in this life. Though Lee's earlier work seems to be focussed on the longer term comfort of finding a home in heaven, his more recent work in *Behind My Eyes*, acknowledges that "The kingdom of heaven is good, / But heaven on earth is better" ("Self-Help for Fellow Refugees" *Behind My Eyes* 18). "Self-Help for Fellow Refugees" offers advice to refugees on dealing with the experience of displacement, suggesting that "it's best to dress in plain clothes / when you arrive in the United States, / and try not to talk too loud" (16). The poem warns against false perceptions of closeness to others who appear to have shared similar experience: "...if

you think you read in the other, as in a book / ... / the story of your own birthplace / ... / ... / it probably means you're standing too close" (17).

Knowing when to look, and when to look away are the key to survival, the poem suggests: "looking the other way was a habit / your predecessors found useful for survival" (17). This is the kind of double consciousness Kim portrays in her poem, "Skins." The need to blend in with the dominant culture means assuming a sort of mask and rejecting those who may appear to share a common background. The sense of displacement is emphasized in the observation that the refugee's "birthplace, a country twice erased, / once by fire, once by forgetfulness" (17). The poem (like many of Lee's poems) emphasizes the importance of remembrance to the displaced person as an act of reclamation while also acknowledging that forgetting is inevitable "Get busy remembering while forgetting" (17). That the events which must be remembered are ones which a protective mother tries to shield her child from is apparent also, "try not to judge your mother too harshly. [... for] turning a child's eyes / away from history" (16).

Failing to find a place to call "home," in which they are not treated as guests, Asian American poets may resort to creating what Salman Rushdie has called "Imaginary Homelands" (10). Rushdie notes that the result of the inability to reclaim what has been lost means that the fragments of memory that remain assume greater significance (12). This is something which Lee's and Kim's work recognises, expressing a frustration with the fractures in the memories and a need to hold on to the whole pieces, however small or insignificant they may appear.

The Winged Seed, Lee's "Remembrance" expresses a pleasure in recalling memories and an anxiety about the memories which are lost. Kim's "Translations

from the Mother Tongue,” “Fragments of a Forgotten War” and “Hwajon [Fire Field]” are attempts to represent the memories of her parents’ experiences in Korea. In doing so, the two poets are responding to the stories that have been told to them by family members. In common with other children of survivors of trauma, Lee and Kim can be seen to have undergone the effects of postmemory, which according to Marianne Hirsch, is “often obsessive and relentless—need not be absent or evacuated: it is as full and as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself” (22). Lee and Kim respond differently to the effects of postmemory. Lee’s poetic attempts to record his family’s experiences amount to a form of mythmaking, and are based on some of his own memories. Kim must rely on others’ recollections of events as well as her own imaginative recreation because the events preceded her birth.

Lee’s “Imaginary Homeland” is exemplified in “I Ask My Mother to Sing,” where the speaker declares, listening to his mother and grandmother singing, “I’ve never been in Peking, or the Summer Palace, / [...] But I love to hear it sung” (*Rose* 50). The women’s singing has a lamenting, keening quality to it, transporting them back to China. The singing allows them to cross both space and time, as they “sing like young girls” (50). The gap between the three generations is evident in the fact that the speaker’s only connection to the places they sing of is through his mother and grandmother. That this is a connection which will not always be present, is made clear by his father’s death: “If my father were alive, he would / play his accordion and sway like a boat” (50). Already the links to this country have changed, the fullness of the experience has been compromised as another element, the accompanying music played by his father, is gone.

The poem shows that the loss is ongoing, continuing long after the date of departure from home. As the generation with the longest connection to the country of origin ages and dies, ties to the country are further eroded. However, through the poem, the speaker (or Lee) can in his way contribute to keeping an artistic tribute to this image of China alive. And although it is a place he has never visited, he can imagine himself standing “on the great Stone Boat to watch / the rain begin [...] the picnickers / running away” (50). Instead of offering a translated version of the song, the poem reflects the cathartic experience that this kind of artistic, creative remembering can be where “Both women have begun to cry, / But neither stops her song” (50). The last line suggests the isolation of this creative act, the song is “*her* song,” although both women sing together. Their creativity “is superbly solitary” (Kristeva and Moi 14). The poem resonates with Kim’s “Translations from the Mother Tongue,” as in both poems the speakers can access the preceding generations’ experiences through the medium of song and oral tradition. Though they cannot experience living in their parents’ country of birth, or can only do so as visitors, singing allows a shared cultural understanding.

Lee’s need to create artistically a space to call “home” may owe something to his memories of his father’s artistic endeavours during the nomadic period of their lives. Lee’s father constructs a version of “Solomon’s Temple” based on descriptions from the Bible. The Temple, which memorializes Lee’s brothers as the seraphim, was made using cardboard and scraps of paper collected during the migratory travels (*The Winged Seed* 42). This reflects the transitory, fragile nature of the constructions of home. It was designed to be dismantled so that it could be flattened and easily transported from place to place – Lee mentions a number of places in which the

temple was being built, on a ship to Macau, in Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore. The piece is a mobile work of art but one which is constructed over a period of four years, initially begun by Lee's father as a present for Lee's sister eleventh birthday. In spite of its mobility the cardboard Temple is lost at some point during the family's travels, or since their arrival in America.

Lee's father's creative ambition is a constant presence for four years of their travels, becoming a joint family activity:

each place new, while one thing remained the same: on a ship or in a tiny apartment room, a table was cleared [...] his wife and children sat by him while he resumed work on his temple. [...] he was building as we moved. What began as a toy for his daughter became the sole activity around which the family gathered, no matter where we lighted for a week or a month (T 38).

Materials for creating the temple were collected by the children, the temple remaining the one constant during their travel times. However, working on the project became a way to avoid seeing the perilous situation in which the family were living: "while Ba was reenvisioning Genesis and Exodus. We carried our clothes in bundles, our books and shoes were rotten [...] while Ba meticulously scissored, folded, tucked, and layered into existence his house of worship" (41-42). The temple becomes a way of dissociating from the distressed state of his family. The episode shows the way in which creativity can become a way of uniting people, and bringing pleasure to lives, but also warns against the obsessiveness which creativity can bring. The metaphor of his father's creativity suggests that Lee's work is a form of home-making. Using his fragmented memories from his childhood, and more recent experiences, Lee creates a testament to his family's history. Where his father used

scraps of coloured paper, Lee uses allusions from the community of poets with whom he aspires to be associated.

While Lee's "Restless" suggested the Garden of Eden, and the original example of exile, for Kim a garden created in exile is the focus in "The Korean Community Garden in Queens" (*Notes from the Divided Country* 71). Kim describes the "the vacant lot nobody wanted to rebuild," where an abundance of plant life is growing: "[p]lanted by immigrants they survive, / like their gardeners, ripped from their native / plot" (71). The poem celebrates diversity, survival, and change, recognising the way in which transplanted communities can thrive in unpromising circumstances. However, the specificity of the poem's title is misleading, as revealed in Kim's endnotes: "The Korean Community Garden in Queens' is imagined, although some details can be found in community gardens in Astoria, Flushing, and other neighbourhoods" (*Notes from the Divided Country* 74). Kim's insistence in reminding the reader that this is an imaginary garden may be an allusion to Marianne Moore's "Poetry," with its line, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" (1219).

The garden, flourishing on an unwanted vacant ground, reflects the way in which many ethnic enclaves begin, with members of an ethnic group taking up residence in less desirable neighbourhoods. The poem suggests that the presence of the Korean immigrants improves the neighbourhood, converting what had been a barren and potentially dangerous place, into an idyllic spot. The first stanza hints that the vacant lot had been a gathering place for drug use, drinking and dumping rubbish. A wasteland, it is littered with "syringes," "tire-shreds and smashed beer bottles" (71).

Although the garden is described as abundant and flourishing, the language suggests that this success has been achieved after a struggle, with the growth of the

plants described in violent terms. They “spike through” and there is “an uprising of grasses whose only weapons are themselves” (71). What could be a benign pastoral poem instead shows that the fight for life is just that, a battle. The struggle of the plants, and the instinct to survive and thrive reflects the struggles of those who planted them. Kim’s poem shows how these enclaves can flourish in unpromising locations, and recognises that Koreatowns or Chinatowns stand out in contrast with the majority neighbourhoods that encircle them: “All things lit by what they neighbour / but are not” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 72). The diversity of plant life, the daily changes the speaker observes, are reflections of the diversity of life there may be within a city. Kim’s poem recalls the Garden of Eden, however here the garden has been created in exile “planted by immigrants [...] / [...] ripped from their native plot.” (71). The poem concludes with a prayer-like plea:

[...] May I, and their gardeners in the old world,
who kill for warring dreams and warring heavens,
who stop at nothing, see life and paradise as one. (72)

Kim’s closing lines resonate with Lee’s observation in “Self-help for Fellow Refugees” that “The kingdom of heaven is good / But heaven on earth is better” (*Behind My Eyes* 18). While both poets acknowledge the struggle and suffering of the immigrants’ lives, they do not want to exalt suffering as a means for achieving happiness. Happiness, as seen by Lee and Kim, is not better if deferred to an afterlife but should also be attainable in this life.

While “The Korean Community Garden in Queens” would seem to affirm Lee’s assertion of assimilation as a “violent experience,” in Kim’s love poem to New York, “Slant,” a more positive experience is portrayed (S. K. Kim “Slant”). “Slant” sees Kim

celebrate New York, in a similar way to which she celebrates Seoul in “Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers.” Beginning with the suggestion of a slanted eye, a play on both the angle of viewing something, as well as an ethnic marker, it becomes clear that the eyes are those of the Statue of Liberty “possessor of the most famous armpit in the world.” The poem describes a Chinatown scene of Chinese soap operas (a modern twist on the more expected Chinese Opera), “BBQ’d ducks,” and “old men sitting on crates [...] selling dried seahorses & plastic Temples of Heaven.” The poem relies on certain Chinatown stereotypes, such as the old men, “Ying & Yang Junk Palace,” “Golden Phoenix Hair Salon” but in doing so it playfully works against the Emma Lazarus inscription on the Statue of Liberty welcoming the “tired, [...] poor, [...] huddled masses” by portraying a vibrant, thriving community. It is worth noting that while Lady Liberty greeted those immigrants arriving from Europe, there was no West Coast equivalent for those immigrants arriving from Asia, where the majority of Asians would have arrived in the past. Unlike Lee’s desolate city in “The City in Which I Love You,” the New York Kim portrays is a place of belonging and hope, new beginnings and reinventions “the immigrants, the refugees, the peddlars [sic], stockbrokers and janitors, stenographers and cooks, / all of us making and unmaking ourselves, / hurrying forwards, toward who we’ll become, one way only, one life only.” Where Lee sees a city of “scabbed streets,” “boarded-up churches, swastikaed / synagogues” populated by “violated / [...] prosecuted citizenry,” Kim’s city is peopled with “live-it-up-while-you’re-young, Woo Me, / kind of love” “sun-tanners,” “Glamazons,” “oglers wearing fern-wilting quantities of cologne” (*The City in Which I Love You* 51). While Lee’s tone is one of loneliness and longing, Kim’s is

gratitude “I can’t help thinking no word will ever be as full of life as this world, / I can’t help thinking of thanks.”

Kim’s poem’s celebration of humanity recalls Walt Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” in its New York setting, and its portrayal of the city’s residents. The list-like repetition of seven consecutive lines beginning “light of” echoes Whitman’s style. Kim’s poem may also allude to Emily Dickinson’s “There’s a certain Slant of light” but it is offset by its tone and summertime setting.³ The vignettes she observes may in fact reinforce stereotypical Chinatown scenes. The collision of allusions in Kim’s work to Dickinson, Whitman, the Statue of Liberty, and New York street life and contrast with Lee’s encounter with Li Bai and Du Fu in “Furious Versions.” Lee’s encounter is much more intimate, and arguably, meaningful, than Kim’s dramatic scene of people throwing “BBQ’d ducks” at each other on the Chinese soap opera. Kim’s view, while celebratory and life-affirming is detached and voyeuristic, whereas Lee’s speaker walks through the city and interacts with the Chinese poets, they react to his “dumb surprise” (*The City in Which I Love You* 24). Kim’s poem has a cinematic appeal, it is a familiar and unchallenging view of the city as if Lady Liberty’s eyes were looking through a camera viewfinder and panning over the city before alighting on different scenes for close-ups. The portrayal of a soap opera couple throwing food at each other reinforces the carnivalesque aspect of the poem. Although she does not solely focus on Chinatown the scenes conform to some readers’ expectations of how Chinatown should appear. In doing this Kim perhaps makes the poem appeal to a wider readership, but by shifting the focus beyond Chinatown, to other cinematic

³ The “title” I use is the first line given in Johnson’s edition of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

scenes, the cologne-drenched strutting, and the central park sunbathers, she shows that Chinatown is as much a part of New York as the more mainstream scenes.

Indeed many of Kim's poems have a very visual and cinematic quality, especially as will be shown in a later chapter, her poems about war in Korea. Perhaps this may in some way explain the great-aunt's comments in "Levitations" that Americans think war is a "TV show that happens to other people" (*Notes from the Divided Country* 65). "Slant" promotes the idea of reinvention, and new beginnings for "all of us, making and unmaking ourselves, hurrying forwards, toward who we'll become, one way only, one life only." But the poem also acknowledges that it is not just the residents of the city who make and remake themselves, in doing so they "make and unmake" the city: "here in the city the living make together" ("Slant").

In "Generation," the speaker imagines a time before birth, or conception (*Notes from the Divided Country* 3-5). Here Kim returns to, as Lee would put it, "that place all human aching starts" (*Behind My Eyes* 16). Perhaps the ultimate quest to understand our past is to try to imagine what happened before our arrival in the world. Taking Lee's ideas that we are all in exile, then logically, the time before exile must be before our birth. A return to the womb is "the former *Heim* of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning" (Freud in Kristeva *Strangers to Ourselves* 185). Yet even in "the unborn world" the violence of the world outside intrudes as "doubts swarming like reconnaissance planes over forests of sleep" (*Notes from the Divided Country* 3). The speaker's time before birth can be thought of as Korean time. As she cannot know what her parents were like before her birth or before they came to live in America, and both experiences change them so utterly that the pre-birth/emigration version of them is not the present-day

version of them. The development from conception to birth mirrors the travels of the speaker, and other displaced people.

Like Lee's belief that the human condition is inherently one of exile, the poem reminds the reader that all of us have travelled from an unknowable elsewhere, to which we can never return except imaginatively as the poem does. The unborn child explores "the labyrinth of mother's body" which is a world in itself (5). Birth is the beginning of questioning and identity creation, and so the poem concludes: "I didn't know who or what I was, only that I was, / each question answered by the echo of my voice alone: I, I, I." (5). The mother's body is a kind of playground, a landscape which the speaker traverses, hides in, and will only leave when forced from it with forceps. This violent disruption to the idyllic pre-birth world mirrors the severing of ties with the Korean homeland. The uncertainty over identity begins with the arrival in the world, and the separation from mother(land) "I didn't know who or what I was, only that I was," (Kim 5). Kim's use of past tense here is interesting, the poem began with a more certain assertion of what the speaker "was" – "Once I was nothing: once we were one" (3). The poem alludes to Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," with the repeated lines in the fourth section beginning "Out of" (4). Kim's allusions, like Lee's allusions in his work, seek to align her with other American poets. It is interesting to note that although other influences in this poem are acknowledged in her notes – references to César Vallejo, Michel de Montaigne and *Hamlet* are made – her allusions to Whitman are not.

Writing about their parents' countries of birth, and their own relationships to that part of their family histories may be an emotionally fraught experience, but it

may also be an unavoidable part of their poetics. Kim confesses to the challenge of writing about North Korea, not least because of the lack of access to it:

I have found it difficult to write about Korea, particularly North Korea because there's so little information about it, which is deliberate on the part of the regime there. I don't feel that I'm a voice for the people of Korea but writing about it is inescapable for me. It's part of who I am (Sheridan).

Kim visited North Korea in 2007, after many years of applying for permission to visit.

The poems that resulted from that visit will be published in a forthcoming collection.

Unlike Kim, Lee did not initially feel compelled to visit his family's country of origin. In early interviews Lee viewed visiting China and Indonesia with ambivalence:

if I go to Europe I would feel as if I'm going to look at somebody else's ruins, and if I go to China I'd also be looking at someone else's ruins. I have the feeling I need to go back to Indonesia and yet, I don't know what I would look for there either. I'm not sure what I am supposed to look for anywhere (Moyers 38-39).

Although he had lived in America for over 40 years when interviewed for a PBS television show, Lee admits to not feeling completely at home there either: "I don't quite feel at home here in the United States. Although I do believe because we're political refugees this is the best place on earth – this is the safest place on earth, *so far*" (Brown; emphasis added). The adding of "so far," suggests a prevailing mistrust that a sense of security can continue. Lee is married to an Italian American woman, and their children have been born and raised there, but his comment reveals that the sense of displacement and insecurity never leaves, no matter what ties him to the surrounding community and nation. The sense of dislocation Lee feels from what

others may regard as his origins is rationalised by him as a longing for a spiritual homecoming: “often my longing for home becomes a longing for heaven [...]I don’t know if I believe in a heaven or a hell. But there’s a longing in me for heaven. Maybe my longing for home comes from a longing for heaven” (Moyers 39). However, in a later interview Lee speaks of wishing to create a “heaven on earth,” saying that this is his mission (Logan).

Lee’s poems show the attempt to deal with the unwelcome intrusion of disturbing memories from his past. Both poets appear to deal with “postmemory” in their writing. . In addition to postmemory, Chu associates Kim’s work with a type of grief, unique to Korean culture, known as *han* (“Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature” 97). This culturally unique form of grief is described as a kind of repressed anger, which never explodes and can be attributed to the deaths, disappearances and family divisions caused by the war, and because “our country has always had to shut up and listen to bigger countries: Japan, Russia, America” (Ishle Yi Park in Chu 2008, 97).

Though difficult to analyse, it manifests as both a “bitter-sweet longing” and “despair ‘that wracks your insides like fire’” (Freda; Park in Chu 2008, 97). *Han* can cause physical symptoms which have been acknowledged by anthropologists as a “culture-specific medical condition whose symptoms include dyspnea, heart palpitation, and dizziness” (Somers in Chu 2008, 98). The repressive nature of the anger is of note, given Kristeva’s identification of the “sterile repressions” which the foreigner must contain (*Strangers to Ourselves* 29). Kim’s efforts to understand her mother’s *han* is demonstrated in “Translations from the Mother Tongue” and to deal

with her own version of what Chu calls “postmemory *han*,” in other poems, such as “Generation.”

The need to return, or retrace the family heritage in Asia is something to which both poets admit. However, it can be a risky strategy with Asian Americans often viewed as being *not quite* American, and having more of an allegiance to their Asian roots than their American homeland. The most notorious example of this is, of course, the transfer of Japanese American citizens to “Relocation Center” internment camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbour. In “Transit Car,” Kim imagines a speaker looking at a photograph of a Japanese American woman en route to an internment camp in Arizona. Photographs are frequently deployed as a trope in Asian American literature and in literature exploring postmemory, something which will be discussed further in the next chapter. The photograph seems to hold a clue to a past, and to an unknowable person. The speaker looks at a picture of a woman on a transit car, and reverses the gaze, imagining the interior of the train, seeing it through the woman’s eyes as she notices the “steel bars” and peeling paint work “the wood’s surface has turned / to underskin” (63).

Throughout the poem the woman tries to see what is beneath – under the dirt of people’s skin and their clothes, the peeling paint to a place “[w]here hope / must lie” (63). The woman’s “[f]ace pressed against the glass. Her gaze almost burning / through the wall of the photograph to meet mine” (63). Here a note of doubt enters the poem, “Or am I deceiving myself?” (63). Looking at a picture behind glass, or through a train window, one would also see one’s own face reflected back. This merging of faces and identities is unsettling to the viewer: “What is she looking for, staring so hard / her gaze seems to rip the lids of her eyes?”(64). The significance of

the eye lids as racial markers, and their erasure, allows a common human connection between the viewer and the object of the gaze. However the possibility of this is undone by the final two lines “If her hoping has no edges. No skin. / Only clarity remains and it is not enough” (64). Like many of Kim’s poems there is more than a hint of violence in the words “pistons punch” on the train, the train arrives with a “blast” and “crack” (63). The “crack” is juxtaposed with “rifling,” which though a benign reference to looking through labels, hints at the watchtowers and guards to come. Kim’s inclusion of the parenthetical subtitle “Between ‘Assembly Center,’ San Bruno, California, and ‘Relocation Center,’ Poston, Arizona,” stops the poem from directly linking to the more historically familiar transit cars of the Holocaust. However, it still allows the connection between the two historic injustices to be made in the reader’s mind. Like Lee’s communion with immigrants from other Asian backgrounds in “The Cleaving,” Kim’s empathy for the experiences of Japanese Americans’ internment goes against the historical antagonism between Korean and Japanese Americans (Takaki 283).

In “New Year at the Demilitarized Zone,” Kim describes the desolate frozen landscape between North and South Korea, and the movements of the soldiers, diplomats and tourists who congregate in the area. The poem recalls the “11 million separated families, 11 million lost / relations” who crossed the space before the border was put in place (“Writing in the New Year; New Year at the Demilitarized Zone”). However, the poem also notes with hope the plant life hidden under the frost, waiting to put out shoots in spring, whose seeds, like the separated families, will be scattered over the area. Like the Korean Garden in Queens, the unpromising, contested site can still nurture new life and growth. The poem suggests that the

movement and conflicts of the humans around the space are temporary and irrelevant, the plant life continues to grow and flourish as it did before and during the war, indifferent to the concerns of those who walk close by. The implication is that what is being observed by those close to the DMZ are inconsequential.

The passage of time in the poem is striking, the fifty years since the border was put in place being measured out by the trains from Seoul which “arrive hourly.” The titles which the people close to the border have appear to define their identities, and yet seem inconsequential. Even those with more elevated positions seem to be faintly ridiculed by Kim, perhaps because they are titles which do not clearly indicate a role to the same extent as “the secretaries, drivers and janitors,” “secret police,” and “Chinese tourists.” Each of these is suggestive of activity unlike the “U.N. armistice commission officers,” and “Dear Leader [who is] ‘president for eternity,’” the lower case letters making clear Kim’s gentle mocking of their self-importance. The trains which “arrive hourly” – and the emphasis on time in the arrival of the “New Year” shows that these are human artificial divisions, like the divisions between borders.

In “Levitations” Kim imagines her “dead great-aunt levitating over the Hudson in red sneakers and a shroud” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 65). The bizarre dream or vision that Kim “saw,” implies that her great-aunt cannot rest peacefully in America “You think it’s easy being dead? [...] Especially in America?” her aunt asks, and attributes this to the way in which Americans experience war, as “a TV show that happens to other people” (65). Kim’s speaker interprets her aunt’s appearances as “her own voodoo doll” and concludes that “[i]t seemed only a matter of time before I could find the right needles to pierce her back to life, as to pain!” (65). The responsibility that this places on Kim’s speaker may be to educate Americans as to the

real legacy of war, for her parents and her own generation, by writing about it in her poems. However, in doing so she sometimes risks fetishizing the violence herself. The episode is seen as a kind of freak-show television programme, as the great-aunt's speech seems out of sync with the movement of her lips "like a Kung Fu movie with bad dubbing," and she appears surrounded by naked "vodka-jello-wrestlers" and "blond midget hookers, swinging their hips" (65). This perhaps recognises that for Kim's speaker also, her experience of war is disconnected, and through the medium of television.

"Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers" sees Kim capture a different city which was "built / out of ash, out of the skull-rubble of war" (35). Though this poem celebrates Seoul as a city that has survived, and thrived in spite of its past bloody history "MORE THAN 3 MILLION DEAD, OR MISSING—," it acknowledges that those dead and missing are "still missed by the living." (36). The speaker is called "daughter" by a grocer "because I look like her, / for she has long since left home" highlighting the fact that if her parents had not left Korea she could be a daughter of this city (37). The (re)making of this city is more remarkable than the making and remaking of New York in "Slant," with its construction "like a shared dream, / every bridge & pylon & girder & spar a miracle" because there was nothing there fifty years before "but shrapnel, broken mortar-casings, corpses," (36). Where the "lovers on Chinese soap operas" in "Slant" threw food at each other, here there are "lovers so tender with each other / I hold my breath" (37).

The city bustles with commerce with "hawkers haggling," "fishermen," "vendors," and "*hanyak* peddlers" all competing for business. Where "Slant" seemed to be a city observed from a distance, in "Montage..." the speaker walks through the

action, and as in Lee's "Furious Versions," or "The Cleaving," interacts with the people encountered. The grocer's claiming of her as "daughter" asserts her sense of belonging but she still sees a city through the light of its tragic past, watching men "playing *paduk*, or Go, / old enough to have stolen overcoats & shoes from corpses" (37). Though seeing it through this lens, rather than view the men (or other inhabitants) as victims, she portrays them as survivors "whose every breath seems to say: after things turned to their worst, we began again" (37). The poem reflects that "no one can hurt you, no one kill you / like your own people" as she observes the people around her, recognizing that "each soul [is] fathomless" as if wondering how the events could have taken place, or if they could happen again.

Lee and Kim explore the creative possibilities of boundary sites where Asian and American cultures meet. While Lee sometimes finds the experience unsettling, Kim embraces and celebrates the contested sites. The encounters Lee (or his poems' speakers) experience are often an unwelcome reminder of his loss of place and of his family's troubled past. Perhaps due to her lack of memory of a life before coming to America, Kim seems less troubled by a sense of displacement, instead choosing to focus on the possibility for reinvention and growth that America provides while still acknowledging the struggle that this may involve. For both poets a visit to their own, and their parents' birthplaces, allows them honour their families' histories and the circumstances which led them to America. However, in spite of feeling a connection to Asia, their visits reaffirm their place in America. In spite of this connection their thoughts and memories are repeatedly drawn towards Asia, perhaps in an effort to understand their parents' traumatic experiences there. The violence, torture and

famine that their families fled to come to America are frequently explored in their work and will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Weight of Memory: Postmemory, Memory and History

Each memory I own is like a photo being eaten away from the edges toward the center (Lee *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* 88).

The characters survive through the telling,
the teller survives by his telling; by his voice
brinking silence does he survive

("Furious Versions" Lee *The City in Which I Love You* 26)

Both Kim and Lee grew up in the knowledge that their present living circumstances in America were a direct result of their parents' traumatic experiences in Asia. Growing up with the effects of postmemory, the poets try to honour those experiences of trauma within their work.¹ Lee uses his poems and his prose poem/memoir, *The Winged Seed*, to try to understand his father's experiences as well as to try to disentangle his own sense of identity from his father's overwhelming presence. Kim's work revisits her family, and Korea's, history, attempting to reinscribe Korea's "Forgotten war" in her American readers' consciousness. In doing so she attempts to bear witness to events she did not directly witness. As the custodians of their families' histories, the poets bear the burden of finding appropriate means to record and pass

¹ Postmemory, as defined by Hirsch, and outlined in my Introduction, is a particular form of memory which arises in the children of survivors of trauma who grow up "dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (Hirsch 22).

on these memories. This chapter explores the ways in which Kim's and Lee's work responds to these demands, to honour and to record, to transmit but not to exploit their families' histories as well as their own personal memories. The burden of responsibility the poets bear to create an appropriate testimony to their heritage is occasionally betrayed in their work. By examining Kim's and Lee's poems, I will show the effects of postmemory within their work and explore their contrasting responses to the difficulties of curating their families' stories.

Lee's memoir begins with a dream of the return of his dead father and the family posing for a photograph to mark the occasion. He realises that he has taken the place in the photograph that should have been occupied by his father, and that his father is seated in a more peripheral position. *The Winged Seed* uses imagery of photographs at five points in the text, doing so in line with Marianne Hirsch's theories about postmemory and photographs. Hirsch argues that photographs occupy a particularly important place within postmemory because:

in their enduring "umbilical" connection to life [photographs] are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory. They are leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance. (Hirsch 23)

She also notes the difficulty of interpreting family photographs because "the complicated configurations of gazes, looks, and image/screens exchanged within the familial makes any real exposure impossible: family pictures, including self-portraits will continue to resist understanding" (Hirsch 107-08). Lee's recounting of the dream

of his family “crowding to fit into view” in front of the camera lens, and his father’s position “at the end of the front row” instead of the centre of the photograph foreshadows his “Remembrance” which tries to accommodate his family history and his struggle to define his own identity, independent of his father (*The Winged Seed* 12). However, in contrast with the photograph, Lee’s father is very much at the centre of the memoir. Through his memoir, and many of his poems, Lee frequently attempts to deal with the postmemory effects of being the child of a torture survivor, and his own memories of the period during which his father was imprisoned and his family endangered. Although he sometimes tries to suppress the memories, they disrupt the text as he attempts to understand his father and his complicated relationship with him.

The difficulty of reading photographs, highlighted by Hirsch, is addressed by Lee as he describes a photograph of his mother’s family in China, which mirrors the posed family photograph in his dream. His mother’s photograph is “a complicated arrangement of aunts and uncles, first and second cousins, concubines and slaves, and each member sits or stands in strict accordance to his or her relation to my mother’s grandfather, the Old President, Yuan Shih-k’ai” (*The Winged Seed* 17-18). Lee’s inability to understand the relationships between the figures in the photograph, or identify the family members contrasts with his mother’s easy interpretation of the seating arrangement “It is a feudal hierarchy, impossible for me to understand completely, but which my mother grasps at a glance” (*The Winged Seed* 18).

The photograph appears to be the only one from that time on display, although the family have many more stored in a trunk. Lee describes how the trunk was carried by his father, Lee and his brothers throughout their journey from Indonesia but is now covered with a “white bedsheet” which obscures the ornate jade

and mother of pearl inlay scene from a Chinese opera (17). On top of the sheet covering the box is a “potted white begonia [...] dropping its flowers that lie like lopped ears pressed to a story” (17). The contents of the box include jade and porcelain ornaments which are “between many layers of blankets, wrapped in cloth” (17). Inside the box is yet another box, containing “hundreds of black-and-white photographs of people I’ve never met, pictures like the one that sits in a gilded frame on the cabinet of my mother’s big screen TV” (17). The belongings which were important enough to protect and transport over great distances cannot seem to be reconciled within the American location. The artifacts are hidden from view, and the trunk and its contents are more akin to a mausoleum, than a cabinet of wonders, or touchstone to the past.

Although Lee’s mother displays this particular photograph in a seemingly prominent position, the flat and inanimate figures in the photograph would surely be undermined by the moving images beneath them. Susan Sontag argues that photographs may be “more memorable” than the ephemeral television images: “[t]elevision is a stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor. Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again” (18). However, the stasis of the photograph in contrast to the moving images beneath it means it would be the television, rather than the photograph which would draw the viewer’s attention. The obscuring of the scene from the Chinese opera with the sheet, suggestive of a stage curtain, and the favouring of the more modern entertainment of television also highlights the difficulties of reconciling the family’s Chinese cultural past in an American locale. The use of the draped white bedsheet and white begonia, and the shared carrying of the

box suggest a coffin and grave (white is the traditional colour of mourning in China) with the objects buried with the (photographs of) people, just as Lee's mother's ancestors were buried "shrouded in countless layers of silk and enclosed in a box filled with money and precious jewels" (30). The only people in the photograph whose status Lee can identify with confidence are "the servants whose faces have been blacked out," and who are present only to hold the babies of the masters (18). While Lee knows the stories of some of his ancestors, he refers to them as "my mother's family," rather than his own, suggesting that he does not identify with them to the same extent as his mother did.

The trunk becomes a surrogate for the desecrated ancestral grave in China. Lee's mother's family made an annual visit to the graves to pay their respects. The description of all they took with them on their journey to the graves, shows the cultural and educational pursuits of the family members. The inventory Lee's mother recorded in her diary reflected their interests which ranged from languages to botany, astronomy, sport, music and literature (28). His mother's sisters: "read aloud from Zola or Balzac" as they travel, suggesting an interest beyond China (26). The luggage and caravan of mules contrasts with the meagre belongings the Lee family carried with them from country to country prior to their arrival in the US. The only possessions Lee notes his parents transporting are the paper model of Solomon's Temple his father made, his mother's black cooking pot, some suitcases and this trunk of possessions.

His mother's decision to stay at home in China "where everything that surrounded her was so old, she was certain it must be permanent," rather than attend school abroad like her siblings, makes her later period of exile seem all the more

poignant (27). Because the items which are brought from China and Indonesia are so few in number, their significance becomes far greater. Therefore Lee's inability to connect the personalities and family stories to the faces in the photographs makes the loss even greater. His disconnection from the feudal language of the photograph, makes him an outsider to his Chinese family, unable to identify individuals, and perhaps therefore unable to identify *with* them.

Hirsch notes how photographs can both highlight what has been lost, as well as allowing the viewer to reconnect to their past:

This condition of exile from the space of identity, this diasporic experience, is a characteristic aspect of postmemory. It brings with it its own narrative genres and aesthetic shapes and thus it permits us to return, from a somewhat different angle, to the photographic aesthetics of postmemory – the photograph's capacity to signal absence and loss and, at the same time, to make present, rebuild, reconnect, bring back to life (Hirsch 243).

Sontag also recognises the power of photographs as a representation of loss: "A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence. Like a wood fire in a room, photographs – especially those of people, of distant landscapes and faraway cities, of the vanished past – are incitements to reverie" (Sontag 16). The trunk of photographs may also suggest that Lee's mother does not feel that they are fully settled in America. Keeping the precious belongings carefully packed away, ready to move again at short notice could betray an insecurity about the permanence of their life in America. Sontag observes that: "[a]s photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure" (9). Sontag here is referring to the act of taking photographs

rather than displaying them, however, displaying photographs is often used as a way of claiming ownership over a space, whether it is in a private space, like a home, or a shared space like an office. Lee's mother's reluctance to display the other photographs of her family in China may be due to a complex intersection of reasons. Elsewhere in the text her refusal to revisit past memories is made clear and being surrounded by reminders of all that has been lost may be too painful for her.

Her motivations may also include a refusal to give up on the dream of one day returning to China, and therefore keeping her photographs packed and ready to leave is a statement of a refusal to settle in America. Memories of the episode in Indonesia where soldiers confiscated the photographs of Lee's father from the house may also make her protective of the photographs, keeping them out of sight is a way of keeping them safe. While Lee and his siblings had no desire to return to China, their parents still held on to the belief that they would one day return to live there. As an adult, Lee continues to feel not quite at home in America, while still accepting that it is the closest place he will have to a home.

Though Lee cannot identify the figures in his mother's photograph, he relates some of their stories through his text and beyond this he gives a history to those whose identities have been elided from the family narrative. He notes that the faces of the servants "have been blacked out, so that the babies they hold (not their own, but the children of the masters) look like they're floating" (18). The "floating" babies, perhaps anticipate a disconnection from the previous generations' way of life. Lee recounts the story of one teenaged servant girl, whose homesickness and

maltreatment led her to hang herself.² Later in the text his own close relationship with his Indonesian nanny, Lammi, is recalled giving a visibility to the relationships which surely existed between the servants and the children they held for the photograph. His recollections of Lammi, her family and a visit to her village home with his siblings, illustrate that the erased servants had families and lives of their own also. A desire to reconnect with Lammi is partially the motivation for Lee's return visit to Indonesia as an adult, although he was unable to locate her. Through these stories Lee shows that he can identify with the outsiders in the photographs rather than the privileged family members who understand the feudal codes by which he fails to live.

Of the other moments in the text which describe photographs, two concern photographs of Lee's father. While Lee's father ("Ba") was imprisoned the children prayed before his photograph each night, and over time he became both the object and the subject of their prayers "so that we were praying *to* him as well as *for* him" (64 emphasis in original). During this time soldiers called to the family home and removed Ba's personal papers and photographs of him, including the photograph the children addressed their prayers to before bed, in spite of their mother's pleas and attempts to bribe them. "Standing before the table and the absent photograph, we all three closed our eyes to see his face, and then uttered our supplications for the man called Ba, to the power called Ba. But the image was no longer vivid" (65).

Earlier in the text Lee's sister has mistaken a poster of Sukarno for a picture of their father, to the evident distress of their mother, who asked "*Have you forgotten what your father looks like?*" (64; emphasis in original) These episodes show the

² The episode is reminiscent of the "No Name Woman" section of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. Like the No Name Woman, the servant's ghost in Lee's text haunts the family after her death.

distortion of their father from man to mythical figure. The gap between the reality and the illusion is best illustrated by the final photographic appearance of their father within the text. This occurs after the family have left Indonesia and Ba has attracted a large following as a preacher in Hong Kong. The children encounter the photograph on a leaflet which, according to the text, is dropped from an airplane to publicise a meeting of his father's prayer meeting. "His profile, taken by the camera from a lower angle, was backed by the sky and mast, perfect for the image of helmsman or captain of souls" (74). The children recognise the photograph as one their mother had taken when they "were on the way to a detention center [sic]. My father and his family were being shipped from one prison in Jakarta to another on some remote island, where, so we were told, we would be given a house and yard which we would not be permitted to leave" (74). The photograph, taken just before the family's escape at sea, has different meanings to viewers depending on whether their knowledge of the man is as a public or private figure.³

The first edition of Lee's memoir was published without any accompanying photographs, aside from a photograph of the author. After being out of print for many years, the book was reissued in 2013 with photographs included with the text. However, only one of the six photographs is from his parents' generation in China. This single photograph is of Lee's maternal great-grandfather, the first President of the Republic of China, posing formally and dressed in full military regalia. The photograph of Lee's mother's family which he describes in detail in the book is not included. The photograph of Lee's father which was used on the promotional leaflet

³ The fifth description of a photograph in the text is a photograph of Lee's dead grandmother which his paternal "pedophile" [sic] grandfather makes the children pray in front of each night (*The Winged Seed* 174-75). During her lifetime the grandmother had been subjected to emotional abuse by the grandfather (such as being denied food, as discussed in Chapter One).

is absent also. The other photographs are typical family shots of Lee, his parents and siblings, during their travels in Asia, and shortly after their arrival in the United States. There is also a picture of his father in his prison uniform, posing with two other inmates. Perhaps Lee's decision not to include the "floating babies" family portrait in the reissued edition of *The Winged Seed* reflects his disconnection from this side of his family. Including the photograph could also undermine the impact of the description of the photograph, and the details of its position within the American family home. Paradoxically, unlike the first edition of *The Winged Seed*, the reissued version does not include an author's photo, all of the photographs of Lee in the book are of him as a young child.

Photographs, or descriptions of photographs, are used in other Asian American narratives as providing links to a lost past. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, a postmemory novel which explores the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians during and after World War II, contains several descriptions of photographs. A photograph of three generations of the Nakane family, including both maternal and paternal grandparents, before they were separated from each other by internment and travel restrictions connects the narrator to the time before traumatic history (17). Another photograph of the narrator as a toddler clinging to her mother's leg becomes a significant touchstone to her past and a recurring motif within the text (46). The photograph of her father's funeral is the only connection she, her brother, aunt and uncle have to his death and burial which they were unable to witness due to the travel restrictions (211).

Eric Liu's memoir, *The Accidental Asian*, also uses photographs as a way of mediating his relationship with his family's past and his . He describes looking at

photographs of his father in a privately printed memorial book created by his father's friends:

[i]t's through these photographs that I'll read the book every so often, searching the scenes for new revelations. That's partly because the photographs are so wonderful, soft black-and-white images of an innocence beyond articulation. But it's also, frankly, because I do not understand the text.

(5)

Unable to read the accompanying Chinese text which give context to the photographs of his father's Chinese childhood, Liu recognises that his inability to access this part of his father's life is connected to his own sense of identity:

I realize just how little I know about those years of Baba's life before he arrived in America, and before I arrived in the world. I sense how difficult it is to be literate in another man's life, how opaque an inheritance one's identity truly is. I begin to perceive my own ignorance of self. (6)

Trinh T. Minh-ha and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha make very different use of the motif of photographs in their work by reproducing photographs alongside the text. Both Trinh and Cha have backgrounds in film making, which may explain the ways in which they use photographs in their texts. Trinh uses stills from her films, reproducing multiple frames captioned with extracts from the text. The photographs do not always seem to relate directly to the text or even to the captions beneath them and run parallel to, rather than directly converse with the content. The inclusion of the photographs invites the reader to try to find connections between the images and the text alongside it. Trinh does so without providing any certainty about what those connections might be.

Cha's text also uses photographs and pictures in a similarly unconventional and perhaps to some readers, unsettling way. Without providing the reassurance of captions, *Dictée* includes photographs and images alongside the text, which like Trinh's use, seem to run parallel with the text. At times the reader can assume that the woman in the photograph is the woman referred to in the text. Other moments in the text leaves blank spaces which seem to invite readers to project images of their own on the empty space, which Josephine Hock-Nee Park compares to a "cinema screen, blank whiteness, and living surface" (144). Some illustrations in her text provoke the reader to make connections between them, for example the medical illustration of the vocal chords followed by the map of divided Korea a few pages later (Cha, 74,78). These two apparently unconnected images resonate with each other on many of the subjects of Cha's text, such as language, loss and division.

Lee's use of photographs in the reissued text is less artful than either Trinh or Cha. The inclusion of the photographs appears incidental. They relate to the text which surrounds them and they are clearly pictures of the people who are the subjects of the text. They serve to satisfy the reader's curiosity about the author and his family's appearance. However the photographs described in the text seem far more interesting than those reproduced. Lee attributes his preoccupation with memory to the differences between Western and Chinese views of the past:

In the Chinese language, when we say, *qian*, "t[h]en," that's the day before yesterday. The word, *qian*, means "in front of, or before." So yesterday lies in front of us. When you say *hotian*, that is the day after tomorrow; *ho*, means behind us. So the future is behind us. To the Chinese mind, the future is behind us, the past is in front of us. We are backing up, blind, into the future

[...] to the Western mind, the future is all before, so you leave the past behind.

(Jansen 79)

Because of this differing perspective on the relationship between the past and the future, many of Lee's poems seem to anticipate a future moment which invests the present with more meaning. His poems seem to have a consciousness of both this future as well as the past. This can result in linear time coming undone as the past, present, and future intersect. This may in part explain why the form of *The Winged Seed* is seemingly so unstructured. The text does not follow a coherent chronological order, instead it more closely mimics the disordered way in which the mind can wander as one memory leads to another. Lee's text moves from the present to his parents' childhood in China, to his own childhood experiences in Indonesia, Hong Kong and America. Interspersed throughout the text are poetic meditations, and an attempt to recall his father's "sermon on the seed." The text itself reflects the waywardness of a seed.

The title of, and recurring image within, the text was inspired by Lee's father's practice of carrying seeds in his pocket. According to Rocio Davis it "clearly refers to his father's successive migrations" (205). While this may be true, the title also reflects the waywardness of memory. At the mercy of the elements, a winged seed must rely on a breeze in order to travel to fertile soil where it can take root and grow. Davis reads the title as a "powerful image of memory as a plant that takes root and grows [which] contrasts sharply with Lee's disruptive childhood and eventual settling in the United States" (205). Although as Davis notes, the seed "travels with its essential resources inside it," its growth and future are beyond its control.

As the son of a Christian minister Lee would be familiar with the parable of the seed. The parable describes a farmer's carelessness scattering seeds, with some landing on the path to be eaten by birds. Some fell on shallow ground where they grew but wilted in the sun because they did not have deep enough roots. The remaining seeds fell on fertile ground and produced a much greater yield. A winged seed, dependent on the wind rather than a farmer to aid its travel to fertile ground is even more at the mercy of the elements. While it could be argued that the wings mean the seed has some form of agency in comparison to other seeds, it is largely powerless to control its own flight, or where it will land and take root. Lee's title may reflect his anxieties about how his testament to his family's experiences will be received by readers.

The memories in *The Winged Seed* which take root and spread throughout the book also mimic the unpredictable flight path of a winged seed, rarely allowed to rest for long in any one place. "A seed, born flying, flew, knowing nothing else, it flew [...] its natural course was inevitably radial away from its birth [...] From unrest to unrest it was moving. And without so much as a map to guide it, and without so much as a light" (*The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* 92). Written in prose poetry, Lee's text rejects a chronological organisation of memories for a looser and more wayward structure. In this way the text reflects more accurately the way memory is dis/organised.

This structure, or rather lack of apparent structure, places the reader as the winged seed, a migrant, uncertain of where the journey will next take them. Memory itself rarely follows a chronological path, instead words and the associations they evoke lead the mind to wander from one memory to another, moving forwards and

backwards in time. The lack of a recognisable, chronological structure in the text also mirrors the uncertainty of life for the migrant:

to write is, of course, to travel. It is to enter a space, a zone, a territory, sometimes sign-posted by generic indicators [...] but everywhere characterised by movement: the passage of words, the caravan of thought, the flux of the imaginary [...] writing opens up a space that invites movement, migration, a journey (Chambers 10).

To read is to travel also, and in Lee's text, which defies easy categorisation, it is to travel without a map. Like migration, writing:

involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain [...] Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour—becomes an impossibility. (Chambers 5)

Lee professed a desire to attempt to write the text in a short space of time, without revising or working from drafts. Instead, he wanted to surrender himself to the creative process, allowing language to take control rather than attempting to exert control over language, "I was going to blacken the page from the upper left-hand corner to the bottom right-hand corner. Literally as if I had a black crayon I would just go like that.[...] I wasn't allowed to think" (Dearing and Graber 99). The language carries the text forward, just as the breeze gives the winged seed flight. His desire to blacken the pages also implies a desire to fill in the gaps in his memory. Each blackened page is a rushing forth of memories and word associations. "For survivors who have been separated and exiled from a ravaged world, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall but also of mourning, mourning often tempered by anger, rage,

and despair” (Hirsch 243). Lee’s frustration with the gaps in his memory is evident in the text, and his urge to write it in one sitting seems to reflect a desire to fill in these gaps.

“The memory has burst, as a balloon bursts, but we spend our time sewing it back up. [...] sewing scraps together is every writer’s task, a hypothetically endless task, an impossible task” (Raczymow 103). Lee sews the scraps of memory together, linking them with poetic meditations on the night, time and seeds. In *The Winged Seed* he strives to find an appropriate form for remembrance of his family’s past, hoping to create a testament to their suffering and loss. Lee admits to having a mistrust of prose, and wanted the text to have the feeling of a poem: “it has to accomplish the feeling that the book was an instant in time—one instant—the way a lyric poem is [...] I didn’t know how I was going to accomplish that except that I would have to sit down and see if I could write the book in one night” (Cooper and Yu 55). The reader is made subtly aware that this text may have been written in one sitting by the opening line “2:00 A.M., I wake to rain, apartments dark where other travellers sleep” and the reference later in the text to “the clock, which reads 5:04 A.M.” giving the sense that the preceding pages have been written in the intervening time (11, 139). In a sense Lee was ambivalent to the process of writing a memoir, telling one interviewer that his decision to do so was a pragmatic one, due to a job loss.

Lee acknowledges his reluctance to write prose, explaining that “I don’t have a lot of respect for prose. [...] I just feel as if poetry is the language itself and that in prose the language is doing something else. [...] in prose [...] you use language to talk about something. But in poetry you’re being used by language. Language is the master in poetry, it masters you”(Cooper and Yu 56). It has been suggested that

poetry may be a more appropriate medium for portraying personal and traumatic memories than prose. There is a perception that “poetry is to prose precisely as the private and individual are to the public and the social . . . that readers often experience an anxiety over being equipped with the right ‘key’ to decipher a complex of images and patterns in order to gain access to a ‘hidden,’ and therefore private meaning. Prose, by contrast, presumably offers a less mediated, and more public, access to meaning” (J. Chang 85). Because of its aura of intimacy and the level of effort required by the reader to “access [...] meaning,” poetry can explore issues of trauma without seeming to exploit those memories. Thus, the reader is expected to approach the text more contemplatively, with an expectation of enlightenment and intimacy, rather than entertainment. However, even with this difference, Lee is reluctant to explore traumatic experiences in his work, believing that this is not the poet’s role: “The poet becomes a perpetrator of those crimes when he or she reproduces those crimes in his or her work. [...] It’s ignorance for us to think that we have to somehow witness all of this. No! That’s not our business; the poet’s business is to witness the spirit, the invisible” (Marshall 136).

The poet must balance the desire to remember the traumas in order to honour the memories of the victims and survivors, against a wish to avoid perpetuating the crimes. One possible response to these conflicting purposes is to transform the retelling into an artistically and spiritually enriching form. In this way the creator may avoid feeling that he/she is exploiting the trauma for financial gain. Because Lee’s decision to finally write his memoir was initiated by a job loss, he cannot really deny the “dialogue with the marketplace.” However, Lee is careful not to sensationalise certain aspects of his family’s story, in particular avoiding any speculation about his

father's experiences in prison. While references are made to the effects that the torture and mistreatment received in prison had on his father, no detail of the exact sequences of events is recalled. Although his father may not have shared the details with him, and Lee appears to have been reluctant to ask for them, other writers might have imaginatively recreated scenarios in order to provide the reader with a more complete chronological account of events.

Lee reveals that his father believed it was important for his experiences to be recorded and that he (Lee) passed on the stories to his own young sons, "I started making up stories in which the bad guy's name is Sukarno and the good guy's name is Yeh, which means grandfather in Chinese. Now they say, 'Tell us the Sukarno stories.' [...] I make them sound more fairytale-like for them" (Moyers 41). In fact, in its resistance of a more chronological form there are gaps left in the narrative about important aspects of Lee's family story, such as how his parents who were from such differing backgrounds came to meet; his father's role as Mao's physician and the reasons his parents moved to Indonesia.

Some of the ruptures in the narrative occur at moments of danger. When Lee and his siblings are staying with their grandfather, described by Lee as a criminal and a paedophile, the text switches from a nightmarish moment where Lee's sister is in danger of being abused by the grandfather to a meditation on his father and China: "When my father was a boy in China, that country was already old" (175). The effect on the reader is unsettling as the text never reveals if, or how, the children escaped from the situation. The traumatic effects on Lee are clear as he recalls that: "For years after that and well into adulthood, I dreamed I was beating him with a shoe heel. I would wake up screaming, exhausted"(175).

At these moments in the text it reveals the way in which traumatic memories may trigger dissociation. Dissociation occurs when events which are taking place are too painful to be processed or experienced, instead the mind travels to less painful circumstances in order to escape the reality of what is unfolding. Within the text, Lee recalls hiding from a violent uncle who was beating his cousin, powerless to help their cousin, the children “would simply stare at our fingers, our knees, listen intently to a song inside our heads, recall our favorite food,” actively dissociating from the immediate events (168-9).

Memory is naturally disordered, and returns at random and chaotically. These flashback-like interruptions often occur as a result of traumatic experiences and are attempts to understand the incomprehensible, “the flashback or traumatic re-enactment conveys [...] both *the truth of an event*, and *the truth of its incomprehensibility*” (Caruth 153; emphasis in original). For trauma survivors they may be a disruptive, but essential, aspect of the healing process. Normally the mind can comprehend and store events as memories but during a trauma, according to psychologist Pierre Janet:

existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which cause the memory of those experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control. (quoted in van der Kolk and Hart 160)

The returning memories manifest as fragmented, involuntary flashbacks which the survivor can use to try to comprehend the events, and integrate them into a

meaningful narrative. “In order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often” (van der Kolk and Hart 176).

By leaving gaps in the narrative and unsettling the reader, Lee illustrates the way in which memories are experienced, and re-experienced. The titling of his book as “A Remembrance” reflects the intention, rather than being a memoir which gives the reader a chronological narrative of events in a person’s life, his remembrance is an exercise of remembering and a record of memories as they occur. Rather than impose a false order on his jumbled collection of memories, Lee allows them to emerge on the page as they would in the mind – incomplete, disconnected and confused. In “Mnemonic” Lee’s speaker expresses frustration at the chaotic nature of his memory, declaring that:

[...] my father
would be ashamed of me.
Not because I’m forgetful,
But because there is no order
to my memory, a heap
of details, uncatalogued, illogical. (Rose 66)

However, *The Winged Seed* could be seen as a celebration of this “heap” of memories, which is contrasted with his father’s disciplined memorisation of his sermons each week. While Lee’s frustration with the flaws in his own memory is evident at moments within the text, most especially when he is unable to remember his father’s sermons, the text honours the unruliness of memory. There are moments where memories unfold within other memories – at one point Lee recalls that his father bribed his prison guards in order to be allowed visit the family home. The story of the visit,

which culminates with the children accusing the father of being a thief when he tries to take some soap back to the prison, is recalled within a memory of another childhood incident: “I remembered all of it while I sat under Aunt Maria’s vanity” while hiding from his violent Uncle (168). However, even allowing for the waywardness of Lee’s memory, the text returns to the motifs of the night, seeds and time. The repeated use of these motifs creates an underlying structure to the text.

Perhaps Lee’s reluctance to finish the text, and to complete the gaps in the narrative is a way to acknowledge the traumas suffered by him and his family. Trauma disrupts memory and as Lee’s intention was to create a “testament” to his family’s suffering the gaps in the narrative may signify the losses the family have endured, of a sense of place, numerous possessions, and most damagingly of all, family members. Disrupting the narrative places the reader in a comparable position to the displaced person, uncertain of the outcome of events, dealing with absences, and trying to make sense of fractures in the story. Lee’s status as an exile is reflected in the fragmented text. As Seyhan notes:

For the displaced populations of our age, parents’ biographies, autobiographies—veiled or revealed—autobiographical fictions, testimonies, and memoirs become the restorative institution of personal and group memory. Here memory is an intersection between personal recollection and historical account, and though self-consciously fragmentary, it intimates the virtual existence of a longer collective narrative of a nation, ethnic group, or class. (17)

By linking these experiences to the more collective human experience of memory and its failings, Lee fulfils his self-declared mission of linking diasporic experience to the

wider human condition, something which he explores in “The Cleaving,” discussed in Chapter One. He explains,

our experience [as refugees] may be no more than an outward manifestation of a homelessness that people in general feel. It seems to me that anybody who thinks about our position in the universe cannot help but feel a little disconnected and homeless, so I don’t think we’re special. We refugees might simply express outwardly what all people feel inwardly (Moyers 31-32).

Relating the effects of displacement to the more commonly felt frustrations of memory loss and missing information could risk diminishing the suffering of refugees; however, Lee’s text succeeds in honouring these detrimental effects.

Postmemory effects are evident in Lee’s poems, as well as in his memoir. Photographs appear in Lee’s poem “A Hymn to Childhood” in his most recent collection (*Behind My Eyes* 25-27). The poem outlines the lasting effects of a childhood cut short by war and violence. The childhood is imagined paradoxically as “one that didn’t last,” but also “one that never ends,” and “one from which you’ll never escape” (*Behind My Eyes* 25, 26). The photographs in this poem “whispered to each other / from their frames in the hallway” (25). The efforts of the children to dissociate from the chaos around them are shown in the fourth stanza: “And you pretended to be dead with your sister,” “You learned to lie still so long / the world seemed a play you viewed from the muffled / safety of a wing.” (25). However, the effectiveness of this strategy is questioned by the stanza which follows and warns, “Don’t fall asleep” (26). This suggests either that sleep does not offer a refuge and is haunted by nightmares about the events, or that to sleep would mean failing to

witness important moments in their parents' lives such as "your mother / reading a letter that makes her weep" and "father / fallen into the hands of Pharaoh" (26).

The aftereffects of the pretence of experiencing events as a play are far-reaching as the adult voice still finds it difficult to distinguish between reality and imagination, "You, / so slow to know / what you know and don't know" (26). The subject matter of the poem itself is put in doubt in the final stanza "Still slow to tell / memory from imagination" and "death from childhood, and both of them / from dreaming" (26-27). The uncertainty of which of these events transpired, is like the uncertainty of the adult postmemory witness. Some of the details disclosed in the poem concur with events recounted in Lee's memoir, "the servants screaming, the soldiers shouting" (25). However, these and other events could be applied to the circumstances of many displaced people. The events are given a more mythic quality in the line "The cooking pots said your name" and the reference to "Pharaoh" (25, 26).

Connecting the events to much greater myths or stories from folklore or the Bible could perhaps comfort the speaker by offering a deeper meaning to what happened. Rather than simply being unfortunate victims of circumstance, having a father who has "fallen / into the hands of Pharaoh" suggests that he has been chosen by God, and this is part of a greater mission. Lee has acknowledged his desire to create a testament to his family's misfortunes, and cites the Bible as an influence on his work, especially in regard to the position of refugees and displaced people: "I was interested in *The Winged Seed* in the idea of an old testament, a new testament, and that each of us somehow has to write a current testament. That's the injunction that I heard to write our own myth" (Jansen 74). Linking the father in the poem's troubles to the biblical figure of Pharaoh and, by association, Moses, makes their persecution

of far greater significance. Instead of being subjected to persecution because of their ethnicity and the paranoia of a political dictator, the persecution becomes part of God's plan. This makes the suffering they endure more meaningful to the rest of humanity, rather than just the private troubles of one family.

The myth-making aspect to Lee's recollections are strongly evident in *The Winged Seed*, which recounts strange events such as localised ice-storms which only affect the Lee family home in Jakarta, and the family's escape at sea. However, these experiences are also shown to be in common with those experienced by the other Chinese families in the evangelical community "it was all talk about what had been lost, homes they'd left behind, friends who died in prison. [...] all that loss was somehow turned into the tie that bound everyone there, at least the adults. All the stories were practically the same" (134).

Both "Self Help for Fellow Refugees" and "Immigrant Blues" address the long-term effects of postmemory on displaced communities. Written as advice for refugees, the ironic "Self Help" poem offers suggestions for appropriate behaviour on arrival in the United States, and what to do if the refugee encounters someone they believe to be from the same country, "it's probably best to dress in plain clothes / when you arrive in the United States, / and try not to talk too loud" (*Behind My Eyes* 16). The poem also explores the tensions between the need to record history, and the caring, if misguided, gesture of parents hoping to protect children from unfolding events. Witnessing the removal of "your father" by "armed men," the mother "buried your face in her skirt folds," "turning a child's eyes / away from history / and toward that place all human aching starts" (*Behind My Eyes* 16). The response to the events is gendered, the mother's protective reaction is in contrast to the father who "shouted

to your mother / from the back of the truck, 'Let the boy see!'" (18). The conflicting responses to the traumatic events illustrate the binary position of the postmemory survivor who is caught between the need to record events, but also the desire to forget them. This can lead to "the story of your own birthplace, / a country twice erased, / once by fire, once by forgetfulness" (17). The poem advises the refugee to "Get used to seeing while not seeing. / Get busy remembering while forgetting" (17).

The passing on of history between fathers and sons is a recurring subject within Lee's work. In an interview he revealed that while his own father felt it was important for his children to know their history, his mother preferred not to revisit the past, "My father found it important to tell us stories about both families, but my mother was basically very reticent about her story [...] even now when I ask her about what it was like growing up like that, she doesn't like to talk about it" (Moyers 38). In his memoir he records his mother responding to his questions about her childhood "*Let's not talk about old things [...] Don't make me go back there. [...] the past is all one bitter draft to me*" (24 emphasis in original). The only occasion Lee pushes his mother to tell him about the past is in relation to the circumstances which led to the death of Lee's infant brother, and the reason that Lee and his other siblings were not allowed to go to his funeral.

For years, Lee had mistakenly believed his brother died from contact with rust, however, as an adult he learned Tai died from meningitis. Lee's discomfort in pressing his mother for answers increases the more she reveals: "her voice was so naked in its shame and frustration that I felt embarrassed to have asked the question. She continued. [...] I wanted her to stop. I felt the unkindness of the original intention. She went on" (171). Paradoxically, the more open his mother became, the more

embarrassed and uncomfortable Lee was, as he realised that it was not facts that he wanted from her after all:

I felt I'd gone too far with my mother. Yet I realized that this was exactly what I wanted from her. More than the answer to why a long-past event turned out the way it did, I wanted some sort of admission of guilt from Mu, some expiation of pain. Now that Mu was giving it to me, though, I could hardly receive it. I wanted her to stop. (171)

"Immigrant Blues" and "The Interrogation" explore the father-son passing on of memory, and the younger generation's resistance to this transfer of knowledge. The burden placed on both generations by this compulsion to either handover or receive the memories is made evident in the poem. In "The Interrogation" this burden is made clear by the speaker who declares: "I'm through / with memory" (*The City in Which I Love You* 33). The poem appears to be a dialogue with two voices, one which recalls a stream "clogged with bodies" while the other speaker resolves that he is "through / sorting avenues and doors, / curating houses and deaths" (33 emphasis in original). As the poem progresses, however, it becomes clear that this is an internal dialogue, as the speaker is unable to forget, in spite of his resolve not to let his "survival / depend on memory" (34). However, for survivors of trauma memories of the violent events may be a necessary part for future avoidance of similar situations, according to Roberta Culbertson: "This is not memory to be told, not memory to be analyzed, but memory to be used for purposes of survival" (175). At the same time, when the possibility of facing a similar situation again is unlikely the memories may seem irrelevant and disruptive to the survivor, leading Elizabeth Yukins to ask, "does the person who experiences trauma possess memories of the trauma, or do the

repressed memories possess the survivor?" (221). Lee's poem demonstrates this struggle for possession between the speaker and his repressed memories as he attempts to escape reliving the disturbing events.

The sense of memory as a physical burden is illustrated in the line "I grow / leaden with stories" (34). The contradiction between the need to grow, and the weighing down with memory is emphasized with the line break between "grow" and "leaden." The following lines continue the weight motif as the "son's eyelids / grow heavy" suggesting the passing on of this burden to another generation. Through passing on the memories the speaker can claim a form of ownership as they are transformed from something by which he is possessed to "a form of property, that can be claimed, possessed, and passed on to others" (Yukins 221). However, along with the memories, the speaker transfers the need to preserve those memories, continuing the cycle of postmemory.

The contradiction between growth and heaviness reflects the conflict between the need to preserve and pass on the memory of the original trauma. As living things grow they naturally become heavier, here the word "leaden" suggests that heaviness is negative, causing a kind of paralysis and inertia. The sleepiness of the son may suggest a lack of interest in his father's past, or indicate that these are stories he has heard many times in the past. Unlike his father, to a certain extent he can remain detached from the traumatic memories, "[c]hoosing not to engage with past trauma is a privilege available to descendants [...] that was not available to the witnesses of the traumatic experience" (Yukins 238). The father's storytelling seems to have an almost hypnotic effect on the son, and this may be intentional. Hypnosis is sometimes used as a way of remembering repressed memories where "resistance has been put

completely on one side” (Freud 151). Telling the stories while his son is in a hypnotic state would allow the father to pass on the memories without encountering any resistance from the son, and may make him more likely to remember them in the future.

The dialogue is printed with one voice in italics—which could be said to represent the speaker’s memory—and the other in plain text—the speaker who is resistant to remembering. Memory’s voice is the more insistent; it is given the first and last lines of the poem. The persistence of memory, with its interrupting questions, defies the speaker’s attempts to repress it by “neatly folding / the nights and days, notes / to be forgotten” (33). However, memories cannot be ordered “neatly,” but return at random. These interrupting lines are similar to flashbacks. The interrupting voice in the poem asks questions, trying to prompt the speaker to complete the gaps in his memory: “*Which house did we flee by night? Which house did we flee by day?*” (*The City in Which I Love You* 33). The title of the poem, “The Interrogation” makes it clear the way in which the questions are viewed; it is not a peaceful reflection on past events, or a conversation between friends.

According to Paul Valéry, “our memory repeats to us what we have not understood. Repetition is addressed to incomprehension” (quoted in Felman 276). This may be especially pertinent if the trauma occurred during childhood when the person is less likely to understand the events. That the events recalled took place when the speaker was a child is made clear in the lines “*We stood among men, at the level / of their hands, all those wrists, dead or soon to die*” (*The City in Which I Love You* 33). The height of the child suggested by these lines implies that the speaker was very young at the time, possibly as young as three or four. The men are disembodied,

it is the “wrists” which are “dead or soon to die” as if connecting the wrists to the bodies, and to the lives of the men is too much for the observer to take in. Children lack the linguistic and cognitive skills of adults to understand the traumatic events being witnessed, so the adult speaker must engage in “a sort of archaeology of memory, a reconstruction and reinterpretation of some complicated leftovers” (Culbertson 182-3). These “leftovers” must be reassembled into a coherent narrative, something which the child would have been incapable of doing, “to create in some sense then, a fiction, a story the child never knew, from a perspective that was not part of the original scene or experience” (Culbertson 181).

This is a painful and disruptive process, leading to the speaker’s desire to be “through with memory.” His resistance to acting as archaeologist or curator of these painful memories means that he has failed to transform the fragments into a meaningful, and possibly healing, narrative. In spite of his attempts to silence the painful memories, the memories persist, continuing to resurface unexpectedly and refusing to be repressed. Erikson suggests an alternative to Valéry’s explanation for the way in which memory recurs: “our memory repeats to us what we haven’t yet come to terms with, what still haunts us” (184). As an adult, the speaker may have a better understanding of the traumatic events of the past, yet without ever having come to terms with them. That the speaker is still haunted by the traumatic memories is clear in the last two lines “I’m through with memory. / *Can’t you still smell the smoke on my body?*” (34). The speaker’s assertion of being “through with memory” is immediately contradicted by the haunting last image of the smoke-scented body. In spite of his declared refusal to remember, a non-verbal sign, the smell of smoke, triggers an involuntary response from the speaker. These non-verbal

signs would have been what the child remembered rather than a linguistic narrative of events.

“Immigrant Blues” revisits the intergenerational passing on of stories of survival, but examines the effects that this can have on other relationships. Using italics to indicate a dialogue, as he does in “The Interrogation,” Lee opens the poem with the lines: “*People have been trying to kill me since I was born / a man tells his son, trying to explain / the wisdom of learning a second language*” (*Behind My Eyes* 28). The story which the father tells the son is given a number of alternative titles which could be titles for papers relating to a medical condition of “Immigrant Blues” such as “Survival Strategies and the Melancholy of Racial Assimilation,” “Psychological Paradigms of Displaced Persons,” “Patterns of Love in Peoples of Diaspora” “Loss of the Hometown / and Defilement of the Beloved” (28, 29).

The son’s resistance to following his father’s advice is reflected in the title “The Child Who’d Rather Play than Study” (28). The story which merits the many titles is “The same old story from yesterday morning / about me and my son” and “an ancient story from yesterday evening” (28, 29). The paradoxical nature of this “ancient” yet recent story may be representative of the ways in which traumatic events of the past can continue to disrupt the present. The effects that this “story” has on the speaker in the poem are seen in his struggle with intimacy with the woman figure in the poem, and his resistance to heeding his father’s advice. Told by his father to “*Practice until you feel / the language inside you,*” the man notes that the father was “spared nothing / in spite of the languages he used” (28). The poem plays with the notion of the difference between “inside” and “outside,” which also applies to the condition of being an immigrant, always perceived as an outsider, and perhaps longing to be

accepted as an insider. The speaker questions the father's understanding of this binary, asking "what does he know about inside and outside" (28).

Seeking an intimate connection beyond language the speaker asks the woman over the telephone, and during love-making "*Am I inside you?*" (28, 29). In contrast to the speaker's doubts, the woman is "at peace" with uncertainty – Lee uses the phrase four times in nine lines juxtaposed with the descriptions of the speaker's states of "bewilderment" and being "confused" (29). The use of the quasi-psychological alternative story titles suggests that the speaker's uncertainties are due to his status as a diaspora, and can be linked to his father's stories of, and strategies for, survival. Mignolo notes Ambrosio Fornet's theory that "it is not the place of birth of a writer that makes him or her of one particular 'nationality' but rather it is the language that he or she inhabits that gives the writer a place of belonging" (230).⁴ This suggests that the speaker's father's well-meaning advice hinders the son's sense of belonging. While speaking a number of languages seemed a necessity to the father, the usefulness of this strategy does not translate well to the son's current circumstances.

Like Lee, Kim attempts to deal with the effects of postmemory in her work. However, having been born in America, she lacks Lee's direct experience of events leading to her family's arrival there. Because of this lack of her own memory of events Kim imaginatively reconstructs historic events in her work, linking them to family members perhaps as a form of authentication. In "The Chasm" Kim's speaker portrays similar flashbacks to Lee's speaker in "A Hymn to Childhood" (*Notes from the Divided Country* 26-27). The poem tells of the death of the speaker's "mother's cousin" from a stomach wound inflicted "by Soviet T-34 tanks or U.S. rocket-launchers" (26). From

⁴ Language will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Four.

the beginning it is unclear whose dream this is, it is only in the last eight lines that it becomes apparent the speaker is the one who is having the nightmare “I know you were real, even if I can only see you / in dreams,” and “It’s humiliating to wake up / alive, fifty years later” (27).

The poem clearly shows the postmemory effects on the speaker, and how past events continue to affect the three generations. As well as describing her mother trying to beat away vultures from her cousin’s body, the poem describes the grandmother who “shouts at her to *leave him*. / Digs her nails into her arm and drags her on” inflicting violence herself, in desperation to keep her daughter moving on (26 emphasis in original). The poem has several moments of deliberately ambiguous meanings, for example when describing a vulture landing on the cousin’s corpse “thrashing for foothold, his small body shaking beneath its wings” it is unclear if the small body refers to the bird, or the corpse. The change of proposition from “his” to “its” suggests the body is the cousin’s but this meaning only unfolds by the end of the sentence. Another moment of ambiguity in the poem comes in the rhetorical question phrased as a statement which follows a description of the vultures pulling apart the insides of the corpses “all the bleeding sinews and nerves, strange jellies, / / all the hieroglyphs of generation. Why won’t they speak.” (26-27).

The poem refers to the real historical event of the battle of the Naktong River between the NKPA (North Korean People’s Army) and United States’ forces. In order to reinforce its historical veracity Kim parenthetically subtitles the poem “August 1950” (26). The chasm of the title may refer to the river valley as well as the gaps in knowledge and life experience between the speaker of the poem and the preceding generations. Kim highlights that the mother and her family are among “a million

refugees caught in the crossfire, / crossing far as the eye can see" (26). If this is a nightmare, it is one based in reality, the poem's title asserts. The postmemory aspects of the poem are clear in the far-reaching effects of the traumatic event which continues to haunt the imagination, and disrupt the sleep, of the following generation. Her mixed emotions about her survival are clear "It's humiliating to wake up / alive" and her realisation that had she been present she would have been as helpless as her mother "I couldn't have saved you. / I couldn't have saved a dog" (27).

The desire to bear witness to the events is perhaps a result of this survivor's guilt. The idea of witnessing is reinforced by the poem's many references to sight. Throughout the poem there are five such references, the vultures "[e]ye the gash" in the cousin's belly, there are refugees as "far as the eye can see" the mother "can't see" her cousin's face, and the speaker "can only see" him in her dreams, but can "see" that they will never meet (26, 27). No sense of the cousin as a living person is given, no personality traits or identifying characteristics, or even a name or age, but his "small body" would seem to indicate that he was a child. He is depersonalised, a corpse and a victim. The cousin could be read as a metaphor for Korea, being circled by the vultures that by the end of the poem "wear the faces of soldiers" (27). Reading the poem this way, the gash in the boy's body could be seen as the dividing border between North and South. The mother's futile attempts to protect the corpse could represent the relative powerlessness of the Korean people to protect their land against "wave after wave" of vultures/soldiers (26). The vultures which "eye the gash," fighting each other to get a share of the exposed corpses, can be seen as soldiers struggling to gain more ground than the opposing army.

Kim's poetry sometimes borders on fetishizing the victims and violence of the Korean War. Although she may have heard stories of the traumas experienced by her family members she did not directly experience these events herself. Consequently her descriptions at times border on the grotesque, almost voyeuristic in their portrayal of events. Unlike Lee who hesitates to describe anything he did not experience himself, Kim gives graphic imagery of war and its outcome, perhaps with the aim of shocking her readers and prompting them to remember the "forgotten war." The section of her collection in which most of the war poems appears is prefaced with an epigraph from Brecht:

It should be apparent all through his performance that 'even at the start and in the middle he knows how it ends' . . . it is the crudest form of empathy when the actor simply asks: what should I be like, if this or that were to happen to me? (Brecht in S. K. Kim *Notes from the Divided Country* 17; ellipses in original)

Kim chose this epigraph in order to draw attention to the artifice of her project, as she explained in an interview:

part of the reason I placed the epigraph there was in order to foreground the artifice of the poem as a [...] construct to try to imagine the experience of others [...] the reason I think that distinction is really important is that it's obviously not my experience I didn't go through what they went through and I think that preserving the otherness of the others' experience is really important and yet at the same time, trying to understand what people went through (Cobb).

In the same interview Kim highlights the fact that she began her career as a playwright and she sees her poetry as a way of using different voices to explore subjects, saying

she was “trying to imagine different points of view almost as if it was a cubist painting” in her collection (Cobb). While some of the details in her poems are taken from conversations with her father, who, along with his two brothers, escaped from the North of Korea to the South, many of the details are from Kim’s imagination or from reading historical accounts of events. Her thirst for knowledge of events in Korea is not limited to events around the Korean War but extends to the current situation in North Korea.

The poem is structured in two parts, thirteen couplets in the first part, and four in the second. Between the two sections is a short borderline (Figure 1). This border may be thought to represent the line which separates sleep from wakefulness or the past from the present. While many of Kim’s poems are in numbered sections (such as “Translations from the Mother Tongue” and “On Sparrows”), only two other poems in this collection use this dividing line designation. Kim sees her work as exploring the gap between imagination and reality, and this line could be a visual representation of this. Kim’s use of the line leads the reader to examine where she “draws the line,” asking if there is a point at which Kim will not speculate or give voice to the experiences of the victims and survivors of trauma.

all the hieroglyphs of generation.
Why won't they speak.

I know you were real, even if I can only see you
in dreams, I see

Figure 1 "The Chasm"

“Fragments of the Forgotten War,” which makes use of the same dividing line, shares similar subject matter to “The Chasm” (30-32). The poem, dedicated to Kim’s father, describes refugees fleeing “south in January 1951 [...] with a million others,” the inclusion of the date and the reference to her father again asserts the historical veracity and that Korea’s history is also part of Kim’s family history (30). Unlike Lee who keeps references to his family’s particular traumas generalised, and broadens the experiences to being part of a wider human condition, Kim moves from the broad (“a million others,” in “Fragments from the Forgotten War” and “a million refugees” in “The Chasm”) to the more personal and individual, using the first or third person and referring to “my mother” or “we three sons” (26, 30). Lee’s poems “Self Help For Fellow Refugees” and “Immigrant Blues” are addressed to a second person, a “Fellow Refugee” whereas Kim’s use of the second person in both poems appears to be someone with whom direct contact has been lost either through death or displacement. Their absence haunts the speakers in both poems, reappearing while they sleep “Sometimes in my dreams you hoot like a soul-owl, / *What have you done with your life, / who will you become, who, who, who?*” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 31 emphasis in original).

Kim’s title of the poem is deliberately provocative. Jodi Kim points out that although “the war has not technically come to an end (since an armistice, and not a peace treaty, was signed in 1953), the war’s very existence has been ‘forgotten’” (281). While the strained relationship between North and South Korea, and the ongoing threat of escalation of hostilities may be subject to scrutiny, the details of the original conflict have been largely forgotten over time. However, as Kim’s poem makes clear,

for those who experienced the war and their children, it is never forgotten and continues to haunt their waking and sleeping hours. The musing of the first stanza “when will I forget you: / when will I forget the NKPA soldiers who took you away” may be answered in the second stanza’s realisation that “I’ll never forget the smell of burning flesh. / I’ll never forget the stench” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 30, 31).

The contradiction between a desire to forget, and a need to memorialise is one which is shared with many postmemory writers. Kim’s lines resonate with the speaker’s desire and inability to forget in Lee’s poem “The Interrogation,” with both poems’ speakers unable to forget the smell of burning. Kim also faces the challenge of trying to respond appropriately to the events not directly experienced by her. In this particular poem in order to do so she:

encompasses multiple generations of a Korean family divided and scattered by the Korean War: a Korean American daughter who dedicates the poem to her father and writes in his voice, and the father who in turn addresses in the poem the parent(s) he had to leave behind when fleeing south during the war (J. Kim 279-80).

Kim again assumes this “multiple generations” speaking position in “Resistance,” a poem she dedicates to her great-grandparents and which she based “on the writings of my maternal great-grandfather, Kim Youn-Kyung, [...] who was imprisoned by the Japanese Colonial Governor-General for several years during the last phase of their occupation” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 22; 73). This poem takes Kim further into Korea’s past, exploring the effects of the Japanese Occupation which preceded the Korean War. The first stanza appears to be written in the voice of the great-grandmother, who watches as her husband is beaten and taken to prison in

front of their children. Noting the similarity of appearance between the Japanese occupiers and the oppressed Koreans, the speaker observes “a Japanese soldier beating you, / / a man who looked like your brother, / as like you as you were to yourself” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 22).

The second stanza assumes the voice of the great-grandfather, with the change of voice highlighted in the change of gender in the first line of the stanza “Bless the chestnut trees I climbed as a boy” (22). The poem highlights the role of language and speech in resisting colonial power, which is perhaps unsurprising given Kim’s dedication of the poem to her great-grandparents and her great-grandfather’s role as a linguist. The female voice in the poem recalls biting her tongue “until I tasted blood,” whispering to calm their children because she was “afraid their cries would kill us all” (22). The male voice of the poem notes several instances of silence as a form of resistance, observing “old men [...] / thinking ‘anti-imperial thoughts,’” and children “expelled for not swearing the loyalty oath to the Emperor” (22, 23). The poem praises the “prisoners arrested for speaking Korean,” who would not answer to the new Japanese names given to them by the colonising Japanese (23).

“At the Imperial Palace: (not-Pyongyang, North Korea)” offers a nightmarish vision of the ways in which all citizens are made complicit in keeping a dictatorship in power. Unlike the old men “thinking anti-imperial thoughts” of Kim’s earlier poem, the two speakers in this poem appear afraid to think beyond performing their assigned tasks. Divided into two sections, “The Emperor’s Housekeeper” and “The Emperor’s Janitor,” the poem demonstrates what Hannah Arendt would call “the banality of evil,” as the housekeeper and janitor clear up after the Emperor’s excessive and violent behaviour (252). Kim makes the link between the actions of the personas

in this poem, and Arendt's assessment of the Nazi regime more explicit, as the janitor in the poem reflects "They're just following orders / We're all just *following orders*" ("At the Imperial Palace (Not-Pyongyang, North Korea)" emphasis in original).

The parenthetical subtitle of the poem is undone by the reference to the Emperor's clothes "Someone has to launder the Emperor's soiled clothes / jumpsuits made of the national polyester called *vynalon*." Although the Emperor is not naked as in the fable, the idea of a "national polyester" carries with it a sense of ridicule, having misplaced nationalistic pride in a synthetic textile. The description, following on from the description of the Emperor as "a small man," and the reference to jumpsuits immediately recalls Kim Jong-Il.

Kim and Lee both recognise the role of television and film in mediating between the experience of war in Asia and its US audience. In "Cuckoo Flower on the Witness Stand," Lee writes, "I sang in a church choir during one war / American TV made famous," while his memoir recalls his father as "an Asian come to a country at war with Asia" (*Behind My Eyes* 64; *The Winged Seed* 12). Zia recalls the effect of becoming "the local personification of a war nearly ten thousand miles away. If I looked like the enemy I must be the enemy" (14). However, just as damaging could be the lack of coverage of war, leading to a "forgotten war." "I fled a burning archipelago in the rain / on my mother's back, in another war / nobody televised" (*Behind My Eyes* 64). Recognising that while most people's experience of war is through the medium of television or film, as current affairs or as entertainment, the poets must have experienced feelings similar to Zia's of being the "local personification of war" (14). "Even as *geopolitical* distinctions are made between enemies and allies – between South and North Korea and between the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong – *racial*

distinctions between a group taxonomised as similarly 'oriental' or 'gook' cannot be made" (J. Kim 296; emphasis in original). The poets attempt to redress what Edward Said drew attention to in his 2003 Preface to *Orientalism*:

education is threatened by nationalist and religious orthodoxies often disseminated by the mass media as they focus ahistorically and sensationally on the distant electronic wars that give viewers the sense of surgical precision but that in fact obscure the terrible suffering and destruction produced by modern 'clean' warfare (xx).

While the wars to which Kim and Lee refer may not have been "modern 'clean' warfare," their work shows the devastation of war for their families.

Kim acknowledges the role of television in both alerting viewers to wars, as well as numbing them to the reality of war, in "Levitations" the "dead aunt" says "'Americans don't know what war *is* anymore! They think it's a TV show that happens to other people" (*Notes from the Divided Country* 65).⁵ The fact that the words come out of Kim's dead aunt's mouth "like a Kung Fu movie with bad dubbing" further emphasizes the other familiar portrayals of Asian people on American television and film (65).⁶ "Levitations" comments on the commodification of war as entertainment. The poem is almost at the end of the collection, after Kim's poems dealing directly with the Korean War, so that the poet has already revealed many of her family's

⁵ The aunt could be referring to the comedy series "M*A*S*H," set in a Korean War field hospital, which ran from 1973-1982. The airing of the first series coincided with the US military withdrawal from Vietnam, so that even after the end of an actual war in Asia, American television screens continued to air images from a past war in Asia.

⁶ These portrayals are the ones which prompted the editors of *AIIEEEEE!* and *The Big AIIEEEEE!* to observe: "Chinese and Japanese Americans, American-born and -raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from the pushers of white American culture that pictured the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering, whined, shouted or screamed, 'Aiiieeeee!'" (Chan).

experiences of the conflict, the preceding occupation and the displacement which came after the armistice.

Appearing alongside the great-aunt in the dream are “a vodka-jello wrestling team” and “a phalanx of blond midget hookers,” suggesting the other forms of diversion available to American viewers flicking between channels on cable television. Competing alongside these strange images is an elderly Korean woman howling ““O, the sorrows of exile”” (65). The poem is unsettling, it offers no neat conclusion, instead asking “What did it mean [...]?” (65). Even the “hookers and vodka-jello-wrestlers” are not what they seem “naked, except for the human-faced masks they kept trying to tear off” (65). By concluding the poem with this line Kim seems to suggest that this is what the reader/viewer is more interested in. She compares the great-aunt to “her own voodoo doll” that the speaker will “find the right needles to pierce her back to life,” it is “only a matter of time.”

The poem could be seen as a comment on the work of Kim as a poet, trying to bring the experiences of her dead relatives to life, like a voodoo practitioner, by portraying them on paper. This would suggest that they appear alongside the other poems in the collection which, to Kim, may seem as inconsequential as the wrestlers and hookers. The great-aunt is decomposing “her face had started to rot” and her flesh “scorched and blistered” and “charred,” and Kim’s act of *composing* poetry seeks to reanimate her. Kim seems aware that her poems, with their portrayals of dead, rotting war victims compete for attention with the apparently more lively American entertainment pursuits, junk food, alcohol, sport, sex and spectacle represented by the wrestlers and hookers in “Levitations.”

Many of Kim's poems have a voyeuristic feel to them, acting as poetry of witness which do not allow the reader to avert his/her gaze from the shocking scenes portrayed. Although Yusuf Komunyakaa, himself a US veteran of the Vietnam War, praised Kim's "explicit" poems for their "revelation of horror," at times the poems become dangerously melodramatic in their portrayal of the brutality of war. This is a strategy which risks alienating the reader who may question whether Kim's experience of war is any more meaningful than their own experiences of watching it on television or in the cinema. Here she finds herself in the bind of postmemory, recipient of another's traumatic memories, compelled to preserve and pass them on but lacking the authority of a direct witness to events.

Kim's dedications of her poems to family members and her notes of the historic sources and explanations in the collection may be a way of asserting a sense of authority from which to describe these scenes.⁷ However, in dedicating her poems *to*, as well as speaking in the voices *of* her family members Kim risks speaking *for* them. Unlike Lee who resists assuming the voice of his father, and seems full of doubt about his own memories of events, Kim's strategy could be viewed as presumptuous.⁸ Dominick LaCapra outlines the challenges and risks that writers like Kim must contend with:

Empathic unsettlement also raises in pointed form the problem of how to address traumatic events involving victimization, including the problem of composing narratives that neither confuse one's own voice or position with the

⁷ For example Kim's poem, "*Hwajŏn* [Fire-field]," is accompanied by a footnote which explains "During the Japanese occupation of Korea, rural homelessness rose drastically and peasants were forced into slash-and-burn farming in the mountains." (21).

⁸ Lee's uncertainty leads one of his poem's speakers to ask "Is this my father's life or mine?" ("Ash, Snow, or Moonlight" *Rose* 52). Many of his poems explore this confusion between his own identity and his father's, something which will be explored further in Chapter Five.

victim's nor seek facile uplift, harmonization, or closure but allow the unsettlement that they address to affect the narrative's own movement both in terms of acting-out and working-through. [...] But empathy that resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the experience of the other would depend both on one's own potential for traumatisation (related to absence and structural trauma) and on one's recognition that another's loss is not identical to one's own loss. (LaCapra 723)

Kim's poetry occasionally risks hovering over Korea, and picking over the corpses like the vultures in "The Chasm," when choosing poetic subjects. This appears to be unintentional, perhaps due to Kim's immaturity as a poet when the collection was published.

Her approach to dealing with postmemory differs from Lee's, perhaps due to her lack of direct access to memories. To compensate for her lack of first-hand experience of the traumatic events which led to her family's immigration, she imaginatively creates histories in her poetry. Her use of the Brecht epigraph creates a space for her to imaginatively reconstruct events in her work by drawing attention to the artifice. Some of the details are based on fact, for example the line "I felt artillery crash miles away in the soles of my feet" in "Fragments of the Forgotten War" is based on something her father told her about feeling bombs exploding through the ground (Cobb). However, most of the war poems are created imaginatively, to try to understand the experiences of Koreans during the Japanese occupation, Korean War and subsequently. Asked if her need to bear witness was a way to recover "something of what you may have lost by not having been born in the country of your genetic origin," Kim replied "I don't think that kind of loss is recoverable" (Cobb).

In some ways Kim's and Lee's aims in their work intersect – they seek to record their families' experiences in a way which honours rather than exploits them. They search for a deeper understanding of the events which took place before their birth, or which happened when they were too young to fully comprehend them. However there are divergences in their response to postmemory and memory. Lee's stated aims of creating a "testament" to his family history differs subtly from Kim's aims of "trying to imagine different points of view" of those impacted by the atrocities in Korea. Kim's poems, therefore, began at least partly as a kind of creative and intellectual exercise. Although she does not see herself as "a voice for the people of Korea," she confesses that "writing about it is inescapable for me. It's part of who I am" (Sheridan).

Lee argues against "bearing witness," saying that it is not the poet's role to bear witness to specific wars or historic events, and that by doing so the "poet becomes a perpetrator of those crimes when he or she reproduces those crimes in his or her work" (Marshall 136). Instead Lee believes that "the poet's business is to witness the spirit, the invisible" (136). Kim's poems are often rooted to a particular time and geographic space for example, "August, 1950," and "across the Naktong River," showing that there is a factual basis for her depictions (*Notes from the Divided Country* 26). She uses notes in her collection to provide the reader with further details about the historic events portrayed. Her dedications of particular poems to family members personally link her to Korea's history. Lee's poems' settings are less anchored in historically specific events, and therefore may be seen as being more universal, in keeping with his beliefs about feelings of exile being part of the human condition, rather than restricted to diaspora. Although his memoir has a historic basis,

it evades this by portraying events as Lee would have experienced them at the time, as a child who failed to fully understand. Rather than connecting his family's story to history, as Kim does, he instead tries to create a mythic version of events. In spite of their differing responses the poets clearly show the effects of postmemory within their work, haunted as they are by the events which they did not directly experience.

Chapter Four

The Divided Tongue: Languageing, Bilanguaging and Codeswitching

You may or may not have a “mother tongue” as Derrida argues [...], but you cannot avoid “being born” in one or more language(s), to have them inscribed in your body (Mignolo 229).

Thus, between two languages, your realm is silence. By dint of saying things in various ways, one just as trite as the other, just as approximate, one ends up no longer saying them (Kristeva *Strangers to Ourselves* 15)

This chapter focuses on Lee’s and Kim’s differing ways of using language within their work. Lee seeks to create a poetic depiction of silence within his work, believing that language can be as much a hindrance to communication as it is a form of communication. The speakers within his poems often seek reassurance that they have been understood, reflecting Lee’s apparent mistrust of language. Kim’s very selective use of Korean words and phrases within her work oftentimes comes close to being orientalist in nature. Her use of Korean is comparable to her use of notes and her family’s connections to historic events portrayed within her poems – it seems to seek to authenticate her work but paradoxically it draws attention to the inventiveness of her creativity. The different ways in which Lee and Kim approach the use of language within their work is reflective of their differing experiences of language acquisition.

One of the most obvious early challenges facing the Asian diaspora in America is communication with the majority English speaking population. Acquiring language

skills is a hugely important factor in their successful integration into American life allowing access to employment, education and the ability to communicate with non-Asian communities. However, along with a commitment to learn the new language is a desire to maintain the mother tongue. A complete loss of the mother tongue would make a return to the country of birth more challenging, and relationships with family there more difficult. Speech patterns and words from this birth language infiltrate the adopted language, creating a new hybrid form. Refusal to speak the new language, or to speak at all, can be a form of resistance and may be one of only limited options to exercise power.

In opposition to this, loss of access to the language of ethnic heritage can lead a person to learn it in order to explore aspects of a family history from which they may be cut off. Lee and Kim's personal experiences of language acquisition differ widely. For Kim, unlike Lee, the choice of using her parents' native language was denied to her from early childhood. While Lee had already learned to understand, if not speak, several languages by the time he arrived in America, Kim made the decision as a college student to study Korean and attempt to gain use of her parents' language. Because of their differing experiences, they respond to the issues of language use differently in their work. Lee's work recalls his early attempts at speaking English, while Kim selectively incorporates Korean words into her poems. Although Lee occasionally uses Chinese phrases within his work he does so with less frequency than Kim's use of Korean phrases. Lee believes that being a "guest in the language" as he phrases it, is what inspired him to begin to write poetry. A lack of familiarity with English meant that he was able to hear it as sounds, noticing rhymes and puns in ways which a native English speaker might not.

In spite of their different creative responses, both Lee and Kim can be thought to embody Walter Mignolo's "bilanguaging" and Gloria Anzaldúa's theories of borderlands and codeswitching. Mignolo outlines the strategy of some postcolonial writers, calling it "bilanguaging," that is to say, writing which uses both native and acquired language within the same text. "Languaging," he explains is:

thinking and writing between languages, [...] moving away from the idea that language is a fact (e.g., a system of syntactic, semantic, and phonetic rules), and moving toward the idea that speech and writing are strategies for orienting and manipulating social domains of interaction (226).

Mignolo prefers the term "bilanguaging" to "bilingual," explaining that it is:

something that is beyond sound, syntax, and lexicon, and beyond the need of having two languages ([...] bilanguaging as a form of life is possible in the fractures of an hegemonic [national or imperial] [sic] language): the law that instills [sic] fear and shame among those who do not master the master language (264).

Anzaldúa's reflections on overcoming silences imposed by outside forces resonate with Lee's experience of periods of muteness. Approaching Kim's and Lee's poetics through Mignolo's and Anzaldúa's theories about border thinking and borderlands can help to explain some of the contradictions and tensions which are evident in their use of language throughout their work.

Lee's complicated nomadic early childhood experiences attest to the "fear and shame among those who do not master the master language" (Mignolo 264).

Although he clearly overcame his difficulties in mastering English eventually, Lee's childhood efforts to speak English in America triggered feelings of shame and

embarrassment. His memoir recalls his struggle to acquire language proficiency at several moments in his life. The distinction between what might be thought of as “proper” language, associated with adults and authority versus children’s more playful use and misuse of language is analogous to what Mignolo calls “thinking in between languages” (250). Identifying certain languages as “children’s” language (Javanese, or English, depending on the context) to distinguish them from the grown ups’ languages (Chinese, or fluent English), Lee creates a hierarchy of languages which he moves through in his lifetime. His memories of his childhood embarrassment at his English mispronunciation show the anxiety he experienced, and internalised. The frustration and humiliation caused is best shown in “Persimmons,” as discussed in Chapter One, where his logical confusion between similar sounding words leads to public humiliation. Ultimately, however, through his refusal to speak and inform his classmates that the persimmon they are about to eat is not ripe, a form of retribution is achieved. The poem shows that while language knowledge can be a form of power, silence can be used to exercise power also.

Lee’s memories of learning to speak English, his: “early attempts at making American sounds,” recall his embarrassment and self-consciousness at his mispronunciations (*The Winged Seed* 77). Experiencing language as sounds can allow the writer greater creative possibilities:

we see through the eyes of foreign speakers and hear through their transcriptions of English a different way of reproducing meaning. This can happen on an acoustic and visceral level. We can re-experience English sounds as sounds and not as words (Ch'ien 6-7).

This way of experiencing language is a good basis from which to begin writing poetry, with greater awareness of the phonetic similarities between words, and therefore a greater appreciation for the poetic possibilities in even common words. Lee recalls that the first poem he wrote as a child: “was, ‘Here is a fish, make nice dish,’ or something like that. [...] I was just learning English, and I was just so amazed that words rhymed” (Fox 157).¹

In spite of this playful enjoyment of language, as a child his failure to speak perfect English was associated with shame and embarrassment. Preferring to stay silent around fluent English speakers, Lee would attempt to cover up his mistakes by either mumbling or placing a hand in front of his mouth:

I remember my own deliberate slurring and mumbling in order to hide my mouth, to make my accent less discernible [...] I sometimes miss my own sound. I remember how I used to hold a hand very casually over my mouth when I talked, hoping to hide the alien thing. And I grew to hate its ugliness more than anyone. It hurt my ear and I avoided as much as possible any contact with native English speakers. In their company, I said as little as possible (*The Winged Seed* 77-78).

In fact, according to his memoir, Lee appears to have been slow to speak as a child, in any language, and claims that he spoke for the first time when his family was leaving Indonesia, speaking in complete sentences for fifteen minutes, and asking: “can we go home now?” (Heyen and Rubin 20) The self-loathing and insecurity arising from learning another language is evident in the phrases such as “ugliness” and “alien.” The passage shows the kind of internalised racial hatred Lee absorbed as a child,

¹ It is interesting to note that Lee’s earliest poem had food as its subject matter.

which may be experienced by writers who are “linguistic exile[s] from their original language,” according to Chi’en:

in appropriating English they can engage in a reconstitution of identity that absorbs the mainstream conceptions of their marginalized culture. For a writer to resist succumbing to this pathology of self-hatred, the appropriation of English must be a very self-conscious activity; learning English is not simply learning words but conceptualizing the political force of the words in relation to one’s own culture (28)

English became the third language he acquired after Bahasa Indonesian (or Javanese) and Mandarin Chinese. Lee internalised a hierarchy of languages, which altered as he grew older. As a child he and his siblings spoke Indonesian, “the children’s language” because it was the language their nanny and the servants spoke, unlike his mother “who spoke Chinese to us, spoke the adults’ language” (*The Winged Seed* 122). After the family’s arrival in America, the children chose to speak English with their Chinese and American born Chinese friends, in spite of their self-consciousness about the “awkwardnesses [sic] that came from saying English with a Chinese mouth” because “English cleaved us from our parents, who were, we believed, like parents all over the world, an embarrassment to their children” (32, 33). However, to pretend not to have a knowledge of Chinese is seen as a racial betrayal, as “Philadelphia Wong,” another minister’s daughter, does:

when she was seen talking to two white boys at the lake, everyone’s heart [sic] sank, thinking she was one of those who spurned their own kind. Of course, everyone was to some extent right, she was. She pretended to not be able to speak Chinese (131).

There is even a linguistic hierarchy among Lee's peers based on their fluency and lack of accents:

while our vocabulary was equal to that of native English speakers, our syllables often sounded off-key. Thus, the strangeness promised by our alien faces was fulfilled in our strange-sounding speech. [...] the Chinese without accents treated us as if we were fresh off the boat. In fact, we were only five years off the boat. (132-33)

Although Lee, and other Asian Americans cannot disguise their "alien faces," fluency of speech may offer at least some respite from the hostility and racism they might face.

Acquiring fluency of English was vital to assimilation, as noted by Helen Zia, whose parents decided to speak English in the home because: "[m]y father wanted us to speak flawless English to spare us from ridicule and the language discrimination he faced" (8). However, Lee's father's emphasis was on learning multiple languages, probably because of his own peripatetic experiences: "[h]e impressed upon us that we were supposed to speak seven languages, as he did; but I only speak two – Mandarin Chinese and English" (Moyers 33). Lee's inability or resistance to learning multiple languages could be seen as a statement of his intention to settle in America, and reflective of his sense of security in his adopted homeland. His sense of failure to live up to his father's expectations is reflected in many of his poems. This tension over learning to speak multiple languages is explored in "Immigrant Blues" (as outlined in Chapter Three), which also examines how language can be an obstacle to intimacy. Although he has never written any poetry in Chinese, Lee has spoken of the way in which the Chinese language affects his way of being saying: "It haunts the way I am in

the world. [...] It must influence the way I grasp the world” (Dearing and Graber 97). He also recalls his parents’ recitations of Chinese classical poetry when he was growing up. His acknowledgement of how Chinese “must influence” how he experiences the world recalls Julia Kristeva’s observations about language. Kristeva recognises the way an unspoken language, though hidden, can continue to make its presence, and absence, felt:

Not speaking one’s mother tongue. Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body’s nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet slumber of childhood. Bearing within oneself like a secret vault, or like a handicapped child—cherished and useless—that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you (*Strangers to Ourselves* 15).

Speaking about his loss of, first Bahasa Indonesian, and later, Chinese languages Lee observes that “I don’t know if you forget it, or it’s a buried language” (Fox 157). Although he continued to speak Chinese with his mother and other family members, and a trip to China rekindled some of his knowledge, Lee realises: “that the people that I use Chinese with, there’s less and less of them. [...] my use of it, is getting less and less” (Fox 158).

In addition to his self-consciousness about his early mistakes when speaking English, Lee recognises that speaking can reveal more than just a foreign accent : “not speaking is a family trait, silence my inheritance, and since every time anyone talks, not just skeletons come jumping out of mouths, but doors and wardrobes and cars and trains and provinces” (172). To speak is to betray his origins, and to reveal his secret family history – the words “skeletons” and “wardrobes” suggesting skeletons coming out of closets. Lee’s choice of the word “wardrobe” rather than “closet” in the

same passage where “skeletons come jumping out” suggests the way in which a non-native speaker could incorrectly use an idiom. His speech links him to the great distance travelled and to his ancestors. Lee’s response to these anxieties was often to suffer a form of mutism, to the evident frustration of his father. He recalls his father’s sustained efforts to get him to speak. Although “not speaking is a family trait,” his father attempted to heal Lee’s muteness by praying while placing:

the palm of one of his big hands on the back of my head and the other over my mouth, while Mu, Fei, and Go sat in their assigned chairs as witnesses, for where two or three are gathered, there a miracle might occur ().

In spite of an almost overwhelming urge to speak during his father’s laying on of hands, Lee maintained his silence, reasoning that:

where talk was disappointing, my silence would never disappoint me. [...] my silence was larger than myself. Larger even than Mu and Ba, my silence could contain them, and everything else. I could hold everything without changing it into words, without violating it (185-86).

Apart from suggesting a strength of will to match his father’s, not speaking meant not debasing emotions or events by converting them into words. Speaking about things, Lee suggests in this passage, diminishes them.

Silence allows him to hear everything, and gives him a form of invisibility in the eyes of most of the household. Servants speak and act freely around him, knowing he cannot repeat what they say or betray their transgressions. Paradoxically his muteness gives him heightened visibility in his father’s eyes as he becomes a focal point for his religious zeal. Elsewhere, Lee reveals his continued unease with language as a medium of communication and creativity and expresses a desire to create

silences within his work: “[l]anguage is almost an inconvenience” and “[i]t’s not just language that we use to write poems. We use silence too. In fact, I think we use language to inflect silence so we can hear better” (Jordan 145, 46). Language, Lee believes: “is both a vehicle of communication and yet an obstacle to communication” (J. K.-J. Lee 274).

The section of Lee’s memoir concerning his mutism clearly echoes the “Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” section of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (161-209). The passage recalls Maxine’s mother’s act of cutting her frenum so that she would not be tongue-tied.² She later rationalised her actions by explaining to Maxine that: “Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You’ll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You’ll be able to pronounce anything” (164). Like Lee’s father’s desire for his son to speak multiple languages, however, Maxine’s mother’s efforts seem to have the opposite effect. Maxine, like Lee, recalls problems speaking clearly: “I have a terrible time talking. [...] When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent” (165). Like Lee, Maxine is self-conscious and ashamed of her inability to speak freely: “A dumbness—a shame—still cracks my voice in two [...] It spoils my day with self-disgust when I hear my broken voice come skittering out into the open. It makes people wince to hear it” (165).

Even the section’s most disturbing passage, the description of Maxine’s attempts to force her silent classmate to speak, has a corresponding passage in *The Winged Seed*. Maxine’s unnamed classmate, provokes a violent response, followed by her (Maxine’s) breakdown. In Lee’s memoir his reminiscences on his difficulties

² I use Maxine to refer to the character in the text, and Kingston to refer to the author.

speaking are triggered by observing his son's friend struggle to speak, using the same mouth-covering habit that Lee developed. Lee's response is protective, while recognising his own experience in the boy's self-consciousness at speaking English, and leads him to feel nostalgic for his younger self: "I don't know if I want to tell him, *Don't worry, the accent wears off, no one will know you're an alien then*, or tell him how I sometimes miss my own sound" (77-78; emphasis in original). While Maxine's response is to try to force her silent classmate to speak through intimidation, Lee reacts with empathy, acknowledging the internalised self-loathing he once felt towards his mispronunciations.

For Maxine, not speaking is a sign of weakness, whereas Lee's period of muteness is a form of resistance and one of the few strengths he has which matches his father's. He endured beatings from his father in silence: "[b]ecause it was my strength he admired and loved, and I would be what he admired" (188). Maxine is unable to recognise that silence can be a form of strength and resistance, unlike the speaker in Lee's "Persimmons," and in his memoir. Lee's mother tells him: "*Your father was a blade, [...] and he broke against you upon continual sharpening*" (187; emphasis in original). Lee's fear of the "skeletons" and "wardrobes" which would be unleashed as he spoke echoes Maxine's list of things she tries, and fails, to confess to her mother: "I had grown inside me a list of over two hundred things that I had to tell my mother so that she would know the true things about me" (Kingston 197). Lee's desire for silence enables him to conceal himself, to disappear, whereas for Maxine the desire is to be seen for the person she truly is.

Lee links speech and poetry to mortality, believing that because poetry depends on words and speech its meaning can only unfold with the breath, which is

linked to mortality. As Lee sees it, every word is spoken with the outgoing, “dying” breath, and therefore each word spoken brings us closer to our own death. Therefore the poet’s role is to invest each word with as much meaning as possible because: “one becomes so aware that one’s medium is the dying breath and what you’re trying to do is ransom that with as much psychic, intellectual, emotional content as possible.” (*Li-Young Lee*) The challenge to find the correct word to reflect accurately all of these demands, and still convey the desired meaning, can be seen in many of Lee’s poems. Often his poems’ speakers seek clarification or reassurance that they have not been misinterpreted.

I need to name this, needed to know
what we meant when we said *we*,
when we said *us*, when we said *this*.

I wanted to call it something (“Seven Happy Endings” *Behind My Eyes* 33; emphasis in original).

In “*A Dove! I Said*” the speaker’s utterances are followed by uncertainty about the meaning and intent of his speech, or even whether speech was required at all. “What I meant was” and “What I should have said was” and “maybe I meant to say” and “Maybe I should have called out” (*Book of My Nights* 53; emphasis in original). Even the concluding couplet of the poem is doubt-filled, a question which is unanswered: “Or did I only mean to ask, *Whose face / did I glimpse last night in a dream?*” (*Book of My Nights* 53; emphasis in original). While a fear of misinterpretation may be a common anxiety among poets when exposing their work to public view, the second-guessing of the speakers in Lee’s poems of their own intent

goes beyond any expected artistic doubts. These uncertainties are not limited to Lee's early work. His most recent collection includes poems whose speakers convey the same urgent need for reassurance about the clarity of their expression. In "The Lives of Voices" speakers in the poem's different sections interject seeking reassurance that they have correctly understood the other voices in the poem. The second section, subtitled "A Voice's Gaze," repeatedly asks: "what are you saying?" and "what do you mean [...]?" (*Behind My Eyes* 80-81). The voice of the concluding section of the poem, subtitled "Fire Enthroned," suggests a loss of faith in language and metaphor, indeed in poetry itself. It declares: "Not another word about" referring to the various repeated images throughout the poem. The poem ends with yet another final uncertainty about the ways in which language can accurately capture even seemingly simple aspects of real life:

Not another word about the child who,
suddenly remembering his death,
tells his mother, "By then
I'll know what to call
the color of your eyes." (L.-Y. Lee *Behind My Eyes* 87)

The child's inability to find a name for his mother's eye colour also reminds the reader of language's limitations – eyes are never simply blue, green, brown or grey, but it takes the observations of a child for the reader to be reminded of this.

This failure of language to accurately communicate even the most basic elements of reality, colour, reflects Lee's anxieties about his own ability to connect with others through language. Lee confesses to feeling anxious about his ability:

to communicate to any human being at all. All my life, I used to attribute it to being an immigrant. The things that are closest to me and dearest to me defy language. It seems to be some sort of ghastly joke. [...] Why can't I communicate? Part of it is because language itself is both a vehicle of communication and yet an obstacle to communication. And the other thing is my feelings are somehow outsized. They seem to me frequently larger than myself, overwhelming. In that way, they seem to defy language (Cheung 274).

If language cannot accurately record the colour of a loved one's eyes, as the poem suggests, then how can it successfully be used to communicate less tangible, but more meaningful, aspects of human experience? Lee links this insecurity about communication to being an immigrant, and perhaps it may also be connected to his bilingualism.

However, his work also recognises that multiplicity of meanings can be a creative advantage. "Words for Worry" plays with possible alternative words for "father" and "son" (*Book of My Nights* 36-37). "Persimmons" also uses the free association between similar sounding words to create wordplay and clever puns which highlight the absurdity of language and the ways in which related words can be confusing. His work recognises the emotions that can be associated with different words as evoked in "For a New Citizen of These United States": "[...] those words whose sounds / alone exhaust the heart – *garden, / heaven, amen*" (*The City in Which I Love You* 41). Speaking about *The Winged Seed*, Lee talks about language "exceeding" him: "[a] lot of times there is slippage in the language" (Cheung 272).

Interestingly for someone once so reluctant to speak, Lee appears very willing to be interviewed. Rather than retreat and allow his poetry to speak for itself, he

appears eager to discuss his own work and poetry in general. Whether this betrays further anxiety about misinterpretation, or confidence in his ability to discuss his creativity is unclear. However, Lee reveals having suffered a kind of panic attack when asked to give a lecture rather than read his work:

My talk was about how you can't talk about poetry [...] My tongue got real thick and stiff in my mouth, and I couldn't move [...] I couldn't talk [...] Somebody in the audience said, "Read a poem." So I opened a book and started reading a poem, and I was fine. I just don't like talking and there was a thousand people there (Cooper and Yu 70).

The topic of his talk became a self-fulfilling prophesy, but Lee blamed his inability to speak on a combination of medication and a kind of "seizure" (70). Although he declares that he does not "like talking" the many interviews he has given and public poetry readings he has performed suggest otherwise.

Unlike other borderland/border-thinking writers such as Anzaldúa, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Lee's work does not switch codes or demand bilingualism of its readers. Where Chinese words are used in his work they are Romanized and though they may not always be glossed, their meaning is apparent from the context. *The Winged Seed*, however, contains a passage describing Lee practicing writing Chinese as his mother dictates words for him to write. The passage contains the repeated (English) phrase "Here as in childhood," and compares the experience of recalling the correct ideogram to correspond with his mother's word, with the practice of writing his memoir: "I'm waiting for my father, and the clock says I have hours before day," the section begins, recalling the way in which his memoir began with Lee waking from a dream where his father returns (144). The practice of writing the

ideograms is analogous to finding the correct imagery and words to describe events. Lee's practice serves as a metaphor for communication and creative writing, as the wrong stroke of his pen can change the meaning of the word, as when he becomes confused between the correct way to write two words: "I mix memory and forgetting" (145). His use of the phrase "[h]ere as in childhood" connects Lee's writing of the text, "here," with his childhood struggles to communicate. The phrase suggests that this is an ongoing struggle.

These few pages are the only ones in Lee's work which contain Chinese ideograms. Their inclusion changes the reader's experience as, a few pages before the ideograms appear, the line spacing on the pages alters. It would appear that this is a typesetting error, which was rectified in the reissued edition to the text. However, in the original, the spacing changes to being double-spaced on the preceding pages in advance of their appearance, as though to suggest an expansion of space between language and meaning. The last lines before the section with the ideograms ask: "What name, what one word, might contain me, [...] Mustn't each one fix his own sign? What's mine?" (143). In spite of the desire to "fix his own sign," the text does not reproduce the ideogram for Lee's name in the pages which follow.

Kim uses Korean words frequently in her work, but she does so by Romanizing them rather than printing them in Hangeul. While her use of Romanized Korean words is more prevalent, their meanings are glossed in her notes. Even without checking their meaning in the notes readers can guess at the general meaning from the context. In "Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers," she switches from Korean words to italicised English words indicating they are spoken in Korean:

hanyak peddlers calling out names of cures

for sickness or love –

crushed bees, snake bile, ground deer antler, chrysanthemum root, (Notes from the Divided Country 37; emphasis in original)

Her notes translate “hanyak” as “herbal medicine” – something which should be obvious to the reader from the rest of the stanza (*Notes from the Divided Country 73*).

Her decision to list the herbal remedies in English, rather than their Korean equivalent is probably because the context would be lost, and the poetic and exotic sounding cures would not be as apparent to the reader. This careful choice of which Korean words to translate demonstrates the selective nature of Kim’s use of the language within her work. Had she translated “hanyak” to “herbal medicine” within the poem, she could have listed the names of the cures for sale in Korean. However, in choosing to use the original Korean word for the peddlers she has to translate the cures they sell into English. Indeed, one could argue that she need not have included the word “hanyak” in the verse at all since the translation of the cures makes it clear that they are selling herbal remedies.

Other items being sold at the market are given their Korean names “shaking dirt from *chaemae* & bok choi” (36; emphasis in original). The proximity of *chaemae* to bok choi suggests that it is some sort of fresh produce, and it is glossed as “yellow melon” (73). Switching between Romanized Korean names exoticizes some familiar foodstuffs, such as yellow melons, while she makes clear to the reader the other unfamiliar food for sale by using English to describe them: “charred silkworms, broiled sparrows / frying sesame leaves, & [sic] mung-bean pancakes” which will be prepared in “*pojangmaches*” – glossed as “portable roadside bar/restaurant” (*Notes from the Divided Country 36, 73; emphasis in original*). Kim uses her bilanguaging ability to

make the familiar unfamiliar (“chaemae”) and make more apparent the less familiar (“crushed bees,” “broiled sparrows” etc). It is worth noting that when categorised the majority of the Korean phrases that Kim uses refer to food (seven phrases), with other phrases used for pastimes, textiles and everyday objects. Kim risks creating “food pornography” in her selective use of English and Korean in relation to food items, especially as she seems to translate to English what non-Korean readers might find exotic in the market, while leaving more commonplace ingredients in Korean. When Kim’s poems appear outside of her collection, for example in the anthology *Asian American Poetry: The Next Generation*, they appear without supporting notes or glossary.

Kim’s use of Korean in her work may be contrasted with another Korean American poet, Cathy Park Hong, whose poem “All the Aphrodisiacs” also makes use of Korean phrases. The poem’s speaker uses Korean phrases with her lover because “you say it turns you on when I speak Korean” (V. M. Chang 64). Hong’s use of Korean in the poem seems to comment on the way in which Korean can be used to exoticize, and eroticize, communication when not all parties can understand the language. The speaker’s lover is unaware that the words and phrases she uses are often banal, “the recitation of the alphabet,” “*pae-go-p’a* (*I am hungry*),” orders “*ch’i-wa* (*Clean up*)” or insults “*kae sekki* (*Son of a dog*),” phrases which she refuses to translate for her lover: “I tell you it’s a secret” (64; emphasis in original). The speaker’s use of Korean is transgressive as it allows a reversal of expected gender roles, and subverts the stereotype of the sexually submissive Asian woman by having the speaker issue commands to her lover. However, the inability of her lover to understand the commands, and Hong’s speaker’s refusal to translate them means that the success of

this transgression is limited. Kim's use of Korean risks doing what Hong's poem seems to warn against – creating exotic sounding poems for the entertainment of a non-Korean readership.

Romanization of Hangul Korean words is problematic, as has been noted by Myung Mi Kim in her poetry collection *Commons*:

How physically (almost physiologically) impossible it is to pronounce or even imagine what Korean words are being depicted under the standard (standardized) Romanization of Korean. The odd vowel blurs, the unclear consonant combinations. Poised between a spectral and real engagement with Korean. [...] Practices in transliteration: comparing the standard Romanization to what [I] [sic] might be said to be hearing [...] Whose ears are at work? Where does the authority of romanizing [sic] reside? How might it be entered into otherwise? (110)

Although Suji Kwock Kim does not use Hangul characters in her work, she signs her books with both the English and Hangul spelling of her name (Figure 2). Her inclusion of an epigraph from Li Po in Chinese characters shows that her decision not to use Hangul is not due to typesetting limitations (Figure 3).

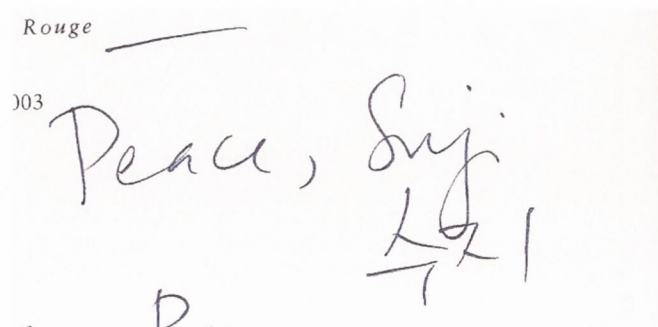


Figure 2 Suji Kwock Kim's Signature

相看兩不厭
只有敬亭山

-- 李白

We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.

—LI PO, trans. DAVID HINTON

Figure 3 Li Po Epigraph³

Her inclusion of Romanized Korean words in “Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers” lends the poem, whose subject matter and setting is Korean, a feeling of authenticity. However, her switching between Korean and English, and the words which she chooses to translate and leave untranslated could place her “[p]oised between a spectral and real engagement with Korea” (M. M. Kim 110). Giving more mundane items their Korean names, and translating the more unusual terms into English in order to highlight their strangeness places Kim in the position of a cultural ambassador who decides which information to transmit in order to create a highly specific desired impression for visitors. Not only will the Romanized versions of the words Kim uses fail to accurately capture the correct Korean pronunciation, but by only selectively using Korean terms she can create a different version of Korea for the reader. Her inconsistent use of Romanized Korean, as well as the incomplete glossary

³ Kim misattributes the English translation to David Hinton, when in fact Sam Hammill is the translator.

suggests an uncertainty about her relationship with Korea and Korean language, and about her readers' response to the codeswitching aspects of her work.

In contrast to Anzaldúa's refusal to accommodate her English speaking readers, Kim seems reluctant to make the same demands. Kim's mixed use of Korean and English recalls Anzaldúa's arguments in favour of switching codes:

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. [...] Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (81)

However, unlike Anzaldúa, Kim makes accommodations for her non-Korean-speaking readers, translating the majority of the words in her notes. The only untranslated words have meanings which are obvious from their context – "*Kamsahamnida*," in the Acknowledgments, means "thank you," while both "*yut*" and "*paduk*" are games which in Kim's poems are played by "children" and "men," respectively (*Notes from the Divided Country* x, 23, 37). While Anzaldúa's work does not include a glossary or notes to aid the non-Spanish speaking reader's understanding, Kim provides notes which acknowledge that many readers will be unfamiliar with the terms she uses. Her use of Korean, therefore, is less of a political statement or assertion than Anzaldúa's mixing of Spanish and English.

In fact, it could be argued that her selective use of Korean words, such as *chamae* for yellow melon, is a form of orientalism, given that she exoticizes some words, while translating the relatively exotic, such as the herbal remedies on sale in

the market. In "Translations from the Mother Tongue" many of the Korean words are used because no English word could adequately replace them, for example, *hahngari*, meaning the clay pots used to store and ferment the *khimchee*. She translates the names of many of the food items on sale in the market, such as "pinenut," "quince," "shark fins" but also uses the Korean words for "*makkoli*" and "*soju*." Her notes explain that these last two are: "liquors made from rice" which therefore do not have an English language equivalent beyond the more familiar Japanese *sake*. Kim's selective use of Korean words is problematic, with some Korean words seemingly selected for their otherness, while other items are translated into English in order to emphasize their strangeness.

Although she is perhaps not as fluently bilingual as Lee, and her acquisition of Korean came relatively late in life, Kim writes with an awareness of Korean language terms and structures and this may be particularly relevant when her subject matter is Korean. Mignolo argues that:

Bilanguaging, in other words, is not precisely bilingualism where both languages are maintained in their purity but at the same time in their asymmetry. Bilanguaging [...] is not a grammatical but a political concern as far as the focus of bilanguaging itself is redressing the asymmetry of languages and denouncing the coloniality of power and knowledge (231).

Kim's use of Korean in her poetry therefore may be seen as way of reclaiming her lost language. Due to Korea's colonial past, the survival of the Korean language itself was at times uncertain. "Language, in Korea, where use of the native tongue was suppressed during the Japanese occupation that lasted from 1909 to 1945, is a particularly emotional issue" (Lewallen 2). Kim's family history of promoting the

Korean language during Japanese occupation makes her choice to include Korean phrases in her work more meaningful. Her work recognises the political implications of speaking Korean, especially during the occupation, with her poem “Resistance” urging the reader to “Praise the prisoners arrested for speaking Korean / for not answering to Yamada or Ichida or Sakamaki, their new names by law” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 23).⁴ The poem is dedicated to her great-grandparents and according to her notes, is based on the writings of her great-grandfather who was imprisoned for several years during the Japanese occupation for his part in creating a Korean language dictionary (*Notes from the Divided Country* 73).

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée* highlights the changing languages within the country, from French to Japanese and Korean, and her text shifts between English, French, and in the form of illustrations, Hangul Korean, although English and French are its predominant languages. While Kim’s use of Korean in her collection is less prevalent than Cha’s, her choice to include any Korean phrases at all is significant and deliberate, particularly so given her relatively late acquisition of the language. Of course, this is a challenge that all bilanguaging poets face – when to translate a word into English, and when to use its original. In some ways it is similar to the challenges discussed in Chapter One, how much explanation to give in relation to describing the foodstuffs with which a non-Asian reader might be unfamiliar.

Where does the responsibility lie to translate or explain these words and phrases? Anzaldúa would expect her readers to “accommodate” her codeswitching,

⁴ Refusing to speak Japanese could have other long-lasting repercussions besides serving a prison term, such as demotion from jobs or work transfer to remoter areas of Korea. Even philosophical debates about the nature of language could be dangerous, as one teacher who was demoted discovered: “I claimed that there are Korean words that Japanese words cannot match – there are no equivalent words in Japanese. They did not like to hear this” (Ch’oe Kilsong in Kang 73).

rather than providing translations to them. Kim, however, appears less certain about her readers' willingness to accommodate, firstly by providing Romanized versions of the Korean, rather than using Hangul, and secondly by providing notes for the readers which offer both a historical context and an English translation of the Korean phrases she chooses to use. Part of this may be explained by the fact that *Notes from the Divided Country* is a first poetry collection, and future collections may be less willing to make the same sort of compromises. Eight of Kim's poems in *Notes from the Divided Country* use Korean phrases, with a total of 21 Korean words. Twelve of these words are glossed in her notes, with the meanings of the remaining phrases immediately clear because of the context in which they appear.

According to Martha J. Cutter: "translation evokes a crossing of borders, a permeation of barriers erected between what seem to be separate and disjunctive cultural and linguistic terrains (the ethnic and the American)" (7). Each time Kim translates a Korean word in her work she crosses this border, and doing so reminds the reader of the border's existence. Anzaldúa's refusal to translate, her insistence on using "Spanglish" in her work, can be seen as empowering. So too can Kim's use of Korean words and phrases, in spite of the problems outlined. Although very selective in her use of Korean words, by inserting them into her work she asserts her identity as a border thinker, and as both Korean and American:

English becomes a multilingual space of transmigration and translation, of contestation and resistance. In this middle space ethnicity itself also becomes transcoded and transformed into a source of not only cultural capital but also social and human capital, a source of psychological empowerment (Cutter 249).

Although Lee does not codeswitch to the same extent, or with the same purpose, as Kim, both poets' work is coloured by the presence or absence of their other languages. Japanese American poet, Kimiko Hahn describes the effect that bilingualism has on her own writing, observing that:

language, both English and Japanese, is not only a tool for writing, but also subject matter . . . knowing there are two ways to say something and not being able to say it, or decide which way to say it, or knowing the nuances of each are not translatable (quoted in J. Chang 92).

Lee explains the effect that bilingualism has had on his work saying: "I can't tell if my being Chinese is an advantage or not, but I can't imagine anything else except writing as an outsider [...] It's bracing to be reminded [that] we're *all* guests in the language, any language" (Zhou 131; emphasis in original). According to another Asian American poet, Catalina Cariaga: "what Asian American poets grew up hearing, but not speaking, gives spark to the linguistic qualities of their poem: lexicon, syntax, music, utterance and sense of gesture" (quoted in J. Chang 92).

Lee links his earliest poetic efforts to his childhood attempts to learn English: "I wrote as soon as I started learning the English language [...] I thought it was a really amusing language [...] when I started learning it, I started rhyming little words together" (Bilyak 603). His status as an "outsider" to English allows Lee to have insights into language which may be less immediately accessible to native speakers of English. Being a "guest in the language" allows him to notice puns and subtle word associations which may be less obvious to those for whom English is their first language. In this way, Lee's relationship with language reflects Kristeva's observation: "[l]acking the reins of the maternal tongue, the foreigner who learns a new language is

capable of the most unforeseen audacities when using it – intellectual daring and obscenities as well” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 30). His observations are similar to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s, who, like Lee, had to acquire English as a child after moving to the United States: “As a foreigner, learning a new language extended beyond its basic function as communication as it is general for a native speaker, to a consciously imposed detachment that allowed analysis and experimentation with other relationships of language” (Cha in Lewallen 2).

Kim’s response to the demands of being a bilanguaging poet is to visit Korea, both imaginatively and literally, and along with using Western allusions and sources, to use Korean folk songs and translated Korean poems for some of her work. In doing so she asserts her linguistic skills. However, while she uses Korean phrases within her work, she Romanizes them rather than writing them in Hangul, thus avoiding alienating her readers. Lee’s work occasionally also uses Romanized Chinese words, and his memoir features some Chinese ideograms, but he is more concerned with multiple allusions and associations that can be created between English words and phrases. His poetry relies on the networks of meanings that can be connected through his choice of words, and this is most evident in *The Winged Seed* where the networks are sustained throughout the longer text. In common with his views on exile, Lee also links language and communication to the wider human condition rather than to his own diasporic status. While Lee’s work explores the frustrations and demands of mastering a language, Kim’s work does not directly deal with this as a subject matter. However, through her choice of using Romanized Korean words her work exposes the differing linguistic modes in which she operates.

Mignolo sees “linguaging” as “that moment between speech and writing, before and after language, that languages make possible” (252). Poetry can be seen as occupying the same space as linguaging as an art form whose medium is between speech and writing. Poems, though written, are frequently intended for reading aloud. Because of this Lee sees breath, as well as speech and writing, as the medium for poetry because, he says: “[p]oems and breath are related in basically the same way that breath and utterance are related. That is, when we speak we use outgoing breath, the exhaled breath” (Jordan 144). This would, therefore, place his poetry “between speech and writing,” as a form of “linguaging”. His desire to inflect silence in his poetry also reflects Mignolo’s idea of the moment “before and after language,” which Lee sees as a moment of potential before meaning is fixed when the words are written on the page. For Lee the borders in his poetry may be not so much between English and Chinese languages, but rather between inhaled breath and exhaled breath, between speech and silence.

Chapter Five

Generation: Family, Influence and Inheritance

Still, the Asian immigrant family remains a much analyzed and greatly romanticized institution. At times seen as a formidable import, it is also sometimes held up as the truest realization of traditional *American* values, which whites have lamentably forsaken. Laudatory accounts of the Asian immigrant family are at once a reaffirmation of the 'immigrant makes good' myth and a sobering 'pep talk' to embattled whites, who have sensed a slipping away of supremacy along with numerical majority (Wong 38; emphasis in original).

Discussions of the identity that arises from the parent-child relationship in Asian American families comprise a much-traversed territory in the body of critical material responding to Asian American novels, narratives, and dramas, but this territory has remained less explored when it comes to poetry (Wardrop 50).

The family unit has long been considered the most important basis for society in Asia. With the transplantation of the family to the United States from Asia the bonds between family members can be disrupted as the culture in which they grow up changes. Paradoxically it can strengthen the bonds between relations as they are uniquely placed to understand the culture from which they sprang, and they are united in contrast to the mainstream culture surrounding them. Having a strong

family unit can be an important contributory factor to successful transition to the American way of life:

In the migration to the United States, Asian families had to wrestle with traditional ideas of socialization as opposed to the changes that came with the adjustment to the new environment. Families became the sites for the negotiation of issues pertaining to cultural values, enculturation, and economic activity. [...] Families are often seen as a key element behind the success of Asian immigrant achievement (Ng ix).

Recent demographic research attests to the high level of importance Asian Americans continue to place on parenting and marriage. A 2012 survey of Asian Americans found that 67% believed that being a good parent was “one of the most important things” in life, with a further 27% saying it was “very important but not one of the most important” things in life (Cohn et al. 130). Having a good marriage was considered the next most important thing, according to survey respondents.¹

Because of the importance placed on the family both, within the Asian American community and from outside, as Asian American family values are lauded as the “model minority,” family relationships have been the subject matter of many Asian American literary works.² More often than not it is the mother-daughter

¹ The survey was carried out by the Pew Research Center which interviewed 3,511 Asian Americans in all 50 states between January and March 2012. Respondents were interviewed in English or one of seven Asian languages. Survey findings were used in conjunction with “a detailed analysis of economic and demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other official sources” (Cohn et al. N. pag.)

² The problematic term “model minority” has been used to describe the Asian American population since its first appearance in a *New York Times* article in 1966 (Palumbo-Liu 174). Although perceived as more positive than the racial stereotyping of the past, it is a problematic term nonetheless, in part because it drove a wedge between the Asian American community and other minorities with which they might have shared political and economic interests. A *U.S. News & World Report* article published shortly after the *New York Times* report, lauded the Chinese Americans for their hard work, while implicitly criticising African Americans: “Still being taught in Chinatown is the old idea that people

relationship which is placed under scrutiny, especially within fiction. Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* are just two obvious examples of this. In poetry Cathy Song's *Picture Bride* examines the story of her grandmother coming to America, while Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* explores her mother's experiences in Korea. Less literary attention is given to father-son relationships, although Frank Chin's work has explored masculinity and father-son bonds in works like *Donald Duk*. In literary criticism while attention has been given to family relationships within the novel, less attention has been paid to family within poetry. Because family is such an important concept within Asian and Asian American culture, this chapter brings overlapping strands of Lee and Kim's experiences together, strands which have emerged through the preceding chapters. As well as examining Lee and Kim's portrayals of family within their work, I will show how both poets seek to create a literary lineage by alluding to, or directly quoting, literary figures from Europe and the Americas. The poets can be seen as straining against the Confucianist tradition in their choice of career and by writing about their families' stories. Along with their use of non-Asian sources within their work they show their development as Asian American writers.

While every writers' family is important to them, for Asian American writers, with the Confucian emphasis placed on family, having the approval of their families may be even more important. The Confucian view of the family puts the father at the head of the household: "as patriarch, [...] master of the universe [...] a stand-in for God" (Zia 11). This has particular implications for female members of the household who must follow: "the Confucian order of the Three Obediences [...]: the daughter

should depend on their own efforts – not a welfare check – in order to reach America's 'Promised Land'" (in Zia 46).

obeys the father, wife obeys the husband, and, eventually, the widow obeys the son” (11).

In *Words Matter*, twenty Asian American writers (including Li-Young Lee) were interviewed and:

asked to speak openly about their aesthetics, their politics, and the difficulties they encountered in pursuing a writing career: *disapproval of parents who press them to engage in more practical pursuits; cultural prohibition against exposing oneself or one's family; the absence of literary predecessors; self-contempt associated with race, poverty, gender, or sexuality; or the toll exacted by the ravages of war, exclusion, and internment* (Cheung 5; emphasis added).

The implication is that not only are Asian American families likely to disapprove of their children's choice of career, but that family is as important an influence on their work as any of the other factors listed above. While many of the writers interviewed were supported by their families, some encountered strong resistance until they attained public recognition for their work. Others only began to write freely, or without using pseudonyms, after the deaths of certain influential family members. Curiously, the interview with Lee in the collection does not ask about his family's reaction to his work, perhaps because he had discussed this in previous interviews. In addition to the financial insecurity of a writing career, families often worried about their own stories becoming public knowledge. One writer's mother's reaction on reading her daughter's novel was relief: “So well written! [...] And it's not about anybody!” (Gish Jen in Cheung 225).

Writing about family members in poetry, or prose, may break taboos, and transgress generational codes. As discussed in previous chapters, by seeking to understand their parents' and extended families' traumatic experiences Lee and Kim risk alienating them. By writing about these experiences they can also exert an authority over their parents which may have been denied to them when they were younger.

As outlined in Chapter Three, each poet must find a form which manages to respect, and accurately reflect, their families' experiences, while still being true to their own artistic impulses. Because Lee has published a memoir about his and his family's experiences, this chapter is more concerned with his work. Although family is a subject matter in many of Kim's poems, she does not have as large a body of work to draw from as Lee does. However, her work reflects on family in a very different way to Lee, which makes for interesting comparisons. Kim explores the biological side of family – beginning her first collection with a poem which explores the time before conception, and birth in "Generation." Her work appears to be haunted by the ghosts of family members left behind in Korea, both those who survived and those who died or whose whereabouts are unknown.

Perhaps in line with the Confucian view of the household, Lee's work is much more preoccupied with his relationship with his father than his mother. Although some of his work reflects on his mother, and her experiences, his father dominates his work to a much greater extent. In addition to using family as subject matter for their work, the poets draw from a range of literary figures, Asian and non-Asian, to assemble an alternative literary family tree. While not quite a complete rejection of

the Confucian family model, Lee's and Kim's use of non-Asian sources as literary ancestors can be seen as an assertion of a new literary identity.

Lee's memoir contrasts the closeness of his family with the dysfunctional families in the Pennsylvanian community around them, which might seem to uphold Wong's observation about the idealized Asian American family. As examined in Chapter One, disabled and elderly parishioners depended on the charity of Lee's father's church, rather than supportive families, for even very basic needs like food. This is in sharp contrast to the way in which Lee cares for his ailing father. The memoir also recalls that it is not just the elderly who are vulnerable and unsupported. Lee remembers a childhood classmate who: "was frequently arrested in Pittsburgh for prostitution," subsequently ran away, and: "telephoned a week later from Florida to say she was living with a man who, it turned out, was old enough to be her father. [...] she was stabbed in the back while hitchhiking her way back to Vandergrift" (85).

It would be tempting to think that Lee is conforming to the idea of the Asian family as "model minority" in contrast to "embattled whites," however, his family's history, as relayed by Lee, shows the truth to be more complicated. His father's abusive childhood, and his subsequent beatings of Lee and his siblings, though well intentioned, shows the family to be a less than model one. Even Lee's extended family is shown to be subjected to violent fits of rage, as Lee remembers his uncle beating his cousin. His mother's family, while cultured and wealthy, are also shown to have their own flaws, including an uncle: "who, forbidden to marry his thirteen-year-old niece, in grief gave up his inheritance, left for Mongolia to live in a hut, let his hair grow to his knees, and wrote page after page of poems and songs about [her]" (8). The bullying behaviour of Lee's great-grandmother leads to the suicide of a young

servant girl, who returns as a ghost to haunt the family.³ Lee's recollections show the complexities of families, and that each family has secrets they would rather keep hidden. His work explores the struggle to escape from these family histories, and to create a separate identity for himself. His relationship with his father at times threatens to overwhelm his sense of his own identity. His poetry examines the ways in which aspects of his identity, as father, and husband, are modelled on his father's identity as well as seeking to separate himself from his father's identity. While seeking to extricate his identity from his biological father's, Lee aligns himself with a literary genealogy of other poets. In creating this literary lineage Lee turns to North and South American, European as well as Asian poets for inspiration.

Kim's work does not explore the complexity of the "model minority" family to the same extent as Lee. Her connection to one section of her family was severed long before her birth, with the division of Korea into two separate nations. Her poems attempt to give voice to the silenced, missing portion of the family tree. In addition to the usual intergenerational strains that all families contend with, Kim and Lee are part of a postmemory generation and their understanding of the older generation's traumas must be aided by speculation about their experiences, ones which they themselves do not remember and perhaps are taboo topics. Lee's work repeatedly returns to the theme of fathers and sons, and even his poems about husbands and wives often echo memories of his parents' relationship, showing his father as a role model for masculinity. Kim's work explores the mother-child relationship, and shows that this bond begins to develop in utero. Her more recent work reflects her own

³ The great-grandmother's way to defeat the ghost suggests the strength of the mother-daughter bond continues into the next life: "*I told her if she didn't behave I'd make her mother who sold her to me my maid as well. The girl never visited the old lady again, although the others continued to see her*" (*The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* 24; emphasis in original).

experience of becoming a mother. Her work also acknowledges the hardships families may face and the bond that extends across time and geography, existing even after death. Lee and Kim face additional challenges as members of the generation which bridges the gap between Asia and America – as part of the 1.5 generation. As children of immigrants, Lee and Kim are in a dichotomous position, integrating into American life through the education system, and interracial friendship and marriages, while retaining cultural links through their home life.

Lee's family's continued use of Chinese in the home, and their links to other Chinese religious groups meant that he was in a border thinking position, moving between the worlds of the Pennsylvanian community and his parents' religious and cultural community. Kim did not appear to have the same connections to a wider Korean community in New Jersey, and perhaps for this reason felt compelled to further her connections with her parents' country of birth by visiting it as a Fulbright Scholar, and writing about their experiences:

Among other things, it [*Notes from the Divided Country*] explores my family's life in North and South Korea during the last century, particularly the War (1950-1953) and the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945)[...] I hope to honor [sic] my family's memory the only way I know how: by imagining and giving voice, however subjectively, to what they lived through and witnessed (Kim in Ball 27).

Both poets to some extent rebelled against parental expectations in order to become poets, career choices which their parents found difficult to understand. At a poetry reading Kim recalled that she grew up in a “really strict immigrant Korean family” adding that “it's to her [mother's] everlasting grief that I didn't become a

dentist.” (*Suji Kwock Kim*) Lee studied biochemistry at university but began taking creative-writing classes while there. He confesses that his mother does not fully understand what he does:

[s]he thinks I’m fooling around by writing poems, as if I should get a “real” job. [...] Her idea of what poet is would be the classic Chinese poet like Lao Tzu or Li-po. [...] My mother can’t believe that I’m as serious as any of those poets, so I don’t weigh in at all comparatively. Every time I translate a poem of mine for her, I’m aware it’s not Li-po, or Tu Fu or Su Tong Po. The poems fall short so I don’t translate them very much (Lee and Ingersoll 151-52).

His own view of writing poetry is that it is work, as shown in the stanza of “Furious Versions” which compares the “scratching of his pencil” to the sound of “a rasping / file,” in the same poem in which he encounters Tu Fu and Li Bai in Chinatown in Chicago (*The City in Which I Love You* 29).

Lee’s confidence in his own ability is also impacted by his continuing need to have his father’s approval, even long after his death:

Nothing I do is going to be good enough for him, so everything I write I hate a week later. [...] I guess my father is going to have to materialize and tell me, ‘You’re OK [sic] now. I think you’re a poet now’” (Moyers 42-43).

It is perhaps in response to this need for approval that he seeks to create a literary genealogy for himself. Although his parents recited classical Chinese poetry in the home, and were both creative, his mother still struggled to understand his decision to write poetry. Lee’s father died before his poetry career began in earnest – perhaps he did not feel free to devote himself fully to writing poetry until after his father’s death. In addition to being in the border thinking dichotomous position, as postmemory

children Lee and Kim find themselves attempting to understand the experiences of their family members and acting as interpreters of those events within their work.

In his foreword to Lee's first poetry collection, Gerald Stern muses that "[m]aybe Lee – as a poet – is lucky to have had the father he had" (*Rose* 9). *Rose*, and many of the poems in Lee's later collections, can be seen as his attempts to come to terms with his father's influence on his life, and the impact it continues to have even after his death. "Is this my father's life or mine?" he asks (*Rose* 52). It is almost impossible to assess Lee's work without considering his father's influence. His poetic meditations on his father's experiences further confuse him, as he realises that: "These days I waken in the used light / of someone's spent life" (*The City in Which I Love You* 13). His father's life coloured the publication of his first two collections *Rose*, and, *The City in Which I Love You*, with his father's experiences as a prisoner of conscience in Indonesia being noted in Lee's biography, as well as the family's migrations in Asia prior to their arrival in the US. Although later collections dropped the explicit references to his father in Lee's biography, within his work his presence can still be clearly felt. He remains very close to his family, living in the same building with his mother, brother and sister-in-law. His wife's sister is married to his brother. His family relationships are frequently subjected to scrutiny in interviews and criticism in a way which is unusual. However, this may be expected to a certain extent, as they are often the subject matter of his work.

The influence of his father on Lee's life and the formation of his identity may be illustrated by a memory he has of time spent with him as a child. In *The Winged Seed*, he recalls sitting still while his father sketched him and his siblings:

And as his hand moved to make a face or an arm appear on a white tablet [...] I could feel large parts of myself being vanquished by his gaze and his drawing hand, as though, being translated that way to rough page and graphite by my father, there would soon remain nothing of me. Or else there would be so little of me, I might eventually appear. For he was making me go away so completely, I was beginning to arrive. And as his hands and eyes realized more and more of me, less and less of me remained. I was nothing but a lump of heavy time expiring, a clay vase going porous, a stone, a seed. I was one of those seeds my father kept in the pocket of his suit which hung in the closet (56).

Lee's image of his father is of a godlike creator with the power to create and erase, while Lee sits silent and motionless. His use of the word "tablet" recalls religious the figure of Moses descending from the mountains with the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone, or as more akin to a sculptor rather than a portrait artist. The passage suggests the power Lee's father's presence exerted over Lee, with his ability to make him seem to disappear, as he brings a new version of him into existence.

However, this passage also offers an insight into Lee's own creative process and betrays an insecurity he may feel about his own ability to portray his father in his text. Speaking about writing the memoir, Lee expressed a desire to blacken the pages "as if I had a black crayon" – the crayon could be similar to charcoal used for portrait sketches (Dearing and Graber 99). The passage therefore, has an Escher-like quality – the adult Lee recreating both his father and his younger self in writing, while the father he describes on the page sketches Lee within the text. In a way this recalls

Lee's description of paper model his father made of King Solomon's Temple, discussed in Chapter Two. Lee's re-creation of his father's model within the pages of his memoir similarly depends on his father's artistic endeavours, as he does here by writing about his father sketching him.

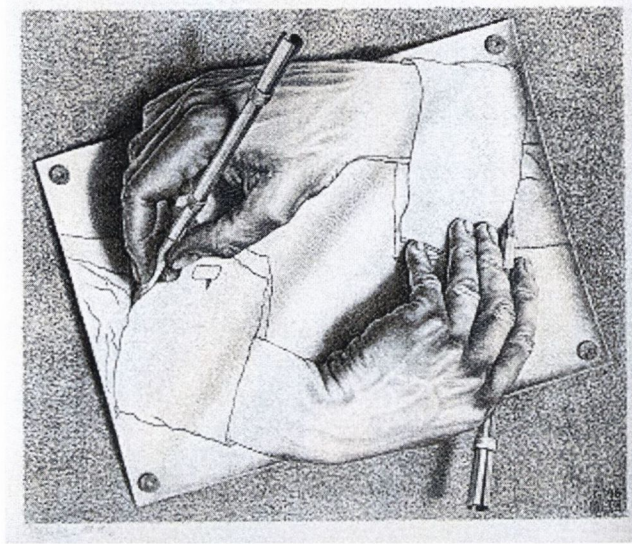


Figure 4 M.C. Escher "Drawing Hands"

Rather than being a "lump" or a "stone," for his father to shape at will, this older version of Lee can make his younger self reappear, as well as scrutinizing his father in a way which would have been unthinkable during his father's lifetime. By doing this he can assume control over both his own, and his father's identity, choosing which words to use to describe both men. Lee becomes the creative father to his own father, and to his younger self. Writing about his father Lee is finally able to return the gaze, something which was forbidden when he was growing up, Lee "was never allowed to look my father straight into his eyes" (60). Lee only breaks this taboo once, and "[i]t was an accident," he only realises "too late" that he is looking at his father during his father's church service and his father is returning his gaze (60). A strange stand-off ensues, similar to Lee's refusal to speak as a child, with both Lee and his father staring at each other:

there was no turning away. His gaze forbade it. And I wanted nothing more than to look away, to avoid his penetration. Yet I wanted nothing more than to look. I wanted nothing more than for *him* to look away. *I would penetrate him*, I thought. So I looked. And looked (60; emphasis in original).

The use of the words “penetration” and “penetrate” here are curiously sexual, especially when placed in proximity to Lee’s description of his father’s “[f]ull, almost sensuous lips” (61). This may betray a desire for domination over his father, a man who was such a domineering presence in his life.

However, scrutinizing his father after his death is not the same as returning his gaze during his lifetime. The object of his gaze is no longer present, Lee is studying him in his absence. The frustration of his absence, and Lee’s inability to ever fully understand him, is evident in his return throughout the text to try to remember his father’s “sermon on the seeds.” His desire to remember a sermon which he thinks would help explain his father’s practice of carrying seeds in his pockets, and therefore explain his personality, is never fulfilled. Interestingly, with the reissued version of *The Winged Seed*, readers are afforded the chance to gaze at his father, in a limited way. The book includes three photographs of his father. In two pictures he is with his family, while the other photograph shows him in his prison uniform with two other inmates. Lee, however, retains control of how his father is shown, as presumably he decided which images to release for publication. The photographs reproduced are small, only slightly larger than passport photographs. In the largest of the three photographs Lee’s father is shown full length, with a slightly battered briefcase in hand, with the rest of the family about to depart Hong Kong for Japan. As if to

frustrate the reader's gaze, in the photograph only Lee's sister and his older brother look at the camera – his father, mother, and Lee look in a different direction.

Although Lee's portrayals of his father show him at times to be a frightening parent, he is also shown to be both loving and cultured. An anecdote about his father calming a violent and mentally ill congregation member, shows this gentler side, as he spoke to her "very softly and patiently, with great formality, but a genuine kindness" (82). In part Lee's difficulty in understanding his father is because these contradictory sides of his personality are hard to reconcile. As the speaker in one of his poems records: "My father loved me. So he spanked me. / It hurt him to do so. He did it daily" ("Mnemonic" in *Rose* 66). The paradox is of violence as an expression of love, something which a child would have found difficult to understand, and even as an adult, the poem shows it is difficult to rationalise.

The same poem recalls the loving actions of the father: "I was cold once. So my father took off his blue sweater. / He wrapped me in it, and I never gave it back" (66). The sweater, which "is the sweater he wore to America" becomes a symbol for manhood or the kind of role model a father can be (66). The son in the poem must try to fill the space left by his father, and although claiming to have "grown into" the sweater, "[its] sleeves are too long," and its "elbows have thinned," suggesting that he cannot really measure up to the memory of his father, "its rightful owner" (66). His inability to live up to his father's talents is most in evidence in his disordered memory "a heap / of details, uncatalogued, illogical" in contrast to his father "who devised complex systems of numbers and rhymes / to aid him in remembering, a man who forgot nothing" (66). However, his description of the sweater which his father wore

suggests a man who did not quite fit in with his surroundings either, “[F]lamboyant blue in daylight, poor blue in daylight” (66).

Father figures in his poems are often recalled by their hands. In “The Gift” he recalls:

[...] his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head. (Rose15)

In “Always a Rose” the father “raised his voice, and then his hand / against his children, against his children / going” (Rose 41). In “Furious Versions” the father is defined by the texts which appear on either side of his hand, one from *Song of Songs*, suggesting love and tenderness: “*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*” and the other suggesting a God-like power to judge:

*For God shall bring every work
into judgement with every sweet thing,
whether it be good,
or whether it be evil* (The City in Which I Love You 22; emphasis in original)

Lee’s portrayals of his father are of a man shaped by these two impulses, a capacity for tenderness and love, as well as a propensity for uncompromising principles and discipline. While recalling his ongoing need for his father’s approval in an interview, Lee compares his work negatively to both books of the Bible quoted in this poem: “As I’m writing [...] I’m realizing this is not Ecclesiastes, this is not The Song of Songs, and yet I have a duty to finish those poems” (Moyers 42).

Lee recalls his father's impact, and his father's awareness of his status as role model for his children:

He was for me a huge character. He made it obvious early on that he was the template by which all his sons and his daughter were to measure our lives. He always set himself up as a goal for us, and he wasn't modest about it (Moyers 33).

The Winged Seed records Lee breaking another cultural and parental taboo as a child when he spelled his father's name: "[n]ot even allowed to speak to them using the third person pronoun or speak to them using the second person pronoun, to say their proper names felt criminal to me" (203). Lee's recollection of this transgression (which he overcomes as a child by spelling his name in Javanese) demonstrates that in writing he is rebelling against these cultural codes.

Although he only records his father's name directly twice in the text – once in its English equivalent: "My father's name was *Perfect Country*, which I write by drawing a spear enclosed in a heart and piercing the heart from within," and on the following page prints the Chinese ideogram for his name (144, 145; emphasis in original)

l
i
" forth saying the words I write. My father's name was *Perfect Country*, which I write by drawing a spear enclosed in a heart and piercing the heart from within. My mother's name is *House of Courage*, and as she paces back and forth, uttering, as my grandmother's cane taps

Figure 5 *The Winged Seed*, 144

the lotus; I give you morning glory. I let two birds de-	h
scend to braid the lightning; I write my father's name,	e
<i>Perfect Country</i> (国 儿); I write my mother's, <i>House of</i>	w
<i>Courage</i> (家 英). I make the sign for <i>what</i>	i
(什 么), for <i>who</i> (谁), and <i>again</i> (再); here as in	n
childhood, I count the cloves of <i>fire</i> under <i>horse</i> (火 下).	g
While Auntie naps in her room, the <i>China Daily</i> unread	e
	d
	s
	e

Figure 6 *The Winged Seed*, 145

The project of writing “A Remembrance” with his father at the centre is therefore intrinsically taboo. Returning to Lee’s description of his father sketching him, we can see Lee’s creation of *The Winged Seed* as a sort of role reversal. Writing the memoir is perhaps the only way in which Lee can separate his own identity, wresting the pencil (or crayon or charcoal) from his father’s hand and placing it in his own. What Lee does by writing the book echoes Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* which breaks the taboo of revealing family secrets, beginning her novel “‘You must not tell anyone,’ my mother said, ‘what I am about to tell you [...]’” (3). Lee not only breaks the taboo of talking about his father in the third person, and using his name, but also subjects him to direct scrutiny that would have been impossible while he was still alive.

His description of very intimate moments of his care for his dying father would be difficult for any parent to have shared with the world, as Lee describes bathing and aiding his father to have a bowel movement (158-59). The passage shows Lee struggle to lift his father out of the bath tub “I’m practically wrestling him,” and displays Lee’s

fears for the writing project “[m]y fear is he’ll fall apart and I’ll never get him put together” (158). Difficult to grasp, yet utterly dependent and vulnerable, the father’s relationship with his son is one of co-dependency. The description is followed by a passage recalling Lee’s father lying “huge on his bed, bones jutting, prehistoric” while he dies (159).

While it is often dangerous to assume poems are directly autobiographical, in the case of many of Lee’s poems about his father he has acknowledged their factual basis, including “Mnemonic” and “The Gift” (Heyen and Rubin 17; Moyers 36). “The Gift” shows his father’s more loving side, recalling how he entertained and distracted a young Lee with a story while he removed a painful splinter from his hand. Because his father’s gaze is on Lee’s hand while he is removing the splinter Lee is free to look at him “I watched his lovely face and not the blade” (Rose 15). The speaker in the poem recreates this moment as an adult, when he performs the same duty for his wife. Lee’s poem shows how his father was a role model for masculinity and loving relationships. His work shows the full complexity of his father’s character, as a devoted caretaker of his congregation and a loving father, but also formidable man prone to violent outbursts. His acknowledgment of how his own behaviour was modelled on his father’s recognises that while he may be a “remarkable disappointment to him” he has lived up to some of the values his father laid down for him (*The City in Which I Love You* 39).

In “My Father, in Heaven, Is Reading Out Loud,” Lee again returns to the weight of expectation, and to his father’s gaze: “Because my father walked the earth with a grave, / determined rhythm, my shoulders ached / from his gaze” (39). Like “Mnemonic,” the poem recognises the shortcomings in his memory, but suggests that

this may be due to rebelling against his father's efforts: "Because he / made me recite a book a month, I forget / everything as soon as I read it" (39). The poem demonstrates the conflicting behaviour between longing to embrace and emulate his father's values, but also a desire to assert his own identity. However, it also offers a form of resolution as the speaker realises that he is not so unlike his father after all. The speaker recognises that his own knowledge: "comes while I'm mid-stride a flight / of stairs, or lost a moment on some avenue," and that his father also found insight from unexpected places. He observes that his father's wisdom came: "from his god, yes, but also from a radio" and that for his father "knowledge came while he sat among / suitcases, boxes, old newspapers, string" (*The City in Which I Love You* 40).

The poem acknowledges that while his father may have had the appearance of striding with purpose: "he was one of the powerless," who like the speaker and all humans, did not know from moment to moment what to expect, and "waits [...] to find out: / is it praise or lament hidden in the next moment?" (40) The resolution punctures his godlike presence, revealing him to be as powerless over his own destiny as all humans are. The opening stanza recalls the Lord's Prayer "My father, in heaven" echoing "Our Father who art in heaven" and in the last line "As it is in heaven, so it was on earth" recalling "on earth as it is in heaven" (39). The phrase "for either he will" is reminiscent of "thy will be done" – the "thy" is suggested in "**either**." By using the Lord's Prayer as a model for the poem, Lee suggests that his father has a mythic godlike status in his life. The stanza also alludes to William Carlos Williams in the line: "So much depends upon the / answer" (39). The allusion is jarringly blatant. By placing it along with the references to the Christian prayer, Lee creates for himself a trinity of father figures, in his own father, God, and Williams. Lee's allusion to

Williams, a doctor and a poet, is interesting given his own father's earlier career as a doctor. However, I believe that rather than picking Williams as an individual poetic influence, Lee uses the line because of its familiarity as an American poem – therefore placing himself within the network of American poets, just as he did in his allusion to Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others in "The Cleaving". The father in the poem "sat down to await instruction" from "his god" and "from a radio," just as Lee sits awaiting inspiration from his literary gods and the voices which surround him.

Beyond exploring his relationship with his biological father Lee's work seeks to create an affinity with a number of literary father figures. As previously noted, Lee seeks to be read alongside established poetic figures – from America, Europe and China, rather than being seen solely as an Asian American poet. In this, he betrays an apprehension in line with Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Speaking of Williams's influence, Lee acknowledges that: "I read a lot of Williams earlier, but lately find that my assumptions differ from Williams's," further explaining that:

my argument with Williams, I guess – though I have to tell you that I love him. But he practiced poetry as though it's a secular art. It is not. It is the practice of the sacred. [...] Poets are the real practitioners of the sacred (Marshall 128, 35).

The quote of "[s]o much depends upon" in a poem with so many religious allusions combines the sacred and the secular in one stanza.

While in Lee's poem the thing upon which so much depends is the answer to whether the noises his father hears while the children are "laughing / or crying?" (39) Whether the father/god figure chooses to intervene depends on the answer. If the "children" are metaphors for poems, then the (non-)interventionist gods are the

poetic allusions. Depending on the subject matter of the poem, differing literary influences will arise for Lee – the title, with its religious and Dickinson-like allusion setting the tone for the poem, but the more playful and less subtle allusion to Williams draws attention to the artifice of the creative process. The description of his father waiting for what the next moment will bring in the final stanza, recalls Lee’s description of the poet’s attentiveness as he begins to write at the end of “Furious Versions,” which appears earlier in the same collection.

Unlike Lee’s focus on father/son relationships Kim’s work concentrates on the bond between mother and child. She sees the beginnings of this bond as happening in utero, and continuing to develop in childhood. The first section of Kim’s collection is comprised of poems on the subject of this mother-child relationship: “Generation,” “The Tree of Unknowing,” “The Tree of Knowledge,” “Middle Kingdom,” and “Translation from the Mother Tongue.” Her poems also explore the effects of the separation from the extended family in Korea and the way in which the current generation continues to be haunted by what could have been. Imagined “ghost” siblings appear in her work, and the speakers deal with a form of survivor’s guilt. In this way, her work can be seen to be effected by postmemory. Indeed, many of the poems in Kim’s collection could be said to be haunted by the ghosts of relatives left behind in Korea.

“Generation” imagines “the unborn world” where the souls of children await conception, travelling through and playing in the mother’s body, in what Chu describes as “science fiction” and “postmemory *han*” (Chu 2010, 191; C2008, 106). The poem is followed by the two “Tree” poems, the first (“The Tree of Unknowing”) recalls a child rocking in her mother’s arms, and like “Generation,” could be seen as

continuing with the theme of postmemory *han*, as the child observes in her mother: “the maze / / of you: corridors of years, corridors of war” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 6). Like many of the speakers in Lee’s poems, the speaker in this poem has a moment of uncertainty about their identity, and the origin of their memory, asking: “Whose memory was it?” (6). The poem can be linked to “Generation” through shared words and imagery – the “immigrants driving to power plants in Jersey” in the earlier poem is echoed in “an immigrant sits in a Jersey slum” in this one (4, 6). The imagery of trees and forests is carried over from the first poem to the two which follow. In “Generation,” there are “doubts swarming [...] over forests of sleep,” the speaker wanders through “nerve-forests branching in every direction, towering trees” until she is “plucked [...] from mother’s body like fruit torn from a tree” (3, 5). “The Tree of Unknowing” continues the trope beginning, “Uncertainty, take me into the forest,” and “sparks flashed among the branches” (6).

Kim’s use of tree imagery connects with the idea of a family tree with its members branching out in different directions. It is similar to Lee’s use of the image of the winged seed, in that the tree’s (and family’s) success depends on multiple environmental conditions to allow it to thrive, many of which are beyond its control. Trees have a particular cultural significance in Korea, and played a key role in the creation myth. Trees “connect the three cosmic worlds, the sky, the earth, and the subterranean world” and were often used to decorate crowns because of this (Bonney and Doninger 1071, 74). Some gods were believed to originate from trees, for example, the granddaughter of King Hwanung: “married a god of the sandalwood tree” and this led to a form of “tree worship” (Lee et al. 5). Because of the association between trees and gods, trees were often used as shrines on the outskirts

of towns and villages: “[i]n addition to the shrine (*tangiip*) a large tree (*tangnamu*) is said to be the god’s abode and it is believed to eliminate calamities, confer blessings, and help fulfilment of wishes” (P. H. Lee 114). As well as the mythic associations, trees were used during childbirth as a physical support to the woman in labour.⁴

Superstition also led women to hang clothes from the branches of trees to appeal for an easy delivery. Because of the association between trees and childbirth the spirits of women who had died in labour were thought to reside in trees (Porteous 173).

The third of the poems, in what could be considered a trilogy, revisits the imagery of trees and forests, and describes the traumatic premature births of two children who do not survive. The poem takes the position of the first born child, who can be presumed to be the speaker from the previous two poems, and who feels a sense of guilt and responsibility because “I ripped her womb being born” and “She never says she blames me, but I’m to blame” (7, 9). The speaker in the poem reflects the thinking of both herself as a child and as an adult with a greater understanding of the medical conditions of the malformed brother and sister. Remembered overheard speech is included in the poem, with a lack of punctuation to disrupt the meaning in the doctor’s speech “*Nothing Bleeding is normal after delivery It’ll stop.*” (7). The running together of the words in this stanza contrasts with the insistent and disruptive use of colons in an earlier stanza: “know: no: you are you: not / I: this is Admitting: not the Waiting Room: not the ward” (7). The punning of know/no, and “[a]dmitting” in relation to its medical meaning, as well as confessing or acknowledging a truth. The after effects of the first birth, the rupturing of the mother’s womb may be seen as an analogy for the splitting of Korea. Two nations followed, both deformed by the split,

⁴ I am grateful to Bora Im for drawing my attention to this aspect of Korean folklore.

and unable to develop as they would have without the rupture. The word “ward” can also have a geographical meaning in this context. The “other worlds” and “the shadow I could have been” suggest the alternate realities that could have occurred had the nation not been split (12). “Admitting” and “[w]aiting” could be activities which take place at border crossings or in a war zone. While the events of the poem seem to be based on medical emergency, the use of the symbolism of trees, with their significance to the creation myth may endorse this alternative reading.

The poem offers a definition for the way in which children of trauma come to understand what has happened; it could be a primer for postmemory: “How did I know what I know? / From husks of things unspoken, things unspeakable” (11). The poem continues, showing the bind of the reluctant witness, who is compelled to tell the story of the trauma: “I don’t want to go on, / counting, recounting the aftermath / like an eye forced open, hideously seeing and seeing and seeing” (12). Written from the perspective of the postmemory generation, the poem shows the dilemma of trying to understand her parents’ trauma based on her childhood memories of overheard conversations, prayers and some limited first-hand experience. Like Lee’s speaker in “The Interrogation,” Kim’s speaker would perhaps prefer not to keep recalling and re-experiencing “the aftermath” but it is unavoidable. The speaker is a reluctant witness an “eye forced open” who not only keeps seeing events, but is forced to relive and retell them. Her repeated retelling offers no comfort or meaningful substitution for the silence of the “ghost-brother” and “ghost-sister” whose forgiveness she seeks but can never find, “[s]eek and ye shall / seek” (12, 11). The line-break disrupts the expected Biblical outcome to “seek and ye shall find.”

Kim opens this first section of her collection (and therefore the entire collection) with an epigraph from Anna Akhmatova: “And I am silent . . . as though a brother had died” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 1; ellipses in original). It is a contradictory way to start a collection, which is anything but silent – and like Lee’s work recalls Kingston’s opening sentence of *The Woman Warrior*. Examining the rest of the poem from which Kim uses only the last line, we can see one of the sources of the tree imagery that continues through Kim’s poems in this section. Akhmatova’s poem itself has an epigraph from Pushkin “And a worn out cluster of trees” and describes a “silver willow” with “weeping branches” (Wells 86). The poem speaks of “cultural loss,” but recognises that a “return to the past is impossible and the recognition of this impossibility causes the heroine anguish” (86). Wells notes the choice of willow tree as “a traditional folkloric and literary symbol of grief” (86). Kim’s use of trees in her poems of this section builds on this, as well as incorporating the Korean symbolism of trees.

The poem comes to convey a sense of isolation from the poetic past as well as the material and emotional past, and the willow tree or its stump becomes a symbol for the poet attempting to continue writing [...], surrounded by hostile or foreign voices (the new growth of trees) and reduced to silence (Wells 87).

The epigraph therefore aligns Kim’s poetic aspirations and anxieties with those of Akhmatova, who was seen as “the courageous documentalist [sic] of the Terror of the 1930s,” “the conscience of Russia[... who] had chosen to stay and endure, and to ‘bear witness’” (Wells 1; Akhmatova 2-3). Kim’s work thus aspires to bear witness, as well as showing solidarity with those affected by the situation in Korea, or as a diaspora living in the US. While the possibility of staying to “bear witness” in Korea

was not open to Kim, she chooses to try to do so from afar. The “ghost” siblings, therefore, can be read as the Koreans who did not make it to safety and who failed to thrive under the harsh conditions in post-war North Korea, or as the ghosts of what might have been, had the speaker’s parents remained in Korea. Discussing *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, Hirsch notes how Spiegelman’s brother who died in the Holocaust: “becomes the emblem of the incomprehensibility of Holocaust destruction” (37). The stillborn siblings in Kim’s poem become emblematic of Kim’s shadow-family, of the ways in which their possible futures were restricted by the outcome of the Korean War, and the rupturing of Korea.

The poem makes extensive use of literary sources, quoting *Hamlet*, Montaigne, and passages from the Bible. The sophisticated use of these sources suggests that although the child may have absorbed the events without fully understanding, as an adult the speaker is adept at absorbing and understanding complexities. However, it also suggests that some tragedies defy explanation, and that suffering is an inevitable part of life. The epigraph to the poem, from Marilynne Robinson is “Fact explains nothing. On the contrary, it is fact that requires explanation” – and the poem tries to offer an explanation for the facts which prevented the mother from bearing any other children after giving birth to the speaker. The poem, with its use of other sources, shows how inadequate the various facts are which attempt to explain the circumstances:

Nothing in the ultrasounds.

Nothing in the amniocentesis.

Noting intrauterine growth retardation.

Noting severe mental and physical disabilities.

Of unknown origin (8; emphasis in original).

“Sonogram Song,” revisits the womb-setting of “Generation,” but this time from the point of view of the mother, not the foetus (S. K. Kim “Sonogram Song”). Kim uses similar imagery to the earlier poem to capture both the fragility, and tenacity of the unborn child. Using maritime imagery of “sea-swell,” “skull-keel,” “driftwood-bone” and comparing the physical characteristic to a number of water-dwelling animals like swans, otters and seals. The animalistic imagery contrasts with the medical technology which allows the mother to see her unborn children for the first time. However, the artificiality of the circumstances which allow this mechanical intervention fade against the naturalistic terms as the speaker imagines the child “floating in the sonogram screen / like a ghost from tomorrow” in “snowy pixels.” The heartbeats captured on the machine are a “thunder of bloodbeats sutured in green jags on the ultrasound machine / like hooves galloping from eternity to time.” The technology fades from view within the poem as the child comes into clearer focus. Like the imagery in “Generation,” the poem emphasizes the first journey that all beings make, from a not-fully-knowable world into this one. Like the “Tree of Knowledge” and “Generation” Kim again uses the concept of the unborn child as a “ghost” – in “Generations” the fantasy landscape is inhabited by “ghost-children” who have “seaweed dripping hair,” like the child in “Sonogram Song” (*Notes from the Divided Country* 4).

The gap between the generation born and raised in Asia, and their children born in, or transplanted to, America can be the source of tension. Difficulties can arise as the younger generation question previously accepted beliefs and customs, and act

in ways which go against Confucian traditions. By choosing careers as writers, and by writing about their families, Lee and Kim risk alienating themselves from their parents' generation, and challenge the traditional Confucian model of family. Lee's work frequently explores the tension between a need to assert his own identity independent of his father's. Perhaps as a way to resolve this tension he seeks to create a lineage of literary influences within his work, drawing from American, European and Chinese literary figures. Kim's work also explores the possibility of creating a literary family tree by her use of epigraphs and other sources within her work. However, unlike Lee, she explicitly acknowledges their influence in her notes. In doing so she highlights the connections for her readers, whereas Lee allows the readers to recognise the allusions without his help. Whether they make apparent their literary sources or not, by their selection of an alternative family of literary figures, primarily from non-Asian sources, the poets assert their literary identities, independently of their biological families. In doing so they can be thought of as forging identities as American poets, who trace a literary heritage from Whitman, Williams, Dickinson and Emerson.

Conclusion

Border Thinking, Border Crossing

Our poetry is not a static enterprise but a thriving, historical progression. Our identities are multitudinous, multi-layered, and polyphonic. Obviously, after several generations of influential anthologies, we are no longer sojourners with a provisional visa, we are citizens of this culture, and we are here to stay (Marilyn Chin in V. M. Chang xiv).

Diasporas could be compared to stranded “migratory birds” – they are strangers from elsewhere who, without a sense of belonging, never feel at home in a new country yet unable to return to their homeland (Zhang 9-10).

The nature preserve which has flourished in the DMZ region of Korea, which I described as being held hostage to the past, is also under threat from the future. Environmentalists are concerned that part of any potential peace dividend between North and South would be the loss of this unique parkland. A campaign has begun to preserve the biodiversity of the DMZ region, as an environmental movement, as well as a way of promoting better relations between North and South Korea. While the possibility of the site as a possible future eco-tourist resort has been raised, environmentalists are concerned that economic interests are already being put before environmental ones (K. C. Kim in Smith). The contested nature of the site may be its best chance for future preservation.

This study began by observing the relative lack of critical attention paid to Asian American poetry and suggested that Asian American studies is seen as in “a crisis, a catachresis” and as always “about-to-be” (Hayot 908; Koshy 315). However, to some extent the lack of attention may have allowed a greater diversity of poetry to emerge. Perhaps the contested nature of Asian American literature, therefore, may also be its best protection for future study. While Asian American prose may be considered to be a publishing success, its success has come at a cost. A preference among publishers and readers for memoir-based prose has meant that many of the texts which are published conform to certain expectations about Asian American culture and family relationships.⁵ Asian American poetry, by contrast, has emerged in a:

wide range of aesthetic proclivities and *cross-fertilization*. A variety of ‘schools’ and sensibilities [...] – L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, East Coast neoformalism, West Coast hip, Whitmanesque sweeps, domestic quiet spaces, suburban landscapes, urban despair, love in angst and harmony, political rage. [...] a scintillating canvas with varying hues and emotions (Chin in V. M. Chang xiv; emphasis added).

Like the diverse range of species in the DMZ, Asian American poetry has thrived, and cross-fertilized to form an abundant range of poetic voices and styles to emerge.

Kim’s and Lee’s work arises from these rich borderlands. Kim’s collection moves between geographical settings, from Korea to America, crossing time spans,

⁵ The recent publishing success of *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan suggests that there is an appetite for a different kind of Asian American literature which owes less to memoir-style fiction than to the sex and shopping books of Danielle Steele, Jackie Collins and similar authors. However, Kwan’s book also resorts to the trope of troubled mother-daughter relationships and intergenerational tensions often seen in Asian American literature. (Kwan)

from before conception to death, and traversing historical periods from Japanese occupation to Korean wartime to contemporary time periods – shuttling between borders of time and space. Lee’s work returns to childhood memories and, with an awareness of mortality, anticipates a time when he, or his loved ones, will no longer be alive, moving between the past, present and future. His work expands from intimate personal experiences to much broader human experiences. Using the themes of food, place, memory, language and family in their work the poets show themselves to be adept border-thinkers.

Using food as the subject matter, Kim and Lee show how social interactions around food can expose racism, but also allow a sense of community. A postmemory awareness of extreme hunger, through stories passed down to them by their parents, means that they also explore this topic within their work. They show how access to food, and an ability to adapt available ingredients is a form of power. Kim and Lee use literary allusions as skilled cooks would use ingredients, to create new combinations which suggest their confidence in their identities as part of a wider community of poets.

The epigraph from Zhang argues that diaspora will “never feel at home,” and while Lee admits to feelings of homelessness and alienation, he ascribes this to being an aspect of the human condition rather than to being diaspora. Perhaps because she was born in America, with no memories of any other life, Kim seems less affected by this sense of exile than Lee. Kim and Lee visited Asia as adults, and their work reflects on their experiences of those trips. Their portrayals of Chinatown differ slightly, Lee appears unsettled by some of his encounters there, while Kim sees Chinatown as a vibrant place where growth and stability are possible.

Writing from the dichotomous position of postmemory poets, who are either first generation Asian American or “1.5 generation,” Kim and Lee seek to understand and honour their parents’, and previous generations’ experiences. These experiences, while traumatic, were nonetheless fundamental to their migration to America, as one writer puts it: “I’m not here, if this doesn’t happen” (Choi in J. Kim 290). Kim responds to the need to acknowledge postmemory by creating poems which while aware of their own artifice, remind the reader that they sprang from historical events. Lee seeks to create a myth-like testament to his family’s experiences.

The poets’ differing experiences with language acquisition emerge through their work as Lee’s distrust of language as a vehicle for communication leads to depictions of silence. Kim’s selective, and at times problematic, use of Korean in her poetry results from her late acquisition of the language. Their work shows how being outsiders to the language can allow for an inventiveness and awareness of the strangeness of language which native speakers lack. Their work shows that they engage in what Mignolo calls “bilanguaging” which seeks to redress the “asymmetry of languages” (231).

Supporting all of the other themes is the topic of the final chapter - family. In Lee’s work his father’s dominant personality casts a very long shadow. His poetry and memoir seek to assert his own independent identity and he uses allusion to create a literary family tree which does not depend on his biological family. Kim’s work explores maternal relationships, but she too creates a separate network of literary parental figures through her use of quotation and allusion. By writing poetry, and by using their families as subject matter, Lee and Kim challenge the Confucian tradition, in doing so they assert their identities as American poets.

Just as the flora and fauna of the DMZ are oblivious to, and yet benefit from, the artificial divisions created and enforced by political and military interests, Kim's and Lee's work moves across the artificial borders created within this study, I hope to their benefit. Lee's poem "Persimmons," could have been examined from the perspective of all of the themes of the chapters. In a similar way Kim's "Translations from the Mother Tongue," could easily have formed part of any of the five chapters. Many of both writers' poems explore the themes of several of the chapters at once. However, in order to maintain some sort of order over the material difficult decisions had to be made about which poems belonged primarily in which chapters, and occasionally poems appeared in more than one chapter. The themes of the chapters themselves could also be seen as overlapping. Food is strongly associated with family, as well as with location. The significance of language may change depending on the location in which one finds oneself. Memories are often triggered by food, and can link one to one's family or to a faraway location.

Some of the themes of this study have been explored by other critics, however, the criticism is more often applied to Asian American fiction rather than poetry. For example Xu's *Eating Identities: Food in Asian American Literature* (2008), while focussing on the theme of food considers the work of seven writers, only one of whom is a poet. Other themes have been given less critical attention – in particular the topic of family has not been explored in relation to Asian American poetry. There is potential for further research on this subject and on the implications of poets creating their own literary lineage, especially through allusion to non-Asian sources.

Lee makes use of the metaphor of a winged seed in his memoir and of migratory birds within his poetry. Either metaphor could serve for the work of these

two poets. Like winged seeds they cannot be sure of whether their work will fall on fertile ground, take root and blossom or on stony ground where it will not thrive. However, like winged seeds their work can move across borders. Migratory birds travel back and forth between geographical places on flight paths followed by previous generations, and Kim and Lee also return, imaginatively, to the lands of their parents' births. However, their work also seeks to create new paths by seeking out literary predecessors from other parts of the world. Rather than a rejection of their Asian identity, both also seek to align themselves with the non-Asian influences on their poetics, by their use of allusion to, or direct quotation from, what may be considered a more Western Canon. Birds and seeds are oblivious to the artificial boundaries created by humans. Although Kim and Lee are aware of borders, they are not confined by them.

Bibliography

- Li-Young Lee*. 2002. Poetry Reading Webcast 4 January 2006.
- Suji Kwock Kim*. 2005. Poetry Reading Webcast 7 April 2005.
- Akhmatova, A.A. *Anna Akhmatova*. Trans. Thomas, D.M. London: Vintage, 2009. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands : The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. Print.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Ball, D. *National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowships: 40 Years of Supporting American Writers*. Washington, DC: DIANE Publishing Company, 2006. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Bilyak, Dianne. "Interview with Li-Young Lee." *Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, the Arts and Public Affairs* 44.4 (2003-2004): 600-12. Print.
- Bonnefoy, Yves, and Wendy Doninger. *Mythologies*. University of Chicago Press, 1991. Print.
- Brown, Jeffrey. *Extended Interview with Li-Young Lee* 2008. Webcast 3 March.
- Caruth, Cathy. "Recapturing the Past: Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Caruth, Cathy. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 151-7. Print.
- Ch'ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming. *Weird English*. Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.
- Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictee*. 1st Calif. pbk. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Print.
- Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

- Chan, Jeffery Paul. *The Big Aiiieeeee! : An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Meridan, 1991. Print.
- Chang, Juliana. "Reading Asian American Poetry." *MELUS* 21.1 (1996): 81-98. Print.
- Chang, Victoria M. *Asian American Poetry: The Next Generation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004. Print.
- Cheung, King-Kok. *Words Matter : Conversations with Asian American Writers*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press ; Richmond : Curzon, 2000. Print.
- Chin, Frank. "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake." *The Big Aiiieeeee! : An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*. Eds. Chan, Jeffery Paul, et al. New York, NY: Meridian 1991. 1-91. Print.
- Chu, Seo Young. *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep? A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. Print.
- . "Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature." *MELUS* 33.4 (2008): 97-121. Print.
- Cobb, Nancy. *In Conversation: Sunken Garden Poetry Festival, Suji Kwock Kim*. 2013. Webcast June 2013.
- Cohn, D'Vera, et al. *The Rise of Asian Americans*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2012. Print.
- Cooper, Patsy, and Alex Yu. "Art Is Who We Are." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA, 2006. 55-73. Print.
- Culbertson, Roberta. "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self." *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 169-95. Print.

- Cutter, Martha J. *Lost and Found in Translation: Contemporary Ethnic American Writing and the Politics of Language Diversity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Print.
- D.T. "Dear Cabbage." *Banyan: Asian* 2010. Web. 22 November 2010.
- Davis, Rocío G. "Li-Young Lee." *Asian American Writers*. Ed. Madsen, Deborah L. Vol. 312. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005. 202-6. Print.
- Davis, Rocío G. . "Begin Here: A Critical Introduction to the Asian American Childhood." *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*. Ed. Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. Print.
- Dearing, Laura Ann, and Michael Graber. "Working to Hear the Hum." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester, NY: BOA, 2006. 86-99. Print.
- Delgado, Luisa Elena, Rolando J. Romero, and Walter Mignolo. "Local Histories and Global Designs: An Interview with Walter Mignolo." *Discourse* 22.3 (2000): 7-33. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Thomas Dutoit. *On the Name*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995. Print.
- Dinh, Linh. *All around What Empties Out*. Honolulu: Subpress Books, 2003. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. "Edible Écriture." *Times Higher Education Supplement*.1303 (1997): 25. Print.
- Eliot, T.S. "The Waste Land." *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Eds. Ferguson, Margaret, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1996. 1236-48. Print.

- Emerson, Edward Waldo. *Works of Emerson: Miscellanies*. Vol. 11. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1979. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." *Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller: Selected Works*. Ed. Rowe, John Carlos. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. 23 - 58. Print.
- Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Caruth, Cathy. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 183-99. Print.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Fox, Alan. "Saying Goodbye to the 999 Other Poems." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA, 2006. 157-71. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through." Trans. Strachey, James. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. Strachey, James. Vol. XII. London: Hogarth Press, 1964. 146-56. Print.
- Gabaccia, Donna. *We Are What We Eat : Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*. Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems, 1947-1995*. London: Penguin, 2001. Print.
- Hayot, Eric. "The Asian Turns." *PMLA* 124.3 (2009): 906-17. Print.
- Heaney, Seamus. *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. Print.
- Herbert, George. "Love (III)." *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Eds. Ferguson, Margaret, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1996. 346-47. Print.

- Heyen, William, and Stan Sanvel Rubin. "Seeing the Power of Poetry." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA, 2006. 16-29. Print.
- Hinton, David, and Li Po. *The Selected Poems of Li Po*. London: Anvil Press Poetry, Limited, 1996. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames : Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1997. Print.
- Huang, Guiyou. *Asian American Literary Studies*. Introducing Ethnic Studies. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. Print.
- Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*. Eds. Hass, Robert, et al. Vol. 2. New York: Library of America, 2000. 370. Print.
- Huk, Romana. "A New Global Poetics?" *Literature Compass*. 6.3 (2009): 758-84. Print.
- Jansen, Reamy. "Art and the Deeper Silence." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA, 2006. 74-85. Print.
- Jordan, Marie. "The Presence of an Eternal Mystery While Folding Clothes." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar : Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Eds. Lee, Li-Young and Earl G. Ingersoll. American Readers Series No. 7. Rochester: BOA Editions, 2006. 143-56. Print.
- Kang, Hildi. *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001. Print.
- Kim, Jodi. "'I'm Not Here, If This Doesn't Happen': The Korean War and Cold War Epistemologies in Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* and Heinz Insu Fenkl's

- Memories of My Ghost Brother." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11.3 (2008): 279-302. Print.
- Kim, Ke Chung. "Preserving Biodiversity in Korea's Demilitarized Zone." *Science* 278.5336 (1997): 242-43. Print.
- Kim, Myung Mi. *Commons*. Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2002. Print.
- Kim, Suji Kwock. "At the Imperial Palace (Not-Pyongyang, North Korea)." Poetry Society of America 2011. Web. 21 November 2012.
- . *Notes from the Divided Country*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003. Print.
- . "On Pike Street." *Poetry* 165.5 (1995): 274. Print.
- . "Slant." Poetry Foundation 2001. Web. 1 April 2012.
- . "Sonogram Song." *Southword*.21A (2012). Web. 4 August 2012.
- . "Writing in the New Year; New Year at the Demilitarized Zone." *New York Times* 31 December 2003. Print.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior : Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.
- Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984. Print.
- Koshy, Susan. "The Fiction of Asian American Literature." *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9 (1996): 315-46. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. Print.
- . *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Roudiez, Leon S. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia, and Toril Moi. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. Print.

Kwan, Kevin. *Crazy Rich Asians*. London: Corvus, 2013. Print.

LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry* 25.4 (1999): 696-727.

Print.

Laguerre, Michel S. *The Global Ethnopolis : Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society*. Basingtoke: Macmillan ; New York : St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Print.

Lee, James Kyung-Jin. "Li-Young Lee." *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers*. Ed. Cheung, King-Kok. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000. 270-80. Print.

Lee, Li-Young. *Behind My Eyes*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Print.

---. *Book of My Nights*. American Poets Continuum Series. Rochester, N.Y.: BOA Editions, 2001. Print.

---. *The City in Which I Love You*. American Poets Continuum Series V. 20. Brockport, N.Y.: BOA Editions, 1990. Print.

---. *Rose*. Rochester: BOA, 1986. Print.

---. *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. Print.

Lee, Li-Young, and Earl G. Ingersoll. *Breaking the Alabaster Jar : Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. American Readers Series No. 7. Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, 2006. Print.

Lee, Peter H. *A History of Korean Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.

Lee, Peter H., et al. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.

- Lewallen, Constance M. "Audience Distant Relative: An Introduction to the Writings of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha." *Exilée and Temps Morts: Selected Works*. Eds. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung and Constance M. Lewallen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 1-6. Print.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. "Identifying Foods, Identifying Selves." *The Massachusetts Review* 45.3 (2004): 297-305. Print.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin et al eds. *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. Print.
- Liu, Eric. *The Accidental Asian : Notes of a Native Speaker*. 1st ed. New York: Random House, 1998. Print.
- Logan, Liz. "An Interview with Li-Young Lee." *Poets & Writers* 2008. Web. 6 June 2010.
- Marshall, Tod. "Riding a Horse That's a Little Too Wild for You." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA, 2006. 125-43. Print.
- McCormick, Adrienne. "Theorizing Difference in Asian American Poetry Anthologies." *MELUS* 29.3/4 (2004): 59-80. Print.
- Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.
- Mong-Lan. *Love Poem to Tofu & Other Poems*. Sugar Land: Valiant Press, 2007. Print.
- Moore, Marianne. "Poetry." *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Eds. Ferguson, Margaret, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1996. Print.
- Moyers, Bill. "A Well of Dark Waters." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA Editions, 2006. 30-43. Print.

- Munroe, Alexandra. *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*.
New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009. Print
- Ng, Franklin. *Asians in American Life: The Peoples of East, Southeast, and South Asia in American Life and Culture*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1998. Print.
- Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print.
- Park, Josephine Nock-Hee. *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.
- Partridge, Jeffrey F.L. "The Politics of Ethnic Authorship: Li-Young Lee, Emerson, and Whitman at the Banquet Table " *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 37.1 (2004): 103-26. Print.
- . *Beyond Literary Chinatown*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. Print.
- Pham, V. H. "'Secret Kitchen'(TM): An Amalgam of Family, Fortune and Fusion Food in Asian American Cuisine." *Amerasia Journal* 32.2 (2006): 21-34. Print.
- Piccione, Anthony, and Stan Sanvel Rubin. "Waiting for a Final Shapeliness to Occur." *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee*. Ed. Ingersoll, Earl G. Rochester: BOA, 2006. 44-54. Print.
- Pihl, Marshall R. "What Is P'ansori?" *Chicago Review* 39.3/4 (1993): 227-30. Print.
- Pollard, Charles W. *New World Modernisms : T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite*. Charlottesville ; London: University Press of Virginia, 2004. Print.
- Porteous, Alexander. *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001. Print.
- Prendergast, Christopher. *Debating World Literature*. London: Verso, 2004. Print.

- Raczymow, Henri. "Memory Shot through with Holes." *Yale French Studies* 85. Discourses of Jewish Identity in Twentieth-Century France (1994): 98-105. Print.
- Ramazani, Jahan. *A Transnational Poetics*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Print.
- Ricks, Christopher. *Allusion to the Poets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands : Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1991. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.
- Seyhan, Azade. *Writing Outside the Nation*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. "The Tragedy of Coriolanus." *The Norton Shakespeare*. Eds. Greenblatt, Stephen, et al. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. 2793-871. Print.
- Sheridan, Colette. "Birth Pangs of a Poet." *Irish Examiner* 9 February 2012. Print.
- Sielke, Sabine, and Christian Kloeckner. *Orient and Orientalisms in Us-American Poetry and Poetics*. Frankfurt am Main ; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009. Print.
- Smith, Daniel. "Peace Prospects Imperil Korea's Wildlife Paradise." *National Geographic* 2000. Web. 9 September 2013.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books, Limited, 2002. Print.
- Stalling, Jonathan. *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. Print.
- Stern, Gerald. "Foreword." *Rose*. Ed. Lee, Li-Young. Rochester: BOA, 1986. Print.
- Takaki, Ronald T. *Strangers from a Different Shore : A History of Asian Americans*. 1st ed. ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1989. Print.

- Tilton, Eleanor M. *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Vol. 7: 1807-1844. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. Print.
- Tong-hyung, Kim. "Koreans Scramble to Adjust to Soaring Kimchi Prices." *The Korea Times* 3 October 2010. Print.
- Trinh, T. Minh-Ha. *Woman, Native, Other : Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989. Print.
- van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Onno van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Caruth, Cathy. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 158-82. Print.
- Wardrop, Danenn. "Li-Young Lee's "the Cleaving" and the Figure of the Father." *Amerasia Journal* 32.2 (2006): 49-65. Print.
- Wells, David. *Anna Akhmatova: Her Poetry*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1996. Print.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass: The "Death-Bed" Edition*. New York: Modern Library, 2001. Print.
- Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature : From Necessity to Extravagance*. Princeton, N.J. ; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1993. Print.
- Xu, Wenying. *Eating Identities : Reading Food in Asian American Literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. Print.
- Yao, Steven G. "The Precision of Persimmons: Hybridity, Grafting and the Case of Li-Young Lee." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 12.1 (2001): 1-23. Print.
- Yukins, Elizabeth. "Bastard Daughters and the Possession of History in "Corregidora" and "Paradise"." *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 221-47. Print.
- Zhang, Benzi. *Asian Diaspora Poetry in North America*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Zhou, Xiaojing. "Inheritance and Invention in Li-Young Lee's Poetry." *MELUS* 21 (1996): 113-32. Print.

Zia, Helen. *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000. Print.

