

*Multiculturalism: Pied Piper of  
Canadian Nationalism  
(And Joy Kogawa's  
Ambivalent Antiphony)*

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**I**N THE EARLY 1990s, the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship published a series of jingoistic pamphlets to explain Canadian multicultural policy. Given such titles as *Multiculturalism: What is it Really About?* and *Canadian Citizenship: What Does It Mean to You?*, these pamphlets explicitly articulate multiculturalist common sense. For example, the Minister's opening remarks to *Multiculturalism: What Is It Really About?* states, in part,

[m]y hope for the future of Canada is for . . . a country where people feel comfortable with one another, are tolerant and understanding with one another, and where each person recognizes they have the same opportunities, responsibilities, and privileges.

(n.p.)

Few would hope for anything different. But whereas most progressives would base such hope on material ameliorations such as meaningful employment integration, an end to police brutality, or the elimination of racial profiling, Multiculturalism Canada's optimism rests explicitly on an idealist chronological narrative of national progress. The same pamphlet goes on to assert:

Canada has been multicultural from the beginning. . . . It has been gradually extending the same rights and responsibilities to all of its citizens. Although this process is often slow and faces tough obstacles, progress has been steady, and still continues. (3-4)

This upbeat assertion whitewashes Canadian history, breezing by not just the genocide of First Nations people, but also other

watersheds of officially sanctioned racism like the Chinese Immigrant Exclusion Act in effect from 1923 until 1947, or the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Even more pernicious is the statement's implication that the need for ongoing struggle has been obviated by the inevitability of historical progress. The nation, according to Multiculturalism Canada, is unfolding as it should, beyond the bigotry of the past toward a brighter, more pluralist future.<sup>1</sup>

It is, of course, the job of such pamphlets to articulate nationalist common sense.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, I quote such provocative rhetoric because it indicates the degree to which official multiculturalism is entangled with nationalism. Endowed by the state with a mandate to celebrate and a tendency to police, official multiculturalism contains difference within the nation, extolling diversity without asking too many questions about it. Official multiculturalism makes it easier for the nation-state to sweep aside thorny issues like colonialism, immigration bars, internment, and so on, in the name of pluralist inclusiveness.

Japanese Canadian writer Joy Kogawa suggestively pursues the question of national belonging and difference in her first two novels, the widely read *Obasan* (1981) and the equally widely ignored *Itsuka* (1992). *Obasan* takes as its occasion the evacuation and internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. It introduces Naomi Nakane, who is a child when she and her family are relocated from Vancouver to Slocan, British Columbia, and then to Granton, Alberta. Separated from her parents, each of whom dies during the war, Naomi and her brother Stephen are brought up by their aunt Aya (the *Obasan* of the title) and Uncle Isamu, with occasional visits from Aunt Emily. The story is told from Naomi's point of view, rendering the machinations of history intensely local and personal. *Itsuka*, a literary and historical sequel to *Obasan*, follows Naomi to her adult life in Toronto, and the bulk of the novel chronicles her involvement in the Japanese Canadian redress movement of the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Whereas *Obasan* continues to be read, taught, and discussed throughout North America two decades after its publication, *Itsuka* has been roundly ignored by critics, teachers and general readers alike.

Why should *Obasan* remain such a compelling text while *Itsuka* fails to generate any interest? This essay grapples with this question by examining both novels in the context of Canadian multiculturalism and its attendant common sense notion of historical progress. Put simply, it argues that *Obasan* articulates a far more complex political problem and, therefore, a far more nuanced solution than does *Itsuka*. While official multiculturalism posits national history as a chronological narrative of progress directed toward future perfectibility, *Obasan* worries the relationship of the past to the present and wonders whether history can be represented at all. *Itsuka* is much less ambiguous, permitting Naomi one excursion into the past and then driving its characters unproblematically forward to political victory. Although *Itsuka* does voice a contest over national history, it takes place at the level of dialogue, in the form of an argument between two sets of characters over whether internment was justified or not, rather than as a query of history's conditions. Official multiculturalism and Kogawa's novels both ultimately embrace a notion of composite national subjectivity, but whereas this composite, *hyphenated* subjectivity is blindly celebratory for official multiculturalism and to a large degree *Itsuka*, *Obasan* presents a *hybrid* subjectivity as a means of gaining a critical purchase on the nation.

The novels emerged in notably different moments of Canadian multicultural policy, and their contexts matter for at least two reasons. First, it is important to contextualize Kogawa in terms of ongoing Canadian political and cultural debates because her work is increasingly incorporated into course syllabi and debates in *Asian American* literature at the expense of her status as Japanese *Canadian*. Such absorbent critical moves — offered, no doubt, in a spirit of generous inclusiveness — bear an uncanny resemblance to official multiculturalism's own homogenizing pluralism.<sup>4</sup> Second, Canada offers a particularly revealing context for the discourse of multiculturalism. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, although the adjective “multicultural” was used once in a 1941 book review in the *Herald Tribune*, Canadian usage actually brought the term into common parlance in the late 1950s. Similarly, the first use of the nominative “multiculturalism” occurs in a Canadian government report

entitled *The Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, released in 1965.<sup>5</sup> Although not the only nation to embrace multiculturalism, Canada, as the originator of the concept and the first to implement multiculturalism as official state policy, offers an exemplary context for understanding official multiculturalism's machinations and implications.

In Canada, official multiculturalism has always been entangled with contests over national identity, and especially — as the title of the 1965 government report suggests — the struggle between French and English Canada.<sup>6</sup> Multiculturalism became official Canadian state policy in 1971 under Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who articulated a multicultural policy with four objectives: to assist all Canadian cultural groups with the desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada; to assist members of all cultural groups in overcoming cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society; to promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity; and to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society. The policy is unabashedly assimilative, but its political context is instructive. Framed as a "multicultural policy within a bilingual framework," the policy was never intended to counter systemic racism; rather, it attempted to appease white ethnic voters other than those of English or French descent who worried that their cultures were going to be forcefully assimilated to Trudeau's version of a French/English bicultural and bilingual Canadian identity. *Multiculturalism*, in effect, functioned as code for a colour-blind ethnicity that served to consolidate the dominance of Canada's two major white cultures. Trudeau's appeasement worked more or less, and for the next decade arguments over Canadian diversity overwhelmingly concerned the French/English question. Kogawa wrote her first novel in this atmosphere of muted multiculturalism.

Perhaps ironically, it was Trudeau's Conservative successor, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who brought multiculturalism back to the forefront of Canadian political debate in the mid-1980s. Again, multiculturalism was tied to Canadian nationalism



— this time to the constitutional debates designed to forestall Québécois separatism. With the ink not quite dry on the Meech Lake Accord proclaiming Québec a “distinct society,” Mulroney had to court communities of colour understandably put out by this constitutional distinction of a white ethnic group, and he did so by promising increased funding for existing government programs, a race relations foundation, a heritage language institute, the establishment of a government department of multiculturalism, and redress for Japanese Canadians interned during World War II.<sup>7</sup> Mulroney made good on at least the easiest of these promises. In 1986 he created a cabinet position called “Secretary of State and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism,” and in 1988 the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed. Mulroney’s boisterous proclamations treated multiculturalism as an integral characteristic of Canadian society outside a policy of bilingualism, and they certainly had the language of difference — including racial difference — down pat.

However, the very name of the Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship suggests an assimilative thrust that such language of diversity would deny. Moreover, Mulroney’s rhetoric presupposes the notion of inevitable progress rendered so vivid in the official multiculturalism documents that I discuss in the opening of this essay. This notion of necessary progress holds that in spite of historical policies like forced relocation and internment, today a more enlightened Canada can embrace the people it dispossessed in a gesture of unproblematic inclusiveness designed to undo the past and thereby smooth the nation’s trajectory into the future. Although Mulroney’s promises largely proved to be empty, his rhetoric exuberantly favoured multiculturalism, and some of that exuberance appears in *Itsuka*.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas *Itsuka* directs its energies toward correcting the official record, leaving multiculturalism’s nationalist common sense alone, *Obasan* challenges some of the assumptions that buttress national history as it is recirculated in the discourse of multiculturalism. The novel is diachronic, but in a critical mode: *Obasan* uses chronology against itself, which disentangles it from a notion of necessary progress. By showing how the wounds of history are intimately local, even lodged in the

body, the novel questions whether they can ever be healed. If multiculturalism is the panacea for historical pain, psychotherapy is the common sense prescription for dealing with personal pain, but *Obasan* suggests that the curative possibilities of both are limited. Ultimately *Obasan* does not imply that the official historical record can simply be corrected by the assertion of an unofficial record; rather, it suggests that our very techniques of representing the past need to be rethought.

At first *Obasan* looks like a conventional chronological narrative. Chapter One is set precisely in time, right down to the minute: "9:05 p.m. August 9, 1972" (1). References to time in the rest of the chapter, however, thwart attempts to pin the action so exactly. The landscape is primordial; Naomi and Uncle Isamu's visit, habitual. In the midst of describing this 1972 visit, Kogawa cuts to their first visit, in 1954 — a synchronous narrative move across time within the same space. During the earlier visit, Uncle promises that "some day" he will tell Naomi why they return annually (3). We return to 1972, but now the present that looked so neatly pinned down has become an indefinite moment of deferral between the secrets of the past and their future revelation. It is not just action within the novel that is imbued with this sense of deferred significance, but also the relationship between readers and the story: not until the end of the novel do we realize this first scene commemorates Naomi's mother's death as a result of the bombing of Nagasaki.

The breach of chronology introduced in the first chapter is sustained throughout *Obasan*. The narrative "now" of the novel occupies the three days between Uncle's death and his funeral, but the story spans thirty-one years, intercut between past and present. The novel juxtaposes descriptions of internment with descriptions of the lives its survivors have led since that historical moment. Kogawa's most obvious point is that the past produces the present, which, in turn, does not make sense except through its history. Less obviously, the disruptions of linear narrative suggest that racism — the kind behind internment — cannot be considered merely an isolated incident. Though there are specific acts in identifiable moments that are clearly racist, their effects reverberate, making the past and the present

bleed into one another. Whereas the discourse of national progress relies on unequivocal movement from the past to the present, *Obasan* suggests that history is not so simple, because the past never quite stays put.

To reinforce this point, Kogawa portrays her protagonist's own life according to the same temporal logic. Although *Obasan* is a fictional autobiography, it challenges, rather than assumes, the correlation between linear time and progress. The narrative moves back and forth between Naomi at thirty-six and Naomi as a child. The number of years that intervene between any two times of the narrative signify the inevitability of chronology: Naomi has consistently grown older. However, the distinction between Naomi as a woman and Naomi as a child loses its edge in the perceptions of other people. To her family, who keep secrets from her, she is never old enough: "Whatever [Uncle] was intending to tell me 'some day' has not yet been told. I sometimes wonder if he realizes my age at all. At thirty-six, I'm hardly a child," Naomi complains (3). She is also infantilized by her students, who serve as symbolic representatives of the Granton community. Having established that Naomi is unmarried, one student volunteers, "My mother says you don't look old enough to be a teacher" (6). Naomi herself articulates the national analogue to the uncertainty of her personal development: "Time has solved few mysteries. Wars and rumours of wars, racial hatreds and fears are with us still" (78). Despite the years that have passed, progress is not "steady," as Multiculturalism Canada would have it, and certainly not inevitable.

*Obasan* grapples not just with the notion of historical progress, but with whether historical representation is even possible. The novel addresses this vexed question through a debate between speech and silence, figured, respectively, by Naomi's two aunts, Aunt Emily and Aya Obasan. Aunt Emily, the academic who lives out internment in Toronto, articulates the common sense position that talking is good, that it lessens pain and aids healing. Habakkuk 2:2, "Write the vision and make it plain," is her slogan (31). Against Emily's Old Testament credo, the interned community, represented most eloquently by the nearly deaf Obasan in her world of silence, relies on the forgiveness phrase of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as

we forgive those who trespass against us.” Naomi, in coming to terms with her mother’s absence, is faced with two maternal figures, Emily and Obasan, who represent speech and silence, respectively.

Several critics read the novel in terms of Naomi’s progress from silence to speech, and thus see the text as an argument, ultimately, for speech over silence.<sup>9</sup> Such readings have four significant drawbacks. They mask the model of (admittedly limited) resistance that Aya Obasan enacts; they simultaneously oversimplify and overemphasize the positive effects of expressive speech; they elide the role of listening in the relationship of speech to silence; and they neglect Kogawa’s suggestion that bodies, and especially bodily pain, are irreducible and resist transparent representation in language. While I agree that *Obasan* criticizes certain kinds of silence,<sup>10</sup> I would argue, with King-Kok Cheung, that it simultaneously asserts the significance of other kinds; furthermore, because of the close attention it pays to what lies beyond language, the novel sustains deep reservations about the possibilities of language.

The novel opens to two significant silences, the “silence that cannot speak” and the “silence that will not speak” (n.p.). According to the proem, the “speech that frees” emerges from the “sensate sea” beneath the “silence that will not speak”; for Naomi, uncovering this silenced speech is a matter of telling the story that follows, learning the family’s secrets, articulating her history (n.p.). But none of this telling breaks through the “silence that cannot speak,” best represented by Obasan and the interned Issei. Universalized as “every old woman in every hamlet in the world,” Aya Obasan “is the bearer of keys to unknown doorways and to a network of astonishing tunnels,” but these historical passageways are bound to remain “unknown” because “‘everything is forgetfulness”” (15, 16, 26). Obasan knows that there are markers of history in the attic, but because she cannot remember where they are, they are lost/dead (as Kogawa points out, the word for both is the same in Japanese), and therefore cannot speak. Obasan’s silence is the result of trauma beyond language: “[t]he language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances. Over the years, silence

within her small body has grown large and powerful," Naomi observes (14). In its suggestion of traumatization, Aya Obasan's silence points to the severity of internment's effects, but it also implies a nascent resistance: Obasan is the one character in the novel who "does not dance to the multi-cultural piper's tune or respond to the racist's slur" (226).

While Obasan's silence is crucial to the novel, Kogawa emphatically does not argue for a passivity that simply "does not respond" to racism. But to my mind, arguments that have speech vanquishing silence in the novel are equally troubling. The critics who read in *Obasan* the victory of speech over silence make the novel a record of psychotherapeutic recovery, the common sense, expressive logic of which holds that problems can be resolved by finding a voice with which to understand and represent the past, which otherwise will return from its repression in distorted and destructive ways. Talking cures, in brief. Marilyn Russell Rose, for instance, says that Naomi emerges "from that cocoon of silence into healing speech" ("Hawthorne" 295); similarly, Erika Gottlieb claims that Aunt Emily's "diagnosis is correct," and that "[o]nly through articulating the pain of the past will [Naomi] find hope for liberation, healing, and renewal for herself and her people" (37). Sliding into a slightly different metaphor, Gary Willis calls Naomi's emergence into speech a "conversion" but novel-writing is still a "therapeutic process" (242).<sup>11</sup> These claims are part and parcel of Aunt Emily's pro-speech position. Aunt Emily, paraphrasing the psychotherapist, tells Naomi, "'Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene'" (50).

Much of the novel shows Naomi doing exactly what Emily calls for: overcoming her resistance to remembering, expressing pain and bitterness, breaking one kind of silence. For Naomi, this process is a matter of piecing together the painful story of internment's effects on her family. The pivotal and most intimate manifestation of this history for Naomi — indeed, for the entire Nakane family — concerns the loss of Naomi's mother. Just as the opening scene commemorates her death, so does the revelation of her disfigurement function as the novel's culmination.

Silent but extraordinarily significant, absent but always present in that absence, Naomi's mother functions as the enigma around which *Obasan* turns. *Obasan* is no different from any other psychotherapeutic fable of negotiating loss insofar as the novel describes Naomi finding herself by tracing the lost maternal. Where it departs from convention is in its specific machinations: Kogawa breaks down the psychotherapeutic dichotomy between speaking patient and silent healer, and renders the explanations for Naomi's lost mother unequivocally social.<sup>12</sup>

Although Naomi's memory and retelling of the past constitute a vital process through which Naomi gains some measure of healing, that process is finally insufficient without its corollary, listening. The challenge Naomi faces is how to interpret her mother's silence.

Silent mother, you do not speak or write. You do not reach through the night to enter morning, but remain in the voicelessness. From the extremity of much dying, the only sound that reaches me now is the sigh of your remembered breath, a wordless word. How shall I attend that speech, Mother, how shall I trace that wave? (241)

In order to hear her mother, Naomi has to break the paradigm of traditional psychotherapy, moving from the position of speaker to the position of listener.<sup>13</sup> This is a difficult move that requires effort, for listening is not just the absence of speech but a willed act in its own right. "Mother. I am listening. Assist me to hear you," Naomi asks (240). What Naomi hears in the "attentive silence" and adopts is not the conventional story of maternal abandonment told in her mother's singular voice but the polyvocal articulation of history, which tells her, through government documents, letters, conference papers, and diaries, that her mother cannot return because the laws of Canada keep her out and because the bombing of Nagasaki has disabled her.<sup>14</sup> Naomi's psychotherapeutic quest arrives, then, at an explanation that is not the same as recovery: her mother remains a disfigured absence that never speaks.

To read the novel in terms of the victory of speech over silence, then, is to oversimplify it. But there is also a more serious problem with reading the novel as a fable of psychological healing. In order to herald therapeutic expressiveness as a cure, such

readings rely on displacing pain from the body to the psyche — a binary that *Obasan* refuses to uphold because it insists that physical and psychic pain are inseparable. This displacement, germane to Emily's rhetoric, compromises the significant role that bodily pain plays in the text. In urging Naomi to remember the past, she speaks in medical metaphor: "You are your history. If you cut any of it off you're an amputee," she says (50). Naomi, however, experiences the process of remembering as invasive surgery:

Aunt Emily, are you a surgeon cutting at my scalp with your folders and your filing cards and your insistence on knowing all? The memory drains down the sides of my face, but it isn't enough, is it? It's your hands in my abdomen, pulling the growth from the lining of my walls, but bring back the anaesthetist turn on the ether clamp down the gas mask bring on the chloroform when will this operation be over Aunt Em? (194)

Beginning with the scalp — or, metaphorically, the mind — the passage moves immediately to gynecological imagery — paradigmatic, for women, of the irreducible body. The passage suggests that the tumor of repression must be removed from Naomi's womb before she can be fertile, but the passage's invocation of obscene nuclear-age reproduction makes it unsurprising that Naomi never has children. Neither, for that matter, does Aunt Emily, and Aya Obasan gives birth only to two still-born infants. The number of childless women in *Obasan* intimates that the body simply cannot bear to reproduce history.<sup>15</sup>

References to bodily pain and the difficulty of expressing it in language run through *Obasan*. Given the novel's resistance to reproducing history, it is not surprising that Naomi's mother most clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of language to represent bodily pain. Represented only in black and white photographs, the disfigurement of Naomi's mother is both literal (that is, physical) and literary (she is not figured in the novel), yet with her charred skin and maggot-infested wounds, she embodies the trauma of World War II in a way that Aunt Emily's conference papers and government documents cannot. Naomi herself recognizes that the body thwarts representation in language. When Emily presses her for details about life in Granton, Naomi says, "I cannot tell about this time, Aunt Emily. The

body will not tell" (196). The physical hardship of working in the beet fields has destroyed even the will to history: one of the most devastating aspects of the work is doing it day after day in the hot sun and "not even wondering how this has come about" (195).

That "nothing can soak up the seepage" from the "double wound" to body and mind should not be surprising: a novel attempting to come to terms with the end of history can hardly be a novel of personal healing (243). Indeed, models of loss and recovery posited with respect to historical and autobiographical knowledge extend from an ideology that asserts wholeness as precondition and ideal, in order to advance (often imperialist) versions of history as though they were complete. Put another way, healing is not the same as wholeness, for at the heart of history remains irrecoverable loss.

Which year should we choose for our healing? Restrictions against us are removed on April Fool's Day, 1949. But the "old sores" remain. In time the wounds will close and the scabs drop off the healing skin. Till then, I can read these newspaper clippings, I can tell myself the facts. I can remember since Aunt Emily insists that I must and release the flood gates one by one. I can cry for the flutes that have cracked in the dryness and cry for the people who no longer sing. I can cry for Obasan who has turned to stone. But what then? Uncle does not rise up and return to his boats. Dead bones do not take on flesh. (198)

We are back once again at the "silence that cannot speak," or the impossibility of representing history. Paradoxically, it is this very impossibility of history that becomes the condition of its possibility — it is after all a "silence that cannot speak," the death of Uncle, that propels the narrative.<sup>16</sup> Such inescapable silences about the past point to the necessity of history, making it particularly urgent. The crux is this: history is immanent in the body but never certain of articulation because the body exists beyond language. Consequently, history must be told, even though that telling is inevitably partial, in both senses of the word.<sup>17</sup> Kogawa's contribution to this notion of historical necessity is to draw attention to the importance of listening for, not just telling, history: "What the Grand Inquisitor has never



learned," she writes, "is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence" (228).

The complicated imbrication of speech with silence that Kogawa charts throughout *Obasan* stands in direct contrast to the implicitly universalizing convention that lies behind the discourse of multiculturalist history: the common sense notion that stories, even if hidden temporarily, can be dredged up from silence into speech to broaden a shared historical narrative, and can be told, chronologically, because everyone occupies the same temporality. This is precisely the pluralist implication of reading *Obasan* as a narrative of recovery. If chronology marks a drive toward historical universalism, the ruptures of linearity in *Obasan* make evident the problems with it. By intercutting different moments in the past with the narrative present, Kogawa challenges the universality implied by linear chronology. Furthermore, the novel calls attention to silences not simply to argue for inclusion in an all-encompassing historical narrative, but to challenge any view of history that does not make room for what is *not* represented. In place of inclusive history *Obasan* posits a historical narrative that must always remain open, unfinished, subject to reformulation.

Such a view of history is, I would argue, deeply rooted in the eschatological implications of the Second World War which, in its potential for total annihilation, made thinkable the end of history. More important, the conception of history in *Obasan*, based as it is on a challenge to linearity and a crisis in historical representation, enables a shift in the sense of "postcolonialism" from international relations toward what Homi Bhabha calls "the otherness of the people-as-one" (301). The dominant pedagogy of the nation relies on gathering its citizens into a shared temporality. As Bhabha puts it,

For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. Quite simply, the difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One.

("DissemiNation" 300).

Official multiculturalism, in its assumption that immigrants and people of colour can be unproblematically integrated into the story of progress that the (multicultural) nation tells about itself, is a technology of such assimilative nationalism.

It is a technology that *Obasan* resists. The novel ends on a note of profound ambivalence, quoting the 1946 Memorandum sent to the Senate and House of Commons by the Co-Operative Committee on Japanese Canadians. Rational, dispassionate and five years too late, the Memorandum is a perfect representation of official history in its assumption that history can be expressed, criticized and put right. Laudable in intention, its impersonal univocality only throws into relief the silences official history creates. Moreover, as Roy Miki points out, it draws our attention to a different mode of silence: the silencing of a people by an official government document: as Miki states, "following Naomi's private resolution, the silence still haunts in the absence of a Japanese Canadian name on this political document submitted to the government" (144). The Memorandum erases the consideration of silence and pain, and ignores their dynamic and always troubled relationship with speech, whereas it is precisely the novel's attentiveness to such complexities that enables *Obasan* to carry out its complicated political work.

*Itsuka* carries on several of the themes and characters introduced in the earlier novel. Like *Obasan*, *Itsuka* challenges the notion of necessary progress, links personal relationships to politics, and shows how injustice lodges itself in the body. However, while *Itsuka* overtly criticizes official multiculturalism at the level of dialogue, it does not question its ideological struts. Consequently, its critique of nationalist common sense is far less profound than that of *Obasan*. Whereas the earlier novel resists closure, *Itsuka* imposes happy endings on all of its stories, casting them in a Christian context that works against political urgency.

This flattening of complexity and evacuation of political urgency is surprising in a text that writes about the explicitly political matter of redress. Kogawa herself has voiced reservations about *Itsuka*. In several interviews conducted before the book's publication, she worries that the novel will lack the richness of

*Obasan*. "I've become so political, and in many ways very one-dimensional, that I'm afraid of destroying the poetry, the richness, of realities other than political realities," she admitted in 1988 (Williamson 151).<sup>18</sup> Early reviews of *Itsuka* did in fact take Kogawa to task for being too political and not literary enough, and Kogawa herself seemed dissatisfied with the novel when it came out.<sup>19</sup> Within a year of releasing the first edition of the novel, she published a revised paperback version.<sup>20</sup>

My reading of the novel might superficially appear to corroborate Kogawa's fears and reviewers' frustrations, but my interests are different from hers. My argument is not directed to the issue of whether the novel is "good" or "bad," superior or inferior to *Obasan* in literary terms, but, rather, attempts to engage with Kogawa's second novel in the face of its total critical neglect without resorting to criteria of literary excellence (which, Rita Wong reminds us, are never value-free). I explore the ways in which each of Kogawa's novels is and is not political, and suggest some reasons for the differences between the two texts.<sup>21</sup>

The principal reason, I have already suggested, is that they are located in very different moments of Canadian multicultural policy. Each novel also plays a distinct role in the actual Japanese Canadian redress movement. By the time the redress struggle gained the momentum that would carry it through to a settlement, *Obasan* had been in circulation for several years. It was read in reading groups across Canada and the US, taught in English courses in high schools, community colleges and universities, and discussed in academic journals. *Obasan* responds to early official multiculturalism's elision of race by making internment visible to a nation that had tried to forget it. Although it became part of a political struggle, its political work consists of asking questions about common sense notions like silence and speech, past and present: it queries the underpinnings of nationalist common sense. *Itsuka*, on the other hand, gets caught up in the excited lip service paid race in the 1980s. Piggybacking on Mulroney's exuberant promises, it collapses its critical distance from official national discourse recirculated as multicultural policy.

The word "itsuka" means "someday," and it recalls what Uncle Isamu used to tell Naomi in *Obasan*: that someday she would learn the family's secrets, that someday a time for laughter would come. In this novel, instead of that someday being postponed so as to stretch the limits of the narrative, we arrive at it when redress becomes a reality: "This is the time, dear Uncle, dear Ojisan" (288). To arrive at the deferred moment is to close the novel in a single teleological gesture, abrogating the indeterminacy and ambivalence that characterize *Obasan*. More seriously, such closure forfeits the future: it suggests an end of history that is much more conservative than that of *Obasan*. Whereas the earlier novel locates itself in the crux of history's simultaneous impossibility and necessity, *Itsuka*, in figuring redress as the apogee of political struggle, makes the future of the Japanese Canadian community beyond redress unimaginable. It is as though the narrative is beguiled by the slide from "naturalization" to "natural" that the technology of state multiculturalism holds out as utopian promise. In place of a conceivable political future, this novel supplies another (conservative) economy of deferral, the Christian notion of heaven.

Nor does *Itsuka* problematize the past. Like *Obasan*, *Itsuka* begins at a particular narrative moment and then analeptically fills in background to the story. Unlike *Obasan*, however, where narrative past and present interact dialogically, *Itsuka* sustains one long and more or less uninterrupted flashback that does not question the assumptions of linearity; furthermore, it largely smooths over the painfulness of the past.<sup>22</sup> The Granton years that are told discontinuously in *Obasan* and characterized by "hardship" (194) become in *Itsuka* "years [that] gallop by in a prairie blur" of friendships, Young Peoples, pets and laughter (38). The past no longer folds into the present as it does in *Obasan*, and the weight of history has also been spatially displaced to Japan's "time-heavy soil," where Naomi's mother and Grandmother are connected "by dream alone" to their Canadian family (81). Such a strict differentiation between Japan and Canada is not postcolonial. Instead of looking at the inter-relatedness of places in a tense international world, as postcolonialism encourages, *Itsuka* closes Canada's borders, distances it

from Japan and self-consciously introduces Hawai'i as the middle ground between them.<sup>23</sup> Hawai'i does not so much mediate between Canada and Japan as it underscores their separation: it is there that Naomi dreams about the afterlife that deflates the political vision advanced in *Obasan*.

As in *Obasan*, the body is not distinct from the political world it inhabits. Aunt Emily has read a study showing "that more niseis were dying of stress diseases than any other group"; when Emily falls sick, Naomi attributes her illness to "the stress of these years and the constant [political] disappointment" (116, 255). The difference between the two novels is that *Itsuka* situates this politicized body in a Christian context that preaches the certainty of life after death. The afterlife *Itsuka* proposes is profoundly apolitical and ahistorical: to mitigate bodily death with the promise of transcendence evacuates the urgency of making history. Naomi's meditation at her mother's grave articulates exactly this movement:

I kneel by the maple tree and know. We're, all of us, dead and alive. We the dead and we the living are here among the trees, the coloured snails, the moss, the singing insects. We're everywhere here in the sound of distant traffic, in the long-haired grass, in the filtered sunlit haze. In this short visit, on this hot muggy day, within this one hour at Mama's grave, I meet the one I need to meet. (83)

"The one I need to meet" is Naomi's mother as spiritual presence rather than, as in *Obasan*, enigmatic absence. In the earlier novel, her mother's absence compels the story; so in this novel does her presence diminish the necessity of history. The passage continues:

Nakayama-sensei has often said that it is not necessary for people to clamour and shout for their voices to be heard. He says there is time enough and listening enough. "We will all hear what must be heard." (84)

The passivity this statement implies is staggering. Although it recalls *Obasan*'s insistence on listening as part of the dynamic of speech and silence, this passage figures listening as inevitable, simply given, rather than as a difficult act in its own right.

The tension sustained in *Obasan* between Aunt Emily's Old Testament zeal and Aya Obasan's New Testament forgiveness becomes, in *Itsuka*, the supersession of the Old Testament by the New as Kogawa introduces, against Japan, Hawai'i, and Canada, an omnipresent, omnitemporal realm of reconciliation and peace. The eschatological questions that Kogawa deals with in *Obasan* have been answered by religion: "There is no death. There is no disappearance, no finality in the drift downstream. Annihilation is not possible. Individual consciousness cannot be extinguished" (87).

Kogawa has repeatedly mentioned her regard for the work of feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther. As Kogawa paraphrases Reuther's thesis, "the key to divine abandonment is that God has abandoned divine power completely and utterly into the human condition that we might not abandon one another" (Ackerman 221).<sup>24</sup> While it is easy to see the germ of a version of liberation theology in such a statement, it does not come to fruition in *Itsuka* because politics and personal relationships are cut off from one another.

The political and the personal do not appear to be differentiated initially: Naomi gets involved in the redress movement largely because of her romance with Father Cedric. This apparent intersection of the personal and the political actually masks sharp temporal distinctions between family, romance, and politics.<sup>25</sup> Family members who die cease to be absences that haunt Naomi's life: "The dead must be permitted their passage to the dead," Nakayama-sensei says (59). Not unlike a psychotherapeutic healing process, this treatment of grief makes Naomi's mourning a psychic journey with an identifiable end, the transition to hope. After a few scattered meditations on them, the dead do not speak in either words or silence for the remainder of the novel. Confined to the past, they remain there so that Naomi can go forward in the narrative of her life.

Filling the void left by her family and closing the familial rifts left open in *Obasan* stands Cedric. In a move that displaces and then replaces absence, it is not her mother who has been lost, but Naomi, and only temporarily:

The fact of flesh is new in my life. A simple fact, as commonplace as pebbles on a beach. But I'm a pebble that was lost. Now I've been found. I'm held in a hand that's as warm as song. (208)

The lines quote the hymn "Amazing Grace," translating Cedric into God the Saviour and Naomi into the salvaged "wretch," moved from unutterable despair into cautious hope. This theme of redemption, whether explicitly Christian or in its secular equivalent as fairy tale, shapes Naomi and Cedric's relationship. Just as Naomi's Granton days are sharply distinguished from her present life in Toronto, Naomi and Cedric's lovemaking in the forest (not the city) can only take place by their descent to a place touched "not so much [by] history as [by] prehistory" (134). This is the realm of fairy tales that come true (Naomi visualizes herself as Cinderella), the realization of Biblical texts (the forest becomes the Garden of Eden), release "from the political by the personal and the primitive" (134). It is also a moment of textual negotiation, Kogawa tells us, "where the beginning of an altogether new story touches a turning point in the old" (138).

This statement is both true and untrue. Kogawa, through Naomi, wants to rewrite Naomi's old life as a "safe old dead-end tale," her body "a foot binding" governed by "layers of rules and propriety," with none of the ambiguity that surrounds these readings of her life in *Obasan* (138). We are meant to believe that Father Cedric, Prince Charming to Naomi's Cinderella, has taken our protagonist "past thirteen o'clock" — past, the novel implies, spinsterhood to womanhood (136). But can we read this as "an altogether new story"? Although the novel claims to have broken through the chronology governed by midnight, it has really just taken Naomi, at a relatively late stage in her life, back to "the forest of [her] adolescence," to walk chronologically along the well traversed path of family romance and normative heterosexual female development where Cedric — *Father Cedric* — stands in for her dead father, satisfies the longing Naomi feels for her mother, and makes up for the rift between Naomi and her brother (137).<sup>26</sup>

Kogawa is not entirely unselfconscious in her use of the fairy tale structure. She recognizes that the Cinderella story is "an

untimely tale" (135). The recognition of anachronism is not the same as critique, however. Furthermore, the tale is "untimely" in a way that collaborates with the worst effects of splitting romance from politics. For all of Naomi's insistence that Cedric "alters the clock," the transitional forest scene serves to re-entrench chronology in the novel, not by negotiating conflicts between the personal and the political, but by bypassing them (140). The forest scene takes place in a primordial setting clearly differentiated from Naomi's everyday life so that it can function as a kind of temporal loop that allows her to catch up with her chronological age. Although Naomi claims that the destination of her walk with Cedric is "unknown," it is foretold in the "happily ever after" of the fairy tale structure that gives discursive shape to the relationship (148).

The happy ending in Parliament gives a similar discursive shape to the redress movement. Initially, the outcome is not obvious; indeed, when Kogawa discusses political activism, time in the novel recovers some of the critical potency that it has in *Obasan*. Progress in the struggle for redress is not guaranteed; the nearer a settlement approaches, the further away it appears. "Time has gone backwards, Aunt Emily says" (238). But this appearance of complexity ultimately turns out to be a momentary setback, when redress becomes a reality.

The struggle for redress is not, of course, about money, but about social justice: "redress matters," *Itsuka* says, "because there are many many people intent on defending the oppressor's rights no matter what the truth, and they are in places of power" (222).<sup>27</sup> Hence the importance of the argument between Nikki Kagami and Dr Stinson, who argue that internment was a reasonable action for Canada to have taken in the context of World War II, and Emily and Naomi, who condemn it as unjust and unjustifiable. Embracing alternate sides in an ideological debate, both see themselves as "defending history against the falsifier" (220). At stake in this "still smouldering war" is not just historical accuracy — though that is obviously crucial — but also national citizenship (220). The validity of Japanese Canadian claims to citizenship is proven, *Itsuka* suggests, by official vindication of the community and public legitimation of history



written from its point of view. Resting claims of legitimacy on such bases in turn presupposes that history can be told, that language is expressive rather than mystifying, and that alternate versions of history, once told, can be heard.

These presuppositions selfconsciously reveal themselves at the novel's exultant conclusion. *Itsuka* ends with "a feast of words" celebrating "a promise fulfilled, a vision realized" in the "itsuka" that has finally arrived (275). Speech is "healing," a "vaccine against compassion fatigue"; it is "magic" and performative (275, 276, 274). At the moment words are uttered (the passive voice is Kogawa's), "things [are] put right" (274). The Acknowledgement that closes the novel has none of the ambiguity of the Memorandum at the end of *Obasan*: preceded by celebration, it straightforwardly voices the Japanese Canadian victory over historical erasure. The temporalities that clashed against one another in *Obasan*, the past that seemed to stretch into *Itsuka*'s present as the "still smouldering war," fall into place in the narrative present "when the telling leaps over the barricades and the dream enters day" (279). The novel closes triumphantly.

Historiographer Hayden White argues that "[t]he demand for closure in the historical story is a demand . . . for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a *moral drama*" (24). As a historical document *Itsuka* supports his postulation: the novel certainly sorts out heroes and villains.<sup>28</sup> But what happens to critique in a novel with such certainty? The novel does contain critique. In place of the hollow multiculturalism of an official demand to "harmonize in perfect government-approved song," and in place of the illegitimate multiculturalism sought by Nikki Kagami without community support, the ending of the novel advocates a "true" multiculturalism, supported democratically by all Japanese Canadians and guaranteed in government documents (202). The problem with such a critique is precisely that the novel *contains* it. *Itsuka*'s neat closure makes it a kind of carceral structure in which everything is seen, heard, voiced; there are no silences to mark a gap in representational control by a monologic narrator. *Itsuka*'s closure enables the very omissions

*Obasan* warns against; it neglects the silences that accompany every utterance. Its containment also makes the novel nationalistic, in the sense that difference is tamed and recuperated by the kind of pluralist inclusiveness suggested by official multiculturalism.

*Itsuka* pays some attention to the problems of racist national policies, but national citizenship is the origin and apex of political struggle. The goal that Emily and Naomi share is certified Canadian citizenship, a certification which they rest in the hands of state representatives instead of wresting it from them. The Prime Minister authenticates the citizenship of the Japanese Canadians in *Itsuka*:

Aunt Emily and I look at each other and smile. We've all said it over the years. "No, no, I'm Canadian. I'm a Canadian. A Canadian." Sometimes it's been a defiant statement, a demand, a proclamation of a right. And today, finally, finally, though we can hardly believe it, to be Canadian means what it hasn't meant before. Reconciliation. Liberation. Belongingness. Home. (277)

This statement charts a movement from the margins to the centre of the nation; from defiance, demands and proclamations to national filiation, encapsulated in the domestic trope of "Home."

Notably, this version of citizenship has no difficulty coexisting with a pluralist identity. Naomi and Emily could be scripted by Multiculturalism Canada, which is anxious to assert that "We can be proud of being Canadian and of our roots at the same time" (*Multiculturalism: What Is It Really About?* 23). In Emily's words, "Japanese Canadians are east-west bridges. We span the gap. It's our fate and our calling — to be hyphens — to be diplomats" (78). As "bridges," Emily and Naomi "span the gap" for the "other children who wait for their lives" — but the metaphor of diplomacy is even more telling (279). As "diplomats," Emily and Naomi facilitate assimilation into the multicultural nation, which can encompass large degrees of difference without fundamentally changing.

The capacity of the nation to absorb and diffuse difference within its firmly fixed boundaries is brought home in the romantic relationship between Naomi and Cedric, which epitomizes the celebratory vision of Multiculturalism Canada. Father

Cedric, the French Canadian priest, boasts a patrilineage that includes English, French, and Eastern European ethnicities; his mother is an Ontario Francophone whose own mother was Métis, part Ojibway. Cedric's pledge to Naomi, the Japanese-Haida rattle drum he gives her, suggests that *Itsuka's* multiculturalism somehow inheres in objects — like the Pied Piper's clothes of many colours.<sup>29</sup> What Kogawa does not say in this novel is that dancing to such a multicultural beat remains, as the fairy tale warns, perilous: it threatens enchantment by visions of plenty that lead to drowning and elision anew. *Itsuka's* vision is more optimistic. The relationship between Cedric the multicultural Canadian and Naomi the repatriated enemy alien gives the novel a classically comic (not to mention heteronormative) ending where social discord is assuaged by the marriage of two promising young people. The union of Naomi and Cedric, in effect, enables the reproduction of Canada as a nation.

Not so in *Obasan*: the women do not marry and there is no generation to close the novel. Rather, the nation becomes the site of negotiation between global structures of power — in this case, World War II — and state-sanctioned forms of racism — in this case, internment. Japanese Canadians, stripped of Canadian citizenship by internment, and not Japanese either, have no essential identity to fall back on, only the necessary question, “Where do any of us come from in this cold country?” and its deceptively simple answer:

Oh Canada, whether it is admitted or not, we come from you we come from you. From the same soil, the slugs and slime and bogs and twigs and roots. We come from the country that plucks its people out like weeds and flings them into the roadside. We grow in ditches and sloughs, untended and spindly. We erupt in the valleys and mountainsides, in small towns and back alleys, sprouting upside-down on the prairies, our hair wild as spiders' legs, our feet rooted nowhere. We grow where we are not seen, we flourish where we are not heard, the thick undergrowth of an unlikely planting.

(226)

Canada, in *Obasan's* metaphor, is a relentlessly verdant national soil that keeps making Canadians of people, but then trying to weed some out. However, this attempt repeatedly and necessarily fails because the displaced species — the hybrid — confounds classification as flower or weed.<sup>30</sup> Rootless, it cannot be

located in any particular place. It is ubiquitous: rural and urban and, above all, unexpected. It is a product of slime, abjection, made of the citizens a nation casts off. It flourishes in apparent silence and looks terrifyingly unlike any "natural" species. It has a hardness that the legitimately classified has not, so its vitality exceeds the nation's desire to categorize and control.

The hybrid, as opposed to the hyphen, resists assimilation from the inside of the nation, and this is the source of *Obasan's* political strength. Whereas *Itsuka* leaves Canadian identity intact and shows the process of claiming it, *Obasan* demonstrates the tough negotiation of postcolonial nationality from within the always already given of the nation. It recognizes that, in Stuart Hall's apt phrase, "identity is always an open, complex, unfinished game — always under construction. . . . [I]t always moves into the future through a symbolic detour through the past" (362). *Itsuka's* slippage into fairy tales and Christian mythology suggests that happy endings, personal and political, too easily surrender the past to promises of a better tomorrow. In its depiction of ruptured temporality, healing without wholeness, speech that recognizes silence, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* eschews the purities that nationalism requires, remaining instead always cognizant of difference and danger.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Cf. Ang, who shows how under the aegis of Australian multiculturalism "the nation is claimed to be on the road from a racist, exclusionary past to a multicultural, inclusionary present" ("The Curse of the Smile" 37). Cf., too, Ang and Stratton.
- 2 The concept of "common sense" is a complicated philosophical issue. I mean the term in the Gramscian sense: as an articulated set of beliefs that, although out of step with "real" social position, nonetheless "holds together a specific social group, . . . influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity." Hegemonic common sense, in other words, provides ready-made moral and political guidance without requiring its subjects to recognize their real social location and to think through social problems accordingly. One obvious consequence of common sense is political quiescence. See Gramsci 333. Himani Bannerji glosses Gramscian common sense as "the submerged part of the iceberg which is visible to us as ideology" (10). See, too, Robert Holton's accessible discussion of the concept.

- <sup>3</sup> Except where specifically noted, I refer to the revised edition of *Ituka* throughout.
- <sup>4</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim's otherwise thoughtful essays exemplify this trend. Perhaps even more telling is the opening of Cheng Lok Chua's article, which recognizes the specificity of Kogawa's Canadian referent only to insist all the more strenuously on its similarity to the US: "Like that of the United States, Canada's is a multiracial society that is predominantly Caucasian and Christian. Again like the United States, Canada is a nation of immigrants; and both have had a history of antipathy toward immigrants from Asia . . ." (Lim and Ling 1992, 97).
- <sup>5</sup> Ang and Stratton also note the etymology of "multi-cultural."
- <sup>6</sup> Scholarship on multiculturalism is extensive. One good source of information on official multiculturalism in Canada is Koshy and Sharma; for a very concise account of contemporary Canadian multiculturalism, see Cardozo. For commentaries on multiculturalism in Australia, see Ang. Martin discusses Australian multiculturalism and feminism, while Ang and Stratton compare Australian and US-American multiculturalisms. Vertovec uses British examples. Although not nation-specific in its referents, Hage provides a particularly hard-hitting critique of multiculturalism's discourse of tolerance, arguing that tolerance is enabled only by a deeper, and hidden, intolerance. For an excellent collection of essays that discuss multiculturalism in broad, theoretical terms, see Bennett.
- <sup>7</sup> Of course, the Meech Lake Accord was never ratified by the provinces because of Métis politician Elijah Harper's deft political play which drew attention to the document's hypocritical willingness to use the phrase "distinct society" to describe French Canadians, but not Native Canadians. There is a whole other paper to be written about the relationship of state multiculturalism to Native and Métis Canadians. For a consideration of Canadian multiculturalism in specific reference to the Meech Lake Accord, see Parel.
- <sup>8</sup> The Conservative government did settle Japanese Canadian redress, though not without a lot of agony, as *Ituka* chronicles. Shortly after US President Ronald Reagan's August 19, 1988 announcement of a \$1.25 billion compensation package for interned Japanese Americans, Mulroney announced, on September 22, 1988, that his government would provide an acknowledgment of the injustice done to Japanese Canadians during World War II; a payment of \$21,000 to each survivor of internment; a payment of \$12 million to the Japanese Canadian community, to be administered by the National Association of Japanese Canadians for educational, social, and cultural activities and programs; and \$24 million for a jointly funded Canadian Race Relations Foundation. Mulroney's commitment to multiculturalism had less staying power: after a series of serious budget cuts, the department was closed and the portfolio dropped in 1993.
- <sup>9</sup> See especially Gottlieb, Russell Rose, and Gary Willis. Two notable exceptions to this tendency are Magnusson and Cheung. Although it ultimately makes quite a different argument from mine, Magnusson's article begins by asking "[W]hy does a novel that finds such adequate language for a story of suffering persistently question the adequacy of words?" Cheung's essay is a very thoughtful reconsideration of both speech and silence.
- <sup>10</sup> See particularly Russell Rose, "An Intertextual Reading," for a discussion of silence as acquiescence, and Kogawa's critique of it.
- <sup>11</sup> See also Lim, who writes: "What we hear finally is Naomi's own voice, freed at last through knowledge, coming from the breaking of silence, and leading to an internal reconciliation with the absent mother" ("Japanese American Women's Life Stories" 309).

- <sup>12</sup> Another way to put this is that Naomi's oedipal development requires negotiation along national/racial/cultural as well as familial lines. Cf. Goellnicht, who argues for a double oedipal crisis in the girl of colour, "first, when she takes on the gendered position constructed for her by the symbolic language of patriarchy; and second, when she falls under the influence of discursively and socially constructed positions of racial difference" (123). I would modify Goellnicht's position by insisting that racial difference is not negotiated subsequent to gendered identity, but is there from the beginning, demanding simultaneous negotiation with the familial/patriarchal structures.
- <sup>13</sup> Fujita does an excellent reading of the shift in subject position around the Grand Inquisitor figure of Naomi's dreams. She writes:
- In other words, Naomi perceives that she has acted like the Grand Inquisitor, obsessed with her own abandonment and forgetting to attend to the possibility of her mother's greater suffering. Recognition of her culpability as Mother's accuser is her supreme act, for only in the space created by self-denial, by a deliberate attendance, can Mother be restored. (39)
- <sup>14</sup> The phrase "attentive silence" is Cheung's.
- <sup>15</sup> In *Itsuka*, Aunt Emily explicitly relates childlessness to racism: "She says a study should be done on the many older nisei, like herself, who never married. It would show how deeply they've obeyed the order to disappear." (123)
- <sup>16</sup> Cleverly, Kogawa associates Uncle with the stone bread that, like his silence, does not break but nourishes nonetheless.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Goellnicht, "We must narrate ourselves into history or be doomed to extinction" (125).
- <sup>18</sup> Also see Kogawa's interview with Delbaere.
- <sup>19</sup> See, for instance, reviews by Redl and Persky.
- <sup>20</sup> The changes from first to revised edition are largely editorial; the basic structure of the novel remains the same. However, although the editorial revisions are minor, they are far too numerous to list here — nearly every page reveals changes. My discussion of *Itsuka* will focus on the revised edition, with occasional references to the original version.
- <sup>21</sup> "It is very possible that the criteria for judging 'good' literature are based on traditional, male-centred assumptions and that this emphasis on Literature distracts one from reading the text on its own terms" (Wong 122).
- <sup>22</sup> The original edition emphasizes this sanitization of history even more strongly, by using a stock fairy-tale temporality that presages a happy ending in which conflicts are resolved and wrongs righted: "Once upon a time," says Chapter One of the original edition, "Japanese Canadians were interned as enemies, loyal citizens though we were" (3).
- <sup>23</sup> Again, the first edition of the novel makes this point even more obvious: Cedric calls Hawaii a "doorway between East and West" (96).
- <sup>24</sup> See also Delbaere and Williamson.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. *Obasan*, where the loss of Naomi's mother (the personal) and the bombing of Nagasaki (the political) are coincidental — two events happening at the same moment.
- <sup>26</sup> The familial resemblances go on: Naomi reminds Cedric of his mother, and at one point he actually calls her "sister" (139). On Cedric's entering the novel when Naomi's relationship with her brother is at an impasse, see Kulyk Keefer's review of the novel.
- <sup>27</sup> I do not intend my criticisms of *Itsuka* as a novel as an indictment of Japanese Canadian redress or of any other minority legitimation sought in the public

sphere. As I hope my argument makes clear, I think political action is crucial; it is when political events get simplified into one dimension that uncritically recirculates nationalist discourse that I see them as problematic.

- <sup>28</sup> This moral reading is important, just as voicing history and undertaking a psychotherapeutic quest are important. The reading I am engaged in is a particular political reading that does not address other possible explanations for the novel's closure: that for personal reasons or considerations of the marketplace Kogawa could not or did not want to keep the historical question open any longer, for instance.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. the exchange of the plaid pin and the knife between Morag Gunn and Jules Tonnerre in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, where the point behind the (cultural) exchange is precisely that it *doesn't* work, and that the items are finally returned to their original owners.
- <sup>30</sup> The key text on hybridity in postcolonial discourse is Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders." That essay, especially pages 172-73, can be read very productively next to Kogawa and it echoes through my gloss. Notably, *Obasan* was published three years before the initial version of Bhabha's essay.
- <sup>31</sup> Guy Beauregard, Mary Chapman, Mo Engel, Marcia Klotz, Leerom Medovoi, Julie Rak, Jennifer Schaffner and Mark Simpson generously discussed ideas and helpfully critiqued this paper at various stages. I am also grateful to Mary Pearson (1994-95) and Rick Lee (1995-96) for assistance with bibliographic sources.

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