



DISSERTATION | DOCTORAL THESIS

Titel | Title

Ghosts and Gods in Hiromi Goto

verfasst von | submitted by
Mag.phil. Anita Pal

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doktorin der Philosophie (Dr.phil.)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 792 343

Dissertationsgebiet lt. Studienblatt | Field of
study as it appears on the student record
sheet:

English and American Studies

Betreut von | Supervisor:

emer. o. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction: Therapeutic Ghosts in Hiromi Goto's Fiction.....	4
Purpose of Research.....	4
Research Question and Focus.....	4
About Hiromi Goto.....	5
Chapter 1: Gothic Fiction in Its Various Manifestations.....	8
1.1: Gothic and Trauma From a Western Perspective.....	8
1.2: An Overview of the Asian Gothic.....	11
1.3: An Overview of the Gothic in Young Adult Novels.....	14
1.4: Graveyard Poetry and the Gothic Mode.....	18
Chapter 2: Japanese Myths, Ghosts and Asian Canadian Fiction.....	21
2.1: The Japanese Ghost Story and Its Origins.....	21
2.2: An Overview of Transnational Literature.....	24
2.3: Asian Canadian Fiction and Recent Developments.....	26
2.4: Japanese Canadian History and Its Impact on Canada.....	28
2.5: An Overview of Canadian History.....	32
2.6: The Importance of Silence in <i>Obasan</i>	35
2.7: A Brief Analysis of Hiromi Goto's Academic Reception to Date.....	39
Chapter 3: Canada and The Canadian Gothic.....	42
3.1: An Overview of the Canadian Gothic.....	42
3.2: The Unsettling of the Canadian Gothic.....	45
3.3: The Concept of Alienness in Hiromi Goto's Stories.....	48
Chapter 4: <i>A Chorus of Mushrooms</i> : A Story of a Collective, Haunted Past.....	53
Overview of <i>A Chorus of Mushrooms</i>	53
4.1: Loss of Voice and Cultural Identity.....	53
4.2: Mothers and Daughters: Examining Intergenerational Conflicts.....	61
4.3: The Use of Language as a Means of Preserving Cultural Identity.....	69
4.4: The Concept of the Nation and Canadian Identity.....	74
4.5: Retelling Fairy Tales and Trauma.....	78
Chapter 5: <i>The Kappa Child</i> : The Kappa as a Way of Healing Familial Trauma.....	83
Overview of <i>The Kappa Child</i>	83
5.1: Growing up on the Prairie: An Analysis of an Unhappy Childhood.....	83
5.2: <i>Little House on the Prairie</i> and <i>The Kappa Child</i>	92
5.3: Accepting Queerness, Finding a Utopia and the Role of Science Fiction.....	96
5.4: The Importance of <i>The Kappa Child</i> in Japanese Canadian Literature.....	101
5.5: Using the Bizarre and Strange as a Catalyst for Change.....	104
Chapter 6: <i>Half World/Darkest Light</i> : A Fusion of Japanese and Western Myths.....	110
Overview of <i>Half World</i>	110
Overview of <i>Darkest Light</i>	110

6.1: <i>Half World, Darkest Light</i> and The Teen Gothic.....	111
6.2: Bravery in the Face of the Macabre and Unknown: Melanie's Journey.....	114
6.3: Overcoming The Monster Inside of You: Gee's Story.....	119
Chapter 7: <i>Hopeful Monsters</i> : Conquering Terror with Acceptance.....	124
7.1: Using the Gothic Short Story to Overcome Boundaries.....	124
7.2: "Stinky Girl": An Analysis.....	127
7.3: "Tales From the Breast": An Analysis.....	129
7.4: "From Across a River": An Analysis.....	132
7.5: "Camp Americana": An Analysis.....	136
7.7: "Hopeful Monsters": An Analysis.....	139
Chapter 8: <i>Shadow Life</i> - Defiance in the Face of Death.....	143
An Overview of <i>Shadow Life</i>	143
8.1: Graveyard Poetry and Its Connection to <i>Shadow Life</i>	144
8.2: <i>The Stone Angel</i> and Hiromi Goto's Elderly Female Characters.....	144
8.3: Fluid Sexuality, Love and Emotional Maturity in <i>Shadow Life</i>	150
8.4: Encounters of Another Kind – Kumiko's Battle and Character Growth.....	153
Conclusion - The Gothic and its Healing Effects.....	156
Conclusion.....	156
Appendix.....	158
Kitsune – The Shape-Shifting Fox.....	158
Yūrei – The Ghost Trapped Between Two Worlds.....	158
The Kappa's Appearance and Habits.....	159
Ubasute: The Disposal of the Elderly in a Forest.....	160
Noppera-Bō: The Faceless Ghost.....	161
Birds and Death in Japanese Mythology.....	162
Bakeneko– The Ghost Cat.....	163
Jorōgumo – The Entangling Bride.....	164
Japanese Burial Rites.....	164
Abstract - English.....	166
Abstract - German.....	167
Works Cited.....	169

Acknowledgements

For a while, it looked like this dissertation would never bear fruit: various life challenges repeatedly delayed the progress of this project. However, these experiences proved crucial for understanding how trauma and Gothic fiction are not just interlinked; they can also have a healing effect.

I am indebted to Professor Waldemar Zacharasiewicz for his patience and understanding. His guidance and constructive feedback improved the quality of this dissertation.

Similarly, I would like to thank my parents, uncle, and partner for believing in me. I could not have done this without you.

Introduction: Therapeutic Ghosts in Hiromi Goto's Fiction

Purpose of Research

This dissertation aims to showcase how Hiromi Goto, a Japanese Canadian writer, uses her cultural background to create novels rich in myths that Western audiences may need to become more familiar with. This fact opens up an innovative and unique viewpoint because more research is required. Moreover, Hiromi Goto challenges the idea that fiction about spectres and ghosts reflects an exclusively damaging experience.

Research Question and Focus

In fiction, the Gothic is a destructive force that challenges a character to face an unspeakable event or some form of lingering trauma. Due to its disruptive energy, characters in those novels abandon their preconceived notions of the world to confront the ghosts that come knocking at night. While these themes of calling into question accepted norms have been critical topics in previous academic dissertations, there needs to be more mention of how confronting one's demons can mentally and physically strengthen someone.

The main research question of this dissertation is to discuss how characters overcome past traumas by confronting the ghosts that have haunted them rather than focusing on how supernatural events and spectres desensitise them. By analysing the healing effect of these ghouls and monsters, this dissertation aims to showcase a different method of reading Gothic literature by disputing the notion that ghosts are nothing but an antagonistic experience.

The focal texts for this dissertation are five novels – including a graphic one – and an anthology of short stories by Hiromi Goto, which depict how characters become emotionally stronger and move past trauma. From dealing with an abusive childhood to addressing the conscious destruction of one's cultural identity, each of the works investigated in this dissertation demonstrates how the characters in these works become more confident after an encounter with spectres of their past.

Furthermore, this examination highlights the dissertation's overarching, interconnected themes. More specifically, this dissertation will analyse how Hiromi Goto utilises a fusion of Japanese and Canadian myths to portray the Gothic as a means of conquering fears, confronting inner demons, and becoming a more emotionally robust individual.

While each of the works of fiction explores different themes in the dissertation—such as immigration, loss of self, and the depiction of toxic familial units—each of Hiromi Goto's characters encounters a supernatural being that poses an obstacle. The protagonists in each of the five novels face challenges that ultimately strengthen them, even though the journey towards that metamorphosis may be traumatic in itself.

Methodology

This dissertation draws foremost upon research carried out by other scholars regarding Gothic literature. Both in the American South and the Ontario Gothic, there are adaptations of this mode of literary representation – and, as such, detailed studies have appeared about a character's interior struggle and state of mind in such a novel. This thesis also integrates and shows how the history of Japanese immigration has influenced Hiromi Goto's fictional worlds and characters.

About Hiromi Goto

As mentioned in the *Toronto Metropolitan University Library's* online section on Asian authors, Hiromi Goto is a Japanese-Canadian writer born in Chiba'ken, Japan, in 1966. In 1969, her family moved to British Columbia (Toronto Metropolitan University Libraries 1). After spending eight years in British Columbia, her family relocated to Nanton in Alberta, where her father grew a mushroom farm (Pivato 1).

An interview with Gavin J. Grant reveals how Hiromi Goto's experiences settling down in the prairies as a twelve-year-old girl would shape her as a writer later in life. Like the unnamed narrator in *The Kappa Child*, Goto drew on *Little House on the Prairie* as a reference source to prepare for a settler's life. Similarly, Hiromi Goto also moved to a town

with a population of 1,300, where she drew many story ideas from the fragments of her everyday life (Grant 1).

While growing up, Hiromi Goto listened to her grandmother's Japanese tales; her father also told her Japanese stories involving ghosts and other folk creatures (Pivato 1). While talking to Grant, she shares that one of those creatures was the *kappa*¹, which fascinated Goto as a youth due to its fondness for cucumbers, with its bowl-shaped head that retained water, and small stature. Hiromi Goto acknowledges she also liked other Japanese mythical creatures, such as the shape-changing fox and magic cat -- some of these creatures appeared in her novel, *A Water of Possibility*, where a young girl finds herself in a world inhabited by Japanese folk creatures (Grant 1).

In the same conversation with Grant, Hiromi Goto states that Japanese ghost stories are more frightening for her than North American ones due to her Japanese heritage. In *The Kappa Child*, Hiromi Goto was interested in exploring what-if-scenarios, which investigated what a mythical figure like the *kappa* would bring to a North American terrain. While Hiromi Goto feels that her books could serve as a starting point for non-Japanese readers interested in folklore, she does not think that her books serve as a bridge between Canada and Japan due to her status as a Japanese-Canadian as well as the fact that 'being Japanese' can be read in a multitude of ways (Grant 1).

Moreover, elaborating on her language usage in the exchange with Grant, Hiromi Goto writes in Japanese to reflect the reality of bilingual Japanese Canadians like herself. She speaks Japanese with her sisters and bilingual friends. Further, Goto notes that the Japanese text in her books remains untranslated as she believes in writing novels that represent the everyday realities of language, displaying the differences people share and not pretending that everyone speaks the same tongue (Grant 1).

In 1989, Hiromi Goto earned a BA from the University of Calgary, where she studied under the guidance of Fred Wah – an award-winning Chinese-Canadian poet² which resulted in stereotypical reactions to him during his youth – and Aritha van Herk³, a famous Canadian essayist and fiction writer of Dutch heritage (Pivato 1). Aritha van Herk first gained

¹ More information about the *kappa* can be found in the [appendix](#).

² <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fred-wah>

³ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aritha-van-herk>

prominence in North America and Europe with her novel *Judith*, which received the Seal First Novel Award (Herk 1). Fred Wah, of Asian and Canadian heritage, has authored more than 17 chapbooks and full-length collections of poetry: themes such as identity and the landscape of British Columbia appear in his work (Poetry Foundation 1).

In an online article, Christopher Evans points out that Hiromi Goto's first novel – *A Chorus of Mushrooms* – received the regional Commonwealth Writers' Prize Award for best first book and was co-winner of the Japan-Canada Book Award. Her second novel for adults, *The Kappa Child*, won the James Tiptree Jr. Award. Furthermore, her young adult novel *Half World* won the 2010 Sunburst and Carl Brandon Parallax awards (Evans 1).

Apart from writing novels, Hiromi Goto has also written an essay, *Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colourful Full Writing*, in which she discusses her position as a Japanese Canadian writer.

Chapter 1: Gothic Fiction in Its Various Manifestations

1.1: Gothic and Trauma From a Western Perspective

While Hiromi Goto's novels do not feature haunted houses or take place in mediaeval European settings, spectres of the past torment her characters in various ways, bringing concealed desires and feelings to the surface. These repressed emotions terrify her protagonists, often prompting a paralysis that keeps them trapped within a suffocating environment. Considering these aspects of her novels, the following chapter examines the Gothic as perceived from a Western mindset, drawings its findings from sources such as the *Oxford Reference* – a digitised collection of encyclopaedia and dictionary entries, and essays by Snorri Sigurðsson, Steven Bruhm, Justin D. Edwards and Cathy Caruth.

The Gothic tale “is a story of terror and suspense, usually set in a gloomy old castle or monastery” (Oxford Reference 1). Its setting marks a macabre and unsettling atmosphere (cf. Oxford Reference 1), which matches its language of terror, thus “creating fear, terror, and desire in its audience” (Sigurðsson 6).

However, Gothic literature is not only defined by the presence of supernatural elements but also its particles of the fantastical, as an article by Sigurðsson argues, thus creating fiction that defies realism to create meaning beyond day-to-day events. It combines the obscure and bizarre with realistic events that bring forth emotional themes considered taboo, uncomfortable and, thus, frightening (Sigurðsson 6-7). In other words, the Gothic is like a surrealistic painting that embodies ordinary themes with dream-like, logic-defying elements. For Sigurðsson, such a “combination creates a more effective [...] emotional stimuli within its audience” (7).

The Gothic novel, as described in an entry of the *Oxford Reference*, first appeared with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, followed by other works such as Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794 and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818. The Gothic also influenced American writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and William Faulkner. Additionally, the Gothic mode spread to Canada, where, due to its hostile wilderness deemed

only suitable for animals, it gave birth to books such as *Wacousta* in 1832 -- a novel considered Canada's first work of Gothic fiction (cf. Edwards 4).

There are several subgenres in the North American Gothic genre, including the American Southern Gothic, the Southern Ontario Gothic and the Northern Ontario Gothic. According to Thomas Bjerre Ærvold, the Southern mode of Gothic dates back to the 19th century, and “its themes include the presence of irrational, horrific, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses; grotesque characters; dark humo[u]r, and an overall angst-ridden sense of alienation” (1). While it shares similarities with other Gothic styles, tensions in the American South are its primary source of influence (cf. Ærvold 1). However, one of the critical aspects of Southern Gothic literature is how its ghosts shed light on the ugly and repressed aspects of this region's history.

The contemporary Gothic -- which Bruhm categorises as literary works in that genre after the Second World War -- is part of a narrative that “weave[s] in and out of the distant past [...] to comment on the state of contemporary [...] culture” (259). In this way, with its manner of looking at the past and commenting on the present, the contemporary Gothic is similar to the classic one. Another resemblance that the modern-day Gothic variant shares with the classic is that “the dynamics of family, the limits of rationality and passion, the definition of statehood and citizenship, the cultural effects of technology” (259) remain relevant. In the same vein, the contemporary Gothic reflects the anxieties that plague society in its writing (cf. Bruhm 260).

However, what sets contemporary Gothic novels apart from their predecessors is how the protagonists in such works keep returning to the same fixations and compulsions: this allows readers to analyse these books through the lens of psychoanalysis, as Bruhm comments. Another quality that defines contemporary Gothic is “how contemporary Gothic texts and films are intensely aware of this Freudian rhetoric and self-consciously about the longings and fears it describes. In other words, what makes the contemporary Gothic contemporary is that the Freudian machinery is more than a tool for discussing narrative; it is [...] the subject matter of the narrative itself” (262). As such, themes such as loss and ruptures in domestic spaces remain prominent in modern Gothic works.

In a foreword, Edwards suggests that Gothic fiction is a phenomenon that questions social norms in several ways. For example, a character can be depicted in a manner that defies common understanding, thus disrupting a previously established truth -- this can be done by having a character embrace repressed and disturbed feelings. The Gothic is unsettling because it is both familiar and yet unfamiliar, pushing the characters in the story to confront a history they are uncomfortable with (Edwards xviii). In many ways, Gothic fiction serves as a mirror, reflecting truths that have - up till then - remained hidden, unspoken and undisclosed.

To offer an example, Edward mentions the antagonist of *Wacousta*, showcasing how European identity with its seemingly established social norms is a fabrication as this particular character has embraced the lifestyle (cf. Maria and Martin Löschnigg 18) of the native population that the settlers are fighting against: this demonstrates just how fragile notions of identity can become in an unfamiliar environment. The vastness and unknown character of the Canadian landscape serve as an eerie reminder that Canadian identity remains undefined, thus rendering it uncanny and menacing. Its uncanniness is why Canadian literature attempts to build a narrative of its own identity to escape the fact that there is no story in this mode (Edwards 4-5).

The Gothic mode shares a link with trauma because its tales describe mental stress by dealing with themes of repression, split personalities and a way of looking at the world that is unstable, in flux and fragmentary rather than whole (Edwards xxxii). Moreover, what separates the Gothic from other literary modes is its effect on its audience, with “its focus on specific emotional stimuli and its means of effecting this stimulation” (Sigurðsson 6).

In simple terms, Edwards explains that the Gothic uses the sublime to provoke powerful emotions without the immediate threat linked to them. There is a long tradition of using the sublime as an aesthetic category in literature in the 18th century – outside of Gothic fiction, especially poetry (Edwards 5). Additionally, the Gothic mode uses abjection in the form of twisted and deviant characters, triggering in the reader a primal memory of a state between life and death that “leads to a conflict that is repressed” (Sigurðsson 8).

For Bruhm, Gothic narratives are texts shaped by suffering. This fact becomes evident in how characters in Gothic novels experience a profound experience that shatters their everyday perception of life; this destruction is so calamitous that it eradicates the structures of their

existence (Bruhm 260-261). Furthermore, according to Caruth, the connection between Gothic literature and trauma is shown by how these characters respond to such a devastating event. This response can take on the form of dreams, repetitive behaviour or hallucinations: such a response matches the meaning of the word trauma, which is a long-lasting emotional shock following an upsetting experience. Trauma⁴ is also an event lived through when a memory recalls such a disturbing incident (Caruth 6, 11).

1.2: An Overview of the Asian Gothic

As a Japanese Canadian writer, Hiromi Goto draws on Japanese myths and ghost stories, thus establishing a link with the Asian Gothic. For this reason, this chapter explores the concept of the Asian Gothic and its influence on Hiromi Goto using work by Katarzyna Ancuta as a point of reference.

Unlike Europe, Ancuta says that the “[c]ontrary to Europe, Asia never experienced any grand-scale cultural movements that would affect the entire continent, such as the European Renaissance or Romanticism, with many of its countries opting for relative isolationism, [...] [and] only Japan experienc[ing] modernism roughly at the same time as Europe” (208). Additionally, “[t]o complicate things even further, while some Asian countries were subjected to coloni[s]ation, others had colonial appetites themselves “ (208). As such, Ancuta states that studies have been more interested in “...the contrasting of the European cen[tre] and the Asian periphery, ignoring [...] intra-Asian territorial conflicts and power struggles, whose influence on local cultural production is often left unexamined” (208).

In Ancuta’s view, using the term ‘Gothic’ is problematic, as it “is a foreign import, lacking equivalents in most Asian languages” (209): only Japan has a similar term—*goshikku*—but its usage is limited to fashion trends that draw upon Victorian influences or to promote pulp fiction. Otherwise, “the use of the word “Gothic” in Asia is chiefly limited to its architectural connotation, which, naturally, adds further confusion” (209).

Ancuta stresses that, while in Europe, “all the instances of the supernatural have been relegated to the realm of the marvel[l]ous in mainstream Western culture” (208), the process

⁴ There is much literature on this phenomenon, e.g. Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Ithaca, Cornell UP 2001.

of modernisation “did not necessarily mean the eradication of older spiritual beliefs” (208) on the Asian continent. In Asia, outside of fiction, “supernatural powers help maximise business profits, play a part in politics, and accompany practically every significant lifetime event, most of which are rarely complete without their share of animistic rituals and the presence of a fortune-teller or two” (211). Moreover, attitudes in Asia towards the supernatural are characterised by negotiation, as ghosts and spirits are entities to be respected; these entities can also provide protection and be called upon to do favours upon appeasement (Ancuta 211).

Ancuta feels that reading Asian ghosts as byproducts of repression or past trauma can be too simplistic, as spectres in Asian fiction “take forms considered alien or bizarre in Western culture” (211). While Western audiences complain about the abundance of long-haired female ghosts in Asian media, they are more easily identifiable with topics of rage and trauma prevalent in Gothic fiction, as these female spirits were “often mere playthings of powerful men” (212) who turned to vengeance in the afterlife in the aftermath of “death either in childbirth or during a botched abortion” (212).

As Ancuta states, an example of such a female spectre is the Thailandish *Mae Nak*, “a lovelorn ghost of a faithful wife who died in childbirth while her husband, Mak, was away at war” (212). When her husband returns from battle, she resumes her duties as a wife while haunting the villagers to keep them from telling her husband that she is deceased; eventually, a monk performs an exorcism on her. Countless Thai generations have told her story in the form of a poem, a novelette, a radio drama and several other films, among other forms of media (Ancuta 212).

Western audiences would be less familiar with dualistic creatures or shapeshifters who can grow extra organs or split their bodies, with examples of such creatures found in Thailand (*phii krasue*, a floating head with entrails), Cambodia, the Philippines and Indonesia, Ancuta describes. Some creatures can split from the torso and grow bat wings or are “capable of sprouting long tongue-like protrusions from their mouths that allow them to suck unborn babies out of their mother’s wombs” (212-213). Asian authors in these regions have incorporated elements of these traditional ghosts in their contemporary works to fuse the past with the present, as in the case of *Dragon’s Fin Soup* (1998) by the Thai writer S. P. Somtow (Ancuta 213).

Another Asian phenomenon in spectres, Ancuta notes, is the concept of the baby spirit, known by many names, such as *xiaogui* in Taiwan or *kuman thong* in Thailand – which can be “procured through a grisly ritual involving grilling human fetuses and entombing them in a clay jar” (213). These baby spirits are adopted and fed by parents who seek fortune and protection from evil – and “[f]ar from being purely a literary invention, such magical objects can be acquired for a price even today” (213).

Other supernatural creatures, Ankura suggests, such as the Japanese *yokai*, are concentrated on a geographic area: *yokai* are mythical creatures – humanlike or taking on the form of inanimate objects or animals in terms of appearance – that have popularised Japanese folklore and art for centuries. Fox spirits – *kitsune*⁵ in Japan, *kumiho* in Korea and *huli jing* in China – are a specific form of space shifter in East Asia, “taking on the form of a young beautiful woman and seduce men to feed on their flesh” (214).

One of the earliest examples of Asian fiction containing the supernatural is the Chinese “accounts of the strange” or *zhiguai* created during the Six Dynasties (ad 220–589); these stories include encounters with the supernatural such as shapeshifters, ghostly possessions, wandering spirits or seductive foxes while establishing rules on how to interact with the dead (Ancuta 214).

While Japanese horror films such as *JuOn* show how traditional concepts such as the wronged woman can become well-fused with modern-day technology, Singapore stories often merge their ghosts into all areas of life such as office bathrooms, honeymoon suites or university apartments, amongst others, Ancuta observes. Singaporean ghost stories are multicultural, combining Chinese ghost stories with Malay magic – “Singaporean ghost stories do not simply tell stories about ghosts, but rather stories about people who gather to tell and listen to stories about ghosts” (Ancuta 217).

While modern Gothic themes such as madness, trauma or degenerative madness are the product of Western psychoanalytical theories, it is still worth exploring Asian texts with these topics in mind, Ancuta mentions, as “Asia too has had its fair share of wars, revolutions, and territorial strife (between and within nations), the savagery of which has left deep wounds in

⁵ More information about the *kitsune* can be found in the [appendix](#).

individual and collective memories” (218). As such, Asian stories often reflect on the trauma left behind by these conflicts, “often [...] followed by prolonged periods of political repression and denial, which have made history an unmentionable subject and a potential breeding ground for stories resonating with Gothic sentiments” (218). In these stories, rather than forget the haunting aftermath of wartime cruelty and violence, protagonists are affected by these experiences while learning how to navigate their lives. Novels such as Duong Thu Huong’s *No Man’s Land*, written in 2005, deal with the rupture the return of a woman’s first husband – a North Vietnamese veteran – causes after fourteen years of absence, showing a return to the past can be devastating because of its irreversible impact (Ancuta 218-219).

Ancuta reveals that “partly as a consequence of years of self-imposed censorship, Asian texts frequently turn to the Gothic grotesque to deliver social and political critique” (219), which has helped authors avoid persecution but also allowed them to explore themes such as madness, disease, corruption and perverse sexuality. Further, having a mad character allows for denying social conventions or serving as artistic inspiration, as in the case of Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s “Hell Screen” (1918), where the protagonist paints his daughter’s violent death. In Chinese texts, madness often befalls women who suffer at the hands of men, as in novels by Xinran. In contrast, other Asian texts explore the burgeoning sexuality of women in a changing world (Ancuta 219-221).

Asia is a continent of contrasts, Ancuta acknowledges, with the “Gothic seep[ing] into the cracks, feeding off the fear of difference and animosity between religions, races, ethnicities, castes and classes, the old and the new” (221). Moreover, Western audiences may be uncomfortable with the portrayal of dysfunctional Chinese families or the exploits of Japanese feudal lords. Still, Ancuta notes, “we must not forget that each of these concepts was shaped by distinct cultural values and under specific historical circumstances – and so were the methods of their representation” (221). As such, to better understand the Asian Gothic, Buddhist concepts such as karma, fate, or impermanence can help Western scholars make sense of notions such as sickness in one’s current life considered as punishment for past sins, with ghosts often serving as the agents of inflicting said retributions (Ancuta 221-222).

1.3: An Overview of the Gothic in Young Adult Novels

Hiromi Goto's books *Half World* and *Darkest Light*, unlike *A Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*, feature and are aimed at adolescents. Both these texts' main characters are teenagers trying to find their place in the world while navigating the relationships they share with their parental role models and peers their age. While both novels contain supernatural elements, the characters' motivations are driven by themes such as family ties, the emotional upheaval caused by puberty and the loss of a role model.

Due to this, *Half World* and its sequel, *Darkest Light*, belong to the YA (Young Adult) literature category – a genre aimed at twelve to nineteen-year-old readers (Byron and Deans 88). Furthermore, due to their supernatural elements, these novels can also be viewed as members of the Teen Gothic. Subsequently, the following chapter reviews some of the characteristics of this particular subcategory of YA novels, using analysis provided by the scholars Glennis Byron, Sharon Deans, Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith.

The Gothic – as a literary genre, Byron and Deans explain – has always included teenage characters ranging from Conrad in *The Castle of Otranto* to *Carrie* in Stephen King's *Carrie*, serving as examples. The presence of adolescent characters is due to the Gothic novel's link with adolescence. However, despite this, the “Teen Gothic [...], in the sense of fiction written about teenagers for teenagers, is a relatively recent phenomenon” (87).

Further, Byron and Deans state that “[t]rends in YA fiction generally follow trends in adult fiction” (87). Consequently, “YA vampire fiction became popular after the resurgence of adult vampire fiction that began in the 1970s and 1980s” (87), especially vampire novels that followed the pattern of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. While Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series brought mainstream attention to books belonging to the Teen Gothic, “[u]nfortunately, the influence of, and the critical interest in, *Twilight* has led to a distorted view of what [the] [T]een Gothic is, resulting in it all too often being excessively equated with the genre of dark romance in general” (88). While Teen Gothic novels address Gothic themes such as repressed sexuality, horror, transgression and forbidden romance, Moruzi and Smith note that they “encompass a diverse range of subgenres, such as paranormal romance and historical fiction, and a variety of forms, including the short story” (1).

The Gothic mode, with its constant process of reinvention, addresses changes in historical moments; for that reason, Gothic fiction targeting young adults deals with issues important to

teenagers and ones that may become so in the future, Moruzi and Smith elaborate. Furthermore, Moruzi and Smith state that this kind of Gothic literature also explores how youth culture, as a whole, is in a movement of flux; in particular, Gothic fiction responds to the "anxieties about these youthful protagonists [that] are situated at the nexus of the past and the future, connected to their families and childhoods, but also looking towards becoming adults" (4). For example, "YA Gothic fiction is full of protagonists who are the heroes of their own stories and moving into adult roles and responsibilities while questioning the realities of their world" (4).

Another integral aspect of the Gothic novel is how it deals with themes of lust and seduction while reinforcing white, heterosexual and patriarchal norms of sexuality (Moruzi and Smith 5). For example, according to Byron and Deans, many YA novels metaphorically deal with sex: this is especially evident when it comes to vampires whose qualities allow the (female) teenage reader to explore desire without ever submitting to it directly. Vampires represent readers in that age bracket and show how they see themselves - "as ambiguous, subliminal figures" (89).

More specifically, Moruzi and Smith observe how vampires - depicted as tortured and divided figures whose suffering is due to their physical condition – make them resonate with an adolescent readership even more as they are in a transitional period. Additionally, the reader feels compelled to sympathise with such a figure as it represents the emotional tensions that a young adult might experience (Moruzi and Smith 8).

For Byron and Deans, the vampire's kiss often serves as a way of experiencing sexuality, which – in particular – allows female protagonists in such stories to explore their sexuality with agency, being empowered to make their own choices. Similarly to the vampire figure, werewolves are alluring to a readership on the verge of adulthood. While these supernatural creatures pose a danger to the teenage protagonists, they also allow for an exploration of their own darker side. Exploring one's darker side is essential for the protagonist to experience their sexuality and desire while also coming to terms with other internal conflicts within themselves (Byron and Deans 91-93). This exploration is accessible as the threat from these supernatural creatures is non-existent due to the sympathetic portrayal of monsters previously thought deadly (Moruzi and Smith 10).

An important point to consider for the novels *Half World* and *Darkest Light* is that they address the topic of death, a theme often explored in other Teen Gothic novels (cf. Byron and Deans 94). As Byron and Deans maintain, death's universality, non-functionality and irreversibility become non-existent in these novels. Instead, death is a continuation of a state -- reminiscent of adolescence -- whether embodied or not. This state - concerning a teenage readership --reflects "[t]he ambiguity of their status in the world – no longer a child, not yet an adult" (94). While these stories often accept the reality of a person's mortality, the existence of supernatural creatures such as vampires, ghosts, or zombies removes the permanence of death as they live forever (Byron and Deans 94-95).

Byron and Deans indicate that Bella Swan's character, the main protagonist in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, offers an example of such a relationship with death as described in the paragraph above. Throughout the series, Bella yearns to become an eternal being, but "[s]he does not crave death, she craves stasis; she desires for herself the beautiful immortality that Edward and the Cullens all have" (95). She has to die for a moment to achieve this, but her death is viewed as a positive transformation, as "she gains greater awareness and appreciation of the living world" (96).

Outside of dark romance, Byron and Deans point out that "most of the YA Gothic fictions that have had popular and widespread success following *Twilight*, and which have attracted a far wider readership than the largely predominant dark-romance *Twilight* clones have been books focusing primarily on issues of autonomy and power" (96). Furthermore, these kinds of novels focus on teenagers "who, having been torn from their parents' side too early, go on to forge strong alliances with their peer group and ultimately challenge the existing power structures" (97). While realism-based YA novels depict these adolescents coming to terms with the status quo and integrating themselves within the community, stories belonging to the Teen Gothic are not about teenagers repressing their out-of-control behaviour (Byron and Deans 97), but – instead – giving them autonomy, power and a say in how to run the world (Byron and Deans 98).

In addition, Byron and Deans say that teenagers in these novels lose their parental authority figures, gain autonomy, and achieve independence by forming new social ties. Therefore, to address their newfound self-sufficiency, these stories often have the teenagers refuse to return to their parents, "not because they have been in any particular conflict with their parents, but

because they have successfully become autonomous individuals and to return now to the family fold would be regressive” (Byron and Deans 101). To showcase the agency of such a character, it is noteworthy to point out that teenagers in Gothic Teen novels are no longer passive observers but young men and women who take control of their destinies. These alternative viewpoints allow those teenagers to explore their surroundings and offer insight and contributions to the world around them (Byron and Deans 101-102).

1.4: Graveyard Poetry and the Gothic Mode

One of the main topics of *Shadow Life*—a graphic novel by Hiromi Goto—is death. The novel deals with the main character's advanced age and explores her increasingly frail health. This chapter studies the relationship between the Gothic mode and graveyard poetry, using two short articles by Carol Margaret Davison and Serena Trowbridge as a reference.

Davison says that the themes of death and dying have had a long-standing tradition in Gothic novels. Like the Freudian uncanny, the Gothic handles death as a regular entity that no one spoke about due to its uncomfortable and unfamiliar nature. Moreover, Davison states that death became a “cultural trauma that alienated us from an earlier familiarity with death while giving rise to greater anxieties and uncertainties about mortality, loss, and remembrance” (2); this cultural alienation from death is due to the rise of the Enlightenment, where the focus of one's death shifted to an idealised, glamorised view of another person's demise (Davison 1-3).

No work of fiction better represents the Western change in thinking towards death than Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where a young scientist intends to rid the world of sickness and decay by creating an immortal being but instead realises that one's mortality is inevitable as well as something that one cannot run away from (Davison 3-4). Such a manner of thinking is prevalent today, where youth culture is constantly emphasised and catered towards, focusing on living longer and looking younger. Still, ageing is often glossed over, with many of its less comfortable realities, such as dementia or sickness, met with a wall of silence.

Concerning the attitude towards death in the Enlightenment era, people held a glamorised attitude towards dying by celebrating loved ones at a graveside who had passed away, Trowbridge states. This celebration was not only due to the gravestone's proximity to the

deceased person but also because a graveyard provided a tranquil and unchanging atmosphere: in particular, graveyard poetry, such as Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, published around the years 1745 to 1750 display such an environment. Some scholars believe that graveyard poetry influenced the Gothic mode as both literary forms focus on the corpse; in graveyard poetry, the body serves “as a site for remembrance; [the] Gothic, building on this [...] manifests a deeper concern for [the] loss of individuality post-mortem” (22) upon death when nothing but the remains are left behind.

Moreover, the Gothic mode also focuses on the afterlife, thus reflecting the change with which cadavers were viewed in the 18th century, as Trowbridge elaborates. Whereas the existence of the spectre as a physical manifestation was considered a possibility before that period, views embraced by the Enlightenment led to a decline in religious faith, replaced with a focus on scientific analysis where spectres were a reflection of the mental state of the person seeing them; however, corpses were still treated with respect despite the rise of science, with specific rituals centred on mourning and burial rites playing an essential part during funerals. Similarly, graveyard poetry reflects the importance of mourning and proves how carcasses were not just entities of scientific investigation (Trowbridge 22-23). Edward Young's long poem *The Complaint, or Night Thought*, provides one of the most extensive reflections on death.

According to Trowbridge, graveyard's poetry reveals how many poets viewed death as an occasion to reflect on life while simultaneously creating a way to immortalise these musings in poetry. Furthermore, by entrusting poetry to a tombstone, poets “look[...] outward to the world around [them], and open[...] with an indication of the present time” (Trowbridge 24): this is because death is a certainty. Thus, there will always be someone who remains to mourn over a person who has died.

Similarly, as Trowbridge maintains, the Gothic reflects upon the ways of looking at history by creating a landscape “particularly in the form of a romanticised medieval past [that] provides a staple backdrop to which [the] Gothic persistently returns”, where works such as Anne Radcliffe's novels “although set contemporaneously, are steeped in the past and in antiquated beliefs and behaviours” (25). Instead, the present notions show in the characters' “subversive freedom of behaviour given the gender norms context of the period” (25). In other words, the past reflects the present, allowing one to confront the dead and contemplate

a future after death – such reflections are reminiscent of the philosophy underpinning graveyard poetry (Trowbridge 25).

The Gothic mode, Trowbridge suggests, also “evoke[s] a mood of sublime contemplation inspired by the surrounding landscape” (27), similar to the feelings evoked by graveyard poetry. However, while graveyard poetry is hopeful and full of anticipation in seeing heaven, the Gothic, while dismissing spectres as a fabrication of the mind, does not ignore the decay that death brings. The imagery presented in Gothic fiction “is so strongly evocative, so emotionally charged, and in many ways so pleasurably unpleasant, as well as necessary to remind the reader that their focus should be not on the decay of the body, but the heavenly future awaiting them” (28). While the spectres may be a creation of the mind, they destroy the domestic world (cf. Trowbridge 29) by moving the idea of death away from the graveyard.

Chapter 2: Japanese Myths, Ghosts and Asian Canadian Fiction

2.1: The Japanese Ghost Story and Its Origins

Although none of Hiromi Goto's stories strictly fall under the classification of horror novels, they reference Japanese ghost stories such as *The Faceless Ghost* or *The Snow Woman*. These references to Japanese myths are especially prevalent in her short story anthology, *Hopeful Monsters*. Due to the existence of Japanese tales in Hiromi Goto's work, this chapter explores Japanese ghost stories and how they came into being, utilising research by Sarah L. Sumpter and Katarzyna Ancuta.

Sumpter comments that while Japanese horror films such as *Ju-On* and *Ringu* have come to appeal as a cult phenomenon in Western cinemas, in Japan, "such films are not new paths of terror but tales built on the strong foundation of historical visual culture and folklore" (5). Images of ghosts have been a practice in Japan since the development of a writing system, and the evolution of ghost-related iconography showcases "a frank love of an enduring ghost story tradition" (5).

Sumpter further argues that ghost stories have been part of literature in Japan for a long time, as ghost imagery and motifs grew in popularity in the Edo period in the 17th century. This surge in popularity started because of the Edo period's "unique economic and social situation" (6), which came after centuries of instability and civil wars. Such a period of instability led to a decline in the arts, and, as such, ghost stories were underdeveloped, underappreciated, and had a limited audience. Furthermore, civil unrest resulted in more entertaining ghost stories than moralising ones, increasing their diversity and quantity but not quality (Sumpter 6-7).

Ghosts have always been a staple in Japanese literary work; however, Sumpter mentions that a piece of work was rarely solely dedicated to them, as instead, they were "one piece of a larger whole" (7). The origins of the Japanese ghost story and the spirit of the dead come from religious sources, such as Buddhist tales of ethical rules and miracles and the Shinto belief of purification/defilement. Accordingly, both the concepts of spirits and ghosts owe their popularity to Shintoism and Buddhism (cf. Sumpter 7).

While religion does not play a significant role in Japanese people's lives, they follow religious rituals during ceremonies such as births, weddings and funerals⁶, as stated in the *Japan Guide*. Japan's two central religious beliefs are Buddhism – imported from mainland China in the 6th century – and Shintoism, which has existed as long as the country itself. These two religions exist in relative co-harmony with each other, to the point that they complement each other. Most Japanese people are Buddhist, Shintoist, or both (Japan Guide 1). According to a survey carried out in 2018 by Aaron O'Neill, 69 % of the Japanese population believes in Shintoism, whereas 66.7 % of it follows Buddhism (O'Neill 1).

Ghost stories based on Buddhist tales, such as the *Nihon ryōiki*, focus on themes of punishment for those who commit crimes in the form of vengeful spirits who come to haunt those who wronged them in the past, Sumpter notes. One example of such a vengeful ghost takes place in *The Tale of Genji*, where a spectre called the *Rokujō lady* wreaks havoc on her romantic rivals; her spirit can only find rest in the afterlife with the help of a Buddhist monk (Sumpter 7-8). Ancuta states that Chinese stories influenced the creation of these early Japanese ghost stories that incorporated Buddhist teachings; these stories are also referred to in Japanese as *kaidanshu* (Ancuta 215- 216).

Ancuta maintains that the most influential *kaiden* stories are in *Ugetsu Monogatari* (“Tales of Moonlight” and “Rain”, 1776), written by Akinari Ueda, who lived between the years of 1734 and 1809: one of his most famous stories – “Homecoming” – involves a husband returning home to his wife only to realise that he has been sharing his bed with a ghost. “Homecoming” was inspired by a story in the mediaeval text *Konjaku Monogatari* and has also inspired several reworks of its own, along with several film adaptations (Ancuta 216).

According to Sumpter, another Buddhist source for ghost stories was the game *hyaku monogatari*, which was “often played by the Japanese of the Edo period at social gatherings” (8) and had players tell each other stories. A candle represented a story, and once the tale ended, the storyteller would blow it out; in total, one hundred candles lit up a room during that game, and players believed that something supernatural would occur when all the lights were gone. Several artists in the Edo period incorporated these games as themes in their artwork (Sumpter 8). For example, Terry Watada – a Japanese Canadian novelist – has

⁶ More information on Japanese funeral rites can be found in the [appendix](#).

written a book of poems entitled *The Game of 100 Ghosts*, which deals with that very game: this illustrates how Shinto beliefs still hold firm nowadays.

Shinto beliefs, as Sumpter relates, permeate Japan to this date, especially regarding funerals: the living and the dead are separated to avoid the living becoming contaminated with the pollution of death, which “is the most profound [spiritual] pollution undergone by a human being” (8). This fear of corruption caused by another person's demise also bleeds into the Japanese belief of vengeful spirits: people who die in anguish or any heightened emotion return as spirits who seek to haunt the living. These spirits⁷—*yūrei*—can be male or female; however, “the large numbers of women who died in childbirth meant that a majority of premature and painful deaths belonged to women” (9) – a fact that gave rise to the popularity of female spirits (Sumpter 9).

Sumpter mentions how these female ghosts would not be rotting corpses but retain their physical body, making them “seem more like roaming corpses than intangible beings” (9). Their long hair and white clothes often set them apart from living women in famous artwork during the Edo period. These female spirits remain popular to date, with horror films such as *Ringu* depicting their vengeful spirits as long-haired women dressed in white clothing - their appearance reminiscent of the vengeful spirits described in the previously discussed artwork (Sumpter 9-11).

How Japanese ghosts still hold traction in Japanese fiction shows in Koji Suzuki's *Ring* novels, published from 1991 to 2005, which merge the traditional idea of a vengeful female spirit with popular urban folklore using a cursed videotape, Ancuta says. Other modern variations of vengeful female spirits include the science fiction novel *Parasite Eve*, written in 1995, which deals with a creature composed of the mitochondria⁸ – responsible for generating the energy necessary to run cells – of the protagonist's dead wife. *Strangers* by Taichi Yamada, published in 1987, shows a more traditional concept of ghosts as it deals with a middle-aged man who not only has to confront the ghosts of his dead parents but is also haunted by the spectre of a woman he rejected on the night they met (Ancuta 216).

⁷ More information about these spirits can be found in the [appendix](#).

⁸ For more information: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/320875>

2.2: An Overview of Transnational Literature

Viewing Hiromi Goto's work through a transnational perspective remains pertinent as she is an author rooted in two countries - both through her Japanese heritage and growing up in Canada. As today's borders no longer present insurmountable obstacles and journeys back to a country of origin can be arranged, emigration no longer spells the end of contact with one's native land; helping this process is the rapid delivery of characteristic commodities from one's native and host country, which is now feasible, unlike in the past when such things took months -- if not years. As such – considering Hiromi Goto's position as a Japanese Canadian writer, this chapter discusses transnational literature, referencing research by Paul Jay and Mita Banerjee.

Throughout the last few decades, literature - both in its production and the study of it - has moved beyond the traditional boundaries of a nation, Jay describes. It is no longer a monolithic entity but has embraced “authors from formerly marginali[s]ed or ignored regions of the world, such as Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia, and Latin America” (1).

Jay explains that one way of looking at transnational literature involves the concept of mobility, which focuses on how a text can transcend geographical limits. It is also essential to distinguish transnational literature from the idea of world literature, as the former is “a kind of literature, emergent at a specific historical moment and characteri[s]ed by an intersecting set of subjects broadly informed by the forces of decoloni[s]ation and globali[s]ation” (4), dealing with topics such “migration, displacement, exile, border crossings, cosmopolitanism, globali[s]ation, and the forms of personal and cultural hybridity these forces have produced” (2).

Jay mentions that “the term “transnational” is a relatively new one [with] its usage dat[ing] from the second decade of the twentieth century” (9); it stands for extending borders. Further, the term is an adjective, and this quality emphasises its transgressive, challenging nature. Thus, transnational fiction threatens the “notions of purity and exclusivity often associated with nationalism” (9), including novels dealing with and promoting that subject matter. Also, transnational literature moves from the universal to the particular, focusing “less with what is central than with what is thought of or treated as marginal” (9), with its interests

concentrating on the difference and similarities between people. Therefore, cultural identities in such novels are hybrid, shaped by mobility and intersection with other people, their practices and traditions. Moreover, transnational fiction highlights the fluidity within an identity (Jay 9-11).

Like the term *transnational*, the meaning of the word *nation* is complex as a wide range of characteristics is used to describe it, Jay suggests, primarily since it “can be defined in terms of birth, rank, descent, breed, species, cultural practices, and race; any seemingly inherent characteristic a group of people believe [that] indicate they belong to the same genus” (12). Unlike a legally defined state, a nation is often an imaginative matter that stresses its fabrication by a society. The development of globalism has given rise to identities that contradict or challenge the notions of a nation, as the migration of people has led to multiculturalism. However, cosmopolitanism often celebrates being a world citizen while overlooking that such views are usually shrouded by privilege and miss critical inputs from sidelined parties (Jay 12-17).

Jay states that transnational literary studies is an arbitrary term brought to life by scholars, “used to provide order to the study of literary works after they are produced, but do not necessarily refer to properties inherent to the works themselves” (21). It is also a discipline that draws inspiration from “subfields including multicultural, world, postcolonial, diasporic, and border literatures” (21). Additionally, transnational academic studies collectively attempt to understand the experiences of writers who combine links to two spaces, cultures, and backgrounds (cf. Jay 22).

Additionally, transnational literature is more than just literature that moves across boundaries: such a definition is too general and lacks a common theme regarding its historical context and subject matter, Jay maintains. Similarly, transnational literature is different from world literature: too often, world literature is centred around Western values, interpreting other cultures as exotic and other. While universality is a central theme in world literature, transnational literature emphasises the different and local (Jay 45-50).

Jay believes that transnational literature identifies with a point in history that collectively deals with topics such as globalisation, decolonisation, postmodernity and technology. Due to its many influences, transnational literature places the periphery at its centre (Jay 51), with a

critical eye on its historical and cultural trends, including “the development of electronic means for the rapid circulation of literary works (and the range of social platforms that mediate that circulation and reception) have made literature in our own time a transnational phenomenon” (52). It is also noteworthy that its authors have gone through a multinational experience, voluntarily or involuntarily, with their works diving into themes such as “displacement, cultural conflict, diasporic experience, and the decidedly contemporary challenges of living across or between national identities” (52).

However, Banerjee observes that migrational experiences—such as those of people of Pakistani or Indian descent—often dissolve these identities altogether. This dissolution during the migration process results in a sense of rootlessness and a proliferation of identities, thus complicating the narratives. Therefore, such a phenomenon is not a cause for celebration by authors of transnational literature (Banerjee 9).

2.3: Asian Canadian Fiction and Recent Developments

Hiromi Goto is a Japanese Canadian writer who uses her heritage to craft a unique spin on identity and themes such as belonging. This chapter investigates how Asian Canadian fiction began and describes recent developments in that space, with Judy Young, Eleanor Ty, Christl Verduyn, and Smaro Kamboureli as pivotal sources.

It is difficult to pinpoint when Asian Canadian literature came into being, Young states. As a result, it was an imposing task for researchers to find samples of work by Asian Canadian writers in the early years when trying to understand such literary productions better (Young 116, endnote 1). Linguistic barriers and the predominance of Canadian fiction by non-marginalised writers overshadowed any works by Asian Canadians (Ty and Verduyn 5), and “[t]his situation was not unique to Asian Canadian artistic communities; other minority groups in Canada faced similar linguistic hurdles” (5).

Other reasons for the lack of visibility when it came to Asian Canadian writing were the political barriers that these communities were burdened with, from Chinese Canadian families not allowed to be reunited by the legal restrictions placed on them to the displacement Japanese Canadians faced from their homes during World War II, Ty and

Verduyn say. Such obstacles to participating in regular day-to-day life interactions meant that Asian Canadian writing existed merely as a niche (Ty and Verduyn 5).

Ty and Verdun explain that “Asian Canadian writing emerged to critical attention by the late 1980s” (6), with writers such as Joy Kogawa, Michael Ondaatje, and Rohinton Mistry crafting novels. In addition to these individual authors, “anthologies featuring Asian Canadian writers and artists appeared” (6). Asian Canadian literature during that decade emerged at the same time as postcolonial literary theory, diaspora studies, and anti-racist practices (Ty and Verduyn 6).

These new frameworks allowed critics to evaluate the work of writers from minority groups, Ty and Verduyn describe. Moreover, another development that helped Asian Canadian writing grow popular in the late 1970s was “the parallel emergence of the Asian American movement in the United States” (11-12). Most Asian immigrants did not refer to themselves as Asian Canadians until the 1980s – the fact that Asian Canadian writing did not gain prominence until that era reflects that point (Ty and Verduyn 12).

Ty and Verduyn assert that following this development in the 1980s, Asian Canadian literature has emerged as one of the field's most vibrant and exciting areas. However, while early works by Asian Canadian writers focused on themes such as immigration, issues assimilating into Canadian culture, and intergenerational conflicts within migrant families, recent literary publications have “become more diverse and experimental in form, theme, focus, and technique” (3).

Much of Asian Canadian writing is a direct response to the imagined sameness of Canada (cf. Ty and Verduyn 13): it is a literature that is critical of such an ideology and questions notions such as belonging, “rewrit[ing] what it means to be Canadian, [and] showing us the contradictions, omissions, and fissures in specific historical moments in Canadian history and culture” (13). While works by Asian Canadian writers still grapple with issues such as race and a different cultural background in opposition to a dominant culture, these pieces deal with “the impact of globali[s]ation and transnationality; the reconfiguration and play of textual and generic conventions, the questioning of our understanding of sexuality and gender, the claiming of a subjectivity not necessarily linked to ethnic culture, and the

potential of hybridity and hybrid identities” (13) issues that Hiromi Goto's novels often address.

Asian Canadian writing should not be put into such a broad category as minority writing, as the term *minority* has shifted in the past thirty years (cf. Ty and Verduyn 1). Minority writing is not just minority writing: it is not something of trivial importance to Canadians, nor should it be seen as lesser than other literary genres, Kamboureli suggests. Indeed, the diversity of such writing displays the hitherto binary and limited structure of Canadian literature that has dominated the scene for so long (Kamboureli 3).

Ty and Verduyn add that another essential term or phrase in Asian Canadian writing is *beyond autoethnography*, which refers to a process that recognises texts not merely characterised “by their ethnic markers” (4). This phenomenon does not signify the end of autoethnography but allows these texts to move beyond the representation of one ethnic writer speaking on behalf of their community. Instead, it will enable such works to go beyond the author's ethnic background and allow for a view of culture that is not static (Ty and Verduyn 4-5).

2.4: Japanese Canadian History and Its Impact on Canada

As pointed out, Hiromi Goto is a Japanese writer brought up in Canada. Consequently, several of her novels—most prominently, *A Chorus of Mushrooms*—address issues of being Japanese Canadian. To better understand its historical context, this chapter briefly surveys how Japanese people made Canada their home and how their experiences affected Canadian literature.

Japanese Canadian History says that “Manzo Nagano [was] the first known immigrant from Japan [to] arrive[...] in Canada” (1). In an article, Ann Sunahara explains that “he arrived in British Columbia in 1877” (Sunahara 1). *Japanese Canadian History* further adds that the first generation of Japanese immigrants, also known as *issei*, “settled in Vancouver, Victoria and [...] the surrounding towns [while] [o]thers settled on farms in the Fraser Valley and in the fishing villages, mining, sawmill and pulp mill towns scattered along the Pacific coast” (1).

Sunahara describes that Japanese immigrants “called *Issei* (first generation), arrived between 1877 and 1928” (1). At first, Sunahara states that “almost all [Japanese] immigrants were young men” (1). However, in 1908, the Canadian government “insisted that Japan limit the migration of males to Canada to 400 per year, arranging what was known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement with officials in Japan” (1). Following that agreement, most Japanese expatriates “were women joining their husbands or unmarried women engaged to men in Canada” (1). In 1928, the immigration of Japanese was “further [...] restricted to 150 persons annually” (1).

Japanese Canadian History states that “[d]uring this era [,] racism was a widely-accepted response to the unfamiliar which justified the relegation of minorities to a lower status based on a purported moral inferiority” (1). As a result, student protests and mobs tried to drive out Japanese settlers. Prejudices against Japanese immigrants were also enshrined into law: Japanese, like other Asians, “were excluded from most professions, the civil service and teaching; and were paid much less than their white counterparts” (1). They were also not allowed to vote (Japanese Canadian History 1).

Japanese Canadian History explains that as a direct consequence of the prejudice the Japanese immigrants faced in Canadian society and their lack of English skills, many of the *issei* “concentrated in ghettos (the two main ones were Powell Street in Vancouver and the fishing village of Steveston)” (1). In these ghettos, Japanese immigrants established “their own institutions — schools, hospitals, temples, churches, unions, cooperatives and self-help groups” (1).

Japanese Canadian History further maintains that the *issei*’s contact with Canadians was limited; however, the second generation of Japanese Canadians born in Canada, also known as *nissei*, “were more attuned to life in the wider Canadian community”(1) due to their higher education and fluency in English. Despite being better integrated into Canadian society, the *nissei* “faced [...] the same prejudices [as] experienced by their parents” (1). As a result, “their demand in 1936 for the franchise as Canadian-born people was denied because of opposition from politicians in British Columbia” (1). They had to wait “another thirteen years before they were given the right to vote” (1).

When Japan entered World War II on December 7th, 1941, with the attack on Pearl Harbour, *Japanese Canadian History* says that the Canadian government “removed [Japanese Canadians] from the West Coast” (1). Although deemed a military necessity, senior members of the Canadian military and the RCMP opposed the decision, as “Japanese Canadians posed no threat to security” (1) in their eyes. The exclusion of Japanese Canadians from the West Coast continued until 1949, with many forced to move 160 km further inland under the War Measures Act of 1942 (*Japanese Canadian History* 1).

Japanese Canadian History points out that the War Measures Act “affected over 21,000 Japanese Canadians” (1). First, they were moved to internment camps in the livestock barns in Hastings Park, then near the British Columbia and Alberta border. To stay together, many families volunteered “to work on sugar beet farms in Alberta and Manitoba where there were labour shortages” (1).

Japanese Canadian History clarifies that any property seized from Japanese Canadians was sold under the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property Act, and the “proceeds were used to pay auctioneers and realtors [...] and to cover storage and handling fees” (1). Only a tiny share of the proceeds went to the inmates of the internment camps – in fact, unlike other prisoners of war camps, “Japanese Canadians were forced to pay for their internment [and] [t]heir movements were restricted and their mail censored” (1).

Towards the end of World War II, *Japanese Canadian History* says that Japanese Canadians could prove their loyalty “by “moving east of the Rockies” immediately or sign[ing] papers agreeing to be “repatriated” to Japan when the war was over” (1). While many Japanese Canadians moved to the Prairies or Ontario and Quebec, “[a]bout 4,000, half of them Canadian-born [,] were exiled in 1946 to Japan” (1). In 1949, “all the restrictions were lifted [,] and Japanese Canadians were given full citizenship rights, including the right to vote and the right to return to the [W]est [C]oast” (1).

However, *Japanese Canadian History* states that after losing their homes due to confiscation, Japanese Canadians found reconstructing their previous lives difficult, as the “Japanese Canadian community in British Columbia [had been] virtually destroyed” (1). Elderly *issei* “were too old to start anew” (1). At the same time, *nissei* “had their education disrupted and could no longer afford to go to college or university” (1). Many “had to become breadwinners

for their families” (1). The loss of property was not the only consequence of internment, and many Japanese Canadians suffered psychological damage: “[v]ictim[s]ed, label[ed] “enemy aliens”, imprisoned, dispossessed, and homeless, people lost their sense of self-esteem and pride in their heritage” (1).

Beyond that, *Japanese Canadian History* adds that many Japanese Canadians harboured a “fear of [a] resurgence of racial discrimination and [thus developed] the stoic attitude of “*shikataga nai*” (it can’t be helped) [that] bred silence” (1). In addition to silence, the third generation of Japanese Canadians, also called *sansei*, grew up speaking little to no Japanese and had very few interactions with their cultural heritage. Despite that, the late 1970s and 1980s were a period of redress for the Japanese community in Canada (Japanese Canadian History 1).

Sunahara says that the driving force behind the redress movement was the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), which saw the opportunity arise after “the publication of the novel *Obasan* (1981) by Joy Kogawa” (1). The goal of this movement was to seek compensation from the government and change laws to prevent such things from happening to Japanese Canadians again (Ty and Verduyn 12). Sunahara states that between 1984 and 1988, the NAJC “held seminars, house meetings and conferences; lobbied and petitioned the government” about violating their rights during WWII. In 1988, on September 22nd, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed an agreement that compensated the Japanese Canadians for their internment during WWII and for confiscating their property (Sunahara 1).

In an interview for an article by Lucy Oneka, Terry Watada – the author of *The Game of 100 Ghosts* – states that Japanese Canadian writers like him helped fill a void in the Canadian literature landscape. Terry Watada further remarks that, while he was at university in the 1970s, there was no such thing as Japanese Canadian literature; he could only read about writers of colour by enlisting in a course focused on Commonwealth literature that did not include any writers of Japanese origin (Oneka 1).

In the same interview, Watada further recalls how, in the 1970s, Japanese Canadians reacted to the absence of Japanese Canadian literature by proclaiming their identity; this act was political, and fellow writer Kerri Sakamoto reveals how this was a powerful act, seeing how there were not many Asians in Canada at the time. Kerri Sakamoto further elaborates how the

lack of documentation regarding Japanese internment camps and everyday racism prompted her to write her first novel, *The Electrical Field*. It deals with her family's experiences during the internment of Japanese Canadians following the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 (Oneka 1).

In her interview with Lucy Oneka, Sakamoto also reveals how *Obasan* influenced her, helping her understand the internment and displacement of Japanese Canadians. Terry Watada also wrote about the fallout of the attack on Pearl Harbour in his novel, *The Three Pleasures*. Kerri Sakamoto states that the desire to write was more than just a yearning to be an author; it was to express a point of view that was not present in literature at the time. Like Sakamoto, Leslie Shimotakahara states that the lack of stories regarding the Japanese internment prompted her to write *After the Bloom* (Oneka 1). In 1992, Joy Kogawa released a sequel to *Obasan*, *Itsuka*; in 1995, the novel *The Rain Ascends* deals with Japanese Canadians in the prairies (Maria and Martin Löschnigg 86).

2.5: An Overview of Canadian History

This chapter features a brief overview of Canadian history, drawing on research by Eva-Marie Kröller, Maria and Martin Löschnigg to better understand the Canadian Gothic explored in later chapters. Ultimately, this chapter also aims to show how fraught and complicated Canada's history is and why it is essential to understand its community's tensions before discussing its literature. This chapter does not serve as an extensive guide to Canadian history; instead, it focuses on the events that led to Canadian fiction being viewed as international because of the diversity of the country's population (Maria and Martin Löschnigg 7).

Determining the Canadianness of a novel can be seen as a controversial subject, Kröller states, even though "[t]he nominees for the 2002 Booker Prize included three Canadian books: Carol Shields's *Unless*, Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*, and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*" (1). Since "none of the authors was born in the country, media at home and abroad launched an intense investigation of how to determine the "Canadianness" of a writer" (1), with commentators either praising the writers for their talent or explicitly pointing out their non-Canadianness. The need to identify writers as Canadian – as in the case of Yann Martel,

a man of French Canadian background – is because of Canada’s complicated history and its “ambivalent position between coloni[s]ed and coloni[s]er” (2). As such, Canadian literature has focused on a search for its own identity (Maria and Martin Löschnigg 7).

In the 16th century, Jacques Cartier first claimed Canadian territory as a French colony to find rich mineral deposits and a Northwest passage to the Indies, Kröller states. These initial ambitions were never realised, and the colony remained ignored for fifty years until Samuel de Champlain eventually established the settlements of Port-Royal (Acadia) – modern-day Nova Scotia – in 1605 and Quebec in 1608 (Maria and Martin Löschnigg 11) – these developments allowed fur trading with the Indigenous population. These trading activities were soon successful enough to form trading companies. Still, the settlement administration only became a reality “under Louis XIV, when its management was tightly organi[s]ed to mimic that of France and the Intendant Talon oversaw vigorous developments in agriculture and local industries” (4); the region also expanded despite the protests of the native population (Kröller 3-4), which remained ignored (Maria and Martin Löschnigg 11).

Initially, while fur trading benefited the indigenous population and European traders alike, diseases from the European continent led to a decline in the indigenous people, Maria and Martin Löschnigg explain. At the same time, the number of European settlers grew, leading to an increased demand for more land; this process resulted in a slow but steady alienation of the native population from their original lifestyle, leading to their reliance on the welfare state (Maria and Martin Löschnigg 11).

In the eighteenth century, New France – an area covering Nova Scotia and parts of New Brunswick – had trading posts and settlements scattered in the West, even reaching the foothills of the Rockies; however, the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 forced New France to surrender territories to England, which also engaged in trade within the North American continent around that time, Kröller mentions. One of the casualties of these treaties were the Acadians – farmers, fishermen and trappers of French origin who had settled in these areas: they refused to take an oath of allegiance to Great Britain and, as a consequence, “three-quarters of the 13,000 Acadians were deported to parts of what are now the United States and elsewhere, with families separated deliberately to undermine attempts to reconstitute themselves as a community” (4).

Following the Treaty of Utrecht, despite flourishing trade, France neglected to show much interest in New France and – following the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, among four other battles (cf. Maria and Martin Löschnigg 12) – Kröller maintains that the “The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ceded the colony to England” (5). In 1839, Lord Durham’s Report on the Affairs of British North America, where he denounced French-Canadians and recommended assimilation, led to the Act of Union in 1841 that brought “Upper and Lower Canada (the predecessors of modern Ontario and Quebec) together under one government” (5).

Unfortunately, these events contained anti-French rhetoric and legislation, leading French Canadian intellectuals to carry out recovery work protecting French literature and culture, which lasted well into the early 20th century – despite the Constitution Act of 1867, which recognised English and French as official languages in Parliament as well as Canadian courts – while speaking French outside of Quebec was restricted (Kröller 5).

French-Canadian unrest about the restriction of the French language continued further into the 20th century, even though – in 1969 – the Official Languages Act made it necessary for government business to be conducted in English and French, Kröller elaborates. These feelings of discontent led to the October Crisis in 1970 when the Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) kidnapped a British trade commissioner and murdered the politician, Pierre Laporte; these actions resulted in the War Measures Act under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, when 450 people were arrested, including prominent members of Quebec’s cultural community (Kröller 5).

Kröller says that Canada’s demography comprises many ethnic communities, including the French-speaking community discussed in previous paragraphs. According to the 2021 Canadian census, 26.5 % of the total population sees themselves as a visible minority, with some of these identities listed as South Asian (7.1 %), Chinese (4.7 %) and Black (4.3 %) (Statistics Canada 1). In 1961, the Canadian population census showed that 41 % of the population in Toronto were foreign-born, even though most were of European descent (Kröller 6 - 7).

The dominance of European heritage influenced Canadian literature, Kröller remarks, with works of Austrian, Ukrainian or German immigrants dominating the scene until “the

watershed publication of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) [...] [allowed] students of non-European immigrant origin [...] to have a choice of appropriate books to turn to" (7). Even after the publication of *Obasan*, it took almost another decade for other works to buck the trend of Canadian literature being dominated by writers with European heritage and to "provide [it] with its current diversity" (7).

However, Canadian fiction by writers of European descent also changed following the publication of *Obasan*, with novels such as *All of Baba's Children* (1977) by Myrna Kostash proudly exploring their author's heritage without resorting to a 'retreat to folklore' that was prevalent in previous ethnic writing (Kröller 7). The rise of a multicultural demographic and Canada's international culture is often linked with Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who oversaw the Immigration Act in 1978, "which formulated a broad political, cultural, and humanitarian mandate, and asserted nondiscrimination as one of its fundamental principles" (8).

Before that, following Nixon's decision to impose a 10 % tax on imports of Canadian goods into the United States, Canada started looking for trade partners in Europe, Asia and South America, Kröller points out. Additionally, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) helped boost Canada's international reputation through cultural exchanges such as book promotions and tourism. "The Multiculturalism Act of 1988 may be seen as a sequel to the Immigration Act ensuring the rights of new Canadians" (9) to protect their cultural heritage, even though some critics such as Neil Bissoondath argued that it merely added more division. Bissoondath's criticism was so prevalent that it "generated enough debate to require a revised and updated version in 2002" (9).

Considering that Japanese Canadians are part of Canada's multicultural community, the next chapter explores the previously mentioned novel *Obasan* in more detail. It discusses how the [painful history](#) of Japanese Canadians impacted the narrative choices within that book, showcasing an often overlooked point of view in other narratives about Canadian history.

2.6: The Importance of Silence in *Obasan*

Hiromi Goto draws upon her experiences as a Japanese Canadian writer and influences such as Joy Kogawa. Therefore, to better understand the impact of Joy Kogawa's writing on Goto, this chapter looks at her most famous work, *Obasan*, using previous research done by Chuen-shin Tai and Lynne A. Magnusson.

Obasan by Joy Kogawa, published in 1981, was the first Japanese Canadian novel to deal with the internment and relocation of Japanese Canadians from the West Coast during WWII (Sunahara 1). The narrator is Naomi, a thirty-six-year-old schoolteacher who, after a series of displacements, finally finds a home with her family in southern Alberta: "This spot is half a mile from the Barkers' farm and seven miles from the village of Granton, where we finally moved in 1951" (Kogawa 8).

After her mother's disappearance, Naomi and her brother Stephen grew up with her aunt – Obasan – and uncle. The novel details how Naomi's family copes with these experiences, ranging from silence and a desire to set things right, as the character of Aunt Emily shows:

Injustice enrages Aunt Emily. Any injustice. Whether she's dealing with the Japanese-Canadian issue or women's rights or poverty, she's one of the world's white blood cells, rushing from trouble spot to trouble spot with her medication pouring into wounds seen and not seen. For her, the injustice done to us in the past was still a live issue. (Kogawa 33)

Therefore, *Obasan* is a historical novel, Tai states. Its experiences mirror Joy Kogawa's life, as she moved to an internment camp with her family when "she was six—one year older than the novel's narrator, Naomi" (205). As such, it paints a vivid picture of Japanese Canadians' suffering during that period, using silence to showcase it: "There is a silence that cannot speak. There is a silence that we will not speak" (Kogawa 7).

Furthermore, these opening paragraphs illustrate the power of suppressing words to deal with the aftermath of imprisonment and release, shown further in the following extract where Naomi muses about her aunt Obasan: "The 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" (Kogawa 17).

While silence served as a protective shield during the interment, later stifling of talk regarding these experiences actively avoided trauma and also led to the suppression of other

emotions. This act prompted Naomi's brother, Stephen, to flee the oppressive atmosphere: "Stephen, unable to bear the density of her inner retreat and rebuke he felt in her silences, fled to the ends of the earth" (Kogawa 17).

Overcoming silence not only gives voice to the trauma that Naomi endured in her early childhood but also allows her to move beyond the status of a victim to that of a person with agency – the agency to live her life to its fullest and come to terms with what happened to her and her family (cf. Tai 217). She also understands how Obasan and the other adults in her life used silence as an act of love to protect her and her brother (cf. Tai 208). The novel, Tai mentions, pinpoints how people react differently to trauma - while Naomi embraces her Japanese heritage, her brother Stephen scoffs at eating Japanese food as "[t]he fact that they have become the enemy leads Stephen to deny nearly everything related to his Japanese heritage" (213).

Magnusson argues that while "*Obasan* has rightly been celebrated for its power as a political speech act, [...] [w]hat has received less attention is Kogawa's pervasive concern with the act of speech itself" (58). For example, Naomi's linguistic anxiety is a metaphor for her estrangement from her family, her cultural origins and her absent mother, making her hesitant to speak about her trauma: "People who talk a lot about their victimization make me uncomfortable. It's as if they use their suffering as weapons or badges of some kind" (Kogawa 33).

Naomi mistrusts words because the printed press misrepresents the condition of Japanese Canadians in beet farms – portraying their experience as something pleasurable rather than the act of trauma it represents: "There is a folder in Aunt Emily's package containing only one newspaper clipping and an index card with the words 'Facts about evacuees in Alberta'. The newspaper clipping has a photograph of one family, all smiles, standing around a pile of beets. The caption reads: 'Grinning and Happy.'" (Kogawa 156).

Similarly, Naomi cannot find the words to express her trauma; language can only paint pictures in the most shallow ones, thus implying a distillation of the actual event as the following lines (which depict Naomi's distrust and critical attitude) showcase:

All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions, are like scratchings in the barnyard, the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work.

But what good they do, I do not know—those little black typewritten words—rain words, cloud droppings. They do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta, our roots clawing the sudden prairie air. The words are not made flesh. Trains do not carry us home. Ships do not return again. All my prayers disappear into space. (Kogawa 7)

Magnusson explains that Kogawa also uses the Japanese language to depict Naomi's isolation and alienation from those around her (Magnusson 60). By mixing English with Japanese, Naomi is “a linguistic amphibian, living in two verbal worlds, comfortable in neither” (60), as evidenced by her relationship with language or lack thereof: “Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word. The sound I hear is only sound. White sound. Words, when they fall, are pockmarks on the earth. They are hailstones seeking an underground stream” (Kogawa 7).

As such, Naomi only has pictures or words to recover the loss of her mother, which other characters in the novel consider without value; however, Naomi finds the concept of language to become increasingly obsolete in light of such accusations:

Write the vision and make it plain? For her, the vision is the truth as she lives it. When she is called like Habakkuk to the witness stand, her testimony is to the light that shines in the lives of the Nisei, in their desperation to prove themselves Canadian, in their tough and gentle spirit. The truth for me is more murky, shadowy and gray. (Kogawa 31)

Silence can also represent indestructibility, as in the character of Obasan, Naomi's elderly aunt, who uses her silence as an armour: “Obasan is moving about deaf and impassive, unavailable for questioning or their ministrations. Her land is impenetrable, so thick that even the sound of mourning is swallowed up. In her steadfast silence, she remains inviolate” (Kogawa 179).

However, Naomi's relationship with her aunt throughout the novel remains strained. Her aunt's silence directly opposes the one her mother depicts, and while her mother's quietness is protective, Naomi struggles to find solace in her aunt's taciturn nature (cf. Magnusson 64).

In *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, Hiromi Goto's characters experience similar problems: silence, in this case, becomes the oppression and near-total erasure of [one's Japanese identity](#), while uttering one's [native language](#) out loud becomes a shield that protects her characters from losing touch with they consider to be an integral part of themselves.

2.7: A Brief Analysis of Hiromi Goto's Academic Reception to Date

The literary work of Hiromi Goto that has garnered the most academic response is *A Chorus of Mushrooms*. For this reason, this chapter briefly explores research handled in this area by Tatiana Prorokova-Konrad and Alba de Béjar. Later chapters in this dissertation analyse the novel in further depth.

A Chorus of Mushrooms is an essential text in a cultural sense since it portrays Japanese Canadian history from the perspective of three female characters, each representing a different generation of Japanese immigrants (cf. Prorokova-Konrad 97). Thus, it offers a voice for immigrants who usually do not have a say, as in the case of the elderly Naoe, who observes the world from her chair: “Just let Obachan sit in her chair in the hall so she can see who comes and goes. My back to the staircase, and I can see who comes through the front door” (Goto 3).

The residential area within that novel is a metaphor for how the three women have integrated into Canada (cf. Prorokova-Konrad 103). This metaphor is evident in how Naoe, the oldest of the women, feels trapped in her home, unable to come to terms with how she feels ignored by Canadian society:

How can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language? But let them think this. Let them think what they will, for they will. Solly, Obachan no speeku Eeenglishu⁹. Maybe I am the fool, but stubborn I am and will remain. (Goto 4)

However, the alienation is self-inflicted: Naoe refuses to give up on her Japanese heritage and, consequently, renounces any attempt to become anything other than Japanese, which is shown best in how she interacts with her daughter: ““You sit there and mutter and taunt me in Japanese just for spite,” Keiko hisses from the crack between the kitchen door and frame, one eye stabbing me through the tiny space” (Goto 21).

Moreover, Naoe also knows she is setting an example for her descendants by holding onto her Japanese identity, even if it means displeasing Keiko, whom she often addresses in her interior monologues: “Ha! Keiko, there is a method to my madness. I could stand on my head

⁹ In this case, Naoe cleverly mocks the stereotype that Japanese people—according to Westerners—speak English. She refers to how Japanese speakers struggle with the phonemes /r/ and /l/. See: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3518834/>.

and quote Shakespeare until I had a nosebleed, but to no avail, no one hears my language. So I sit and say the words, and will, until the wind or I shall die” (Goto 5).

In other words, by clinging onto her mother tongue and making the limited space around herself as Japanese as possible, Naoe asserts her identity as a Japanese woman and an immigrant: “I mutter and mutter and no one to listen. I speak my words in Japanese and my daughter will not hear them” (Goto 4).

Her daughter Keiko serves as an opposing force to Naoe’s reluctance to adopt Canadian culture (cf. Prorokova-Konrad 104). To embrace her new country, she feels it is necessary to become as much Canadian as possible, shedding any remains of her previous identity and asking others to call her Kay. By doing this, Keiko tries to become Canadian. She forces the rest of the family to follow suit, particularly her daughter, Muriel, as Naoe states in the passage: “My granddaughter, your daughter, Keiko. You taught her no words, so she cannot speak, but she calls me Obachan and smiles” (Goto 15).

Born in Canada, Muriel grows up with no knowledge of Japanese but comes to appreciate the sound of the language by listening to her grandmother’s stories (cf. Prorokova-Konrad 105). Her closeness to her grandmother and Naoe’s subsequent disappearance prompt Muriel to seek out her Japanese heritage, even going as far as changing her name to Murasaki -- a term Naoe used to refer to her granddaughter: “Obachan, why do you call me Murasaki?” (Goto 17). The fact that the people in her hometown view her as different further compels Muriel to learn more about her ancestors (cf. Prorokova-Konrad 105).

The failure to become wholly Canadian is evident in how Keiko breaks down when her mother leaves; the loss of her mother prompts her to realise how vital those remaining ties to Japan are, after all. This event leads Muriel to continue her journey of self-discovery. While she embraces parts of her heritage, she only partially comes to understand Japanese culture, thus becoming something of a hybrid (cf. Prorokova-Konrad 107).

However, this is a better alternative compared with Keiko’s denial of her heritage and Naoe’s refusal to be anything other than Japanese, as both these stances kept Muriel from learning about herself: “I had a grandmother who could only speak Japanese, but I never spoke with

her because I was never learned the language. I wasn't given the choice to choose" (Goto 190).

Without being stuck between those two extremes, Muriel can embrace both sides of her identity, enabling her to understand differing points of view, even if it means exposing herself to uncertainty: "I'm not finished asking questions and I never will be. Home should be a safe space, but there are times when I don't feel safe at all. And I have to wonder where I live" (Goto 190).

In particular, Keiko's erasure of her Japanese identity presents a safety measure; it ensures that she fits better into Canadian society and can live an everyday life (Béjar 620). However, this does not mean she can suppress her Japanese self because her mother – with whom she is at odds about everything – always represents that part of her: “*”Nanio yutteru ka warakarimasen. Nihongo de hanashite kudasai,*¹⁰” I say and she grinds her teeth and refuses to understand the Japanese she spoke twenty years ago. Child after my own heart, I suppose. We are locked together perfectly, each pushing against each other and nothing moves” (Goto 13).

The scene above displays Keiko's dependence on her mother to assert her new lifestyle. Moreover, Béjar suggests that Keiko's assimilation to Canadian identity further sheds light on how she is trying to minimise the difference between herself and Canadian society. However, Keiko's Canadian identity remains fragile (Béjar 620-621).

Moreover, after her mother's disappearance, Keiko only recovers once she has prepared Japanese food -- a symbolic acceptance of and reconciliation with her Japanese self: “Mum got better. She ate food and I brushed her hair and, sometimes, when I felt lonely, I asked her to clean my ears” (Goto 190). This scene shows food's emotional connection to one's identity – in this case, food is a saviour that manages to heal broken familial bonds (cf. Béjar 624).

¹⁰ Translates to: “I don't understand what you are saying. Please speak Japanese.”

Chapter 3: Canada and The Canadian Gothic

3.1: An Overview of the Canadian Gothic

The following chapter explores how Gothic fiction manifested in Canada, which is suitable as Hiromi Goto is a Japanese Canadian writer who relies on her heritage and uses the Canadian landscape to write stories that evoke and deal with fear. While this chapter does not offer a detailed overview, it tries to make sense of what makes the Canadian Gothic unique, drawing on material from studies by Cynthia Sugars and Teresa Gibert.

According to Sugars, Canada used to have a reputation for being boring, as evidenced in a statement by the “well-known Canadian author Robertson Davies proclaim[ing] that Canada was not the boring place that people of his generation had been led to believe” (3); he further clarified that grotesque and strange Gothic phenomena haunted the Canadian landscape (Sugars 3).

Sugar states that such a point of view was seen as reassuring, especially “when Canadians were reaching towards a postcolonial awareness of themselves and struggling with a long-intuited sense that they had been deprived of their local traditions and histories – through myriad forms of cultural, political and pedagogical erasure” (3), as Canada had “long been perceived as either a location of monstrous extremes or an empty terrain that was unhaunted by a historical tradition” (8). Expressing such sentiments, famous Canadian writers such as Catharine Parr Traill in the 19th and Earle Birney in the late 20th century bemoaned the lack of ghosts in Canada, decrying their absence and the voidness of the Canadian landscape (Gibert 84).

Sugars argues that Canada has a fascinating Gothic tradition in the sense that it both exists and does not: on the one hand, Canada is considered too young to have ghosts of its own, but on the other hand, it is too old to ignore the “space teeming with Gothic monsters so alien” (11) already haunting the supposedly empty land (Sugars 11).

Sugars adds that Canadian Gothic writers of the nineteenth century used the Gothic mode, adopted from British culture, to overcome the lack of ghosts that the newness of their home country suffered from – thus, by adopting a tried and true tradition, they managed to infuse or

resettle the Canadian landscape with these ghosts. For Sugars, while the traditional Gothic uses themes such as mourning to place boundaries between the living and the dead, the Canadian Gothic uses it to create an illusion of collective memory, essentially creating an imaginary past (Sugars 4-5).

Historically, Sugars maintains that Gothic fiction "became a forum for working out concerns about ancestral inheritance and historical continuity, which in late eighteenth-century Britain emerged from post-revolutionary anxieties about social legitimacy" (6). Therefore, in her view, Canadian Gothic writers used it to address the lack of certainty regarding its history. Indeed, as Sugar points out, Canada, from its conception, used the Gothic to make sense of what it means to be Canadian, as "the 'idea' of Canada was integrally caught up with discourses of [it]" (6). Furthermore, "the Gothic Revival in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe, and the backlash that followed soon after, coincided with the first attempts, in Canada, to articulate and define a Canadian literature" (6).

Moreover, Sugars states that British Gothic influence is shown in the writings of the pioneer sisters Susanna Moodie and the previously mentioned Catharine Parr Traill, who wrote about Canada in a highly stylised way in the 1830s (Sugars 8). Additionally, Sugars implies that Canada had two Gothic modes: one describing "the Candian wilderness as a Gothic landscape inhabited by savage creatures (animal and human) which posed a threat to the European adventurers" (11-12). At the same time, the other painted Canada as a "terrifying *terra nullius* that was devoid of Gothic effects or ghosts, with the accompanying implication that the Gothic could not be inscribed on the place in any meaningful way" (12).

Canadian literature, along with the Gothic mode, aimed to project a national identity to Canada: by both lamenting the absence of ghosts and ingraining them into the landscape, early Canadian Gothic writers attempted to create their own easily identifiable local literature while following conventions that American and British writers had set, Sugars suggests. Simultaneously, Sugars further claims that debates regarding various literary genres and traditions, such as realism versus romance or historical writing versus fiction, took place, with Canadian editorials often bemoaning the excessive amount of Gothic sensationalism in literary works, showing how Gothic stories and tales dominated Canadian fiction in the 1880s while holding a contradictory position (Sugars 6-8).

Sugars explains that the Gothic—and by association, the romantic Gothic—was “denounced by cultural critics for its aesthetic excesses and assault on taste and moral decency” (7) and, additionally, “there was a sense that the application or location of a Gothic romance on Canadian soil was an oxymoron: the place had not yet been sufficiently historied or lived in” (7). It still, Sugar makes clear, helped create “a tradition that would fabricate/conjure the ghosts and superstitions of an authentically Canadian location and would thereby contribute to a locally grounded and poetically resonant emergent national culture” (7), thus forming a national Canadian voice different from British or American versions.

Consequently, Gothic fiction also rendered the vast emptiness of the Canadian landscape, ranging from the uncanny and unfamiliar to familiar, Sugars elaborates. Moreover, Canada was considered inauthentic due to the settlers' mentality, often reflected in the tension between fur traders and the indigenous population. These conflicts were later reflected in the writings of the famous early Gothic writer Duncan Campbell Scott (Sugars 9-10).

Sugars notes that, because of Canada's relative newness, there was a belief that Canadian people were practical and devoid of superstitions, which prompted “Canadian writers [...] to create home-made legends that might provide an illusion of antiquity, origin and memory, an approach by which the strange – even the strangeness of absence – would become comforting” (12). By “affixing a Gothic tradition, imported yet also newly Indigenous” writers tried to make the unfamiliar and uncanny more familiar but also to make Canada their home (Sugars 12).

Sugars believes that the effects of historic erasure are still felt in Canada today, “seen as an absence of Gothic remembering and, by extension, with a sensation of alienation because the Gothic is not available to render the home space *(un)heimlich*¹¹” (11). Gibert comments that much of Canadian writing focuses on resettling ghosts and on whether these ghosts are formidable enough to haunt the landscape in the first place; however, more contemporary writers such as Margaret Atwood argue that Canada was not ghostless but that European settlers had ignored the ones that were already there (Gibert 83-84).

¹¹ A Freudian term referring to the ‘uncanny’.

3.2: The Unsettling of the Canadian Gothic

Hiromi Goto is a writer who identifies as a Japanese Canadian and writes from the perspective of a person of colour from a Canadian standpoint (Grant 1). As such, this chapter explores Canadian Gothic fiction from writers of a non-white background, again with the help of material from Cynthia Sugars. In addition, using my own views, this chapter compares Goto's texts with other works to demonstrate how she uses her work to 'unsettle' the Canadian Gothic, with hyperlinks and references to other chapters in the dissertation that dive deeper into them.

Traditionally, Sugars says, Canadian Gothic fiction has been dominated by the viewpoints of Canadian writers of European descent, with their "white ghosts that are courted in the settler tradition of Canadian writing and [serve] as a legacy for an expressly White Anglo-Canadian imaginary" (179). However, since the 1980s, "many authors of non-White settler background" (179) have also explored this fictional landscape. By doing this, writers reclaim the histories that have been silenced and bring to light "the processes that have contributed to the constitution of a national literary imaginary and cultural iconography" (180).

Furthermore, Sugars adds that "Gothic texts from non-mainstream perspectives respond to the very constructedness of the Gothic literary tradition by positing metaphors of haunting that unsettle the fabric of the Canadian nation-state and the cultural genealogy upon which it has sought to fix a national-cultural identity and literature" (180). By revealing the inauthenticity of national ghosts, such texts perform a "form of meta-haunting – a haunting of these haunted processes themselves – initiating a Gothic exposure of the haunting effects that undergird the desire for an authenticating national ghost" (180). Sugars further implies that these meta-hauntings are the result of marginalised writers who "do not self-identify as part of the Anglo-settler trajectory" (181).

Sugars states that recent Canadian authors use the Gothic to "secure some form of tentative belonging and communal definition" (182) to the Canadian landscape by revealing the spectre of the nation, which was built by undermining the voices of other ghosts, making these texts deal with topics such as "state repression and communal secrets through an extended metaphor of diasporic haunting" (182) shown in books like Wayson Choy's *Paper*

Shadows, published in 1999. In *Paper Shadows*, Choy spends his childhood surrounded by “a world of invigorating ghosts, some malevolent, others not” (182) and – while he is used to them – they do not help him uncover any secrets. Instead, the Chinese ghosts mourn the homeland they left behind, while the others -- referred to by the narrator as white man ghosts -- plague the Chinese-Canadian community, not only with tricks motivated by racism but also by trying to deny their legitimacy, mirroring the actions of their living counterparts who threaten Chinese immigrants with deportation (Sugars 182-184).

Further, Sugars notes that, in *Paper Shadows*, the spectres are not only the deceased but “the illegal Chinese immigrants whose ‘official’ identities are based on false papers (the papers of legal immigrants who have died) and who therefore literally inhabit the identity of the dead” (184), thus becoming paper shadows that are hiding from the authorities while trying to build a new existence in Chinatown. Other ‘living’ ghosts are the Canadian authorities in search of illegal immigrants, often knocking on doors while the father figure is away, unable to protect the rest of the family from being sent back to China. These hauntings reflect Choy’s own childhood, whose adoptive mother was an illegal immigrant with fake papers, showing how people can be rendered into ghosts by erasing their previous existence (Sugars 185).

Sugars comments that the erasure or partially transcendent existence of Chinese Canadians in *Paper Shadows* is also shown in the absence of Choy's birth mother, where the narrator's silence and a lack of familiarity with himself stand as a metaphor for Chinatown itself. Thus, the Chinese community is unfamiliar with itself due to its inhabitants “[having] been forced to assume false identities while nevertheless living authentic and vital lives” (185). In such a manner, Choy’s text performs a meta haunting as it reveals how this community has created a vibrant community using inauthenticity, showing that foreign ghosts and spectres can become parts of new myths (Sugars 185).

In *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, the main character, Murasaki, uses the ghosts of Japanese fairy tales to make sense of her own identity. At the same time, her grandmother herself becomes a spectre that not only haunts her granddaughter but also the rest of the family, forcing them to confront the Japanese identity that they have renounced. [Chapter 4.1](#) more profoundly examines the topics of identity and the loss of it in *A Chorus of Mushrooms*.

The works of non-white Canadian writers delve into the Gothic experiences of immigrants, often portraying them as supernatural figures like aliens. Hiromi Goto's work, for instance, uses motifs such as monstrous pregnancies or childbirth to vividly depict the alienation and experience of the diaspora that immigrants undergo in a foreign country that perceives them as different. These narratives not only navigate life's challenges in a new country but also delve into the profound feelings of alienness that these individuals and communities grapple with (cf. Sugars 186).

Sugars mentions that David Chariandy's 2007 novel *Soucouyant* uses the metaphor of a female vampire with bruises on her skin to explore the effects of postcolonial trauma and how these wounds will never entirely heal. More explicitly, to deal with the trauma and protect her children, the protagonist's mother, Adele, has suppressed her memories of anything that happened before her move to Canada (Sugars 196-198). This behaviour is reminiscent of the one that Keiko/Kay exhibits in the previously mentioned *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, where she has fully embraced Canadian culture while forgetting her Japanese roots to give her daughter an ordinary life without being marred by cultural differences. And yet, through her mother's actions and subsequent departure, Keiko remains haunted by the memories of her Japanese heritage. [Chapter 4.3](#) will show how Muriel becomes even more keen to learn more about her cultural background because of her mother's actions.

Sugars points out that Gothic meta-haunting can also occur via "transgenerational memory as a form of embodied or genealogically inherited haunting" (201), like in Dionne Brand's 1999 novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, which "represents the history of slavery and its global aftereffects as a lived Gothic nightmare that has not been laid to rest" (201). Descendants of enslaved people remained haunted by the memories of slavery, making them both possessed by the memory of their ancestors while also living out the trauma. Still, the oppressors who practised colonial violence turned into spectres as well, forced to relive their cruelty till eternity so that it would never be forgotten or erased, as these "horrific spectres of colonialism [...] are perpetually out of time, yet as a result, firmly embedded within the trajectory of history" (205).

While Goto herself does not necessarily explore such meta-hauntings in her novel, Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan* shows how the living continue to be traumatised by the horrors of Japanese internment years after the fact, through a form of silence but also the memories of

deceased loved ones and their written legacy; [chapter 2.6](#) has discussed the power of silence in *Obasan* in more detail. *Obasan*'s influence on Hiromi Goto in a Gothic sense is shown in how the spectre of Naoe keeps haunting both Keiko and Murasaki, with the former relying on the memory of her mother to keep her Japanese roots alive – [chapter 4.2](#) analyses the complex relationship between Keiko and Naoe. At the same time, the latter is far more engaged with the spectre, allowing it to even guide her in important decisions like going back to Japan to explore her identity further. In both cases, the memory of Naoe – a metaphor for the family's Japanese identity – allows them to deal with the trauma that the suppression of one's cultural background entails.

Memory or the lack thereof plays an important role not only in *A Chorus of Mushrooms* but also in *The Kappa Child*, where the shared trauma of an abusive childhood at first keeps the narrator and sisters apart from each other but – eventually – brings them together to break free from it, without allowing the father – in this case, with him representing the spectre of violence – to get away with his misdeeds. Instead, he is humiliated and punished by his former victims; this punishment involves making him relive the physical pain that he directed at them once, giving him a taste of what they experienced and ensuring that their abuse is not brushed aside, as he now is haunted by the spectre of his former violence. The impact of familial trauma on the narrator of *The Kappa Child* is discussed further [in chapter 5.1](#).

3.3: The Concept of Alienness in Hiromi Goto's Stories

The following chapter further examines how Gothic elements are weaved into Hiromi Goto's work through the concept of alienness, building on material [from the previous chapter](#) and including an [essay by Hiromi Goto herself](#). Lastly, this chapter explores examples in Goto's work that touch upon the relationship between extraterrestrials -- in this case, posing as a metaphor for immigrants - and Gothic fiction.

In the essay entitled *Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colourful Full Writing* – as mentioned in the introduction – Hiromi Goto states that she has always been fascinated by the concepts of aliens, especially ones that feature some form of commentary on society. More specifically, Goto is aware that, while aliens have not abducted her, she is mindful of racism that she likens to an alien space. The only way to escape that alien space is by pretending not

to notice the daily signs of being part of it (Goto 263-264). This feat remains impossible because an alien cannot hide its origins nor create a new home for itself without outsiders questioning why this is so:

Systematic racism dictates that an alien, no matter how genial or easy-going, no matter how self-effacing and self-erasing, will always be recognized as such. Loveable E.T. not only has to phone home but must go home, for the alien's own good. It is a scripted given and an expected and accepted conclusion. Few people will pause to critically interrogate the reasoning behind this. Few people will bother to even pause. (264)

In Canada, Goto says, people of colour, including Aboriginal people, face daily cultural abduction in the form of microaggressions targeted at how they talk, how they walk and how the trauma of their past is no longer a matter of concern. Historically, too, these populations have been victims of massacres, internment camps, deceiving treaties and institutionalised racism. Indeed, people of colour are often accused of being oversensitive when it comes to racism, which, for Goto, is a baffling concept: "How can racism ever be condoned or excused?" (264).

White denial deals with the disbelief that racism is historically structured and present in all aspects of society, including arts, education and law, amongst others; in other words, white denial is the conscious or unconscious perpetuation of such systemic oppression, Goto explains. She further posits that the only way for non-white Canadians to survive is to lean into a mentality that encourages whiteness above everything else: "How bleak the future seems, when sisters and brothers have been so racially and culturally colonized that they cannot recognize the oppressive forces of racism changing the slant of their gaze. And yet, I may be too harsh. They have made choices of survival, the only choices available to them" (265).

As a Japanese Canadian writer, Hiromi Goto consciously writes about race, stating: "I live in a racialized environment, and the politics of my writing is distinctly Colour Full" (266). Not only does she feel that she has to address themes of ethnicity in her text to maintain integrity, but she also addresses two writing strategies introduced by the Canadian novelist Larissa Lai in an essay called *The Sixth Sensory Organ*. The first writing strategy -- as opposed to the second one that deals with storytelling from a margin -- involves the writer speaking with their world at the centre and only explaining this approach afterwards if they feel it is necessary to do so; the main idea behind this approach is to remain open to challenge and

change. It also allows writers to explore or create worlds that would not be welcome otherwise (Goto 266).

In modern-day Canada, writers employing such a method refuse to be defined by the concept of ‘other’, instead creating a space for ‘Colour Full’ writing that embraces strength, possibility, and progress, Goto mentions. However, when such writing is positioned as creative work from a margin and thus racialised, its potential for change is reduced to a simplistic viewpoint that distils diverse, complex experiences into exotic delicacies that non-alien can enjoy. Some writers – both white and non-white – embrace such a consumer market strategy, feeding the readers’ desire to be seduced by aliens but without any implicit hint of change because such works sell better (Goto 266).

Goto herself had an incident where a publisher rejected a work of hers because she refused to adhere to their vision for its artwork: “The editing process was fine, and the story was almost to publication when they sent me the art work to accompany the story. It was a wood-cut type, “highly Oriental”, stylized image of a supposed Japanese woman in a kimono with a baby at the breast. Her extremely slanted eyes were crossed and there was nothing funny about it” (266). The work in question is the short story “Tales from the Breasts”, discussed in [chapter 7.3](#), which – amongst other stories – can be seen as writing that challenges the reader to put aside their biases.

Hiromi Goto is aware that the concept of alienness is not just defined by race but also by how other marginalised entities, such as people with disabilities, are relegated to particular groups that are separate from the mainstream. For Goto, “the prurient horror of an “ungendered” being betrays a homophobic subtext that speaks volumes of a society that continues to assert heterosexist patriarchal primacy” (267), thus dividing and silencing the voices of those oppressed who would be powerful if allied. To break free from the concept of alienness, the reader and the writer must hold themselves accountable and be open to embracing a different way of viewing the world (Goto 267-268).

Goto’s narrative in *The Kappa Child* references aliens through the mythical existence of the *kappa* that supposedly impregnates the narrator and how the protagonist’s mother believes extraterrestrials have abducted her. This belief not only helps her to leave her abusive husband behind but also enables her to reconnect with her community and embrace her

Japanese identity to the point that she starts travelling to help other people whom aliens have kidnapped:

“Me? Me!? What’s there to talk about? What about Okasan¹²! ‘Heading south’ with Janice. An alien abductee organizing support lectures for other immigrant survivors, for god’s sake. My story is nothing compared to what’s she’s up to.” (Goto 244)

As such, a unique perspective emerges through the lens of the narrator’s family. As Japanese Canadians, they already exist in an alien space. Goto's narrative not only disrupts the Canadian landscape with the presence of a Japanese mythical creature but also enriches it. This narrative approach allows the reader to experience the world from a different viewpoint, one that challenges traditional notions of belonging and offers a new definition of community for these outcasts. The reader views the characters as more than just marginalised communities, thus challenging the concept of them being different or alien. These concepts are further discussed in [chapter 5.3](#) of this dissertation.

A Chorus of Mushrooms similarly employs techniques that challenge the reader to identify with an unfamiliar point of view. Japanese phrases are used within the text, and folk stories from that country comment on an immigrant's family life in Canada, addressing how moving there has traumatised some members by depriving them of their Japanese roots. [Chapter 4.5](#) analyses how retelling fairy tales helps people voice their trauma and allows for an active way to deal with it.

Furthermore, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* addresses systematic racism and white denial through the experiences that Muriel relates, from her first boyfriend objectifying her as an Asian woman to people asking where she is from. The novel, additionally, showcases how immigrants themselves use white denial to better fit in with their new home, which might seem like a useful survival tactic at first but is later revealed to be damning as it leads to the destruction of familial bonds -- as shown in [chapter 4.2](#).

While the *Half World saga* is less overt in themes regarding racism, the fact that Gee is viewed as alien due to his ashen appearance makes him an outcast, thus a foreigner threatening an otherwise familiar landscape. The story's central conflict deals with Gee's trying to find his parents in the underworld, only to realise that he has been an anomaly all along, as -- in reality -- he is a threat to the very existence of the world itself. However, while

¹² *Okasan* means mother.

he reacts with anger at the unfairness of it all, Gee comes to terms with his origins and accepts that, while he is indeed alien, he also has a family and a home that offers him love and support. In this way, the narrative examines, using Gee's unusual appearance as a metaphor for being a migrant, how people of an immigrant background can embrace their differences while also finding a home in the place that labels them as such.

In *Half World*, while Melanie is implied to be of Japanese descent, her crippling poverty is what renders her an outcast. Melanie cannot afford nice clothes or food, and her circumstances make it difficult for her to get good grades, further alienating her from her peers. Further, the narrative draws the reader's attention to often less known factors that being an immigrant indirectly entails, such as a lack of steady employment and the fear of deportation -- which is addressed in Melanie's mother's sudden disappearance.

Similarly, in *Shadow Life*, Kumiko's advanced age affects how people treat her, so her ability to make choices for herself is questioned. Moreover, her Japanese background plays an essential role in one of her past relationships, showing how the story -- uncompromisingly -- forces the reader to place themselves in her shoes.

Chapter 4: A Chorus of Mushrooms: A Story of a Collective, Haunted Past

Overview of *A Chorus of Mushrooms*

A Chorus of Mushrooms, Hiromi Goto's most [academically](#) and critically acclaimed novel, is about a Japanese Canadian woman recounting her childhood story to her partner. The novel alternates between the past and the present, depicting a family portrait that displays disharmony between the desires of the narrator's mother and grandmother, who frequently argue.

While the mother wishes to leave Japan and its memories behind, the grandmother clings to any fragment of Japan, telling her granddaughter folk stories in Japanese. One day, the grandmother leaves the family unit behind, causing the narrator and everyone else in the household to deal with the fallout.

4.1: Loss of Voice and Cultural Identity

One of the many themes left to unpack from Hiromi Goto's *A Chorus of Mushrooms* is cultural identity in the face of immigrating from one country to another. More specifically, one of the main topics that resurface upon further analysis is whether to embrace one's Japanese identity or conform to what is considered Canadian. Considering said issues, this chapter analyses themes such as a loss of voice and cultural identity, with scholars such as Mari Sasono and Stephen Clingman providing the backbone of said investigation.

The novel's main plot revolves around the Tonkatsu family -- in particular, the story highlights the personal struggles of the three women in this family: the grandmother, Naoe, her daughter Keiko and her granddaughter, Muriel. Each woman struggles with what it means to be an immigrant in Canada -- even Muriel, who was born there but faces pressure to fit into Japanese and Canadian stereotypes. In the long run, none of the women finds it easy to integrate - a fact showcasing that there is still enough lingering tension in Canadian society that deems Japanese Canadians as alien and different.

Historically speaking – and as already emphasised in the second [chapter](#) of this dissertation – the legacy of Japanese Canadian immigration is fraught with traumatic experiences - during WW2, in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbour, Japanese Canadians were uprooted from their homes and placed into deportation camps, with their previous belongings and homes sold off to pay for said camps (Japanese Canadian History 1).

Novels such as the previously mentioned *Obasan*, which *A Chorus of Mushrooms* is a direct response to in terms of intertextual references, paint a portrait of how Japanese Canadians dealt with this experience, highlighting themes such as loss and racism in a world that did not tolerate anyone who was not a white Canadian (Sunahara 1).

American-Canadian novels such as *No No Boy* by John Okada portray an even more dire portrait of what it meant to be a Japanese American during this period (Pal 68). In this case, choosing one identity over the other could have severe consequences for the main character and their entire family. *No No Boy* suggests that there were no such things as easy decisions when choosing one identity over the other—someone was always bound to get hurt (Pal 69).

Although not explicitly addressing the themes mentioned above, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* does show how the women in the Tonkatsu family deal with being Japanese in a predominantly white community. For example, the novel highlights how Muriel faces indirect racism while growing up, with her first boyfriend fetishising her Asian identity:

“What’s Oriental sex?” This was a first.

“I don’t know. *You* should know. You’re Oriental., aren’tchya?” He was getting grouchy with my obtuseness, my unlearned innate sexuality.

“Not really,” I said. “I think I am Canadian.” (Goto 122)

In another instance, to play the role of Sleeping Beauty for an elementary school play, her teacher asks her to dye her hair blonde as a dark shade would not fit into the perception of what the character should look like, hinting that alternatives would not just feel unacceptable but unfathomable: “Well, Alice is a story about an English girl, you know. An English girl with lovely blonde hair. And strictly for the play, you understand, Muriel will have to have blonde hair, or no one will know what part she is playing. You simply cannot have Alice with black hair” (Goto 177).

Outraged, Muriel feels that this is an injustice. At the same time, her mother, Keiko, accepts it as a simple fact: this proves her strong desire to become accepted into Canadian society. Indeed, her desperation is so poignant that her pride in being Japanese is nearly non-existent; this reluctance to embrace her Japanese identity is so powerful that she almost seems to suggest that her child become someone else, even if for a short period:

I was horrified. Mom and Mrs. Spear chatting away and dye my beautiful black hair blonde? Me with blonde hair and living the role of Alice? In Nanton? What could Mom be thinking? I would look ridiculous and stand out like a freak. (Goto 177)

Another subtle bit of racism that Muriel and her family encounter is when, for example, she does not feel comfortable interacting with another Asian child at her school. Neither child wishes to draw attention to themselves even further: together, they pose even more of a threat. Another notable instance occurs when Muriel invites a friend over, only for the said girl to comment on the scent of mushrooms permeating the house.

While Muriel's friend is not offensive in her comment and implies that a characteristic odour might exist in her own home, Muriel is embarrassed and made aware that owning a mushroom factory still sets her family apart:

“What house smell?” I said anxiously. We didn’t eat foreign food at all. Only meat and carrots and potatoes like everyone else. And Obachan hadn’t sneaked any squid for months.

“It smells like warm toes or something.” (Goto 61)

This particular instance in her childhood makes Muriel realise that - no matter how hard her mother tries to become Canadian - she will never be able to wipe off the traces of their foreignness, represented by the smell of the mushroom factory they had established – a sentiment that Muriel expresses in the following manner: “I wandered in my house after that, my nose a finger pointer pointing. And really smelled for the first time. I didn’t want to believe that our house had a smell. And Mom was so clean all the time” (Goto 61).

It also shows that despite her mother's best efforts to erase their Japanese identity, Muriel—and her family, by extension—are still considered foreign by the people around them—even if this fact is not necessarily perceived negatively: “Don’t worry; you smell something all the time, and it’s like not smelling anything at all. I don’t know what my house smells like, “ she smiled reassuringly” (Goto 61).

However, Muriel feels that any difference in her mother's world is undesirable. She disapproves of such a worldview, even if she understands where her mother is coming from: “I felt for Mom too, you know. Don’t get me wrong. You couldn’t have a bridge party if you had an immigrant mother who sat muttering beside the door “(Goto 97).

The female characters in *A Chorus of Mushrooms* – Muriel / Murasaki, Keiko and Naoe – display in their behaviours the various complexities that come with an identity that is neither representative of being typically Canadian nor does it fit in with its Japanese origins due to various familial but also internal contradictions and tensions (cf. Sasano 1). While Muriel tries to reconcile her Canadian upbringing with her Japanese ancestry, her mother, Keiko, behaves as if she were Canadian, as Naoe narrates:

There is nothing as silly as dusting when you live in a desert. But she ignores me. Keiko. My daughter has forsaken her identity. Forsaken! So biblical, but it suits her, my little convert. Converted from rice and *daikon*¹³ to wieners and beans. (Goto 13)

Sasano states that, similarly to Stephen in *Obasan*, “Keiko rejects “Japaneseness” in favour of a perceived Canadian norm in order to compensate for the impossibility of being white” (1). Not only that, but Keiko also embraces the Christian faith “to fit in with the rest of the people of the fictional southern Alberta town of Nanton” (1). According to Keiko, anyone who does not fit in is not Canadian; more explicitly, in Keiko's mind, for Japanese Canadians to better integrate into Canadian society, they must behave like everyone else while sacrificing their Japanese identity:

When I decided to immigrate, I decided to be at home in my new country. You can’t be everything at once. It is too confusing for a child to juggle two cultures. Two sets of ideals. If you want a child to have a normal and accepted lifestyle, you have to live like everyone else. This has nothing to do with shame in one’s own culture, but about being sensible and realistic. If you live in Canada, you should live like a Canadian and that’s how I raised my own daughter. (Goto 189)

However, Keiko's greatest mistake is her inability to consider how her differences stemming from her Japanese background could be a strength and an asset. By not accepting her Japanese side, Keiko fails to see how the fact that she is different will always make her and her family subject to racism (cf. Sasano 1), which Muriel touches upon: “Life is hard in Canada, once you come to an age when you find that people think certain things of you just because your hair is black and they have watched “Shogun, the Mini Series””(Goto 189).

¹³ *Daikon* refers to white radish.

Yet again, Keikko's blunt refusal to see this reality likens her to Stephen in *Obasan*: to avoid being treated differently, he rejects his Japanese roots: "Stephen has made himself altogether unfamiliar with speaking Japanese" (Kogawa 185). Such action presents a case of internalised racism alienating immigrants from their source language and community (cf. Sasano 1), as Muriel's thoughts on her childhood showcase: "The place where I lived didn't foster cultural difference. It only had room for cultural integration. If you didn't abide by the unwritten rules of conduct, you were alienated as an other, subject to suspicion and mistrust" (Goto 189).

Despite that, Keiko insists on hiding her Japanese roots by refusing to speak the language. Although she argues that this better fits into the community, Muriel feels that her mother's refusal to speak Japanese has robbed her of the opportunity to communicate with her grandmother. Not only is Muriel unable to understand Naoe's ramblings, but Muriel also loses the chance to learn more about Japanese culture and her familial background: "I feel a lot of bitterness about how I was raised, how I was taught to behave. I had a lot of questions about my heritage, but they were never answered" (Goto 189).

Therefore, she can only pretend she understands her grandmother, who rambles in Japanese while seated on a chair in the living room. These encounters enable Muriel and Naoe to grow closer to each other; this closeness is further reinforced by Muriel bringing her grandmother treats from her great-uncle, who still lives in Japan. They come to share a secret like this, which becomes another act of defiance against the denial of everything Japanese that her mother tries to enforce in the family's life.

Naoe and Muriel's close relationship is not only a direct protest against Keiko's repressed mindset towards having Japanese roots but also proves to be the key to healing the disruption Naoe's sudden disappearance causes. The subsequent chapters following Naoe's departure indicate that she and Muriel must have communicated telepathically. This telepathic link enables Muriel to follow Naoe's advice on how to help her shell-shocked mother regain her footing.

Not only does Naoe tell her granddaughter to purchase Japanese meals, but she also aids Muriel in finding out that her father has been buying Japanese food in secret. This final

revelation helps her decide to prepare Japanese dishes, as she now has her father's support. While food alone cannot cure these familial tensions and the loss of Japanese identity, Muriel makes her mother get out of bed, to which she has now retired.

Moreover, Muriel also learns that her mother's attempts to become Canadian are less clear-cut and successful than the family thought them to be. It becomes apparent that Keiko still understands enough Japanese to be able to teach Muriel about different Japanese idioms. Furthermore, even after she has recovered from her mental breakdown, Keiko still feels the need to consume Japanese food, proving that bringing Japanese nutrition back into the Tonkatsu family's lives fills the void that Naoe has left behind.

This void represents Japanese identity and how a complete abandonment of it leads to a loss of self -- as the case of Keiko proves. In other words, it grows evident that Keiko relied on her mother as a daughter and as a figure that stood for the Japanese identity she wished to hide. Still, even though her mother's absence has left her craving Japanese food, Keiko never fully embraces her Japanese identity- at least, not in the way Muriel does. In some way, Keiko can never confront the spectre she has abandoned, even though it still haunts her. The loss of Naoe's presence in her life leaves nothing but an empty shell that reveals how necessary it was for Keiko to remember where she came from.

In adulthood, Muriel learns the Japanese language and changes her name to Murasaki - a word Naoe used to call her by. Although this brings her closer to her grandmother, Muriel does not consider herself Japanese. She remains a hybrid, a woman who recounts Japanese myths to her lover, but growing up in a small Canadian town has also shaped her.

A scene in the novel showcases her alienation from Japanese culture: it is when Muriel tries buying Japanese food for her family but relies on a shop assistant's help to find the necessary ingredients for her meal. Her reluctance to identify as Japanese shows in her dialogue with others, where she often refers to her Japanese skills as lacking. Essentially, Muriel remains steadfast in her conviction that, even while learning about her Japanese identity, she can never fully reclaim it.

Towards the end of the novel, Muriel discovers that her father -- a hitherto stoic character -- has maintained contact with the Japanese language by reading Japanese texts. When

confronted about it, he states that losing the language left him feeling bereft, so he chose to reclaim the ability to read Japanese. Her father also admits that he is no longer able to converse in that tongue but that being able to read in Japanese is enough for him; he also states that, while he respects his wife's decision not to speak Japanese, he has not been quite as able to shake off his roots.

Although he apologises to Muriel, who thought her parents had entirely embraced Canadian culture, he maintains that he and Keiko believed that not teaching Muriel Japanese during her childhood was the best decision. They thought that it would help her grow up as an average Canadian child without feeling alienated. Naturally, as the course of the novel shows, this is proven to have been a false assumption; however, it also suggests how the experience of migration challenges one's perception of self. In this case, it forces characters to neglect their roots in favour of their new home country. Furthermore, the revelation of Muriel's father illustrates how, according to Sasano, “language and culture are not inherent; they can be learned and unlearned” (1).

From a theoretical point of view, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* describes the two differing aspects of cultural identity (cf. Clingman 5). On the one hand, Keiko's acceptance of a multicultural, unified Canada shows how identity has come to represent a “world of flow” and how, as Clingman believes – on this global planet, there “are serious questions as to whether the national has lost its legitimacy” (5).

However, at the same time, from Clingman's perspective, Naoe's insistence on continuing to uphold Japanese values as well as the language itself represents “a singularity when it comes to questions of location, identity, and identification, whether considered in terms of ethnicity, nationality, or religion” (5), where other “possibilities of ‘self’ are sacrificed for the sake of singular identities” (5) under threat by the globalism surrounding them. It is a way of looking at the world that “rules out transition, change, interaction, modulation, morphology, transformation” (5) -- it overlooks another form of identity that is more complex and clashing, namely that of a hybrid that lives between a global and national world.

In the novel's later chapters, Muriel's existence as a Japanese Canadian woman shows a willingness to embrace Japanese culture without fully considering herself Japanese or Canadian, instead displaying an identity somewhere in between, thus fluid and

ever-changing. It also fits into the view of identity as a spatial and temporal entity, meaning that a person's viewpoint of the world moves in a direction and changes over time (Clingman 10). This fluidity of identity is also depicted by how Naoe changes as a character throughout the novel. Upon leaving her chair and daughter's home behind, Naoe sheds her old Japanese woman persona to become someone with a mysterious identity -- at times Japanese, at times Canadian, while at others neither.

While the novel suggests that Naoe and Muriel exist as hybrids with a shared consciousness in later chapters, Muriel uses her grandmother's voice as a coping mechanism. By talking with her grandmother, Muriel can develop a new identity for her grandmother—and, by extension, herself. This new identity uses the Japanese language (which, as mentioned before, Muriel has learnt as an adult) to reframe Japanese myths in a manner that frees both women of the expectations to be good daughters and wives.

For example, Naoe speaks out against the Japanese ideals of a wife and mother. Indeed, Naoe can embrace her new life by shedding and leaving the family unit behind. By doing that, she follows Japanese traditions of not being a burden on her family without seeking death or moving to the mountains¹⁴. On the contrary, the Canadian aspect of Naoe's new identity – which occurs in the book when realism shifts to a more magical existence – is that of a freedom-seeking, adventurous cowboy-like character who travels through cities without stopping long enough for people to learn their names. This new identity is so fluid that it defies age and gender.

Clingman suggests that this way of looking at identity fits into how identity constantly shifts, just like a generative language. Language is like recursion, a mathematical principle focused on iterating and developing anew until a base case appears. However, unlike the mathematical principle, identity—just like a language—is an infinite recursion that keeps growing without an end. Likewise, transnational fiction is a kind of literature focused on fluctuating, travelling stories that do not end at any arbitrary point (Clingman 17).

A Chorus of Mushrooms is a story that defies time and national borders, with the plot jumping from the present to the past and vice versa. Also, the point of view switches from Naoe to

¹⁴ This sentence refers to [*ubasute*](#) -- a Japanese folklore that believes that old people were abandoned in forests or mountains to avoid becoming a burden to their families.

Muriel, with both women blending into each other at some point. Naoe haunts Muriel in the form of her voice. Still, this haunting is not a terrifying experience: Naoe's voice provides comfort, gives advice, and links Muriel with the adventures her grandmother is partaking in, thus allowing her to continue being a part of her life.

In this manner, the novel fits Muriel's complicated identity; she feels neither Canadian nor Japanese, and neither is a blend of both. In the novel's conclusion, she is still searching for her identity, aware that she still hasn't found all the answers to her questions. Like Naoe, Muriel also sets out on a journey to discover who she is and can be. It is a necessary journey that defies convention: rather than accepting her partner's marriage proposal, Muriel decides to set out to find her cultural identity.

What makes the discourse of identity in *A Chorus of Mushrooms* unique is its perspective on immigration, which is not merely about loss or the constant revisiting of haunting memories. It also depicts identity as a road to self-discovery. This process of self-discovery may be daunting and painful at times, but it is a positive experience in the long run. After all, whether she is a ghost or not, Naoe goes from being a fixed element in a household to a person who is always on the move, living on her own terms. In the same manner, Muriel is in the process of carving out an identity for herself, and her journey towards that goal is an experience that may be solitary but also necessary for her to mature as a person.

4.2: Mothers and Daughters: Examining Intergenerational Conflicts

Keiko and her mother, Naoe, share the most meaningful relationship in the novel. Considering the complexity of Naoe and Keiko's bond—especially regarding how they oppose each other—the following chapter analyses mother-daughter relations, using material provided by Adrienne Rich to understand why these two women are so much at odds with each other.

Although Muriel serves as a main character, the defining events in the novel centre around Naoe, who resists everything that her daughter believes in. In a way, the relationship between Keiko and Naoe serves as a metaphor for the differing viewpoints that migrants within a

family often share -- one of complete integration versus upholding traditions from the country they left behind while being linked by emotional bonds strained by these opposites:

This Western food has changed you and you've grown more opaque even as your heart has brittle. Silver-edged and thin as paper. I love you still. You are my daughter, after all, and this you cannot change. For all that you call me Obachan¹⁵ and treat me as a child. I am not your grandmother. I am your mother. (Goto 13)

Muriel, who neither accepts her mother's black-and-white interpretation of Canadian identity nor identifies as Japanese, represents a moderation of both views. Instead, Muriel's identity is still developing into a fluid one that clashes with Keiko's one-sided viewpoint but embraces her grandmother's ideas by following her desire to know more rather than remaining in the same state:

“No, I don't want to be a tourist. And nothing so biblical as a mission. There is a sound I can almost hear, just slightly outside my hearing range. And I want to know what that sound is. What I'm missing. That's about as close as I can get.” (Goto 209)

Naoe is the sole member of the Tonkatsu family who defies Keiko's stubborn ventures into becoming more Canadian. However, her refusal is less apparent than Keiko believes. For example, Naoe's inner monologue reveals that she speaks English enough to access her postal address; she keeps this information a secret from Keiko because of the underlying tension in their relationship and her daughter's unwillingness to embrace her Japanese heritage: “No, child, no. These packages, these gifts are sent to me from your great uncle, my brother and his wife, Fumiko. Yes, there was a time when I was a child and had a baby brother” (Goto 19).

It is implied that Naoe's insistence on speaking Japanese is a method of vexing her daughter: her refusal to act more Canadian is a conscious rebuttal and a realisation that a person can play a role in fleshing out their cultural identity, even if these efforts seem to have little impact on the environment around them: “The word of an old woman can change little in the world and nothing of the past so why this torrent of words, this tumble of sounds such roaring, sweeping chanting sighing. Hummmm. I only know I must” (Goto 21).

Furthermore, Naoe's ability to recognise that a person is in charge of their identity shows in her retelling of Japanese myths. In her narration of these myths, women take charge of their own lives, even ready to kill an unkind husband – a view that is the opposite of the trope that

¹⁵ A Japanese term for *grandmother*.

Japanese women are content to bear the misdeeds of their spouses: “Miwa lifted her graceful foot and crushed him beneath her heel. All that was left was a tiny stain on an otherwise spotless *tatami*¹⁶”(Goto 73).

The power of women shows when, in recounting how the world came to be, Naoe stresses that the sister, Izanami, made the world the place it is rather than her impractical brother, Izanagi¹⁷:

“You said there were no rules!” her brother complained in his normal voice.

“I said there were no rules, but there is such a thing as good taste and understated beauty. Make this *mittomonai* light go away,” Izanami said. “Besides, the sky and water aren’t blue anymore. You made them turn into a sickly olive colour with that awful light.”

“Okay, I take it back.” Izanagi muttered. The sky and water turned blue again and the sickly bright light disappeared. (Goto 31)

All of this hints that Naoe is a strong woman who merely plays the part of the demure Japanese grandmother. What remains ambiguous is whether she does so to fool her daughter into thinking she is harmless or because she feels trapped in the confinements of her home where even the wind seems to mock her: “Who has left that screen door unlatched? The wind is shouting against the door frame, hurling insults at this house, my home” (Goto 11).

Yet, once Naoe has left her old life behind, she transforms herself, becoming more outgoing, adventurous and an embodiment of various cultural influences throughout this process of self-discovery. Naoe's metamorphosis proves that cultural identity is not a whole but a fractured set of diverse beliefs and ideas that Naoe is far more comfortable addressing than Keiko is, acknowledging that change will not always be met with approval: “Some nod their heads, some tip up their hats, and others scowl and spit. When you do something different, not everyone will like you, I’ve noticed. Ahhh, I say, nothing an old woman can’t manage” (Goto 216).

Keiko's notion of identity requires it to be a fixed entity that does not mingle with others and has to be integrated in its entirety to belong to it; this integration does not allow for any surprises either -- which is why Keiko finds it so hard to accept other ways of looking into

¹⁶ A mat used as flooring material in Japanese-style rooms.

¹⁷ More information on the myth can be found here: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Izanagi>

identifying as Canadian. This refusal of anything non-Canadian does not just affect her family's life, but she also expects the migrant workers in her husband's mushroom factory to take on English names. By doing so, she ignores their cultural individuality: “Help me think of some nicknames for these people, “Mom said, “their real names are too hard to pronounce and no one will be able to remember them”” (Goto 34).

Keiko's insistence on static identity hints at her denial about being influenced by Japanese culture; Keiko may believe that she has forgotten her native language and customs, but Naoe's presence is a constant reminder that she has not. Although Keiko pretends not to understand her mother, her inability to ignore her proves that she, at some level, can comprehend what her mother is saying. Or, at the very least, Naoe is a comforting fixture in Keiko's life. Despite that, the rift between Keiko and her mother remains present, to the point that even when Naoe leaves, the issue of Keiko not understanding is still an issue:

No, I must truly leave. Keiko will worry, I suppose for all that she pretends otherwise. But Murasaki, Murasaki, will linger with me forever.

I leave you a letter, Keiko. If you choose, you may understand. (Goto 77)

The underlying rift between Naoe and Keiko stems from the fact that both women are stubborn in their beliefs -- not just that, but they are unwilling to compromise, which keeps them from communicating with each other. Later, the narrative implies that communication would have solved the growing distance between both women. Still, Keiko's refusal to speak Japanese ensures that the relationship with her mother remains at a standstill, with their banter remaining the only reliable way the women talk to each other: “There is little hope left you and me, Keiko. We choose our words and speak them with little time for thought. I know. I know” (Goto 13 - 14).

In addition, it is not just Keiko who refuses to compromise: Naoe herself maintains habits that upset Keiko -- such as allowing moths to grow inside her clothes or eating in an obnoxious and disruptive fashion late at night: ““Obachan, cut that out! We're trying to sleep in here!” Mom yelled from her room. Dad groaned, only waking up because Mom was yelling across his face” (Goto 17).

Furthermore, Naoe remains intent on aggravating Keiko as much as possible to garner a reaction from her daughter, who, otherwise, is content with herself, ignoring her mother's

wishes to speak in Japanese. One could say that this conscious ignoring of her mother's needs is a reflection of Keiko's upbringing; Naoe's narration of her past life in Japan and China reveals that she was not only an aloof wife but also a mother who found herself unable to show any affection towards her daughter to the point that the servant boy served as a stand-in nurse: "Keiko always with the boy, always clinging to the hem of his shirt or sleeve or pocket and he didn't scold me. Keiko never coming to me because I did not answer" (Goto 49).

While the outright cause of that behaviour remains undisclosed, Naoe suffers from a childhood trauma that stems from the fact that she and her family had to uproot all their belongings and abandon their wealthy lifestyles after fellow villagers deceived her father into signing a forged document:

One *hanko*¹⁸. The family seal. Kiyokawa. The simple characters of our family name engraved in ivory and passed down for fourteen generations, our home, our mountain, the land, one stamp. Kiyokawa. Pure river. Ha. Even the purest river can be polluted, and it will be. It was. The villagers plied our Otosan with sweet words and sweeter *sake*. They lulled him with compliments and begged him to sing and to share with them his wisdom. They tricked him into signing documents he was too drunk to see. (Goto 10)

This abrupt lifestyle change forced Naoe to work in an exhausting silkworm factory. Not only that, but Naoe found herself unable to continue her education. This new-found poverty limited her options and plunged her into the only role available for women in Japan at the time, namely that of a mother and wife; this role was something that Naoe was never comfortable with, as highlighted in her wishes to carry on her father's name. When Naoe found herself married against her will, she acted passive-aggressively towards her husband, unwilling to please him sexually or emotionally: "I left the comfort of my *futon* and crawled beneath his blankets, face rigid and spine stiff" (Goto 24). As a result of her actions, the marriage ended in divorce, with Naoe eventually leaving her husband behind in Japan.

While Keiko's feelings towards her upbringing are a matter of speculation, her reluctance to compromise with her mother may be an action born out of spite; in other words, it could be that Keiko remembers Naoe's maternal neglect and feels that now that Naoe is reliant on her, she can only give back what she received herself in the past. Consequently, her feelings towards her mother's emotional needs are dismissive and negligent at best, with Keiko often referring to Naoe's musings as an early sign of dementia, unaware of the fact that Naoe

¹⁸ A carved stamp that can be used as a signature: <https://tokyocheapo.com/shopping-2/hanko-japanese-personal-seals/>.

eavesdrops upon these conversations: ““Sam, I think Obachan has finally gone senile,” Keiko hisses. Funny how the dark can carry sound so lightly”” (Goto 40).

Naoe, in turn, seems more than content to play the role of a maddened older woman: she looks so starved for affection that even Keiko’s anger is better than nothing. Despite these problems, there is still an element of warmth and love between Keiko and Naoe, especially regarding their ear-cleaning ritual -- it is a tradition that Keiko and Naoe have brought with them from Japan. Keiko’s adherence to the practice and the unspoken trust in her mother proves that a part of her still relies on her mother -- and, by extension, her Japanese identity. It also shows that Naoe is a comfort to Keiko: in fact, Naoe is the last connection Keiko has to Japan, to the point that she does not hesitate to clean Muriel’s ears when asked:

“Obachan used to clean your ears?” I was amazed. It seemed like I was being amazed quite often, lately. Wondering what it meant.

“Oh yes. She was really good at it too.” (Goto 156)

The importance of this connection—and Naoe herself—is evident when Keiko falls apart upon her mother’s disappearance. Unable to deal with her mother’s absence, Keiko retreats into her bedroom, refusing to get up and partake in day-to-day activities. This extreme reaction is akin to the paralysis one encounters after a traumatic event: Keiko seems unable to grasp that her mother is gone.

This fact pinpoints that -- in many ways -- Naoe, as much as she may have annoyed Keiko, was a necessary fixture in her life. Moreover, Keiko’s conflicted feelings towards her mother highlight the complexity of their relationship, which may border on mutual annoyance and disdain but is also rooted in love, often highlighted in their wordless interactions: “Keiko has finished massaging she wipes my face with a hot towel, so that when the heat evaporates, it takes with it any remaining aches” (Goto 43).

Rich states that mother-daughter relationships are complex, not only because of their biological similarities but also because of the intimate nature of their origins. After all, a mother gives birth to her daughter and provides maternal affection and comfort. This emotional connection is essential for the daughter as this maternal affection is often the first insight into the love and relationships she will experience (Rich 220-225).

An absence of maternal affection leads daughters growing up to become women who cannot express their feelings- such a void in emotions makes these women unprepared to deal with experiences such as childbirth or impart essential life lessons to their children (Rich 234). This inability to showcase affection is evident in Keiko. Since a distant mother raised her, shallow conversations in the former and emotional neglect in the latter characterise her relationships with Muriel and Naoe, to the point that Muriel suggests she tried erasing the presence of Naoe altogether:

Mom never told any stories. No compound sentences for that woman, she thrived on subject verb object. But I guess I can't complain. She made my life easy and easy to assimilate if your grandmother is skinny enough to be stuffed in a closet. Not that she ever did and not that Obachan would ever allow it. But in Mom's mind, the closet door never opened. (Goto 68)

Rich says that another critical aspect of mother and daughter relationships is the feeling of guilt that mothers feel towards their daughters; this guilt is due to anxiety and worries about not having raised their daughters to become respectful women -- respectful, in this case, is identified to be what the patriarchy deems it to be. Feelings of guilt often prove to be a stumbling block for mothers and daughters, as such guilt manifests in disapproval and outright rejection. Mothers find themselves unable to cope with their daughters' lifestyles, while daughters try to rebel against the weaknesses that their mothers showcased while raising them. In the case of a biological mother being absent -- a substitute mother can be just as important, if not more so (Rich 235-252).

Naoe and Keiko's interactions show the rebellion and guilt in mother-and-daughter relationships. Naoe feels guilty over having abandoned Keiko in her childhood years but also expresses disappointment in how Keiko chooses to live her life. In one scene, Naoe muses: "She's an ivory girl with eyebrows plucked and pencilled in darker. It's funny how children grow inside your body, but they turn out to be strangers. Funny how you can love someone but never learn to like them." (Goto 69)

A Chorus of Mushrooms is a harrowing but realistic portrayal of a broken mother and daughter relationship where both parties cannot bridge the gap between them. Keiko can only overcome her trauma by bonding with her daughter over Japanese food, which restores some of her lost identity and allows her to pass on some of her mother's teachings to Muriel. While this is not a substitute for the hole that Naoe has left behind in Keiko's life, Keiko can find

solace in the fact that Japanese food has opened up a connection with Muriel; it further allows her to repair her relationship with Muriel who, before that, relied on Naoe to learn about the Japanese language, but – with her opening up toward her heritage – lets her share her knowledge with her daughter:

When Mom reached the bottom of the stairs, I held out my hand and she took it. We walked to the table together. Mom paused before she sat down and looked at the food before her.

“Where are the *hashi*?” She asked. “Chopsticks.” Her voice creaky with disuse (Goto 151).

Muriel and Naoe's close relationship showcases how the ideas of a non-biological mother being a fundamental influence in a woman's life come to fruition (Rich 252); it is through Naoe's power that Muriel herself becomes interested in Japanese culture, going so far as to learn the language and not take her mother's point of view for granted, instead accepting the small tokens of Japanese identity that Keiko is willing to experience: “She still cooked her lasagne and roast chicken, her blocks of beef, but sometimes, on a holiday weekend, she would ask me to whip up something from “my little cook book,” as she called it. And I knew” (Goto 191).

Naoe herself, through her influence on Muriel, encourages her not to feel any anger towards her mother, thus enabling Keiko and Muriel to have a better relationship that does not end in a complete breakdown of conversations while Keiko is recovering from her breakdown; they are even able to discuss Japanese literature together and reference Muriel's namesake:

“Well, there was a woman named Murasaki Shikibu born in the late tenth century Japan.”

“This sounds more promising.”

“She is the first person to write a novel. As far as we know,” Mom amended. “Well not a novel in the Western sense, because it was written on scrolls but she was the first person to write a long piece of prose that was in fact a story and not just a diary or some sort of lesson.” (Goto 165)

More than that, Naoe's strength and ability to cope with change inspires Muriel to become an independent woman who is comfortable not adhering to social expectations but instead focuses on herself and her journey. Indeed, Naoe's departure positively affected her life. It allowed her to grow closer to her mother and take charge of her life. Additionally, she could

remain close to Naoe by learning the Japanese language and embracing the identity that Keiko tried to suppress.

4.3: The Use of Language as a Means of Preserving Cultural Identity

Language plays a pivotal role in *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, mainly when the narrative – often dealing with Muriel relaying her grandmother's stories to her lover – contains Japanese phrases. Considering this aspect of the novel, the following chapter deals with language and its link to preserving cultural identity using research by Meir Sternberg, Mari Sasano and Lynne A. Magnusson.

During the story, Japanese utterances are untranslated – leaving the reader feeling as left out and out of the loop as the granddaughter initially herself. However, using Japanese is not alienating; it connects with the English language: the fairytales switch back and forth between the two languages, allowing the reader to understand what is going on, even if not every single sentence or word is translated.

Moreover, this usage of both languages is a metaphor for the close bond that Naoe shares with her granddaughter - while her speaking Japanese pushes Keiko away (as it stands for everything that Keiko has wanted to forget and move on from), Muriel is drawn to the foreignness of her grandmother's words, finding in them some semblance of what she has been missing all along. It is a way to fill the void that her parents' obstinate adoption of Canadian culture has left behind.

Furthermore, these two languages represent the merging and fusing of Naoe's identity with that of her granddaughter to the point where it becomes difficult to distinguish the two characters later in the story. In this case, language represents a connecting thread between the two women and a union that transcends time, reality and even a sense of self.

While language is a barrier in the relationship between Naoe and Keiko, Japanese is also a continuous reminder of how powerless Keiko is in the face of the truth. Not only does Naoe refuse to shed her Japanese self by speaking in her mother tongue, but she also provides her daughter with a constant reflection of where she came from; the nonsensical and annoying

utterances that Keiko wants to ignore so much are a part of her that she cannot run away from, no matter how much she wishes to.

Sternberg views Babel's fall as a hidden blessing in disguise, as the complicated nature of language renders translation difficult. This event in the Bible showcased the fallacy of the belief that language is universal and highlights how language is a complex and often underestimated subject area. This fact is not just due to the problems of finding an appropriate word for a given source language in the target one but also ensuring that the meaning remains steadfast in the sense it is to be understood (Sternberg 221).

Sternberg states that literature suffers from the difficulty of how “to represent the reality of polylingual discourse through a communicative medium which is normally unilingual” (222), as there will always be a clash between such an ideal and the need to capture the complex nature of using multiple languages. However, “the problem of heterolingual or translational mimesis can [...] be variously circumvented by three drastic procedures: 1. referential restriction; 2. vehicular matching; 3. homogenizing convention” (223).

According to Sternberg, “referential restriction” refers to “confining the scope of the represented world to the limits of a single, linguistically uniform community whose speech-patterns correspond to those of the implied audience” (223); in other words, the fictional world is a place familiar to the audience regarding its linguistic landscape. For example, *Harry Potter* takes place in the United Kingdom, and the language used throughout the novel is English—this ensures that the intended audience is acquainted with the setting and how the characters interact verbally from the start.

Sternberg says that “vehicular matching” is the opposite of “referential restriction”: it “on the other hand, far from avoiding linguistic diversity or conflict, accepts them as a matter of course, as a fact of life and a factor of communication” (223). It uses the vocabulary the reader is familiar with to bridge the gap between it and anything that falls outside of the audience's understanding. An example of such a novel would be *Jane Eyre*'s use of French. While the primary language throughout the story is English, French is used to highlight the foreignness of Jane's pupil, and Jane's knowledge of the French language helps the reader better understand the ramblings of the little girl.

In opposition to that, Sternberg notes that “homogenising convention” accepts language variation in its fictional worlds but has the characters dismiss any interpretation that does not fit the acceptable standard (Sternberg 224). For example, in *The Kappa Child*, which will be discussed in later chapters, the *kappa* speaks the narrator's language while addressing its audience without this seeming strange or remarkable: “*I am a creature of the water. I am a kappa child. Come and embrace me*” (Goto 276). For Sternberg, using language in such a way helps streamline the narrative to portray worlds with multilingual cultures, thus avoiding the complexity and chaos of depicting a universe that would, in reality, contain several linguistic variations (Sternberg 224).

As Sternberg points out, these “three representations eliminate the complications of imitating foreign (“heterolingual”) speech” (224). Consequently, Sternberg adds that “a mixed representation of polylingual or heterolingual discourse may ultimately be reduced, however, to four distinct types of procedures of translational mimesis” (225), broken down into four categories: “selective reproduction”, “verbal transposition”, “conceptual reflection”, and “explicit attribution”, each which will be discussed in the following few paragraphs.

Sternberg explains that “selective reproduction” refers to “the form of intermittent quotation of the original heterolingual discourse as uttered by the speaker(s), or in literature as supposed to have been uttered by the fictive” (225); it appears in works such as *War and Peace* and in titles such as the *Bible* (Sternberg 225).

Sternberg maintains that a more varied category is “verbal transposition,” the practice of writers incorporating certain linguistic features of a source language into the target language to provide an interplay between both variations. More precisely, such an interplay offers the opportunity to refer to multilingual characters who have difficulty expressing their thoughts in a language that is not their native (Sternberg 227-228).

For Sternberg, even further removed from a “verbal disposition” is the concept of “conceptual reflection”. It is not just the integration of linguistic features into a target language but also an attempt to encode the strangeness by using different mediums, such as reporting from an outsider's point of view or using a lexical/referential deficiency on the part of the target language. Sometimes, codification can be so subtle that it is mistaken for monolingualism (Sternberg 230-231).

Sternberg describes the last category as “explicit attribution,” which refers to the principle of “a direct statement on the reporter's (or even the reportee's) part concerning the language (or some aspect of the language) in which the reported speech was originally made” (231). This category can lead to homogenising convention in extreme cases as the line between the target and source language is unclear (Sternberg 232).

To sum up the points in the previous paragraphs, Sternberg points out that these various procedures and categories are often mixed and matched in works of literature, with their interpretation proving difficult as literature adheres to conventions that go beyond considering the rightfulness of a given translation (Sternberg 232).

Considering the points above and the context of *A Chorus of Mushrooms*’ plot, Hiromi Goto's use of Japanese may be described as “vehicular matching” as the narrator closes the bridge between the two languages. Her narration allows the reader to glimpse her grandmother's thoughts and inner life, a feat that would only have been rendered realistic with the use of Japanese.

Moreover, the intermittent usage of untranslated Japanese serves as an example of transnational disposition as it depicts the mindset of two women stuck between two worlds. The mingling of Japanese and English reminds them that, in their experience, there is no precise way to divide or separate these two worlds.

This use of linguistic features places *A Chorus of Mushrooms* in direct opposition to *Obasan*, where silence depicts Naomi's isolation from the world around her. Silence does not erase the rift between her and her aunt or help her understand her identity. The Japanese language is an identifying feature that sets her apart from her peers and herself as she remains trapped in two worlds without feeling at home (cf. Magnusson 58-63).

In contrast, using the Japanese language allows Murasaki to access her Canadian and Japanese identities (cf. Sasano 1). Instead of being confused by speaking two languages as her mother believes (she refuses to raise her daughter in a bilingual fashion for that reason), Murasaki eventually benefits from understanding the languages of both cultures – not only

can she understand the nuances of both English and Japanese, but she also understands how easy it is to slip between both:

And you know what I learned, Obachan? I learned that there's no way to say I love in Japanese except to a spouse or lover. Not to your sister or brother or daughter or son or aunt or uncle or mother or father. Or grandmother. All you can say is *Daisuki yo*. A tepid, I like you very much. But I'm glad I learned Japanese because now I can juggle two languages and when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue, I'll reach for it in English. So I say to you in English. I love you, Obachan (Goto 54).

This slippery quality of language shows when Naoe claims to understand English yet refuses to use it - this is a choice rather than an inability to pick up the features of the English language (cf. Sasano 1). Moreover, Keiko can understand Japanese, no matter how much she attempts to hide it, only allowing that part of her to slip through in the rare instances when she is vulnerable and honest with her mother, Naoe:

Keiko's face relaxes, the tight muscles beside her mouth lose their ache and her lips look soft and full. She lies on her side and rests her head on my bony lap. She hands me the *mimikaki*¹⁹ and I peer into her ear.

“*Ara - ippai aru janai no. Yoku kikoeta ne.*”²⁰”

“I know,” Keiko says, her voice husky, “do it softly” (Goto 47).

Naoe understands and can mock the English language, using it to hide her intelligence. This action shows how her refusal is not only a choice but also subverts the stereotype of the clueless immigrant who is like a child when picking up new customs: “Solly, Obachan no speeku Eeenglishu. Maybe I am the fool, but stubborn I am and will remain” (Goto 4).

Naoe's silence does not mean she approves of Keiko's choices (cf. Sasano 1). Instead, Naoe leads a double life: on the outside, she appears as an elderly Japanese grandmother with a limited grasp of English; however, she keenly observes her mailbox: “I have my own box at the post office, but you don't know, Keiko. I pay for it with the coins I collect from the coach cracks after dark” (Goto 14 - 15).

For Sasano, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* shows that “listening and silence are as important as talking” (1); language becomes an unfeeling entity that allows its users to communicate without worrying about the method of conveyance, meaning that “everyone seems to

¹⁹ Earpicks made out of bamboo.

²⁰ Translates to: “Your ears are full, aren't they? You can't hear me well.”

communicate without being conscious of language” (1). Indeed, Naoe, her granddaughter, and their respective lovers can talk without bothering with “frivolities like what language they are actually using” (1).

While Hiromi Goto does not translate her Japanese phrases (cf. Sasano 1), the limited use of Japanese in *Obasan* uses visual identifiers such as an “italicized roman script (another marker for difference) and the text will repeat immediately the same phrase in English” (1). Like Kogawa, Japanese words are sometimes repeated in English in *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, allowing non-Japanese speakers to understand their meaning: “My back groaning, *akiramete*. Give up” (Goto 21).

The Japanese phrases that remain untranslated are often used to display the interactions between Muriel and her grandmother, whose relationship remains close despite the linguistic barrier: “From cranny to closet I scurried about, hands on my knees and all hunched over. Obachan said, “*Kore, Murasaki-chan. Nani o shiteru no ka na?*”²¹” as I scuttled to and fro, from kitchen to hallway to living room closet” (Goto 61).

4.4: The Concept of the Nation and Canadian Identity

A Chorus of Mushrooms is a partial response to the novel *Obasan*, published in 1981, which is evident in the novel’s usage of the Japanese word *mukashi mukashi*, which translates as ‘a long time ago’. This relationship to Joy Kogawa's book allows Goto's work to reimagine Japanese traditions and recreate/reproduce concepts of Canadian identity. More precisely, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* is an attempt to rewrite the limiting idea of the nation. Due to this fact, this chapter examines the concept of a nation and its relationship to Canadian identity, with views from scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha and Mari Sasano playing an important role.

According to Bhabha, the notion of a nation results from a process that requires people to ascribe to it in a repetitive and reproductive fashion. This process comes from a historical event given the authority to erase any concepts of identity that took place before it to keep this process mentioned above alive – or, in other words, allow it to continue being a living, breathing, and continuously replicating process, with identities often fusing, become

²¹ Translates to: “What are you doing, Murasaki?”

indistinguishable from one another (Bhabha 297). *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, which takes on a postmodernist and magical realism tint in its later chapters, voices these sentiments when it comes to the duplicitous identity of Muriel/Naoe²²: “When does one thing end and another begin? Can you separate the two?” (Goto 213).

As such, Sasano states that the Tonkatsu family, situated in a space that tries to be Canadian but also ascribes to old, traditional Japanese myths, attempts to be “a different, acceptable, yet subversive Canadian identity” (1). However, facing social marginalisation due to their cultural background, the characters in *A Chorus of Mushrooms* reject stereotypical ideas of what it means to be either Japanese or Canadian but choose to write their own identity instead, as in the case of Muriel who has given herself a new name: “My name is Murasaki. My mother calls me Muriel, but I outgrew that name when I came to realize that I came from a background that wasn’t Occidental. Whatever that means” (Goto 189).

Naoe's character also represents the spirit of this choice by refusing to adhere to traditional role models; in other words, she refuses to be a homely Japanese grandmother, shown especially in scenes where she dwells on her desire for sexual contact: “Eighty-five years old and horny as a musk-drenched cat. The only human contact I have now is when Keiko washes my hair” (Goto 39).

Naoe is equally unwilling to accept that she should embrace Canadian culture to become a more idealised, socially acceptable version of an immigrant – something that even her granddaughter Muriel was irritated with: “Of course, there was tension because she lived with us in Nanton and couldn’t keep her mouth shut. Of course there were times when I was acutely embarrassed. Of course” (Goto 93).

In contrast to the points above, Sasano comments, “*Obasan*, on the other hand, emerges from a different historical moment: though the characters deal with similar issues, the kind of play with identity that Goto’s novel engages in is not yet possible” (1). For example, supporting Sasano’s statement is the character of Stephen, who displays discomfort at embracing any part of his Japanese heritage:

Fubuki hodo, chika yori soe ba, atataka shi,” Uncle responds in mock formality.

²² At some point, the narrator becomes fragmented, making it difficult to discern/distinguish between the two individuals.

"Whazzat?" Stephen asks.

It's a haiku, a seventeen-syllable word picture.

Stephen rubs the sticky sugar of the doughnut off his stubbly chin and keeps rubbing in his nervous way. He is always uncomfortable when anything is "too Japanese". (Kogawa 174)

The only way to be Canadian in *Obasan* is by accepting any concepts and ideas accompanying such an identity, a stance that Muriel's father defends by saying, "We decided your Mom and I, that we would put Japan behind us and fit more smoothly with the crowd" (Goto 207). The unfortunate implication behind such a way of thinking is that embracing Japanese ideas is considered too different and foreign, paving the path for racism (cf. Sasano 1).

However, a further problem arising from such a philosophy is that assimilation is impossible as racial minorities new to the host country are likened to children regarding their intellectual capabilities, with their identities often being mistaken for another as individuality has been erased to be replaced by unfortunate stereotypes:

"But I am not Chinese, I protested."

"Yes, you are. You are! You are! You're a slanty-eyed Chinaman. Hweee chong chop chop ching Ahhh so! There, what did I just say now. Tell me what I said in Chinaman."

I was confused. (Goto 53)

Moreover, racial minorities are treated as foreigners due to looking different (cf. Sasano 1). Despite the rise of multiculturalism in Canada, it still places ethnic minorities outside of the centre: the mainstream idea of Canadian identity is mainly white, and more foreign aspects of it are used to enrich that already predominant concept of whiteness shown in an encounter that Muriel experiences at an airport by someone who is of Japanese heritage himself:

I met this guy at the airport in the departures area. Where are you going, he said. Japan, I said. Back to the 'ole homeland, huh, he said. You know you're pretty cute for a Nip. He said. Most Nips are pretty damn ugly. All that inbreeding. (Goto 53)

Naoe and Murasaki reject this predominant view of Canadian identity by accepting that it is better to be different and loud while acting out such a lifestyle (cf. Sasano 1). Muriel has two identities—one Canadian and another one that is very aware of her cultural differences,

displayed best in a scene where she is confronted with how little she knows about Japanese food: “Is that the same *tonkatsu*²³ like my name?” (Goto 137).

Names such as Muriel and Murasaki denote these two different personalities, which she uses to move between both identities, allowing her and – later on – Naoe to choose between the identity she was born with and one that will enable her to decide who she wants to be: “Trade a bowl of soup and a slice of bread for a tale or two. If anybody could live that way, it would be Obachan” (Goto 201).

Throughout the novel, both women adopt other names, such as Tengu, as their identities shift and change. This usage of names is different from how Keiko changed her name to Kay (Goto 189). This change is not a vehicle to display the pluralities of her identity but to better fit into Canadian society, to the point that she avoids anything that could thwart that: “I would never move to Vancouver to retire. There are too many Japanese there who wish they were in Japan” (Goto 189). Similarly, the characters in *Obasan* change their names to hide their Japanese identities (Sasano 1).

Murasaki does not subscribe to any cultural identity; she does not wear clothing with any logos. Eventually, she slips between the two cultures like an amphibian, which her partner notes: ““You smell different,” he continued, “I can’t tell whether you or not you’ve just arrived or if you’re just about to leave””(Goto 58).

Muriel’s character development – discussed in chapter [4.1](#) – places her as the opposite of the character Aunt Emily in *Obasan*, who believes that Japanese Canadians are Canadians and nothing else: “Wherever the words “Japanese race” appeared, Aunt Emily had crossed them out and written “Canadian citizen” (Kogawa 33).

Emily does not see a contradiction between being Canadian and having Japanese origins; however, such a mindset does not describe the problematic position of being part of a country that has and continues to act in a racist fashion towards certain citizens – a feat that seems to render Emily’s actions and desire to make non-Japanese Canadians understand her life’s mission nearly futile:

²³ A Japanese dish consisting of a breaded, deep-fried pork cutlet.

All her life, it seemed to me, Aunt Emily toiled to tell of the lives of the Nisei in Canada in her effort to make familiar, to make knowable, the treacherous yellow peril that lived in the minds of the racially prejudiced. I pictured her as a young woman in Toronto, gradually getting more hunched as she sat over her typewriter, growing gray over the years, erasing, rewriting, underlining, trying to find the right mix that strikes home. Like Cupid, she aimed for the heart. But the heart was not there. (Kogawa 38 - 39)

Despite being the most traditionally Japanese member of the Tonkatsu family, Naoe also shows how immigration shapes a person. Living in Alberta has enabled Naoe to criticise her homeland, as demonstrated in her retelling of Japanese fairy tales. In her stories, Naoe is critical of the roles of Japanese women, who are implied to exist only for the sake of a man's happiness: "When Miwa lay down to sleep beside her new husband, he cared not a whit for her pleasure, but tore into her in what he thought suited his manly pleasure" (Goto 72).

In the end, when—as already mentioned—the novel takes on a more postmodernist approach to its narration, Naoe herself subverts the idea of Canadianness by becoming a rodeo rider²⁴—this shows how even someone non-white can become Canadian: "Can't hear the crowds or the rodeo announcer. The sound all muffled into the background. Only the bull and me, never partners but never really enemies" (Goto 218).

4.5: Retelling Fairy Tales and Trauma

Beyond the novel's investigations into the poetics of language and its historical importance concerning Japanese Canadians during WWII, *Obasan* has become an essential source of analysis regarding its relationship with other literary works – particularly fairy tales. As the previous [chapter](#) mentioned, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* mimics *Obasan's* use of untranslated Japanese phrases and further expands on its usage of fairy tale motifs. Consequently, this chapter explores how fairy tales are linked with trauma, with work by Ruta Slapkauskaite, Mari Sasano and Shu Meng serving as a foundation.

Slapkauskaite describes "intertextuality as a process in which heterogeneous elements (referential texts) are mediated through the narrative space of another text" (29). She adds that it is a process where the texts "may in a peculiar way resemble the processes of

²⁴ At this point in the story, it is unclear if Muriel is narrating the story in place of Naoe or whether Naoe has merged with her. Consequently, the text can be read in a variety of ways.

acculturation of diasporic groups in a multicultural society” (29). During this interplay of cultural exchange, “a dominant pattern of power positions [...] transform themselves into the foreground” (29).

Obasan, Slapkauskaite states, is an example of such a cultural exchange as it “alerts us to the conspicuous presence of silence as the failure of language to overcome pain, and to constellations of symbolic imagery through which the narrative dramati[s]es the semantics of belonging, absence, and loss within a definite historically-bound and at the same time very personal context of Japanese Canadian experience” (30). The imagery – depicted through, as Slapkauskaite says, “stones [that] are as mute as the words coming from Naomi's body” (30) – transcends the Canadian mosaic, creating a narrative that paints a picture of trauma and loss of identity suffered by its heroine, Naomi, with her pain and despair showcased by the opening paragraphs:

Beneath the grass, the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea. The speech that frees comes forth from that amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone.

I admit it.

I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I hate the sealed vault with its cold icon. I hate the staring into the night. The questions thinning into space. The sky swallowing the echoes. (Kogawa 7)

To further retreat into her silent world, Naomi views the world through the lens of a child, as – according to Slapkauskaite, she “is halted in the formation of her adult self because of being haunted by the memories of her childhood” (34). Therefore, Naomi uses fairy tales to make sense of her environment in the only way she knows how, especially since fairy tales remind her of happier days.

An example of such a story, Slapkauskaite mentions, is *Momotaro*, which “marks Naomi's early illusion that her inner world is safe and her home protected” (35). Therefore, a return to it enables Naomi to forget about her trauma for a while but also – simultaneously – reminds her of what she has lost:

Each night from the beginning, before I could talk, there were the same stories, the voices of my mother or my father or Obasan or Grandma Kato, soft through the filter of my sleepiness, carrying me away to a shadowy ancestry.

“Tonight, which story? Momotaro again?”

Night after night I asked for Momotaro. What remains as I remember the story, beyond the rhythm of the words and the comfort and closeness, is our transport to the gray-green woods where we hover and spread like tree spirits, our ears and our eyes, raindrops resting on leaves and grass stems. (Kogawa 50)

It is through the medium of fairy tales that Naomi can express her feelings of displacement and convey the racist experiences that she underwent as a child along with her brother, with the example below listing such a traumatic event:

"Don't notice," he whispers, barely moving his mouth.

Percy has a handful of stones and throws them down the road. When he sees us, he calls out, "Hey, Gimp, where ya goin'?"

"Takin' yer girlfriend to school?" the other boy shouts.

They catch up to us and begin dancing in front of Stephen, jabbing him on the shoulder. "Fight, Jap. Fight!" (Kogawa 124)

For example, she references putting Humpty Dumpty²⁵ from Lewis Carol's *Through the Looking Glass* together again when restoring her fragmented identity (Slapkauskaite 31). Humpty Dumpty not only showcases her mental state and fragmented relationship with Japan but also refers to how she views her brother Stephen, a boy "missing of parents, mistrust of the world, sense of broken identity" (32), with the fictional figure showing his "inner anxieties, revealing his fears and distress" (32).

Stephen's identity has become so broken and fractured that he rejects his Japanese heritage entirely (cf. Slapkauskaite 31) to the point that Naomi identifies more Westernised story figures with him, even villainous ones: "Back and forth he goes, like Long John Silver with a peg leg, like a sailor on a rolling ship. Step hop, step hop" (Kogawa 111).

Another example of how fairy tale imagery is incorporated in *Obasan* is how Kogawa compares the character of Peter Pan with Naomi: her inability to process her emotions maturely renders her childlike and unable to move on. Slapkauskaite further states that the "text alerts us to the aspect of infancy as the crucial stage in Naomi's identity construction" (34).

²⁵ A link to the actual text: https://saban.org/looking_glass6.php

Yet, Meng states that despite fairytales portraying an idealised notion of the world, Naomi can process complex emotions and experiences – such as sexual molestation – with their help as they offer a “dose of therapeutic potion to sooth[e] her anxieties and despair” (70). Naomi matures as a person, thus helping her start a quest to rediscover herself and finally understand the truth about her mother and why her death was kept a secret: “Mother. I am listening. Assist me to hear you.” (Kogawa 191).

Trauma and incorporating fairy tales into memories are also crucial aspects of *A Chorus of Mushrooms*. While the fairy tales narrated by Naoe emphasise female self-empowerment, they also have an element of overcoming trauma. Murasaki breathes new life into her grandmother by recounting her adventures as a cowboy hat-wearing vagabond²⁶.

In a more realistic reading of the novel, the emotional implication behind these stories is grief; it is grief over losing her grandmother and the trauma of having had to process the experience of seeing her family fall apart as a teenager. While Japanese food, as discussed in previous sections of this chapter, brought Keiko back into the family, it is Japanese fairy tales that enable Murasaki to come to terms with losing her grandmother. Like Naomi, who uses stories from her childhood to feel closer to an absent mother, Murasaki uses these stories to keep her relationship with Naoe alive.

By keeping this relationship dynamic and continuously flowing, Murasaki re-asserts her Japanese identity, which was first shaped by her grandmother’s fairy tales. These myths ranged from how the world was created²⁷ to older people retreating to the mountains to stop being a burden to their families²⁸; her grandmother's stories were based on traditional Japanese ones but with an updated twist. Naoe uses these stories to criticise the status of women in Japan and to come to terms with her privileged background as a child (Sasano 1).

Not only that, but Naoe provided Murasaki with the ability to understand her Japanese ancestry, but -- as related in the previous paragraph -- with a more critical eye. Rather than glamorising Japan, Murasaki can separate the good things about Japan from the less desirable ones: this keeps her from over-idealising Japan and falling into the trap of becoming overly

²⁶ Tales of moving from one place to another are popular in Japan. For example, *Takehiko Inoue's Vagabond* is based on the life of the fictionalised swordsman Musashi Miyamoto.

²⁷ A text describing the creation of the world: https://www.cs.williams.edu/~lindsey/myths/myths_17.html

²⁸ This a direct reference to [ubasute](#).

hostile towards Canada. Indeed, while Murasaki is a chameleon who can slip between Japanese and Canadian identities, she is comfortable doing so, having overcome the shame of being different from others in her teenage years (Sasano 1).

Unlike Naomi, she is not looking for an identity and can cope with the more conflicting aspects of her familial background. As such, she can live on her own terms, knowing that her identity will keep moving like the cowboy she keeps telling stories about. Similarly, Naoe can move on from the expectations of being a static older woman. By uprooting herself, she, too, can rebuild her identity.

Fairy tales are a means to overcome grief and help Naoe and Murasaki come to terms with Keiko's hostile stance towards Japan and any Japanese sentiments. Retelling stories in Japanese gives Naoe the ability to forge a connection with her granddaughter, enabling her to get attuned to the language. Moreover, fairy tales also convey the power of words – more than the written word, it is active participation in conversation that allows one to partake in a cultural exchange. It is a vibrant and ever-changing cultural exchange that allows its participants to be active agents in developing an identity; it is a collaborative event that gives everyone a chance to partake in it.

While writing is necessary, the fact that Murasaki's father has forgotten to speak Japanese showcases how paramount the process of telling stories is: it allows one to immerse oneself in a story and, by extension, become part of it. By being able to read and write in Japanese, he can only be part of the Japanese community in a static way. Having lost the ability to speak in it, he cannot fully experience his identity as a Japanese man nor connect to his daughter emotionally.

Chapter 5: The Kappa Child: The Kappa as a Way of Healing Familial Trauma

Overview of *The Kappa Child*

The *Kappa Child* is a story about an unnamed Japanese Canadian woman who believes she has fallen pregnant after a non-penetrative sexual encounter with a water creature on a lunar night at the Calgary airport. Although she shows no physical signs of pregnancy, she starts craving cucumbers. This fact makes her believe she is carrying the same water creature in her belly that ‘impregnated’ her in the first place.

While ruminating over her adolescent years, the narrator finds herself confronted with her past and present. Having spent most of her life escaping emotions, the narrator must come to terms with her past experiences and find a path towards happiness in her current life. These steps include coming to terms with her unresolved feelings for her friend Midori, who has recently embarked on a romantic relationship with her other close friend, Genevieve.

5.1: Growing up on the Prairie: An Analysis of an Unhappy Childhood

One of the central themes in *The Kappa Child* is the narrator’s strained relationship with her family, in particular, the one with her verbally and physically abusive father; the following chapter analyses – in depth – the impact of the narrator’s unhappy childhood on her life.

With *The Kappa Child* set in Alberta, also referred to as the Canadian prairies, with no precise location specified, the unnamed narrator grows up in a harsh climate that proves to be unyielding. In many ways, it is a landscape that fails to live up to the promise of growing Japanese rice -- a dream that made her father uproot his family to Alberta in the first place, with the implication that his word was the final one:

The charm dropped off his face and he snatched another piece of chicken from the moist box. “You don’t like my choice?” he chewed, spraying some soggy crumbs with the force of his word.

“No, Dad, I-I really like it here. There’s lots of room,” Slither started sniffing. (Goto 36)

In addition, her father states that they left Japan to avoid working for others; however, the narrator implies that her father's dreams were based on fantasy, bordering on a delusion: "The nasal spray didn't happen until the dry, dry prairies for some strange reasons filled my father's head with mucus so thick he couldn't breathe without it. Nasal spray. His cavities filled with memories lost, or an unattainable future" (Goto 126).

This fact, in turn, also implies that her father's dreams are the main reason behind all these migrations, with his wife and children just tagging along for the ride – often unwillingly, without knowing all the relevant details:

No one knew what compelled our father to try and grow Japanese rice in Alberta. No one knew what we were doing in boxcars disguised as a motel. No one knew how long we had to stay there. No one knew.

What we did know was that no one would save us. (Goto 114)

While it is unclear when the narrator and her sisters emigrated from Japan, it is apparent that they all speak Japanese, as evidenced by the fact that they understand their mother's Japanese ramblings. At the very least, the narrator and her siblings understand Japanese well enough to get by, to the point that they are also familiar with Japanese folktales and myths, with the narrator mocking her older sister in regards to these stories:

"Okasan," Slither moaned. "Okasan, I can't go into an outhouse. It'll make me sick. All those flies. Maggots."

"Don't forget the kappa," I jeered. "They like pretty girls. When you go at night, it'll touch your butt." (Goto 130).

This connection to Japan also shows how the narrator loves her father's stories about the *kappa*²⁹ - a mythical creature with webbed feet that looks like a child and lives in the river. It also has a dent on its head containing water -- this water is its source of life. The narrator often reminisces upon folk tales of this creature as these stories are what brought their family closer together during less trying times. The few positive glimpses regarding the memories of her father reveal that his retelling of these stories made the narrator feel closer to him: "A head just like mine," Dad muttered, low and warm and my heart almost burst. "Come. I have a story to tell you about water" (Goto 133).

²⁹ More information on the *kappa* can be found in the [appendix](#).

Otherwise, the relationship with her father is troubled, with the narrator often characterising him as a short-tempered man who lashes at his family when feeling distressed or they commit the most trifling of mistakes, such as the narrator leaving eggs in the car as a child:

There was a long silence while Dad thought about my confession. I stared at the dusty grass stains on my sneakers. Dad slipped his nasal spray into his front pockets.

“Raise your head,” he said quietly. And I did.

Smack! The sound exploded in my ears, the thud of brain against skull, the pain last, and I gasped, tears flung through the air. (Goto 179)

In particular, the narrator feels angered whenever thinking back to the abuse that her father directed towards her mother and other sisters -- mainly because the work was too difficult for them: “At least my body was built for the work, at least my girth could turn into gristly muscle, resistant to gravitational deterioration. My ugly salvation. Slither wasn’t so lucky, her bones slender to the point of snapping, her fingers blue-bruised, and her collarbones brittle” (Goto 181). However, she also feels contempt towards her sisters and mother for their fragility, because they would not stop apologising: “How I hated that. How Slither and Okasan³⁰ were always apologizing for their weakness, for things that weren’t their fault” (Goto 182).

In the present, the narrator as an adult is a reclusive person – apart from her friends Genevieve and Midori, she lives like a hermit, avoiding social contact and priding herself on the few comforts she has, such as a collection of fancy pyjamas that she even wears outdoors for special occasions. Further showcasing her aloofness and lonely social status, she works for a company that collects abandoned trolleys, which she describes as a satisfying job as she does not have to rely on any interactions with outsiders or even her family: “I’d rather go on collecting the lost carts than make the pilgrimage home” (Goto 10).

Apart from that, her life revolves around being alone -- with her favourite activities characterised by their solitary nature, even when hanging out with her friends. In other words, she only meets Genevieve and Midori on a one-to-one basis, avoiding any instances where these two women could meet. She does so out of jealousy, as she harbours a crush on Midori and does not want to share her with someone else, as the warm, affectionate nature of her

³⁰ A Japanese term for *mother* that denotes respect; however, rather than implying fondness in this case, it just shows how alienated the narrator is from her own mother.

descriptions implies: “When she sat in the passenger seat, she sighed and stretched out her legs. The milky smell of air, vanilla and honey-sweet. She curled into the moist atmosphere, like it was a quilt” (Goto 57).

Indeed, her fears are justified one day when these two women finally meet: they become romantically entangled, which causes the narrator to withdraw further into her shell as she does not want to become a third wheel: “I never introduced them to each other, because I prefer the simplicity of one-on-one to the possible messiness of a group of three” (Goto 98). Moreover, she fears her friends might distance themselves from her, so she prefers to start retreating to avoid further pain: “I don’t begrudge them their happiness. But there seems to be less left for me” (Goto 98).

The narrator's relationship with the rest of her family is distant; she states they only meet during vacations. Outside of that, the narrator says she spends little time thinking of her sisters and does not even know their current lifestyles. According to her, the reason for their cold and aloof relations is their shared, unhappy childhood -- which she tries to avoid thinking about as much as possible to prevent further pain – this includes keeping her whereabouts from her family a secret: “True. No family member knows my address, just my unlisted phone number. Because I don’t want to deal with unwanted surprise visits from the people who are the most likely to hurt and disappoint me” (Goto 243).

As such, the strained relationship with her sisters is an attempt to evade any aspect of her childhood, to the point of denying its existence altogether. Regarding her parents, the narrator limits contact with her father, which proves easy enough as he is more interested in his land than interacting with his daughters: “I hear Dad whirring back from his inspection of the fields. The thunk-pad, thunk-pad of his crutches on the linoleum. The rattle of bottles in the fridge” (Goto 22).

Meanwhile, the narrator's interactions with her mother are tense and awkward because of the narrator’s own mixed feelings regarding her: “She isn’t being the nurturing Okasan, and she’s not being the other, the martini-escaped-invisible-to-be-nothing Okasan” (Goto 208).

Later, towards the novel's conclusion, it is revealed that her sisters meet outside these family gatherings. The narrator is left unaware because of her distant attitude and lack of interest in

them as her oldest sister, Slither, says: ““You never gave the impression that you wanted to see us.” Slither defends. “But then, - I guess I shouldn’t have assumed.”” (Goto 268).

In other words, the narrator is so withdrawn and antisocial that her sisters assume she wants nothing to do with them. Her thoughts dwelling on her sisters is on how they were as children, which further hints at her inability to connect the present with the past, showing doubt when it is confirmed that her siblings are well-functioning, adult women with unconventional lifestyles themselves: ““She owns a houseboat,” Mice nods. Like this is the sum total of what anyone would want to know. “Houseboats are better than mobile homes because most of the planet is water”” (Goto 245).

Undoubtedly, the narrator's suppressed trauma caused by her childhood is so intense that she lives a monotonous existence upheld by a lack of desire to change. Moreover, that very existence has also caused her to become a self-centred and friendless person who finds it hard to empathise with others. Like her father, she quickly judges others, avoiding confrontations that could force her to open up to others -- to the point that she is utterly overwhelmed when her emotions catch up with her: “Mice and Slither look at each other, look back at me stuffing fried dumplings into my mouth to plug up the tears. I’m gorging and my stomach protests, it has shrunk with my new habits and exercise, has learned to enjoy food slowly” (Goto 245).

However, after a mystical encounter with a stranger, the narrator confronts her childhood trauma. Although there is no physical proof of the fact, and the narrator herself admits that she did not engage in any sexual intercourse with the stranger mentioned above, she still feels that life has changed on account of her pregnancy. Not only does she have a sudden craving for cucumbers like a *kappa* would, but she also finds herself reflecting on memories of the past -- the past that brought her to Alberta and made her the person she is at that moment: “My childhood spills into my adult life despite all my attempts at otherwise and the saturation of the past with the present is an ongoing story” (Goto 215).

Her childhood memories further reveal how hard it was for the family to adjust to their new surroundings. Not only did they not have enough water, but the narrator's father was stubborn, refusing to ask anyone for help and insisting that he could do it all himself -- even if that independence came at the cost of his family's well-being. For example, their neighbour Janice later points out a water pump near the house, which would have ended the family's

hardship by obtaining some water source: “Janice crouched and lifted a scratched, orange bucket which covered a faucet. Twisted. There was the whirl of the engine, a glugging cough, and the water spilled onto the ground” (Goto 164).

In addition, to make his dream of growing Japanese rice a reality, the father forced his daughters to work in the fields, even though it was gruelling and strenuous labour: “Dad roared by again, dust gritting my eyes. I ran my arm over my muddy tears and spat out a gob of clay” (Goto 181).

When the narrator's older sister could not keep up, he punished her and kept pushing her to continue working: “Dad charged down from his pathetic tractor and cuffed Slither across the back of her head” (Goto 183). While the narrator herself could cope with the work, she admits that it traumatised her older sister, Slither: “He smacked her butt, dust billowing from her jeans, and he pointed to the direction of the house, Slither bawling all the way home, fists to her eyes like she was still three years old” (Goto 183).

Upon realising that her father was not good at providing for his family, the narrator also began to grasp that her father was selfish, often punishing her mother when things did not go his way, to the degree that her younger sister, PG, asks as a child whether Pa Ingalls – a figure the narrator looks up to, as she [*uses Little House on the Prairie as a coping mechanism*](#) to deal with her new life – was like that too: “Did Laura’s pa hit the ma?” PG muttered” (Goto 43).

Furthermore, she also finds herself re-enacting his behaviour, which becomes evident in the interactions she shares with her former childhood friend Gerald -- the son of Janice, who lives on a neighbouring farm – going too far one day:

Chin pushed out, my head thrust forward, I drew my hands back then shoved with all my farmer strength. Gerald smashing into the ground.

“Hey, sissy boy,” I sneered. “I don’t let sissy boys touch me ever.”

This hateful coil of ugliness twisting in my gut, the words stinging something inside of me, but unable to stop. “Why don’t you go get your baby butt home.” (Goto 200)

In particular, her cruelty towards Gerald as a child caused him to move, making her grasp that the consequences of such harsh and insensitive behaviour are the loss of trust and affection

from another person. However, upon reconciling with him years later, the narrator learns that the move was good for him as it caused him to grow into a stronger person emotionally, with him also able to understand where the narrator was coming from at the time: “‘We were children. And our lives were a mess. I forgave you a long time ago’” (Goto 240).

In many ways, Gerald's behaviour reflects that of her and her sisters -- all of them have moved away from their childhood home as adults and have, in some shape or form, come to terms with the trauma of their past. Thus, one method of coping with an unhappy childhood is distance -- although the question remains as to whether physical space alone is enough to heal emotional wounds inflicted over time. The narrator herself muses over this: “I thought I had earned the right to forget. But that doesn't save me from sudden memory cramps: Okasan's face being struck, never knowing when the blow would fall. Or on whom” (Goto 233).

These musings show that the narrator is still trying to process some events that occurred to her as a child. As much as she has distanced herself from her parents, she still lives the same isolated lifestyle as growing up in Alberta, where her father's insistence on his children working on the farm prevented her from interacting with other children in the area; she also muses that the alienation was further strengthened by her and her sisters' refusal to disclose what their family life was really like: “When our few friends at school asked us what we got for presents, my sisters and I just looked at each other, told them we didn't celebrate Christmas at our house” (Goto 192).

As such, it becomes clear that she has never entirely left the shadows of her childhood behind -- unlike her sisters. For example, towards the climax of the novel, the narrator's older sister states that she has been in a loving relationship for years and that therapy has helped her process her childhood trauma. Her other two sisters have also found lifestyles that fulfil them, thus showcasing that the narrator's interpretation of them up to that point was flawed -- it is only by getting to know her sisters better as adults that the narrator herself can embrace new changes in her life further and even try out things she dismissed before: “Now that I've changed my hair, should I change my wardrobe?” (Goto 249).

For example, through the help of her elder sister, the heroine gets a haircut. She puts more effort into her appearance, thus accepting herself as an attractive woman for the first time in her adult life: “He's cut my hair short, shorter than it has ever been, and the weight is off my

head, the bones in my face pronounced. My neck emerges from my shoulders, not graceful swanlike, never that, but a neck, definitely long enough to kiss. I shiver at the thought” (Goto 248).

Another person the narrator has misunderstood and misinterpreted as a person is her mother. Following a mental breakdown, the narrator's mother leaves the familial home searching for people whom aliens have allegedly abducted. Upon learning of this event, the narrator returns to the place of her childhood home, not only to discover that her mother has been teaching Janice the Japanese language but that she has also formed a close bond with the other woman – something the narrator was not aware of: “Imagine that. Janice calling Okasan Emiko” (Goto 210).

Not only that, but the narrator learns that she was the only one who did not view that side of her mother: her other sisters knew of her mother's friendship with Janice. Once again, the narrator learns that her disinterest in her family's life has alienated them from her. While she may have done so to protect herself from further emotional pain, all the protagonist has accomplished is to make herself friendless and loveless – a fact she laments now: “Why didn't she say goodbye? Why did she leave with Janice? I would have gone with her.... Eyes, tired, they smart and I drag my arm over the weakness..” (Goto 242).

Following that epiphany of her coldness and tendency to push people away, one of the first hurdles the narrator has to overcome is her unrequited love for Midori. She has kept it a secret for so long that it has stopped her from committing herself to relationships with others—particularly the woman she buys cucumbers from (and who she likes).

When she finally acts out on her feelings, she does face rejection; however, the action also allows her to pursue other romantic opportunities. Moreover, she also realises that – even if Midori does not love her back romantically – she still can stay close friends with her and Genevieve. By confessing her romantic feelings to Midori and expressing her vulnerabilities, she has not only allowed herself to move on from her crush on Midori but forged deeper ties with her and Genevieve as they have grown to understand her better.

Midori and Genevieve come to appreciate that the narrator only distanced herself from them because of their romantic relationship; however, rather than mock her for her feelings (as the

narrator may have feared), they embrace her for her courage to come out and start encouraging her to pursue the other unspoken desires in her life: ““Stop anywhere you see a big enough space,” Midori says from the back. Having given up the front seat to welcome Bernie” (Goto 272).

One of those wishes, the narrator realises, is to apologise to Gerald. By doing that -- by telling him that she is sorry for her actions as a girl over the phone -- the narrator makes the first step towards moving away from the paralysis that her childhood has inflicted upon her:

I’ve been given another chance. I gulp. Shudder. Gasp. Can’t contain the sound that spills from between my clenched teeth and sink onto the cold ground, head tipped back, I wail for all that is gone. Everything I’m afraid to face. I bawl and the sound is glorious. (Goto 262)

She also begins to shed her father's influence on her life. This measure frees her from harbouring guilt or loathing towards herself, instead enabling her to realise that her father was at fault all this time. After dealing with her emotional issues, the narrator finally meets up with her father. During this particular reunion, her father reveals that her elder sister and mother both have confronted him, going so far as attacking him physically for his past misdeeds.

The narrator also engages in physical violence then and there to unleash her rage and anger on him until she realises that her father is a pathetic man who has lost the love and respect of his family but is too selfish and emotionally stunted even to grasp that very fact:

Dad picks up his chair and sits down at the table. Finds his spray for a nasal fix. “I did what I had to do,” Dad states.

I shake my head. How can he believe that? “You’re pathetic,” I say sadly And the words seem to crumple him in his chair. (Goto 260)

In overcoming her fear of her father's anger, the narrator accepts that he was wrong for making his family suffer so much while living on the prairies. Instead of focusing on their well-being, he kept pushing his family to work hard for his dream, even though it was an unsuccessful enterprise. Furthermore, the narrator realises that she needs to focus on herself and her happiness rather than keep living in the shadows of the past.

In other words, she has to let go of the fear of life that her father caused in her, thus also allowing the process of freeing herself of the chains that have kept her shackled to him and

her lonely childhood – even if this means walking away from the man she both admired and hated so much at the same time: “I want to have the last word. Tonight. I want the last word. But there is nothing to say” (Goto 261).

While there is no mention of forgiveness towards her father, the narrator finds herself growing closer to her sisters -- she can accept them as individuals outside of their shared, traumatic childhood. It may not heal all wounds inflicted on her, but it does empower the narrator to embrace life outside of her childhood, leaving the ghosts that have haunted her up till then in the past. Like the *kappa* growing inside of her, she finds herself reborn as a person worthy of love and companionship. She becomes a more extroverted woman through the help of her friends, her new love interest, and her growing closeness with her sisters.

5.2: Little House on the Prairie and The Kappa Child

The Canadian prairies play a central role in *The Kappa Child*: it is not just the landscape that forms the backbone of the narrator’s childhood, but Hiromi Goto also references *Little House on the Prairie* frequently in *The Kappa Child*, thus establishing a connection between both works. For this reason, the following chapter analyses the relationship between both books, with work by Karin Beeler and Eleanor Ty helping to pinpoint it better.

Beeler says that the American West is geographically, historically or symbolically best described using legendary icons such as John Wayne to paint an image of such a landscape in a person's mind. Furthermore, “images of the American West are pervasive in American literature, film, and television and have captured the imagination of writers beyond the borders of the United States” (55).

In the case of Hiromi Goto and her novel *The Kappa Child*, Beeler states that the theme of the West is used in conjunction with the Canadian prairies in Alberta to establish “intertextual references to the frontier experiences of Laura Ingalls” (55), the main character of the novel *Little House on the Prairie* (1935). More specifically, “Hiromi Goto juxtaposes the world of Laura Ingalls’ child character against images of the Canadian West [,] which include the frontier experiences of a Japanese-Canadian family in rural Alberta” (55).

By linking *The Kappa Child*, set in the Canadian West, to the American one, Beeler describes Hiromi Goto as offering "a unique way of writing geographical and cultural landscapes, thereby creating new myths and fictions" (56). Beyond its fusion with Laura Ingalls Wilder's work, *The Kappa Child* "subverts the traditional link between regionalism and inferiority or insularity through a number of different techniques, many of which relate to her intertextual use" (58).

For example, Beeler mentions that the narrator compares "the prairie described in Wilder's book with the Canadian prairie" (59). At first, the narrator romanticises the experience, drawing comfort from a storybook that details the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder: "I pulled my copy of *Little House on the Prairies* from the inside of my T-shirt and flipped to the section where the Pa and Ma set up camp and made molasses sandwiches" (Goto 33). Not only would the narrator try to draw parallels between her move to Alberta and that of Laura to Kansas, but she would also justify her father's cruelty as the by-product of wanting to do better for his family:

"Your father is digging a well," Okasan said.

Oh! I was excited again. Just like Pa Ingalls! I quickly leafed through my book to the well section. Yes! Poison gas in the bottom of the well! Maybe Dad didn't know the candle trick to check for dangerous vapors. (Goto 132)

On a textual level, the book's relationship with *Little House On The Prairie* showcases how the narrator mixes fiction with reality, further emphasising how this fusion was necessary for emotional survival while growing up (cf. Beeler 59). In the present, however, the narrator mocks herself for those futile attempts, wishing she could suppress them altogether: "I've always hoped that childhood could be a book, a sequence of pages that I could flip to or close. A book that could be put away on a shelf. Even boxed and locked into storage should the need arise" (Goto 215).

If anything, the barren landscape of the prairie symbolises her equally empty childhood, even though the narrator—in the moments when she was alone and vulnerable—wished it could be different: "How beautiful it could be, I thought, and trembled. I plunked down in the sea turned desert, lay in brittle grass" (Goto 199).

Her fascination with Laura Ingalls reveals how her family life lacks positive emotions, confirming how the narrator's childhood could never hope to capture the wonder and sense of joy that the Wilder family experiences – a fact that is established in one of the narrator's childhood musings: “I lay there and thought about my options. There were none. I was ten years old and I didn't have any money. I knew what happened to little kids who ran away – they were either found cut up into little pieces or sold to men even more dangerous than my father” (Goto 199).

While settling down in the prairies was a positive, life-changing experience for a family like the Wilders, the reality of the unnamed narrator was different (cf. Ty 112-113). By the end of the summer, when her family has fully settled into the prairies, she finds herself burning Laura Ingalls's book, which also represents the symbolic burning of her childhood: “I poked the mess so the embers wouldn't go out, until every page was blackened and the print unreadable” (Goto 217).

The harsh realities -- the family's lifestyle on the prairies and the father's inability to overcome these issues -- have disrupted Wilder's novels' idealised landscape (cf. Beeler 60). Beeler sees the narrator's father is a subversion of Pa Ingalls: he cannot build a well due to the environmental conditions in their new home, as their neighbour Janice – a woman and person of mixed race – points out while telling the family where to find water, thus putting, as Beeler says, “a new culturally mediated myth of the prairie experience with a special Canadian and feminist twist” (60), further demonstrated in the scene below:

“Diggin a well?!” Janice laughed loudly, a hoarse croaking sound. We took a step back from the noise and Gerald glared harder.

“Can't dig nothing by hand in these parts. Old Man Rodney was a cheapskate, that bastard. He never hooked up his water to the house and the poor missus had to lull it all by hand. Had to heat everything by the stove. But there is water.” Janice, cigarette dangling from her mouth, led Okasan to the back of the house. (Goto 164)

Beeler describes that “the concept of the cultural alien is applied to both aboriginal and Japanese-Canadian culture” (61) in the community where the narrator's family lives. Not only is the Japanese Canadian family regarded as different, but an owner at a motel mistakes them for Japanese Canadians, referencing their internment during WWII; this sparks a heated exchange between the narrator's father and the man:

Which ones? I thought. Which ones does he think we are?

“What do you say?” Dad took a quick step toward the gulping man.

Okasan raised one hand but dropped it heavily beside her body.

“No offence intended,” Motel Man stammered. “I figured you were Japanese.”

“We are CANADIAN,” Dad roared. (Goto 70)

The awkward exchange above and further alienation from the community drive the narrator's temporary fixation on Laura Ingalls Wilder during childhood. For Beeler, Hiromi Goto uses the narrator's Japanese Canadian family to imprint a cross-cultural impression on the white settlers' myth (Beeler 61). For example, the father's desire to grow Japanese rice on the prairies may be futile. Still, it shows that the narrator's family are also settlers, albeit unsuccessful: “Dad didn’t know how to grow Japanese rice. Forget about the fact that you couldn’t grow it in Alberta anyway” (Goto 126).

Another aspect that rewrites the traditional imagery associated with the prairies is depicting that landscape as alien with unusual, supernatural qualities. This alienness of the landscape fits in with the novel's other distinctive aspects, such as the existence of the *kappa* or the abduction by aliens that the narrator's mother claims to have gone through, which the narrator finds out about from her neighbour Janice in the following exchange:

“Never mind about that now. I’ve got your mom over here at my house. There’s been some kind of trouble.”

My heart drops sudden, nauseous. Hand shaking. Dad finally beat up my Okasan so bad she has to be hospitalized. Battered, bleeding, no one there to save her. Okasan finally killed him. A knife. Burned the house down while he bled and now she will go to jail.

“She says she has been up in a UFO”. (Goto 206)

Alienness stands for racial injustices faced by migrant communities in Canada; however, instead of depicting the minorities as being extraterrestrials themselves, Goto seems to indicate that it is the cultural majority that is carrying out the abductions as they are the ones that are trying to erase or otherwise hurt marginalised people (cf. Beeler 64), with Beeler further adding that they serve “as a metaphor for certain injustices faced by visible minorities in Canada” (64).

Lastly, to wrap up this chapter, Beeler notes that an unconventional aspect of Hiromi Goto's novel is how it uses the imagery of the *kappa* to integrate Japanese myths with American landscapes: in a dream, the narrator envisions a child that resembles the *kappa* (Beeler 66). The *kappa* in this dream, which takes place in the prairies, asks for her help and some water: “The creature unfolds a long, scrawny arm and gestures to the expanse of dry death which surrounds us. “Water”” (Goto 265).

This fact, as observed by Beeler, showcases the fluidity of “myths replac[ing] earlier myths in a fluid process of re-invention” (66). Regarding the narrator's experiences, the prairies, while not displayed in a favourable light, also reflect – through their insertion of Japanese myths into the landscape– the adventures of migrant settlers.

5.3: Accepting Queerness, Finding a Utopia and the Role of Science Fiction

The Kappa Child explores the unnamed narrator's issues with her sexuality and mysterious pregnancy, which is why this chapter examines the topics of queerness, finding a utopia, and science fiction; Nancy Kang, Wendy Gay Pearson, and Pilar Cuder-Dominguez have contributed work further analysed in this chapter. The concept of alienness concerning race has been addressed in [chapter 3.3 of this dissertation](#).

In *The Kappa Child*, the Japanese myth of the *kappa* not only describes the narrator's strange and unexplained pregnancy but is also a metaphor to show how the perception of alienness and the unknown are often associated with people who identify as queer. Moreover, according to Kang, *The Kappa Child* details two journeys: “one that stretches toward a cosmos of previously de-sexuali[s]ed mythic experience, and another that trudges through the all-too-terrestrial world of domestic violence in immigrant families” (13). as the narrator alludes to: “A child isn’t born bitter. I point no fingers as to who tainted the clean, pure pool of my childhood. Let’s just say that when I realized that I didn’t want to grow up, the damage was already done” (Goto 13).

Although, as Kang says, readers may brush off the combination of these elements as the absurdities taking place within a science fiction novel, the “heroine is concrete, a specific kind of woman-lover constructed with both symbolic potency and queer audacity” (14), with

her Japanese Canadian roots and previously mentioned sexuality giving her agency that makes her relatable. Furthermore, Kang adds that the narrator comes from “a family whose ratio of men to women is 1:5” (14). However, women are still subject to physical and emotional violence during their childhood, giving the novel even more realistic themes to which the reader can relate: “And we are not small. Dad can see that we are grown. We aren’t little children, and he can’t strike us anymore” (Goto 27).

The narrator is a sleepwalker and daydreamer, wearing luxurious pyjamas even when working as a collector of abandoned shopping trolleys (cf. Kang 14). One night, the narrator dreams of the moon:

I dream that I am sleeping on the moon and I’m surprised, filled with wonder how warm the body of the moon is, when she looked so cool. How warm, like the papery hives of wasps, like prairie stones. I want to laugh out loud, but I can’t because a mask filtering the lunar air covers my face. One breath and I will shrivel up into a husk of insect nothing. So I lie still and smile carefully. (Goto 220)

The dream shows the narrator has been carefully concealing her sexuality out of fear, even though keeping these desires hidden has rendered her lonely: “I watch with dread, as the earth starts to set. Once it is past the horizon, I will never be able to go back. And the thought makes me so lonely, I have to gulp my tears so they won’t rise to my eyes” (Goto 220).

One of the many favourable consequences of her encounter with the *kappa* is that it makes the narrator more comfortable in her skin and sexuality. By embracing the *kappa*, the narrator realises how tenderly touching herself makes her feel loved and -- most of all -- relates to the authentic version of herself, which craves warmth and affection: “The sound is closer. My heart, warm. I dip fingers in a pool wet with possibilities and something touches me back. I don’t know if it is some green, mischievous creature, or just my nightly reflection” Goto (222).

The narrator's previous perception of herself as an alien and undesirable creature fits into the lamentable reality of homosexuality within Asian Canadian communities where its existence remains ignored – this is especially true for lesbians, with their bodies – as Kang implies – viewed as unwanted unless “through the lens of heterosexual erotic fantasy” (16). Sadly, the narrator's perception of herself as ugly and grotesque makes her feel like a monster: she views herself as deficient as she does not fit into the beauty standards of Western society,

often using this as an excuse to distance herself from love even in cases where the interest from the other party is apparent:

Bernie turns back to me and the tenderness in her eyes makes me blink and blink.”I’m here if you need to talk,” she says. She rests her rough hand on mine, before letting it drop. Her sincerity slices. I nod my head and back out of the store. (Goto 205)

As such, as Kang mentions, in the light of such homophobia, rainbows – objects that “emerge after the rain, banishing drought [...], [...] suggest how a lesbian utopia requires the irrigation of self-love; these would be mental landscapes “wet with possibilities,” a community of empowered women who love each other without fear from within and without” as such, the search for love and the connection to water play integral roles in *The Kappa Child* as well, especially since it involves the narrator finding her version of a utopia: “Then more droplets fall, plump, warm, soft as kisses, they rain down on us. We turn to each other, eyes wide with wonder” (Goto 274 - 275).

Pearson mentions that *The Kappa Child* envisions a utopian future that is neither heteronormative nor defined by white supremacy. Its status as a science fiction novel, which allows it to defy conventional notions of time and logic, makes it possible for Hiromi Goto to depict a landscape where queerness and reproduction run counter to the still-existing homophobic tensions that haunt the community in the present reality (Pearson 187-188).

Similarly, science fiction of such a nature functions as a way to derail the typical tropes of reproduction by redefining what it means to be human – and, in this way, these novels find a way to avoid shaming their protagonists for their queerness (Pearson 194). Instead, these stories present an alternative lifestyle to the prescribed patriarchal symbolic order, like the ending of *The Kappa Child*, where women celebrate life and love by dancing in the rain: “We hold out palms to catch the wet in the cups of our hands, tip our heads, drink from the skies” (Goto 275).

By questioning the white supremacy of science fiction novels and rewriting familiar tropes found in the genre, Pearson states that *The Kappa Child* offers “an explicitly Asian Canadian take on [its] mythology” (190). In this case, rather than focusing on paranoia and the destruction of the human race, a sense of hope and the possibility of the world becoming a better place are placed in the foreground (Pearson 190).

In addition to subverting typical science fiction tropes, Goto also pays homage to the first science fiction writer, Mary Shelley, by addressing the strange circumstances of the narrator's pregnancy that bring to mind the origins of Shelley's tragic creature (Pearson 191). When the *kappa* first appears in the novel as an androgynous creature with an appearance reminiscent of an alien, it mirrors popular science fiction films depicting such entities as reptilian figures: "Skin, moist green. My fingertips stroked a slender arm, softly elastic like the skin of frogs, like tiger salamanders" (Goto 124).

Pearson argues that the *kappa* provides a link to extraterrestrials and highlights how Hiromi Goto explores the topic of gender and sexuality: both are undefined and rooted in mythology. These elements provide another connection to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its handling of a creature born under supernatural circumstances: the narrator, unlike Viktor, does not abandon the *kappa* child (Pearson 194) but shows affection and love for it, even though the pregnancy was unplanned: "It's all your fault," I mutter halfheartedly to my middle region. The tiniest flutter against the bones of my ribs. I snort" (Goto 109).

Thus, *The Kappa Child* is also a feminist response to Mary Shelley's novel and, as Pearson elaborates, proof that reproduction can be a positive experience for a queer community which "argues that there is a queer future and a future for racialis]ed queers" (194), with both the narrator's mood and the warm atmosphere of the landscape towards the end of the novel representing these positive emotions:

By the time we drive toward the prairie in the folds of a warm winter wind, the night is rich. The stars glitter. The orange glow of the city lights fade into the west and Marisa Monte sweetens the darkness. The creature inside me curls around my heart. (Goto 272)

Pearson comments that *The Kappa Child* uses the figure of the *kappa* in two other instances within the story – one of which involves the *kappa* finding a dying child in a forest and offering it water from the bowl on top of its head. This story sees the author re-imagining Melissa Gilbert, the actress who depicted Laura Ingalls Wilder in the TV adaptation of *Little House on the Prairies* as starving, thus depicting "something closer to the truth, replacing a dominant happy narrative with the memories of First Nations people, immigrants of colo[u]r, animals, and people displaced" (195): "And as I watch, her face hardens, the skin slowly browns, tightens, pressing against bones, her eyes glitter bright in her starving face, lips cracked with malnutrition" (Goto 252).

Hiromi Goto establishes a link between aliens and Asian Americans (cf. Pearson 196). According to Hiromi Goto, alienness remains undefined by science or technology but gains meaning through a more radicalised definition of humanity with the *kappa* taking on human traits:

The Stranger was leaning against the wall of the hallway. Wearing a silk red wedding dress, snug on her slender body, and slightly worn on the curve of a middle-aged body. A black beret covered an oddly shaped head, strands of thin hair hanging long and limp. A heavy leather jacket. (Goto 88)

The fantastical elements in Goto's novel help the reader accept a definition of humanity that defies traditional boundaries concerning race, gender, and sexuality (Cuder-Dominguez 117). This is especially true as the narrator is looking for a way to make sense of herself, her sexuality, her ethnic community, and her family's expectations: "I consider my options. I can pretend I'm not at home. I can let her in and pretend we are still friends" (Goto 269).

In a similar vein, the conflicting allegiances within her family shape the narrator's identity: on the one hand, she resents her verbally abusive father and how he has affected herself, her sisters and her mother in various ways, but – on the other – she also belittles her female relatives for their weaknesses in response to abuse described above (cf. Cuder-Dominguez 118).

Additionally, Cuder-Dominguez notes that the other role models in her childhood, such as "Laura Ingalls, with her obsession to see "a papoose," is sadly wanting as a role model for an Asian child" (118) due to being too restrictive regarding gender or race to look up or "not the standard nuclear family and their lifestyle [...] too eccentric" (118) to fit into the Japanese standards of femininity and familial happiness. In the case of the eccentric Nakamura family of mixed race, the narrator first comes to terms with what a diverse and alien identity represents – she may be bewildered by it -- but it brings her closer to them as "one who feels stranded among such diverse identities" (120).

Cuder-Dominguez explains that the *kappa* then comes to represent the various conflicting aspects of the narrator's personality: it depicts her repressed sexuality, serving as a driving force for the narrator to confront these tensions within her (Cuder-Dominguez 120).

However, the *kappa* – as a water creature – also serves as a metaphor for the displacedness and isolation of the Japanese characters in the dry landscape of the Canadian prairies” (124).

The *kappa* also represents the family's Japanese roots, creating a connection between said family and the Canadian prairies, showing that – even in this dry landscape – it can make its way there: “The print was webbed, but not the wide-webbed indentation of an aquatic fowl, the shape was stretched longer, more foot-like. In size, it was comparable to a five-year-old child’s, only this print had four webbed toes instead of five regular ones” (Goto 228). The *kappa* also stands for human sexuality (Cuder-Dominguez 124), which is apparent when the pregnancy turns out to be merely psychological – not the birth of an actual living being, but the birth of a renewed self for the narrator.

As a concluding note to this chapter, Ty implies that the abnormal pregnancy and the fact that the narrator houses a *kappa* inside her body further emphasise the themes of “non-belonging and self-estrangement” (111) that Japanese Canadians face, being reminded that “people with raciali[s]ed bodies are “resident aliens” or strangers, always being asked to demonstrate their right to belong or else constantly being reminded of their status as Other in one’s country” (110).

Furthermore, the themes found in *A Chorus of Mushrooms* resurface again – such as food bringing people together, female bonding and the importance of being part of a small yet local community that provides love and stability, which the narrator realises – all along – that she has had: “My friends are silly and beautiful beyond belief. How have I been this lucky and not known?” (Goto 274).

As the narrator’s family cannot provide her with the emotional warmth she craves, Ty remarks that the narrator “has to find sustenance and emotional support from outside of her nuclear family” (112). Lastly, her pregnancy arguably stands for regeneration: a regeneration between reality, fantasy, and being both Canadian and Asian: “And in the collage of green, the movement of our bodies, I can see kappa rising from the soil” (Goto 275).

5.4: The Importance of *The Kappa Child* in Japanese Canadian Literature

The following chapter analyses how *The Kappa Child* is an essential piece of work in the landscape of Asian Canadian fiction, with Eleanor Ty's work as a point of reference.

Ty says that “[a] number of Japanese North American novels have explored the traumatic experience of dislocation, internment, confiscation of property, and dispersals of the Japanese Canadian and Japanese American communities during and after the Second World War and the consequences” (108) these events have had on the community to the present day.

Since the early 2000s, Ty adds that Japanese Canadian novels have moved away from these narratives and “have attempted to go beyond an ethnographic account of the way the issei, nisei, and sansei cope with the internment and dispersal” (108) to focus on topics such as “traditional family values, globali[s]ation, contemporary capitalist culture, ecology, sexuality, and desire outside of what Adrienne Rich calls “compulsory heterosexuality” in her book of that name” (109).

Main characters, such as the unnamed narrator in *The Kappa Child*, do not follow the pattern of an immigrant trying to fulfil the American dream: “I’m a collector of abandoned shopping carts” (Goto 9). Instead, the unnamed narrator leads an unorthodox life – her interest lies in finding harmony and happiness rather than achieving financial success: “I like my job. I like my library card. I have enough money for cucumbers and movies and I put a little aside in an empty one-gallon kimchee jar for something special” (Goto 139).

Moreover, having come from a dysfunctional family with a patriarchal father, the unnamed narrator rejects values imposed upon model minorities: these involve concepts such as competition and the importance of profit and business rather than fostering individuality like the narrator does with her penchant for expensive nightwear: “I must admit, sometimes, I do choose pyjamas that are just a bit hoity-toity in price, but you only live once. Some people worry about being in an accident and found wearing tatty underwear. I only want to be found in a pair of pyjamas, preferably a nice silk job” (Goto 139).

Ty notes that globalisation depicts Asian females' bodies in a specific fashion, “hav[ing] been consistently produced and reproduced in Western media and transnational culture in particular ways that have facilitated their work in speciali[s]ed areas” (109). These depictions often show “Asian women’s docility, reliability, innocence, and sexual pliancy” (110). The

narrator in *The Kappa Child* feels like a mockery as she does not live up to the standards of such a stereotype, especially in terms of her appearance: “But without them, I was a short and dumpy Asian with bad teeth, daikon legs, stocky feet. A neckless wonder with cone-shaped pseudo breasts” (Goto 122).

Beyond this conscious subversion of the narrator as a 'typical Asian woman', the *kappa* results in the narrator's abnormal pregnancy: it also adds a supernatural twist, Ty observes, shifting the novel from a “seemingly realist narrative about growing up on the Canadian prairies to a magic realist or science fiction novel” (110), particularly when describing the lunar night that resulted in the conception of the *kappa* child: “Our bodies rotated, spun like solar creatures, time spreading in slow motion” (Goto 124).

Thus, Hiromi Goto moves away from what is typically considered a Japanese Canadian novel; instead, Ty explains that she “makes use of a form that until recently had been targeted to a primarily male audience in addressing the concerns of globali[s]ed and minority subjects” (110). Not only does she use “science fiction and fantasy [...] to write about gender” (110) but also to look at what it means to be other (Ty 110).

As previously mentioned, the metaphor of the alien (cf. Ty 111) shows how immigrants in North American societies – no matter their length of residency – are constantly reminded of not belonging to the community: the narrator refers to this fact by how they cannot use their Japanese names due to having to accommodate English speakers: “Okasan gave us all Japanese names too, but folks couldn’t remember for nothing, as the saying goes. Hard to know what was worse. Having names no one could say or being called names not our own” (Goto 15).

The central theme of *The Kappa Child* is healing – and, in this case, Ty believes that “pregnancy and childbirth are offered as partial solutions to a broken world” (113). Notably, this healing focuses on a woman who is ineffective and a subversion of the ‘Oriental model’: she works a dead-end job, is not an exemplary citizen and does not present the mysterious allure of a *geisha* (Ty 113). Additionally, the narrator often describes herself as unattractive and states that she has to wear pyjamas as nothing else fits her:

I am not beautiful, but I am a collector of abandoned shopping carts who has the most expansive collection of pyjamas in the western hemisphere.

Clothing does not fit me. My big-boned arms, my daikon legs, my beta-beta feet, and splaying toes. My bratwurst fingers and nonexistent neck. And my head. My poor colossal head, too huge even to dream of a ten-gallon hat. (Goto 51)

Ty further elaborates that her job as a shopping cart collector is also not typical of an Asian Canadian woman, as it “does not require delicacy, nimble fingers, or sexual largess” (Ty 113). Instead, the job borders on dangerous and involves driving a van: “The minivan roars and cuts me off. I slam on the brakes to avoid rear-ending it and a worn bungee cord snaps, so my shopping carts break free” (Goto 10).

However, Goto makes it evident that the narrator, as Ty suggests, even “from her marginali[s]ed position, [...] sees that the world around her is in need of repair or help” (113). For example, she can see the ugliness in the world, especially in how easily people disregard things: “But the stores’ll have to make ten-dollar deposit locks before people return shopping carts. No one cares about a dollar any more” (Goto 138). Regardless, she remains an outsider who does not participate in a capitalist world. Still, she is happy doing so: “My profession’s not exactly a brain job, but who wants one? I want to use my brain for myself, not some corporation” (Goto 138).

Yet, by the novel's climax, the narrator has found her place as an immigrant and a lesbian woman. It is only by breaking away from the mould of expectations that society and her own family have placed on her that she can do that. Indeed, what makes *The Kappa Child* so crucial in Asian Canadian fiction is how it stresses the importance of individuality, empathy and the ability to move on from past traumas. While the novel still addresses issues such as racism and its lasting impact on migrant communities, it also offers hope for a better world and future. It also tells how one can overcome past demons by embracing such positive emotions.

5.5: Using the Bizarre and Strange as a Catalyst for Change

The following chapter explores how the *kappa* motivates the narrator to embrace change -- especially in terms of interacting with others and loving herself.

Before meeting the stranger -- in reality, a *kappa* in disguise – the narrator's life is -- at best -- monotonous, with the narrator shying away from anything that could upset her emotional balance. Her reclusive lifestyle is a coping mechanism to deal with her childhood, where – as previously mentioned – she grew up under the pressures of an abusive father who neglected his family's emotional needs and discouraged any signs of physical or emotional weakness, which influences the children, as is shown most clearly when the narrator rebuffs her only real friend, Gerald:

A heavy hand on my shoulder, I almost fell out of myself, squeaked in sudden fear.

“Good for you,” my father nodded approvingly. “Shouldn’t be friends with weaklings.”

Dad was proud of me. (Goto 201)

More precisely, every time the narrator or her family displayed such perceived weaknesses, he would punish them with physical violence; this would cause the narrator to harden herself both physically and emotionally, while her sisters grew up in a toxic environment due to not being able to meet the harsh expectations of the family's patriarch:

With Slither gone, the house was quieter, the rest of us able to gauge the buttons of our father’s anger. We tiptoed past brief moments of peace. PG didn’t have to protect herself with childish mantras and Mice didn’t have to be a dog. And I plucked fewer strands of her, nourished by the knowledge that in one year, I would be free. (Goto 226)

Meanwhile, the narrator's mother was emotionally distant, paying no heed to the suffering of her children; she did so out of fear herself, as her husband often punished her for her children's misdeeds. Moreover, the father would also not listen to any voice of reason, avoiding any suggestions that his plans to grow Japanese rice were unfeasible in the harsh landscape of the Canadian prairies; he even resorted to stealing at one point to fulfil his dream: “Having no water wasn’t going to stop our father from his rice-growing obsession. He spent a lot of time stealing the precious liquid from his neighbors” (Goto 197).

As a result of this upbringing, the narrator's usual emotional state is avoidance and a non-confrontational stance towards conflicts, which is proven by her solitary life. She may be self-reliant, but she also avoids any real connections with people, choosing instead to play it safe so that any possibility of her getting hurt is minimal. Therefore, the narrator's mindset is also tense and fragile, with unexpected changes causing it to crumble immediately.

The cracks underneath her stoic demeanour become apparent when her two best friends – as highlighted in an earlier chapter of this dissertation – become romantically attached due to a shared concern over her, causing the narrator to feel even more isolated than she already is: “And my friends were no help, making moony eyes at each other, knees brushing against each other in transparent enactment of leg-kissing. They were pathetic” (Goto 100). She chooses to cut herself off from Midori and Genevieve, just like she has cut herself off from her family: “Midori and Genevieve don’t stay long. And I don’t care” (Goto 175).

In turn, this causes the narrator to lose the single connection she has had to society -- even if the said connection was one of the few things keeping the narrator from further plunging into a lonesome and friendless space. After all, Midori and Genevieve gave her emotional support, especially when they felt that the narrator was growing ever more withdrawn than usual: “Midori and I drink tea. We don’t say much and what we do say is not important. But I’m happy in her company. When she leaves I feel lonely” (Goto 214).

The meeting with the stranger forces the narrator to come out of her shell, not just because of the apparent pregnancy but because the strange night catalyses change for the narrator. She starts eating better and is more willing to reflect on her past and realise what happened. This realisation makes her more open to meeting other people, such as the woman named Bernie, who sells her Japanese cucumbers, or an elderly male dog owner called Jules, with whom she spends a single evening interacting: ““Good night,” I call faintly, just a small Asian man disappearing into the street dimness, a huge German shepherd looking back once, tail wagging” (Goto 187).

Moreover, the narrator finds herself curious about her sisters' lives- a step that brings her closer to bridging the gap between her and the rest of her family. This vital step is emotionally healing as she understands how much her father impacted her life. She also begins to appreciate that her sheltered existence results from her father's upbringing. This upbringing taught the narrator to make fun of or denounce anyone who dared to be reliant on others, to the point that she is incapable of understanding her own desire for companionship: “PG is gone and I feel bereft. I don’t understand this loss. I have never seen her outside our migratory holiday dinners and none of us actually seek each other out with premeditated intent” (Goto 182).

She gains an increased understanding of what her sisters went through, thus deepening the link between them, as their shared childhood trauma means that none of them ever suffered independently. Indeed, the narrator starts to form a close bond with her oldest sister, allowing her to look after her: "Slither doesn't ask any questions. She gently puts her arm around my back, her other hand reaches in front of her body to hold my elbow" (Goto 263).

Furthermore, the narrator's unplanned pregnancy is a metaphor for renewed energy. The *kappa* growing in the narrator's womb thrives on water as this very liquid represents its life essence (Foster 4). Considering this fact, the *kappa* is a creature that looks to the future, embracing change, warmth and the knowledge that it is safe in its cocoon surrounded by its sisters (Kang 19). This safety net extends to the narrator, who finds herself tempted, for the first time since childhood, to be brave -- and this courage reaches new heights when she kisses Midori, thus giving voice to the suppressed desires she has harboured for so long: "I reach, clasp Midori's neck, and pull her toward me. My ugly lips on her surprised mouth. Our eyes open" (Goto 235).

Although Midori does not reciprocate her feelings, the narrator finds that being vulnerable with someone else allows her to recognise that she is not an empty shell of a woman. For the first time, she begins to grasp that there is nothing wrong with being emotionally open, finding that drawing emotional support from another person is healing: "Midori holds me longer than I can remember anyone holding me. She holds me until my body slumps, exhausted" (Goto 236).

On the contrary, she finds herself daring to hope for something new in her life again -- for something more than the monotonous and lonely life she has led up to this point, realising that other women find her attractive: "The first girl who whispered blushes and I slow-smile. Her look of interest sends a rush of blood into the base of my throat" (Goto 250).

Additionally, the revelation brings her closer to Midori and Genevieve, who now realise why the narrator has been withdrawing from them. In response to that realisation, they grow even more supportive of the narrator, encouraging her to come out of her shell even more, complimenting her on her new haircut:

"Wooweee! Nice do!"

“Get out! Shut up,” I burn in pleasure and sweet embarrassment.

“You look sexy,” Genevieve breathes, leaning against the counter.

“I’m serious,” Midori says. “You look very nice.” (Goto 270)

They come up with the idea of spending the night together watching another lunar eclipse. Also, once they get to know Bernie, they support her and the narrator in forming a romantic relationship. Metaphorically speaking, this mirrors the *kappa* inside the narrator's womb, where it feels comfortable and loved; just like the *kappa*, the narrator has found a nest, a cocoon that allows her to be herself where loved ones surround her.

No longer alone, the narrator has grown from a reclusive individual to someone who can appreciate the more mundane beauties of life. She has been reborn and has a new lease on life (and love), which motivates her to take the first step towards showing her romantic interest in Bernie:

“You’re so quiet today,” I whisper in her ears. “I’ve never seen you this way before.”

“I’m feeling shy,” Bernie whispers back. The heat of her breath tickling my ear, down my spine.

I blush with pleasure. A flutter in my ribcage. Was that my heart or my unexpected one? Now what should I do?

Her cool hand rises to cup the curve of my chin, my cheek. I am not frightened. I turn my lips and kiss the cup of her palm. (Goto 274)

More specifically, she starts allowing herself to feel like someone who could be unique—someone another could love. Moreover, she comes to mourn that she distanced herself from people who could have understood her: people like Gerald, who was more in tune with his emotions and could have offered much-needed support to her growing up.

Instead, the narrator grew up in an environment with little understanding of her emotional needs. As a result, she could not know whether her desires were necessary. These experiences made her scared of attempting anything out of her comfort zone, keeping her confined in a small, suffocating space. However, once the *kappa* comes into her life, she realises she needs to make significant modifications to understand herself better – this means acknowledging that she needs people in her life: “Genevieve rests her hand on Midori’s lean arm and I laugh with relief. We are still friends. And I need them” (Goto 270).

One of the most significant changes the narrator makes is letting her older sister convince her to take part in a makeover. Before that, the narrator dismissed her looks as monstrous because they did not meet the expectations of her cultural surroundings (Kang 17). This lack of appreciation of her appearance, in turn, kept her from addressing her inner hopes and dreams, making her feel that even the slightest flirtations towards beautiful women were silly.

After all, a monster cannot hope to find love or companionship in the narrator's eyes. By shedding the image of herself as undesirable, the narrator grows more comfortable with herself and, as such, finds the courage to invite Bernie to accompany her to a meeting to view a solar eclipse night that Midori and Genevieve have organised for her: ““Bernie!” I call. Heart tripping. I hop from my van and trot to the door. Bernie unlocks and grabs both of my hands” (Goto 272).

This particular action marks a huge step forward for the narrator as she has allowed feelings of hope to guide her rather than paralysis for the first time. Not only has the narrator shed her hermit persona, but – by asking Bernie out – she has accepted her worthiness and is ready to embrace love: “Tipping her eyes to the curve of the night, Bernie slips her arm around my waist and my silly heart trembles” (Goto 274).

She has stepped outside her narrow, suffocating space and permitted others to get to know her, thus allowing the unexpected and strange pregnancy to give her a new purpose and joy. In other words, the protagonist has adopted an emotionally healthier lifestyle by improving her familial relationships, breaking off toxic ties and embracing new partnerships.

Chapter 6: Half World/Darkest Light: A Fusion of Japanese and Western Myths

Overview of *Half World*

Half World is a story centred on three realms. These realms are called the world of the living, the one of the dead and that of the spirits. The land of the deceased is also called Half-World: it is a place that represents a transitory state of existence, for its inhabitants are required to work through the turmoil and trauma of their lives³¹. Only once they have done so can they transcend into a spiritual state. Spirits are reborn once their spark has faded, thus continuing an ongoing process that starts with birth, ends with death and then returns to its origins (i.e. rebirth) with each iteration.

More specifically, the three realms are continuous cycles that ensure that the fine line between death, the afterlife and life remains unaltered. Otherwise, the world would be prone to chaos and destruction, causing misery to the three realms as its inhabitants are kept in limbo, unable to transition to the next stage of their existence. These realms represent Japanese Shinto beliefs, with the Half-World referencing *Yomi*, the Kingdom of the Dead³².

However, the balance of the three realms has been in jeopardy since a creature called Mr Glueskin halted the regeneration process. Instead of moving onward, he feeds on other inhabitants of the Half-World to increase his powers. He only fears Melanie – a girl born in the Half-World, who managed to escape his grasp as a baby when her mother decided to cross the border between the Half-World and the world of the living.

When the possibility arises to kidnap Melanie's mother fifteen years after her flight from the Half-World, Glueskin seizes the opportunity and forces Melanie to confront some truths about herself. Not only does she have to play a part in a prophecy that she was unaware of, but she also gets over her fears to save her mother and – most importantly – the three realms.

Overview of *Darkest Light*

³¹ The concept of 'half world' is further discussed in the [appendix](#).

³² More about the kingdom can be read here: <https://www.ancientpages.com/2021/06/07/yomi-kingdom/>.

Darkest Light follows the story of Gee—previously known as Mr Glueskin—in the world of the living sixteen years after the events of *Half World*. Since then, he has grown into a moody young man who seeks to uncover the truth about his past after an attack on his foster parent, Popo, leaves him worried about his future. Further fostering his fears are mysterious creatures claiming to know the truth about his origins and following him around to entice him back to the Half-World.

When he learns about the existence of the Half-World, Gee feels compelled to undertake a journey to visit it with the help of a classmate called Cracker, who wishes to discover the truth behind her sister's suicide. A white cat that can talk also joins him on the trip. While the answers Gee may find are not the ones he wants to hear, they are vital regarding his future and that of the three realms – especially since it is up to him to break the limbo of creatures stuck in the Half-World.

6.1: *Half World*, *Darkest Light* and The Teen Gothic

The following section references the Teen Gothic, a subgenre of Young Adult fiction previously discussed [in chapter 1.3 of this dissertation](#), to demonstrate why Hiromi Goto's novels *Half World* and *Darkest Light* belong to that particular genre.

While no classical vampires inhabit these novels, demons such as Ilana- a woman with eels for hands- or the terrifying Mr Glueskin, who can absorb anything into his flesh, are scary and downright macabre: “Mr. Glueskin's thin middle was bulging. He looked as if he were pregnant. His wet giggling rang in the sudden silence” (Goto 81).

These figures exist to challenge the adolescent Melanie and Gee to come to terms with their fears, but also address the inadequacy of adults around them: Gee became Mr Glueskin because – rather than protect him – his father murdered him. Melanie faces the prospect of growing up alone due to her parents' decision to have a baby, although they are both no longer alive – even if their intention was motivated by love:

Fumiko enfolded Shinobu with her arms. “It's been fourteen years, “ she murmured into his dirty hair. “Our daughter grew up in Life, even though we do not hold Life ourselves.” She shook Shinobu and he raised his head.

Pride shone from his eyes. (Goto 177)

Nevertheless, whether their guardians' motives were good or bad, Melanie and Gee must leave their familial units behind to ensure their parents' mistakes do not hurt them or others—themes other novels in the Teen Gothic also deal with (cf. Moruzi and Smith 4). By doing that, they – like other protagonists in such novels – have to grow up, shedding their innocence and becoming agents of their own lives at an earlier age than anticipated (cf. Moruzi and Smith 4).

Not only do they have to leave their homes behind, but—as part of their character development—they have to learn to build relationships with others: Gee becomes friends with Cracker, while Melanie opens up to people other than her mother, mirroring the abandonment of the traditional family unit in favour of forming other social ties in the Teen Gothic (cf. Byron and Deans 101).

While Melanie's mother, Fumiko, is shown to be caring, the narration also indicates that her ill health has impacted their economic situation: “Her mum wasn’t well, had never been healthy and strong. Her complexion was always wan, and the dark circles underneath her eyes never faded. She couldn’t keep a job for longer than a few months before her body broke and she had to rest in bed for several weeks” (Goto 16). Consequently, Melanie and her mother are poor, with insufficient money for a full fridge or a working telephone service: “Their service had been terminated five months ago because of unpaid bills” (Goto 24).

An article by Nicole Racine and Shainur Premji states that although “Canada [ranks] 11th out of 39 of the world’s wealthiest countries” (1) the number of children living “in monetary poverty has sharply risen from 15.2 per cent in 2020 to 17.8 per cent in 2021” (1), meaning that “one in five children live in persistent fear and stress, face barriers to having their basic needs met, such as stable housing and nutritious food, and experience a lack of opportunity, including access to quality early childhood experiences” (1). These statistics, released after the book’s publication in 2009, show that *Half World* addresses themes that young people in Canada nowadays struggle even more with, thus showing how this novel belongs to the Teen Gothic as social criticism is part of this genre (cf. Moruzi and Smith 4).

Another factor linking *Darkest Light*, in particular, to the Teen Gothic genre is the portrayal of Gee's volatile emotions, with his desire for violence and power often at the forefront: “Gee

shook his head. Too big, too many unknowns. What he knew for certain was that Winston Chang was going to pay for sending Popo to the hospital” (Goto 59).

While Gee is not a soul-sucking predator, his pale skin could remind readers of one. Accordingly, by associating him with a vampire, they may feel compelled to identify with Gee's often-conflicted state of mind, even though his ailment does not come from a desire to consume blood (cf. Moruzi and Smith 8). And yet, Gee himself, through the course of the novel, goes through bodily changes that affect his state of mind even further because of the mortification and horror of losing control of his body:

He backed away, clasping the wrist of his maimed hand. It wasn't the pain. He felt no pain. Chunks were missing from his hand. His wound was bloodless, painless and white through and through. As if he were made of plaster of Paris.

A noise erupted from Gee's mouth. He slapped his unwounded hand over his lips. He didn't know if he was trying to hold back laughter or sobs. But if he started, he didn't know if he'd be able to stop. (Goto 228)

Thus, throughout the novel, Gee's turbulent and conflicted mind mirrors those reactions that teenage readers might occasionally experience (cf. Moruzi and Smith 8). In a way, Gee—far more so than Melanie—represents the tensions many young people face: losing their parental figure while also dealing with social isolation due to their appearance. Although Gee feels he is an outcast because of his differences, his status as a social pariah in school may reflect the current reality of adolescents suffering from various forms of bullying, particularly cyber-related.

Considering the fact above, an article written by Lui Xia Lee states that 58% of young Canadians have experienced some form of bullying due to their race or ethnicity (Lee 1), showing that *Darkest Light's* handling of the subject matter is realistic, highlighted by the scene where Gee is bullied by classmates while working at his adoptive grandmother's store:

“Heeeey.” Winston peered at Gee's downturned face. “You go to our school! You're that freak who doesn't talk! Are you a Re-tard?”

Winston and Tad laughed, batting at each other's arms as if they'd just told some wonderful joke. (Goto 20)

Additionally, *Darkest Light's* treatment of Gee and his attraction to Ilana addresses the fact that the Teen Gothic allows predominantly female readers to explore their sexuality (cf. Byron and Deans 89). Interestingly, Melanie never finds herself drawn to Mr Glueskin;

however, Gee is not only attracted to Ilana on a physical level but also wants to impress her, often allowing himself to be manipulated by her and nearly giving in to her demands. Simultaneously, she terrifies him as her caresses frequently come across as forceful and frightening due to her eel hands: “Her cold, lean torso pressed into his back, and Rilla slipped around his waist to hold him closer. Her deep, cold wet sank through Gee’s skin. His teeth began to chatter” (Goto 244).

By showing Gee’s fear, the narration warns readers of being lured in by someone with malicious intent -- a topic that the Teen Gothic genre often addresses (cf. Byron and Deans 96). With the rise of the internet, the *Canadian Centre for Child Protection* states that online grooming has become a prevalent problem in Canada, with the national tipline Cybertip.ca receiving an 815% increase in online luring reports. Online grooming involves flattery, compliments and pitting a child against one’s parents to make them comply with the sexual demands of a predator (Canadian Centre for Child Protection 1).

Although Ilana is not an online predator, her behaviour borders on obsession and without any regard for Gee's wishes:

Ilana tipped back her head and her laugh trickled like water. “Leave you alone? *Darling*, you’re the one who made me who I am today. I owe you my loyalty and commitment forever. We’re drawn together, through our experiences, our desires, our memories. Our love...” She giggled playfully. “I’ll never let you go,” she hissed. (Goto 244)

When Gee breaks free of her, he also stops wanting to be Mr Glueskin, which shows how much of a hold Ilana has had on him. He also lets go of his desire to be immortal and remain young forever – another theme that the Teen Gothic genre explores (cf. Byron and Deans 95). Instead, Gee accepts that he has to return to his actual state as a baby and, in this way, confront the familial trauma he has denied for so long; this not only means sacrificing his freedom but also leaving the loving home Popo provided for him. However, in this case, by leaving the comfort of the life he shared with Popo, Gee grows as an individual and helps others move on.

6.2: Bravery in the Face of the Macabre and Unknown: Melanie’s Journey

Considering the themes of becoming more assertive as a character throughout this dissertation, the following chapter addresses how Hiromi Goto's adolescent protagonist, Melanie, grows as a person in *Half World*, focusing on exploring her motivations and character development throughout the novel.

One of the recurring themes in *Half World* is overcoming crippling fears, inner demons and making difficult choices. These choices represent themes other Teen Gothic novels face, such as autonomy, finding one's voice and dealing with the loss of a parental role model (Byron and Deans 97).

Thus, it makes sense how its ending shows how making the right choice does not come with a reward or the option of a happy ending, indicated by Melanie's thoughts after the realisation that her mother cannot return to the world of the living: "Senseless. To have lost all that she had ever known - lost what had been most precious to her...All that struggle and heartache for nothing, all for nothing" (Goto 196).

On the contrary, the novel showcases how to grow into a more mature person -- it is necessary to sacrifice something; this sacrifice can be the loss of a loved one. However, it can also include the return to an existence that is fragile, uncertain and wrought with recurring pain and never-ending trauma, as is the case with Melanie's parents:

Tears welled in Fumiko's eyes. Her smudged eyeliner looked tawdry and cheap. But her voice was strong. Clear. "Your father and I cannot return to the Realm of Flesh. We are not Flesh. We never were. We cannot live there, with our Half Lives. I think I was able to cross the Realm only because I carried you: I carried Life. And I was able to live a kind of Half Life because I was near you these fourteen years. But I was already fading. I would have faded into nothing if I had stayed any longer." (Goto 189)

On that note, while the novel ends in a bittersweet way, there is a sense that Melanie has become more adult, especially in terms of her emotional evolution – this, in turn, can be perceived as more worthwhile and valuable than earning recognition for her bravery. In the case of Melanie, it is the realisation that her actions saved her mother and other beings of the Half World:

Melanie, a voice said wonderingly. Proudly. *You did it.*
Melanie blinked back a sudden surge of tears. "Mother?" she asked. "Is that you?"
Yes, the Spirit answered. (Goto 201)

Melanie, who starts the novel as a passive and timid girl, is forced to take action for the first time. Initially, she is reliant on others -- her neighbour Ming Wei (later referred to as Popo by Gee in the sequel), her mythical travelling companion, Jade Rat, and magical tokens that answer the questions she raises. However, the abovementioned tokens and her companions can only sometimes answer Melanie. Sometimes, the answers from these objects or beings are untransparent, downright unhelpful, incomplete, and, thus, frustrating: “Do you think you’re the only one who has a task to undertake in Half World?” Jade Rat asked evenly” (Goto 64).

Confronted with these sources of frustration, Melanie often remarks on her worthlessness, especially at the beginning of her journey:

If only she were more clever. Like the smartest girl in her school. Eleanor Cortes-Quan. They were both in the same grade but Eleanor had already skipped two years in a row, and she had placed first in the provincial math competition. If Melanie were smarter she could figure out what she should do; she could use her head and make intelligent decisions. (Goto 75)

During early moments in the novel, Melanie displays instances of paralysis that render her hesitant, to the point that it costs Jade Rat a limb when crossing the bridge to enter the Half-World: “Intense feelings writhed inside of Melanise’s stomach. Jade Rat had bitten off her own finger when she couldn’t do it herself” (Goto 62). Realising that her inactivity had such consequences causes Melanie to feel anger and disgust towards herself, marking the first step towards maturity: “Besides, she’s made of stone. Stone can’t feel pain ... The excuses Melanie made for herself infuriated her” (Goto 64).

Melanie initially blames her mother for her current conduct, but she also worries about her mother’s well-being: “How could she possibly save her mum? How could her mother have left her to cope with everything by herself?” (Goto 65). Motivated by the desire to save her mother, Melanie shows emotional growth when she dresses up as an inhabitant of the Half-World by donning makeup that hides her colourful cheeks and wearing grey clothes to mask her youth further: “She didn’t know which way to twirl the rod, so she ended up with odd kinks and cowlicks, as well as sausage-roll curls. It looked awful, but was also perfect. She didn’t look like a teenaged-girl; she looked like a frumpy middle-aged mother” (Goto 112).

From that point onwards, she starts relentlessly looking for her mother, not resting even when it becomes apparent that her mother, Fumiko, has forgotten about her existence: ““Why are you calling me that? I don’t know you,” Fumiko said in a monotone” (Goto 128). However, Melanie remains insistent on getting her mother back, no matter the fact that this risks her disguise; she finds herself unable to leave because -- once again -- her desire to save her mother is more potent than any other emotion, especially when she faces Mr Glueskin who treats her mother, Fumiko, like a prized possession: “Fumiko drew close to Mr. Glueskin and slipped her hand into his. Melanie felt sick as she watched his sticky fingers elongate and squeeze possessively, an elastic smile beginning to spread across his expressive face” (Goto 131).

Although Mr Glueskin deeply repulses Melanie, she explores her appeal as a woman for the first time by trying to charm him: “Melanie bestowed a smile upon Mr. Glueskin” (Goto 144). In that instance, Melanie learns about her femininity without too much exposure, which fits how the Teen Gothic genre uses subtlety to explore a main character's budding sexuality (Byron and Deans 81).

By claiming her sexuality, Melanie starts to realise that she has power and agency of her own. This epiphany allows her to summon the courage to make difficult decisions, namely to continue her ploy of fooling Mr Glueskin until the opportunity to act arises, even if his twisted actions infuriate her:

Rage burned hard and deep inside Melanie’s chest, but she clamped it down. She could not overcome Mr. Glueskin and his guests with physical force. Time. She would bide her time. The starfish-child suffered, but she would not die

The cruelty was that she would *never* die.... (Goto 147)

Her growth is shown in the novel's finale when she chooses not to abuse her power. Rather than giving in to anger and feelings of vengeance, Melanie shows mercy towards Mr Glueskin. She decides not to abandon him when he reverts into his proper form – a baby – despite the temptation to do so: “They had done nothing to deserve this life! Baby G could grow up into Mr. Glueskin again. But then it would all start once more. Locking all the Realms into the cycles of suffering” (Goto 184).

Instead, she decides to take the infant, also called Baby Gee, back to her world, even if this means leaving her mother behind. This sacrifice is difficult, but it is the only way her parents and other creatures from the Half-World can ascend to a higher plane of existence, namely that of spirits.

Her mother and father were both shaking their heads.

“It cannot be,” Fumiko said. “You have Life, as does this infant. This is a condition that cannot be argued. If you willfully break the cycle you disrupt the natural patterns. And no good can come from that. Look at what the division of the Realms has created. Creatures like Mr. Glueskin. Worlds decaying, deteriorating, violence and monstrosity. And we do not even know if Spirits still exist; they have been cut away from us for so many millennia. Melanie, you must go back to Realm of Flesh. For the good of all things.” (Goto 189)

While Melanie wants to have her mother at her side, she comes to terms with the fact that she has to grow up without her mother. Furthermore, she shows courage when she takes Baby Gee home, even if his existence is bizarre and uncertain. Melanie and her companions decide to raise him despite these reservations, which causes some supernatural creatures to feel bewilderment in the epilogue of *Half World*:

The two crows opened wide their beaks and made an odd popping sound.

“So the girl saves the Realms, loses her parents, and ends up living with an old woman while they raise a baby,” the white cat said snidely. “Human lives are so pitifully pedestrian. You have to admit it. There is nothing spectacular about them. How awful it must be to be human.”

The rat opened wide her mouth and revealed her long incisors in a great rat grin. “Don’t be so certain. Sometimes endings are beginnings in the making.” (Goto 225)

In the sequel, it is shown that the loss of her mother at such an early age has fundamentally affected Melanie to the point that she left her home upon graduating from high school. While she has succeeded academically in pursuing a thriving career as a researcher, she has yet to see her family in years. She later attributes this delay to feeling disdain towards Gee for being the infamous Mr Glueskin who caused her so much pain: ““Poor Gee.” Melanie’s voice was low. “I-I didn’t treat him well. I was too frightened to give him a chance. And then I left as soon as I could”” (Goto 319).

These events show that Melanie is not flawless even as an adult and has some lessons to learn- her adventures in *Half World* have not rendered her any wiser than most people. Although her knowledge of what comes after death gives her some understanding of the

universe, she still suffers the fate that all living humans face: that of dying and having to go through a never-ending cycle of trauma until these feelings have been processed and overcome.

6.3: Overcoming The Monster Inside of You: Gee's Story

Darkest Light addresses bravery in the face of the unknown. It handles themes such as overcoming anger and bitterness, especially as its main protagonist, Gee, is a young man battling intense rage and hatred. The following chapter explores his character growth throughout the story.

Set sixteen years after *Half World*, in *Darkest Light*, the uncertainty regarding Gee's future evolution is confirmed as he has grown into a brooding and mellow young man. From the beginning, it is clear that Gee's background is friendless as he is alienated from others his age due to his pale appearance:

At first, the Neo Goth kids at school had been drawn to his striking looks. They'd thought he was one of them until they realised that his white skin wasn't makeup, but was his natural complexion, and that he wasn't wearing contact lenses. After a few awkward starts at conversations they had pulled away, as if they couldn't stand to be around him. Like he gave off a kind of smell. He was avoided by everyone thereafter. (Goto 19)

The only people who show him love and affection are his adopted sister Melanie and his grandmother Popo (previously referred to as Ming Wei in *Half World*); however, even in this case, it is mentioned that he has not seen Melanie since she graduated from high school -- in fact, the only form of contact he has from her are monthly postcards: "She phoned once a month and sent postcards when she was on archaeological digs, but really, she was a stranger to him. Sometimes he felt bad for Popo, who spoke of Melanie often, with much love and admiration, but mostly he was glad to have his grandmother all to himself" (Goto 17).

Although Gee cares for his adoptive grandmother, he withdraws from other people and prefers to remain friendless. Gee acts this way because of fear, anger and bitterness inside him. In fact -- when taunted -- he often finds himself harbouring dark and destructive thoughts, with the added hint that he has the power to influence others negatively:

Gee continued staring. And Winston couldn't tear away. There, Gee thought, almost tenderly. There. The edges of the boy's own darkness. Everyone had it inside then. What you could do with that power. What – (Goto 22)

When he hears about his former existence, Gee is intrigued, primarily because of the villainess with eels for hands who tries to persuade Gee to remember his old self every time they meet. While he feels appalled by her behaviour and taste for violence, a part of him subconsciously wants to impress her, understanding that she knows a part of him that he is not aware of yet: “Deep down, he looked his fill, and she did not break his gaze. Her eyes seemed to widen, eager, greedy. He reached for his darkness with his own” (Goto 95).

She is as fascinating as she is dangerous, reminiscent of how vampires provoke fear and longing in the main characters of YA novels dealing with the supernatural (cf. Byron and Deans 91). In some way, her existence represents the darker impulses of Gee's soul- the ones he has tried so hard to suppress but have been cracking beneath the surface. More often than not, he considers her presence comforting and seductive; the more time he spends in her company, the less Gee can break her spell over himself, particularly once he has returned to the Half World: “Let me drown like this forever, he thought. Give me more. Give me all of it. Never let it stop” (Goto 165).

Ultimately, Gee feels compelled to travel to the Half-World because he has no idea what his parentage is; the hospitalisation of his adoptive grandmother, Popo, also makes him realise that -- upon her possible death -- he would be alone in the world, which makes him want to seek out the truth: “His parents were down there. Somewhere. His true family. The truth of his past” (Goto 140).

Although Gee is afraid of what might happen and initially reluctant to return to the Half-World, he still decides to face his fear, even though the uncertainty and danger looming over his head is terrifying. Eventually, it is the presence of his friend, Cracker, who wants to find her deceased sister, that keeps him going:

“Promise me. We'll see each other through this. Me, for my sister, you, for your birth parents. Promise me we're partners in this. Whatever happens. “ She met his dark eyes with ferocity. (Goto 110)

His fear proves to be true: the more time Gee spends inside the Half-Word, the more he feels hungry while an inner voice tells him to devour Cracker as she is alive, and he isn't, as White

Cat confirms: “He stood with his tail held vertically, except for the tip that flopped to one side. “You were born of Half World,” White Cat said. “You are not the same as Cracker”” (Goto 205).

In other words, he realises that, unlike Cracker, he is not alive and has to go through his cycle of trauma to ensure that he, too, can be reborn. He also comes to understand how Mr Glueskin came to be. This memory is triggered by witnessing the continuous traumatic cycle of his parents, more specifically, that of his mother. It is revealed that Gee died as a baby along with his mother due to his father attacking them: “Black blood dripped from his mother’s scalp onto the floor. Her nose running, thick with mucus and blood. Her eyes, dull, flat, dead from eternal suffering” (Goto 260).

Initially, Gee is disgusted, but he concludes that his father himself has been trapped in this vicious, recurring event as well; he starts to understand that -- by withdrawing himself from that cycle as Mr Glueskin -- he doomed his parents to be unable to move on:

Gee could feel White Cat staring.

“Why should you care what befalls her?” White Cat asked.

“I don’t know if I really do care,” Gee had to admit. “But my birth mother suffers. And that – The man who is my father ... he suffers doing evil.” Gee’s eyes were fierce. “I did evil too, as Mr. Glueskin! Popo knew that! But she still gave me a chance! She still loved me!” (Goto 308)

This realisation propels him to return to his own healing process as Gee has witnessed what happens to Half-World creatures unwilling to go through their trauma: they become monstrous and lose their humanity. He can see the bigger picture and accept that he has to return to his previous state of existence -- even if this means sacrificing his life with Melanie and Popo. Moreover, he also has to give up his newfound friendship with Cracker, who has brought him out of his shell; however, Gee realises that this sacrifice is necessary to restore the balance of the three realms permanently:

Gee took a long shuddering breath. “I’d do anything to go back home, to live with Popo....But it wouldn’t work. I’d be disrupting cycles. And even if Ilanna didn’t come for me again, Half World would send someone or something to take me back. I won’t do anything more to have Popo risk herself again.” (Goto 309)

Additionally, his kindness and compassion even inspire White Cat – characteristically grouchy and dismissive of humans until then - to join Gee in his cycle of suffering to ensure that he does not remain alone:

White Cat, ears pressed flat to his skull, plummeted beside him.

What are you doing, Gee screamed, appalled.

I am just joining you. For a little while. I've never tried this before. (Goto 313)

Furthermore, he feels gratitude that he spent sixteen years with a family who loved him -- he ascertains that this experience has helped him find the courage to return to his original state of existence. In the long run, the novel's conclusion makes it clear that Gee's sacrifice was not in vain: Gee and his mother become spirits in the sky, lighting up the world for others and having finally found the peace they craved for so long: *“The two orbs of light zigzagged across the dark sky, chasing each other, spiralling up to fall back down, so that the sapphire and green light would play upon the creatures who reached for them with such longing”* (Goto 324).

The other character who grows throughout this adventure is Cracker; she learns to accept that it was not her fault that her sister died and that -- to move on -- she has to process the fact that her sibling will have to undergo the cycle of suffering. Her anger and bitterness fade away when she realises how important it is to face one's fears and pain -- even in the afterlife:

She took a deep breath and dragged her fingers through her hair to push it away from her forehead. “But you’re right, Ms. Wei. I’ve accepted that I couldn’t undo her suicide. And hearing Karu’s story and what happened to his brother....” Cracker shuddered. “There are worse things than death.” (Goto 318)

She also learns to let go of her constant bitterness, finding a potential new family unit in the form of Popo, Melanie and White Cat (who has since returned home upon Gee having ascended to the Realm of Spirits):

She ran her fingers down the curve of White Cat’s furry back.

His tail lashed. “The nerve!” He exclaimed. But he didn’t leap away. He began to purr, a little unevenly, as if he were ill-practised.

Cracked continued stroking the cat as the night bloomed around them. His fur was very soft. (Goto 322)

While Hiromi Goto's characters grow stronger during their respective novels, the emphasis lies on accepting one's faults and overcoming demons that have haunted the characters until

then. In many ways, an integral aspect of facing one's demons is the realisation that, sometimes, things will still fall apart, as Melanie comments at the end of *Darkest Light*:

What does it all mean?" Melanie's voice had an edge. "What now?" She started laughing, a small bitter sound. "How many times must people go back there? First, to seek my mother, only to lose her. Then end up saving Baby Glueskin. Only to have him returned to Half World!" (Goto 316)

The older and wiser Ming Wei points out that, while it is not fair for Gee to return to the Half-World, the cycle needs to continue. Moreover, she hints that things will not be the same this time but that they will have to wait for the results: "Youth seeks immediate and visible outcomes. And if they don't see it with their eyes, they believe nothing has changed. Yet change is often slow, and it is often subtle" (Goto 317).

The novel ends with the message that the only thing for the living to continue doing is remembering their loved ones:

Cracker sighed, her breath breaking into shudders. "So what do we do now? What are we supposed to do?"

Ming Wei smiled. "We carry the memories of our loved ones forward. We honour their memories. And we live well. That is all" (Goto 317).

The maturity of such an ending - both hopeful and bittersweet -- gives *Darkest Light* an honest message that shows how, while happy endings are not necessarily guaranteed, it is still possible to pave a path for oneself that leads to an improved existence for oneself and others.

Chapter 7: Hopeful Monsters: Conquering Terror with Acceptance

7.1: Using the Gothic Short Story to Overcome Boundaries

As *Hopeful Monsters* is an anthology of short stories with some gothic elements, the following chapter provides an overview of the Gothic short story using work by Tracy Hayes, Guangwei Wu, Cynthia Sugars and Katrin Berndt as its backbone.

Hayes states that short stories are a form of writing that can more intensely elicit the reader's feelings of horror, sensationalism and melodrama as they escape the kind of scrutiny that a novel would enjoy. Using a limited amount of text space as its starting point, the Gothic short story wastes no words in “creating a balance between actuality and artifice which holds the reader enthralled” (77).

Hayes says that Thomas Hardy “studied the perverseness of human nature in both romantic and sexual matters, often pursuing them to bitter and violent conclusions” (78). Moreover, he often subverted the social expectations placed on men during the Victorian era while “explor[ing] social and psycho-sexual constructions of Victorian masculinity” (77). Further, Hardy argued that to accomplish such unconventional depictions of characters at that time, it was not a writer's job to imitate mundane events in short stories but to deliver unusual and extraordinary tales instead (Hayes 78).

Following a similar philosophy, *Hopeful Monsters* is an anthology containing eleven short stories about motherhood, cultural differences and living as an outsider. All of these stories feature Japanese or Japanese Canadian characters as their main protagonists, thus enabling Hiromi Goto to make references to Japanese myths such as the *kappa* or *yuki-onna*, which respectively refer to a mischievous water creature and a woman covered in white whose kisses entail freezing to death. Goto also uses *Hopeful Monsters* – as its title implies – to explore how these Japanese Canadian characters deal with displacement and being other, using monstrosity as a metaphor for how they deal with being alien to the Canadian landscape (cf. Sugars 186).

While the stories in *Hopeful Monsters* are grounded in reality, some of them contain a magical component—not dissimilar to *A Kappa Child* or *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, where realism and surrealistic elements intermingle to weave stories that overcome the boundaries and obstacles that the characters encounter. Furthermore, the inclusion of supernatural elements fits the notion of Gothic short stories containing unusual aspects while still taking place within the boundaries of the ordinary (cf. Hayes 77).

These gothic inclusions also make *Hopeful Monsters* similar to the previously listed and discussed novels by Hiromi Goto in terms of the theme of overcoming trauma: characters find themselves in difficult situations, enabling them to learn something about themselves and their previously established notions.

In some of these cases, those self-realizations can lead to overcoming one's obstacles, thus paving the path for a better existence; however, while the majority of those stories feature some epiphany on the part of the characters, not all of the stories' endings are happy, with some containing unresolved issues and lingering tensions between the parties involved.

The lack of a promise of a happy resolution further strengthens the realism of these short stories, each containing a character that deals with an obstacle. This obstacle may be external or internal, but the critical point remains that it proves to be a hindrance that stops said characters from fulfilling their full potential.

Wu explains that other Gothic short stories, such as those by Joyce Carol Oates, a prolific American writer, expose these characters' journeys through various techniques. These techniques are “psychological realism like stream of consciousness, interior monologue, association, memory, and inner analysis” (84). Wu adds that “[m]odernism techniques like grotesque, symbolism and nightmare” (84) are further methods used in Oates' and other Gothic short stories.

According to Wu, psychological realism “[...] comprise[s] two aspects: psychology and reality” (84). These particular aspects complement each other and are combined to allow a writer to reflect on the objective world through the character's point of view while keeping it consistent with reality. These literary techniques differ from the traditional novel in that the focus is centred on the character's inner thoughts while not displacing them from the

objective reality of the world surrounding them. The narrative removes the author from the plot, letting the character's interior life drive it instead (Wu 84-85).

Hopeful Monsters uses psychological realism by placing its protagonists at the forefront of their stories: the thoughts of these characters make the plots unfold, which usually deal with realistic life events interacting with the bizarre. In particular, the monstrous – imagined or otherwise – is placed in the middle of day-to-day events such as giving birth, breastfeeding a baby or going on a camping trip with one's family. The characters in these stories acknowledge these supernatural events as unusual, having to either accept the extraordinariness of these incidents or flee from them altogether.

For Berndt, an aspect of the modern Canadian Gothic short story is its focus on the horrors that haunt small towns and “settings whose seemingly intact civili[s]ation ought to provide refuge and safety from the terrors of the wilderness” (3). These stories—particularly those by Alice Munro—examine the obscure, ambivalent, illogical fears and anxieties lurking underneath everyday life's surface. Alice Munro's stories are part of the Southern Ontario Gothic, exposing the Ontario region's hidden cruelties (Berndt 3).

While the characters in *Hopeful Monsters* are of Japanese descent, their seemingly ordinary lives in Canada are turned upside down by the spectacle of the things that they wish to hide from. For example, in the short story “Hopeful Monsters”, a woman experiencing motherhood for the first time is confronted by the realisation that her newborn daughter's appearance is different from those of other children – a fact that exposes her desire to fit in with her community, but also reveals how, in some sense, she will always be an outcast.

Interestingly, Canadian life may seem monstrous, strange, and frightening to an outsider, as an elderly character experiences in “Camp Americana” while embarking on a camping trip with his son's family. As such, these two stories and others selected for analysis in this dissertation highlight how the horrors of day-to-day life often appear underneath the surface.

Furthermore, all selected stories in this thesis are in the present tense and are rendered from the point of view of a single character going through some ordeal. As described before, the criteria for choosing a story from Goto's anthology were themes of overcoming trauma with gothic elements incorporated to tackle these issues.

7.2: “Stinky Girl”: An Analysis

One of the central themes in “Stinky Girl” is the main character's alienation from the rest of the world. Her weight and poverty mark her as an outcast - in other words, she states that people avoid her at all costs: “It is crowded but I always have a wide path to myself” (Goto 47). Whether this keeping away from others and isolation is self-induced or not, it is essential to note that, for a large portion of the story, the main character considers herself an atrocity unworthy of being loved: “It’s not the fact that I am fat that foul odours are trapped in the folds of my body” (Goto 35).

Despite the character's belief in her hideousness, the narrator does not dwell on the more embittering aspects of being unattractive (such as the woman's crippling loneliness or depression) but – instead – dives into issues that are more focused on the character's potential to find a path to happiness for herself. The focus of “Stinky Girl” is not to shine a light on the fact that the main character cannot escape her fate but is capable of enriching it instead. More precisely, it depicts a journey from being forced to live with one's ugliness and physical abhorrence to finding value in such an existence, even deriving satisfaction from it.

At the story's beginning, the main character is all too aware of her shortcomings: she claims that her body emits a strong odour. In addition to that, her mother inflicts verbal abuse on her daily. The ghost of her father – a talking head that spends its existence lamenting their current situation -- also haunts her. These factors contribute to her leading a confined and oppressive life in a trailer home that offers little comfort, not helped by the fact that her mother owns a dog she shows more affection for than her daughter: “The dog decided to remain in the confines of our trailer and I realized one can never foretell the life choices that others will enact. Mother called him Rabies, and dragged his floppy body outside” (Goto 43).

To escape that suffocating household, the protagonist spends her days at a shopping mall, observing human behaviour while mulling over her lot in life. While she does not want to be angry like her mother or dwell too much self-pity, like her father's spectre, she feels lonely and isolated: “Alas, no one wants to be merely tolerated, like a whining child or an ugly dog” (Goto 47).

Still, by spending time in the vicinity of others, she establishes a sense of self-worth by acknowledging her intelligence and using her powers of observation to feel some kinship with others – not only because she can see cracks in the facade that others present but because she has grown to feel empathy with others, due to having been overlooked for most of her life.

Her ability to understand other people's shortcomings enables her to eventually overcome her loneliness by stepping outside her position as a mere observer and partaking in an activity involving other humans. By doing that, she finds happiness and joy in the company of children – a feat she accomplishes because she decides to stop fearing other adults' judgement: “Fathers faint and an enterprising teenager grabs a camera from a supine parent and begins to snap pictures. None of it matters” (Goto 53).

Once she embraces her perceived differences from other people, she discovers that the purpose in her life might be to make others laugh. Thus, at the end of the story, instead of using her appearance as an excuse to shy away from the company of other people, she finds it to be a strength and an asset that she can use to her advantage: “I burst out laughing and the children too. I don’t know what will happen tomorrow or the day that follows, but the possibilities are endless” (Goto 54).

The gothic aspects of “Stinky Girl” come into play when considering the presence of the father's head. This spectre is an out-of-ordinary element in an otherwise realistic story. While the father's phantom does not depict any suppressed emotions or hidden fears on the protagonist's part, his appearance highlights what she wishes to avoid – namely, an afterlife characterised by bitterness: “But Father is a sorry shade, a cloud of perpetual doom and defeat” (Goto 44).

It warns her of what might happen if she keeps hiding from others. Other gothic elements appear in the story's writing style: the character's inner musings on her life allow the reader to glimpse her mindset, thus allowing them to sympathise and understand her character development throughout the plot.

7.3: “Tales From the Breast”: An Analysis

“Tales From the Breast” deals with the often undisclosed and uglier sides of motherhood – namely, breastfeeding issues and a mother’s inability to reconcile herself to the action expected of her as something natural and beautiful throughout the story. The unnamed protagonist faces criticism from her husband for being unable to deal with the pain and discomfort of feeding her baby:

“Women have been breastfeeding since there have been women.”

“What!”

“You know what I mean. It’s natural. Women have been breastfeeding ever since their existence, ever since having a baby,” he lectures, glancing down once at my tortured breasts. (Goto 59)

Aside from the physical turmoil, the central figure also feels objectified: she sees herself as nothing but a milk maker for a baby. It does not matter how much her breasts hurt or that the milk is coloured red. Her feelings on the subject are disregarded, effectively silencing and side-sweeping her objection: ““Why do you have to be so complicated?”” (Goto 59).

When she voices her concerns, her husband deems her selfish; he does not help her with other household chores and complains that she is demanding. He also insinuates that she is weak because she cannot deal with the duties of motherhood. He is indifferent to her personal feelings and sees her as a milking machine that exists to provide for their child and nothing else: ““You’re only thinking about yourself,” he accuses, pointing a finger at my chest. “Breastfeeding is the best of her and you’re giving up, just like that. I thought you were tougher”” (Goto 62).

While her mother-in-law never criticises the main character out loud, she often ignores her daughter-in-law, only addressing her when asking whether she and her son want food. Managing her daughter-in-law in such a manner implies that the mother-in-law does not view her as an actual person but as part of her son’s life – not unlike an inanimate object: “You want to yell down the hall that you have a name and it isn’t Breast-Milk” (Goto 61).

At one point during the story, the new mother grows so fed up with everyone dismissing her feelings that she proclaims she wants to stop breastfeeding, prompting her husband to say:

“If I could breastfeed, I would do it gladly!”, he hisses. Flings the blankets back and stomps to the crib” (Goto 63).

This statement showcases how little he understands his wife and views her condition as something taken for granted. He also seems to think that caring for a baby is easy – in fact, he regards it as something anyone with breasts could do. He shows, once again, how he views his wife as an object that does not have feelings or opinions.

Meanwhile, the narrator herself – describing her person in the second person – details how much breastfeeding has put a strain on her: “The middle-of-the-night feed is the longest and most painful part of breastfeeding day. It lasts from two to six hours” (Goto 61). Not only has breastfeeding placed a physical toil on her, but the usage of the second person pronoun hints at a sense of self-alienation and detachment that implies that the narrator has to come to view herself as an object as well.

In a cruel twist of fate, the husband wakes up with breasts the morning after having said he could breastfeed the baby. While he is horrified by this discovery, the wife states that he should be happy and that his current state is perfectly natural. With her husband now having breasts, she can feed the baby as she wants without facing criticism or backlash from those closest to her. Moreover, her husband has been given what he deserves after ignoring his wife’s problems and concerns about raising a child: “It’s okay,” I nurture him. “Don’t worry. Everything is fine. Just do what comes naturally” (Goto 65).

What “Tales From the Breast” highlights is how motherhood is not unlike a monstrous transition due to the changes inflicted upon the mother’s physical and mental state. Not only does the lead character feel like she has lost control over her own body, but others question her ability to make her own choices – it seems that, in society’s eyes, her individuality is non-existent and that her entire purpose in life is solely defined by that of her child and her child alone. In a way, this not only makes the state of motherhood a physical monstrosity but an emotional one as well: the protagonist feels suffocated by the expectations of others and wishes to flee the burdens of being a mother.

Only when her husband can breastfeed himself – an unnatural state for him – is she freed from the shackles he and his mother have forced on her. Her husband has been turned into a

creature like her, enabling him to carry out the tasks he expects of her in her stead: “The unfamiliar weight of engorged breasts make him sit, stir, restless, a soft moan between his parted lips. They are no longer spurting with milk, but drip evenly, runnels down his side” (Goto 64).

He may consider it abnormal and demonic to have breasts, but the main character experiences a feeling of bliss, *schadenfreude* and relief. This physical change in her husband enables her to feed her child with formula milk. She makes this choice while also acknowledging the beauty of her body, its naturality and its power to sustain life – the knowledge allows her to sleep soundly for the first time: “I smile. Beam in the dim glow of the light. Turn on to my side and sleep sweetly, soundly” (Goto 65).

This knowledge enables her to understand that being a mother is a thing of beauty in itself. Moreover, she also comes to comprehend that, as a woman and a mother, it is up to her how she wants to feed her child, with the opinion of others not being as important as her maternal instinct. In other words, she has finally grasped her agency as a woman. Moreover, she has overcome the stigma of being an unnatural mother – a woman who is either mentally or physically incapable of meeting culturally acceptable norms of being pregnant or bringing up a child (cf. Ruthven 40).

Apart from the husband’s sudden physical changes, “Tales From the Breast” is a realistic story, with the most frightening aspects occurring in the central character’s head. While feeling ignored and dismissed by her husband and mother-in-law, she often muses about how the child wishes to eat her alive because of the pain that breastfeeding inflicts upon her. However, while the story deals with the realities of motherhood, the mother’s emotional turmoil unveils how horrific and frightening the experience is: “The pain is so intense, so slicing real, that you are unable to think of it as pleasurable. You realize you are not a masochist” (Goto 61).

Because the story emphasises the central character’s emotional state, these elements make “Tales From the Breast” a Gothic short story: it puts the mother at the centre of the plot while offering the reader a glimpse into her mental state with its nightmarish thoughts (the fear of her child wanting to devour her whole). Moreover, her husband’s transformation into a man with breasts fits in with the concept of mixing the plausible with the grotesque – at the same

time, the outlandish does not seem so out of place as to disrupt the overall plausibility of the situation.

Furthermore, regarding themes, *Tales From the Breast* is a tale about overcoming trauma while respecting a character's choices. In the case of this story, the protagonist comes to accept her existence as a mother while also growing in an emotional sense. No longer willing to submit to the wishes of her husband and mother-in-law, she becomes an independent person who feels confident enough to do the things that feel right for her. More precisely, she is free to raise her baby in a manner that establishes a healthy relationship with her child, with her nightmares becoming a thing of the past.

7.4: "From Across a River": An Analysis

"From Across a River" is centred around an emotionally troubled mother, Emiko, whose husband, Gordon, and primary-school-aged daughter left her after she hit her child. Throughout the story, a mysterious old woman who keeps her face obscured stalks Emiko. When confronting the stalker, she finds out that the figure is faceless: a silent entity that does nothing but make the principal character feel increasingly unsettled and tense in her own 'home'³³: "Emiko's eyes narrowed. It was *her*! Now she was spying!" (Goto 109).

Towards the end of the story, the main character confronts the hollowness of her emotions and the grief of having lost a child – a little daughter called Tara, whose death – implied to have been an accident – has left Emiko with feelings of guilt as well as despair. These feelings are most clearly highlighted when she imagines seeing the spectre of her deceased child: "An ache in her chest, her breasts. So familiar, a mother never forgot" (Goto 108).

Emiko's guilt is a result of her cultural inheritance that she views as 'bad blood' and that the faceless woman herself represents the Japanese heritage she has been trying to reject (Sugars 187). A dream of Emiko reveals that her father seemed to believe that their blood was tainted, to the point that it had to be 'let out': "The blood is sick," he explains gently as he clasps her wrist in a soft but firm grip. He slices the tender flesh, a parting of meat and sinew, white, red

³³ It is arguable whether Canada, which seems hostile, is Emiko's home.

and gleaming” (Goto 95). As an adult, Emiko remains haunted by the spectre of her father's beliefs.

At the same time, while Emiko expresses disregard for her heritage, she also voices regret for having left her home country behind, even if it is because she feels that it was another factor that contributed to the death of her child (cf. Sugars 187): “If she’d never have left Japan none of this would have come to be” (Goto 107).

However, by having cut herself off from her Japanese background, Emiko has not only isolated herself from the part of herself that could potentially make peace with the guilt but also made it harder for her to reconnect with her husband, Gordon, and child (cf. Sugars 187), as – instead of allowing herself to heal – she keeps dwelling on everything that is wrong with her, consequently falling further into a vicious cycle that keeps her trapped in her feelings of self-hatred, as indicated by the way she is starving herself while musing whether she could eat herself: “Her stomach rumbled. Perhaps, she could eat her tongue, feed herself with her own body and eliminate the element that tasted bad in the first place” (Goto 106).

By confronting the mysterious figure, the protagonist has, at the very least, been made aware that the inner demons haunting her made her abusive towards her family. The story ends with her breaking down after her pursuit of the faceless spectre has proven to be fruitless. During her mental breakdown, she is not alone but comforted by a concerned neighbour, which Emiko struggles with as she has been avoiding human contact for so long: “He opened his arms to enfold her, the scent of baby pine powder mixed with sour brine stench rising from his housecoat” (Goto 112).

Unlike the other stories in *Hopeful Monsters*, there is no resolution to the main character's internal struggles: she is still coping with grief. It remains unclear whether meeting the faceless stranger will help her overcome her issues or heal the rift that her mental state has caused within her family: “Emiko gave a little wave without looking back, but Gordon had already carried Kelsey to her bedroom” (Goto 104).

Indeed, the fact that the faceless creature forces Emiko to confront her own ‘facelessness’ – the complete erasure of her own identity – implies that Emiko could remain haunted by the death of her child forever, become a spectre of her guilt unless she comes to accept that the

death of her child was nothing but tragedy (Sugars 187) that she could not have prevented. To a degree, Emiko seems aware of that herself as she confronts the faceless woman who, in a sense, represents the manifestation of her own guilt:

“Look at me!” Emiko sprayed. “It wasn’t my fault! I don’t know who told you! I couldn’t see her! Do you understand? It was a mistake. She was playing in the alley.” (Goto 110)

Despite that, the story still fits into the themes of overcoming trauma as the main character confronts her emotions. She is no longer allowed to repress them, which means that – at some point – she will have to process the sadness that has plagued her up till then. Her behaviour has been destructive because she wanted to hit her surviving child. Additionally, she has been neglecting her daughter, preferring to dwell on the child she lost instead, with Tara’s name often omitted as the trauma of her death is still fresh: “Kelsey had come into this world, bawling, headfirst. But Ta - but the other had to be cut out” (Goto 105). In other words, Emiko is not only haunted by a faceless spectre but by the memories of the daughter she lost – a fact that makes her unable to move on.

“From Across a River” showcases how Hiromi Goto fuses Japanese legends within a Canadian landscape. The faceless creature that haunts the main character is part of Japanese folklore, more widely known as *Noppera-Bō*³⁴. As in Japanese folklore, its purpose in the story is to frighten the protagonist – which it accomplishes at the story’s climax: “Emiko spun the woman around, she must see her face. Faster and faster, Emiko spun the stranger, desperate to catch up, sobbing, her tears streamed into saliva, gulping to hold down her heart. But every way she turned her, the woman had no face” (Goto 111).

Dealing with the faceless woman leaves Emiko shell-shocked and exposed to the fragility of her mental health. Moreover, it forces her to come out of her shell. She breaks down in front of someone else, which forces her to acknowledge her depression: “Emiko wailed even louder. The pain would last a very long time” (Goto 113). As frightening as the revelation of the faceless woman is, there is hope that, with the help of her neighbour, who now is aware of her mental state, Emiko could seek the professional help she needs, triggering the first step towards coming to terms with the feelings of grief.

³⁴ More information about the faceless ghost can be found in the [appendix](#).

The faceless ghost's existence showcases how “From Across a River” is a Gothic short story. Not only is the *Noppera-Bō* an abnormal element in an otherwise realistic tale, but it also fits in with the theme of a supernatural event not disrupting the ordinary day-to-day occurrences within the story. Another gothic aspect is the story's focus on Emiko's interior state: her anxiety and guilt over having lost a child help the reader understand the driving force behind the protagonist's actions.

Additionally – what makes “From Across a River” fit in with the Canadian Gothic – is how the story's action unfolds within the confines of a small community. Emiko often suspects that her neighbours are playing pranks on her, which hints that she still feels alienated and uneasy living in such proximity to them: “They didn’t live in a bad neighborhood, but who knew what could happen in a back alley? There was no security” (Goto 99).

“From Across a River” also uses the bleakness and wintry nature of the Canadian landscape to highlight further the fear Emiko feels towards the stalker—and, by extension, herself. This fear is indicated by the fact that she thinks her own face is invisible: “‘M-m-my face!’ Emiko gasped, shuddering with terrible fear” (Goto 112).

By exposing the facelessness of the figure that is haunting her, she accepts that something is wrong with herself: Emiko's own facelessness reveals that she can no longer ignore that she has become unrecognisable to her loved ones and herself. Emiko has become uncanny and frightening, igniting feelings of disdain in others, including her husband: “Gorden ran to his daughter and scooped her up in his strong arms. His eyes burned Emiko’s face with something she’d never seen before” (Goto 104).

Confronting one's grotesque nature is another central theme in Hiromi Goto's novels and gothic literature. In Goto's novels and short stories, embracing one's Japanese – thus, other – identity means accepting that one is different from one's neighbours. It means accepting that one is an outsider for being Japanese and that trying to fit in is never going to be entirely possible, as shown by how Emiko views birds as precursors of the afterlife, referencing the connection birds share with Japanese folktales related to death³⁵: “But Emiko made sure the birds that visited her yard only partook of what the living had eaten” (Goto 102).

³⁵ More information about birds and their connection to death in Japanese folklore can be found in the [appendix](#).

By denying her Japanese heritage, all Emiko accomplished was making parts of herself wither away, which further shows how the Gothic mode often deals with undisclosed and repressed emotions masked by imagined spectres: it is by confronting these spectres that a person grows emotionally stronger and also comes to reconcile the parts of themselves that are unsavoury in terms of social norms. While Emiko still cannot accept all parts of herself, there is hope she may do so after meeting the faceless ghost.

7.5: “Camp Americana”: An Analysis

“Camp Americana” follows a disgruntled, retired Japanese dentist, Masahiro, on a camping trip with his family in North America. However, it soon becomes evident that the former dentist has issues with his son's Canadian family, to the point that just looking at them infuriates him: “Masahiro’s lips turn down. His grandchildren” (Goto 113).

Not only does he consider his son, Osamu, a disappointment because he moved to Canada, but he also disapproves of his daughter-in-law, Shizuko, and grandchildren, Jennifer and Gary. He deems them ill-mannered, disrespectful towards himself, and unskilled when speaking Japanese: “Speaking in English in front of their visiting grandfather when they could try harder with their atrocious Japanese” (Goto 113).

During the journey, he does nothing but complain, incapable of seeing anything good about his surroundings or the people closest to him, instead often musing about where he would rather be: “He could be golfing in the Rockies or swimming in a properly chlorinated pool at a resort hotel. But no, camping in a used camper with an ill-mannered fat woman and uncivilized children” (Goto 121). In addition, he also compares his son's lifestyle to his own in an unfavourable light, which further implies that his offspring have failed to live up to his expectations: “Who would have thought that his son would throw away his own country and move to a land of foreigners?” (Goto 115).

His displeasure grows more palpable when he discovers (or deludes himself into believing) that his grandchildren are abnormal entities – this confirms his suspicions that his daughter-in-law and her children are different from him, thus reaffirming his dislike of her

and Canada: “If they turned upon each other, he could run for the camper. Ohhhh, what manner of children are they? Their mother is a monster. His fool son” (Goto 128).

In a moment of panic, he rushes to his wife Chiye for comfort, who fits into the old man's norms of what a perfect Japanese homemaker should be despite having grown older and less attractive in his eyes. She has never questioned his decisions and always provided for him: “Food appearing like it ought to whenever he was hungry. His bath filled until it ran over. Abundance and grace. His life has been polished and shined by his helpmate, Mama, all along” (Goto 128).

However, rather than finding solace in the arms of his spouse, he discovers that she – in his bungled perception – is also demonic. Her physical form, especially her face, is ominous and distorted:

It bobs mere inches from his. Lit up like a paper lantern, her face glows. Her expression is benign. She stares at him. Small black eyes unblinking. Like they are painted on her skin. He cannot feel her breathing. Her breath.

Masashiro cannot move.

His wife's head starts weaving. Churning, moiling through the night air, his wife's neck writhes sinuously without a sound.

Her body, sitting neatly on the ground, is three metres away. (Goto 129)

The horror of seemingly discovering his wife's true nature leaves the elderly man shell-shocked: he suffers from a heart attack due to these revelations. As he leaves his earthly existence behind, the old man laments how little he knows about his family: “Really, he thinks, his entire life. He hadn't known any of them at all” (Goto 133). Not only does this display his ignorance of others but also of himself: it is not his family who are outsiders but the old man himself. Whether this is because he failed to embrace his monstrosity or theirs, it is clear that his lack of affection and empathy for his extended family has robbed him of the ability to form a connection with them.

Tragically, it seems that his granddaughter Jennifer -- the only one who views his soul's ascent into heaven -- may not have been as monstrous and alien as he believed while still alive (Sugars 188), showing how it was Masahiro's lack of willingness to overlook their differences that robbed him of the opportunity of getting to know her. Not only did he deprive

himself of the affection of a grandchild, but he also robbed her of the chance to learn more about him, which her melancholy goodbye to him shows: ““Goodbye, then,” Jennifer whispers. The girl tilts her head to one side, an unreadable expression on his granddaughter’s face” (Goto 132).

“Camp Americana” uses the concept of shapeshifters³⁶, famous in Japanese folklore, to highlight how being in a foreign country can often be intimidating. What makes it different from the other short stories in *Hopeful Monsters* is the fact that the protagonist is a Japanese native who has a limited understanding of Canadian traditions and worldviews but references myths from his own country instead: “The warmth is sucked from his lungs, and, unbidden, he thinks of the Woman of the Snow. Her deadly kiss” (Goto 124).

As such, he finds himself mystified by how his son's family works: for him, they are as hard to understand as wild beasts. The discovery that they are monsters at the end showcases how alienated the old man is from the world he knows and how he views outsiders as inhumane: “Gary’s troubled eyes stare at him from a cat face” (Goto 127).

Not only does he view his son's family as horrific and monstrous, but he also is dismissive of them and the country they live in. By constantly comparing their lifestyles and habits and regarding them as inferior to Japanese ideals, he displays an attitude of superiority and internal racism that makes it hard for him to harbour any affection for them, even at the very end of his life: “Fat Shizuka dwarfs his freak wife who may or may not be the Chiye he married so long ago” (Goto 133).

Instead, he behaves indifferently and cruelly towards his son's family, not even attempting to understand them better. Indeed, he is annoyed that they do not speak Japanese and have not embraced more traditional aspects of Japanese culture, such as respecting one's elders: “His son’s wife was not raised properly, that’s obvious. And the same thing is happening to his grandchildren. He glares at the little beasts, but they ignore him” (Goto 116). This indifference shows annoyance at being in Canada – a country that he finds hostile and strange, constantly lamenting that he is not in Japan.

³⁶ More information about shapeshifters can be found in the [appendix](#).

These “Camp Americana” aspects are reminiscent of the Canadian Gothic, where everyday occurrences of Canadian life are presented as mysterious and frightening. Furthermore, the story's gothic elements reveal how regular events are grotesque by displaying the demonic nature of one's family. Indeed, the old man's fallacy shows when he finds out that his wife, a person he has taken for granted – is also a shapeshifter – a fact that shatters his preconceived notion of what he thought he knew: “Masahiro can hear the dragging shuffle of his wife’s gait coming closer and closer. He had thought that her shoddy way of walking had been caused by the overuse of slippers inside the house. Did he remember a time when she had walked differently?” (Goto 132).

Ultimately, the retired dentist is punished for his willful ignorance and cruelty. Rather than celebrating his family's reunion and trying to find joy in their differences, he is contemptuous and unable to accept a culture unknown to him. This inability to embrace something else costs him his life. Still, earlier, it also robs him of the ability to overcome his disappointment towards his son, which in the end leaves him with nothing but feelings of regret as he witnesses a grieving family that – despite all of its supposed faults – loved him deeply:

It looks like a movie, he thinks. He can see Osamu’s bald head bobbing with sorrow. Fat Shizuko dwarfs his freak wife who may or may not be the Chiye he married so very long ago. Gary, crouching down next to his body, looks like he is praying. Only Jennifer looks up. Her dark eyes glint in the rising sun. Chiye follows Jennifer’s gaze. Her mouth drops in a wail. (Goto 133)

His life ends without ever bridging the gap between him and his son's family – he has nothing left but to muse over how little he understood his family, having wasted his entire life being hung up on pettiness: “So many years, Masahiro thinks. So much time” (Goto 133). This ending marks “Camp Americana” as a cautionary tale that shows how important it is to embrace differences rather than brush them aside. Finally, “Camp Americana” reveals that monsters lurk everywhere – and that it may be more damning to run from them than accept them for what they are as monsters – entities that cross race and boundaries – may be what tie us all together.

7.7: “Hopeful Monsters”: An Analysis

Tying in with the themes of her novels, such as *The Kappa Child*, the short story “Hopeful Monsters” reconciles the horrific with the good, the kind, and the beautiful. It further deals with horror: beastliness in the form of an undesirable physical trait.

More specifically, in “Hopeful Monsters,” where a woman called Hisa gives birth to a daughter with a tail, acceptance and hope are fundamental themes as the main character has to come to terms with the fact that her child—despite being different—is also precious. Thus, like “Stinky Girl,” it touches upon embracing a physical deformity—in this case, not just one’s own but also that of a loved one.

During the story, Hisa processes feelings such as disgust and horror: horror at giving birth to a baby with a tail and disgust towards her husband, who does not understand her concerns. According to him, the baby's abnormality is fixable and not something to worry about:

“Shhh,” Bobby tried. “Sweetheart. It’s nothing, really. I was just a little surprised. But as the doctor says, it’s nothing that can’t be fixed with a little surgery.” (Goto 146)

However, Hisa feels differently – sensing that – even with the tail's removal – her child will always be unlike others. Hisa thinks that the entire experience has altered her as well. “How could everything change so quickly? Just yesterday or the day before she’d been such an innocent. Hisa shook her head. She could have lived her whole life an innocent, and been perfectly happy for all she knew” (Goto 167). In essence, the gist of “Hopeful Monsters” is that Hisa goes from thinking that the surgical removal of the tail is necessary to conform to social norms to questioning these expectations (cf. Ruthven 44).

The story's climax occurs when Hisa’s mother, Junko, confronts her with the truth about her birth: she was herself born with a tail that was later surgically removed. Moreover, Junko also confesses that she had three other babies with tails, whom she miscarried:

"Hisa-chan, I was weak. I was forty-two when I had you. I was confused. You lived. But you had a tail, like the others. Your father, my husband, “Mama spat. “He left that night.”

Hisa’s cheeks burned.

“That night I felt your tail twitching beneath the wet cloth diaper. I-I screamed. They came back and took you away. Sedated me. When I woke up the next afternoon, your tail was gone.” (Goto 164)

Not only does Hisa's mother regret allowing that operation to happen, but she also pleads with her daughter not to let her granddaughter suffer the same fate: “‘Hisa-chan. I’m so sorry. I didn’t protect you. Please forgive your mama,’” Mama sobbed” (Goto 164). This revelation makes Hisa realise she felt empty and deprived of something without knowing its reason: “A searing heat cracked inside Hisa’s chest. Her breath was short and the clamor of bells resounded inside her head” (Goto 164).

Moreover, she also understands that her baby's tail is not a thing of horror but something to be honoured, preserved and protected. Hisa realises that her baby's tail is not a deformity but a moving, living part of her: “The tail still circled Hisa’s wrist. The baby gazed at her face” (Goto 163). Confronted with those facts, Hisa, with the help of her mother, leaves her old life and hometown behind, realising that outsiders will never understand how precious her child is:

She changed into day clothes and packed her overnight bag with the diapers and bundling cloths that were stored below the bassinet. Luckily she had her purse already. She would have enough money to finance travel. And Mama had her savings, too. It would be enough to see them to warmer climes. Like that childhood game. When something or someone was hidden. And you had to guess where. (Goto 167)

Not only does the tail make Hisa’s daughter unique, but it also offers hope for other ‘monsters’ – people who do not fit into the stereotypical ideal of being able-bodied and white – as she is both human but also superior in a way (cf. McCormack 169). A change of scenery, in this case, is not an act borne out of fear but out of a desire to protect her child from others, especially medical professionals who wish to cure Hisa’s daughter by removing her tail (cf. McCormack 167).

Furthermore, the story shows how initial fear and horror can become admiration once these negative feelings are processed, as in the case of Hisa, who ends the story as a protective, loving mother: “Hisa clasped the overnight bag and purse with one elbow, then carefully lifted her baby into her arms. “Nenne,” she murmured. “Nenne”” (Goto 168).

Like the other stories in the volume, “Hopeful Monsters” demonstrates how the ordinary can often contain unusual elements. As with other Gothic short stories, the extraordinary events in “Hopeful Monsters” do not clash with the realism that otherwise characterises it; the only thing that supposedly sets the mother and her daughter apart from their community is that

they were both born with a tail. It is only by removing the tail that they can escape the supposed fate of being considered abnormal outcasts.

However, the hope that removing the tail would solve all of Hisa's problems is an illusion, as it would destroy a vital part of her daughter. Also, the tail may arguably be read as a metaphor for her Japanese identity, referenced by Hisa when she associates the tail with a Japanese myth: "Kobutori Ji-san," Hisa giggled. "Like the Japanese folk tale. 'The Old Man and His Wen'" (Goto 149).

Therefore, by giving in to the pressure to be like everyone else, Hisa would doom her daughter to feel the same sensation she has throughout the years, namely that of not entirely fitting in without knowing why. As such, the realisation that she has to keep her daughter's tail intact fits in with the theme of embracing one's differences as they are – and, by extension, accepting that one can never really fit in.

Moreover, the narrative clarifies that such an outcome is more desirable as it allows its characters to live their lives to their fullest potential: the heroine can understand why she has always felt so empty, while her daughter can be who she is.

Chapter 8: Shadow Life - Defiance in the Face of Death

An Overview of *Shadow Life*

Shadow Life is a graphic novel that Hiromi Goto co-wrote with Ann Xu about an elderly Japanese-Canadian woman named Kumiko who escapes from a care home after her overprotective daughters place her there. Having decided to live out the rest of her days on her terms, Kumiko rents a small apartment and does her day-to-day business.

Not only does she gather thrown-away items and refurbish them for later use in her home, but she also manages to keep in touch with her daughters via message chats and video calls. She does so without disclosing her location, as she wants to assure her daughters that she is doing fine and does not want them worrying about her (or looking for her).

Kumiko finds her solitary yet peaceful existence shattered when she encounters a shadowy cat-shaped spectre she regards as a harbinger of death. Stating that she is not ready to die, she lets the vacuum cleaner swallow the creature whole to keep it trapped. After this incident, Kumiko embarks on a journey of self-discovery, reading up on death in a local library. When Kumiko collapses at home and goes to the hospital, the doctors inform her that her health is declining.

During this time, Kumiko meets Alice, a former lover who can see shadowy forms of death herself due to being terminally ill. Their reconciliation leads Kumiko to reflect on the past and make amends with Alice. She also tames a little ghost chick only visible to her; this creature becomes her steady companion and proves loyal to her.

When Kumiko nearly dies in the hospital following another collapse, it is through the love and devotion of Alice (and her little ghost chick) that she fights off the entity that wants to claim her life and return to the world of the living. Surrounded by friends and family, Kumiko can live without worrying about going too soon.

8.1: Graveyard Poetry and Its Connection to *Shadow Life*

The following chapter briefly examines the relationship *Shadow Life* shares with graveyard poetry, previously discussed in [chapter 1.4 of this dissertation](#).

In defiance of a society that dismisses death as a taboo subject in favour of focusing on the young and beautiful, *Shadow Life* tackles the subject matter not only by having Kumiko try to fight it but is also present in other instances, such as Alice's terminal illness and the effects Samuel's – her husband's -- untimely death has left on Kumiko.

While Kumiko and Alice are aware of their mortality, they use it as an opportunity to dwell on their lives and past relationships and further utilise it to heal the rift between them. Thus, in many ways, *Shadow Life* treats death in a way that is not too dissimilar to graveyard poetry, where poets mused over their lives while confronted with their mortality (cf. Trowbridge 24). Unlike the poets, though, Kumiko does not wish to immortalise herself -- she wants to live out the rest of her days in peace, knowing that, when she dies, she will see her husband, Samuel, again. Similarly, when Kumiko is close to dying, Alice remains convinced that she and Kumiko will connect in the afterlife: “Well then. I’ll be seeing you very soon, my dear” (Goto 303).

That aspect of hopefulness makes *Shadow Life* more in tune with graveyard poetry than the traditional Gothic, where death is viewed as a force that brings rot and decay (cf. Trowbridge 28). However, *Shadow Life* does not entirely sweep aside the darker aspects of death, with the spectre pursuing Kumiko depicted as a vengeful being who wishes to lay claim on her due to her tenacity and desire to survive, as further explored [in section 8.4](#) of this chapter.

Yet, even with the more sinister sides of death explored in *Shadow Life*, the fact that creatures of the afterlife come to Kumiko's aid shows that there is more to dying than just turning into a corpse. Instead, there is something else to look forward to -- a concept conveyed by how Gothic writers depicted the afterlife in their works (cf. Trowbridge 28).

8.2: The *Stone Angel* and Hiromi Goto's Elderly Female Characters

Unlike her other novels, such as *A Chorus of Mushrooms* or *The Kappa Child*, *Shadow Life* is about an elderly heroine, Kumiko, who deals with health issues. The people surrounding her – including her loved ones- question her ability to make life choices, thus undermining her independence and agency.

To better explore the themes of ageing, this chapter focuses on another Canadian novel that features an old female character, Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, published in 1964. Research by Asmaa Awad Ahmed, Nelly Atef Hashaad and Jody Ludlow provides analysis that helps understand the connection between those two novels. Hiromi Goto's novel *A Chorus of Mushrooms* is discussed, too, as the elderly Naoe is a central character who also goes through a journey.

The Stone Angel is about a 94-year-old woman named Hagar Shipley. It details the last days of her life and how her childhood memories, unhappy marriage and strained relationship with her two sons, Marvin and Jacob, resurface during her fight for independence (cf. Ahmed and al 97). While Hagar has arthritis, her mind is sharp, which she uses to her advantage to avoid drawing attention to her fragility: "I must be careful not to speak aloud, though, for if I do Marvin will look at Doris and Doris will look meaningfully back at Marvin, and one of them will say, "Mother's having one of her days"" (Laurence 9). At the same time, her family threatens to put her in an elderly care facility, which she fears as it reminds her of a tomb: "Is it a mausoleum, and I, the Egyptian, mummified with pillows and my own flesh, through some oversight embalmed alive? There must be some mistake" (Laurence 90).

Hagar is a proud woman who realises in her twilight years that this quality has stopped her from having a closer relationship with her family (cf. Ahmed al 98). Due to the inability to derive joy from interacting with others, Hagar builds a wall around herself, placing a distance between herself and others. In addition to her pride, Hagar was rebellious in her youth by marrying outside of her social class (cf. Ahmed and al 99):

Father looked at me, scrutinizing my face. Then he turned back to the shelves and went on arranging the tins and bottles.

"You'll marry no one," he said at last, as though he hadn't meant a thing by the pliable boys of good family whom he'd trotted home for my inspection. "Not at the moment, anyway. You're only twenty-four. And you'll not marry that fellow ever, I can vow to that much. He's common as dirt." (Laurence 47)

Moreover, Hagar defies the expectations placed on a frontier woman by refusing to give up on her stony demeanour until her death (cf. Ludlow 60). Hagar does not display any emotions in an open manner, especially feelings such as compassion or love, as she considers them to be a sign of weakness (cf. Ludlow 61). Her inability to express emotions also extends to her sexual life: “Twenty-four years, in all, were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of our wrangle and bicker. Yet when he turned his hairy belly and his blackhaired thighs toward me in the night, I would lie silent but waiting, and he could slither and swim like an eel in a pool of darkness” (Laurence 108). Eventually, Hagar separates from her husband and starts working for a man called Mr Oatley: “I told him my husband was dead. That's the only mention I ever made of Bram. I was lucky to have the post, I thought, and I'm sure Mr. Oatley considered himself fortunate as well, for I was efficient, and got work done in jig-time and stood no nonsense from the tradesmen” (Laurence 146).

In *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe suffers from a similar plight regarding her relationships with others. As the daughter of a formerly wealthy family, she is stubborn, proud, and unwilling to sacrifice her independence. Like Hagar, she was married but unable to communicate emotional or sexual feelings towards her husband. As a result, her husband cheated on her. Unlike Hagar, Naoe had not chosen to marry her husband; however, she does express regret that she did not appreciate his kindness towards her.

In addition to the emotional issues mentioned above, Naoe – like Hagar – was an indifferent mother who did not cater to her child's emotional needs. This neglect during her daughter's crucial years is reflected in their present-day relationship. More precisely, Naoe's daughter, Keiko, ignores her and often threatens to send her to an assisted living facility, dismissing her ramblings as early signs of dementia, [as was shown in chapter 4.2 of this dissertation](#). Naoe, however, wishes to be acknowledged as a person and not be treated like a stationary piece of furniture. For this reason, she uses her fluency in Japanese to assert her independence and identity. This behaviour results in Naoe and Keiko barely communicating, making it harder for both women to show affection for the other.

Hagar can also not open up to her older son, Marvin, and is only able to express her affection for him while she is on her deathbed. Before that, even though she lived with him and his wife, their relationship was strained, even distant. Hagar regrets favouring her younger son, which seems to have impacted her relationship with Marvin to the point that she still lies to

Marvin before passing away because she understands that he needs to hear her say that he has been a good son:

"You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John."

The dead don't bear a grudge nor seek a blessing. The dead don't rest uneasy, Only the living. Marvin, looking at me from elderly eyes, believes me. It doesn't occur to him that a person in my place would ever lie. (Laurence 277)

However, while she may have preferred her younger son, Marvin always craved her affection, finishing his chores even if no one asked him to: "But Marvin still at nightfall would often say, 'I've finished my chores,' and stand there on the kitchen threshold until I'd have to tell him to come in and close the door" (Laurence 105). Although he wants her to go to a caring facility, Marvin shows care for his mother's well-being and believes that he is acting in her best interests:

But when the doctor's report comes, they are both so secretive about it, sneaky almost, looking at me with their eyelids lowered. Even Marvin, usually so down-to-earth, seems vague as vapor when he speaks.

"He says you need professional care, Mother. He thinks the nursing home would be the best place for now." (Laurence 109)

Like Hagar³⁷ and Naoe, Kumiko is treated like an invalid elderly woman by her oldest daughter, Mitsu. While her daughter claims to be worried about her and that she is doing what is best for her, she ignores her mother's wishes, as Kumiko acknowledges when thinking about how Mitsu would scold her for the simplest of decisions: "Why do you always get yourself into these situations, Mami?" (Goto 13). In voicemails, Mitsus treats Kumiko like a child who cannot make decisions and needs constant supervision, to the point that she threatens to call the police: "MAMI. IF YOU DON'T RESPOND I'M CALLING THE COPS!" (Goto 39). In retaliation, Kumiko clarifies, in an email, that she is doing fine: "Please don't call the cops. Mami is well" (Goto 44).

Mitsu's behaviour directly contrasts with how Kumiko raised her daughters: she may not have always agreed with her daughters' life decisions, but – as a scene from the past shows – she allowed them to make their own choices:

"Mami - I still need to live life on my own terms."

³⁷ Strictly speaking in Hagar's case, it is her daughter-in-law, Doris.

“I don’t want to emotionally blackmail you. I don’t. But when I donated one of my kidneys to you I didn’t think you’d go out of your way to risk the life you have.”

“I’m not risking my life, Mami. I’m living my life. Sailing around the world has been a lifelong dream. Now I can finally do it.”

“It is your life. To live as you wish...” (Goto 44)

Apart from having three old women as their main protagonists, another theme that the three works of fiction share is that of flight/escape - all women leave their homes and children behind. It is implied that Naoe did so because she wished to depart before being shipped off to an elderly care home, while Hagar goes on a last adventure before her death to reflect on her life: “Deposited by the roadside, I stand and stare after the bus. I’m here, and astonished now that the place looks ordinary. And yet — I’m here, and made it under my own steam, and that’s the main thing” (Laurence 137).

It is only by leaving everything behind that Hagar comes to terms with the things she has left suppressed for so long: her indifference towards her oldest son, Marvin, her fraught marriage with her husband, and the death of her younger son. Before passing, Hagar makes amends with her chosen life and realises that Marvin loves her deeply: “A pause, and then Marvin replies. “She’s a holy terror,” he says. Listening, I feel like it is more than I could now reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness” (Laurence 278).

Regarding Kumiko, she leaves the caring facility because she wishes to live on her terms, as stated in an email to her daughter Mitsu:

But I didn’t like it there. Something didn’t feel quite right. Mami also enjoys her quiet time. She does not like meddlers. Meddlers came to my day every single day. (Goto 43)

However, while Naoe and Hagar’s journeys deal with their approaching deaths, Kumiko leaves because she has not done with living yet and wishes to partake in the small pleasures of life: “Nobody wants to be told how to live” (Goto 45). Unlike Naoe and Hagar, her reflections on her past deeds are neither a way of reconciling her regrets with the present nor a desire to set things right. Instead, they are the meditations of how her life had its ups and downs, including overcoming her fear of swimming: “It was so difficult to trust water again after Samuel’s accident. Four years before I understood. It wasn’t water’s fault” (Goto 21).

Despite that, Kumiko does not need to redeem herself but embraces her existence as just that: a life that has been well-lived, with all the experiences shaping her into the senior woman she is now, without her trying to act or look younger: “I guess I look old. I don’t feel ‘old’ inside. Do people who see me think, ‘she’s an old woman’” (Goto 30).

If anything, Kumiko acknowledges her advanced age but also knows she is mentally and physically capable of looking after herself, as her thoughts indicate: “Should have slept properly on my futon and buckwheat pillow. Not a spring chicken...” (Goto 48). The fact that Kumiko knows she can look after herself exacerbates her frustration towards her daughters. In the previously mentioned email, Kumiko pleads with her daughter to understand her: “Please respect my wishes Just as I have respected the choices you have made in your life” (Goto 44).

As such, Kumiko's journey is not about death but about finding joy and a renewed meaning for life in her twilight years, such as getting a pet or a new plant: “I could get a cat. Or I get a cactus...” (Goto 46). It is about opening herself to new friendships and experiences while retaining independence. At the beginning of *Shadow Life*, Kumiko is somewhat isolated, often only interacting with her neighbour: “It’s Yusuf. I wonder if there are rules about bringing in castoffs from the alley... I’m kind of a castoff...” (Goto 14). However, once she has regained contact with her former partner Alice, Kumiko feels more confident about her life, which widens her horizons. She does not have to lead a solitary existence but can enjoy growing old with her daughters and other people who care about her, as shown on the final page of *Shadow Life* (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, reuniting with Alice enables Kumiko to disclose why she broke up with her in the first place: this revelation brings the two women closer and gives them a sense of closure. Moreover, they can move on from being ex-lovers to close friends without lingering hang-ups. Both women acknowledge that – despite the hurt and pain of their breakup – they found other partners and led fulfilled lives with them as Alice herself states: ““Oh don’t think that I was waiting for you! I married too, you know! Glenda and I finally exchanged vows when gay marriage was legalized”” (Goto 287).

While both women have been left single by the deaths of their respective spouses, they acknowledge that they are happy in the knowledge that somebody loved them. Beyond that, they find solace in their reunited friendship, drawing on each other's shared experiences regarding loss and sickness.

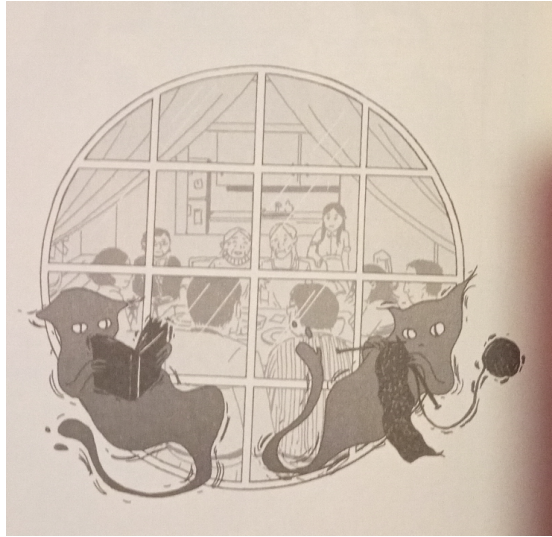


Figure 1: The final page of *Shadow Life* shows Kumiko with Alice, her daughters and friends. (by Ann Xu).

8.3: Fluid Sexuality, Love and Emotional Maturity in *Shadow Life*

In *Shadow Life*, reconciliation with Alice after fifty years of not talking to each other gives Kumiko the strength to overcome fears of her mortality when she comes close to dying. Alice's presence is vital when Kumiko suffer a close brush with death, and she also plays a central role in saving her life. Although Kumiko broke up with Alice in her twenties and then married Samuel, their relationship is just as significant as the one that Kumiko shared with her husband.

In light of this fact, the following chapter explores how *Shadow Life* defines Kumiko's sexuality, her attitude towards love and how – as an old woman – she approaches her existence as a widow after having lost her husband to a heart attack. Moreover, it also addresses how – through the realisation that life is short – relationships are meaningful and a reason to keep going in one's twilight years.

In *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, an elderly woman's sexual frustrations are examined and later transformed into exploration through the stories that her granddaughter weaves. Moreover, Naoe's character—once having undergone that evolution through Murasaki's stories—is also displayed as ambiguous regarding her gender. She becomes a cowboy-like figure seen as male and female, thus defying the conventions regarding traditional and binary views of humans.

In addition to touching upon subjects like a woman's sexuality in her novels, Hiromi Goto's *The Half World* and *Darkest Light*—while not putting these themes at the front and centre—contain lesbian characters who are proud of their sexual identity. Furthermore, their sexuality is just part of their personalities, with their kindness, compassion, and loyalty being the traits that stand out more than their attraction towards women.

The Kappa Child is Hiromi Goto's most overt novel about lesbianism and coming out; much of the character's development towards becoming a more mature person lies in the fact that she can finally embrace her sexuality. Also, just like the cowboy figure that Naoe later moulds into, in *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, the *kappa* is neither female nor male; instead, it displays both traits.

Shadow Life showcases how love is a fluid entity. Throughout *Shadow Life*, Kumiko often thinks fondly of her late husband Samuel: his death affected Kumiko in various ways, with her admitting to Alice that she believed he died too young: ““He was taken sooner than he deserved. No one ought to be taken before their time. He had a good life, though. We had a very good life together”” (Goto 158).

In fact, due to having lost her husband in a car accident that caused him to drown while amid a heart attack, Kumiko developed a fear of water – a fear that she only managed to overcome years later. Kumiko's swimming activities are one of the reasons why she remains as active as she is, which adds to her desire not to spend her last days in an elderly care facility. In addition, Kumiko's ability to swim plays a vital role in battling death towards the end of the novel.

However, Alice also plays a meaningful role in Kumiko's life. Before meeting Samuel, flashbacks reveal that Alice and Kumiko lived together as young women, and their

relationship was loving and intimate. An early scene in the novel shows that Kumiko has kept a photograph of her and Alice as a couple – the photograph is placed on the same shelf as those of her husband and daughters, showing that Alice is still a precious person in Kumiko's life, which she also confirms with the following thoughts: “All these years. I still keep this photo ...” (Goto 2).

In the present, their relationship remains gentle, and there are slight hints of familiarity, such as Kumiko touching Alice's cheek as a gesture of affection. Although the women have not spoken to each other in fifty years, Alice and Kumiko quickly grow close again, showing a closeness that conveys trust and mutual respect: “Your hand is cold. You’ve always hated cold hands” (Goto 276).

When they broke up, Kumiko demonstrated that she was not only a person who identified as Japanese Canadian but also that – as a younger woman – she was politically active and persistent in her beliefs, even if it meant hurting others who disagreed with her. Kumiko apologises to Alice for her behaviour, implying that her pride got in the way: “I was very angry then. And I saw things in absolutes. I’m so sorry, Alice” (Goto 153).

In response, Alice says that the 50-year-silent treatment was necessary to deal with her feelings regarding Kumiko: ““We were lovers. You broke up with me and ended up marrying Samuel Ching. And we fought about the war. That’s why I stopped talking to you!”” (Goto 152). However, she also states that Kumiko was not only the first person to break her heart but also the one she loved first. As such, Kumiko will always remain important to Alice: ““But you were the first to break my heart, Kumi. There’s a special place kept for the person who first breaks your heart”” (Goto 287).

Once again, this scene establishes the importance of Kumiko's relationship with Alice, reflecting that both the character and the author are emotionally mature. Hiromi Goto's mature writing shows in another scene where Kumiko reveals to her daughter that she is bisexual; she does so without needing to indulge in further details or comment on her sexual identity -- this is not out of shame or unwillingness to embrace her sexuality but because Kumiko is a private person. As a mother, Kumiko respected her daughters' privacy: she never asked her daughters about their sexual partners either, thus also mocking her daughter's hyper concern in the present:

“Do you tell me all the details of your relationship history? Pfft. I loved your father. I still love him. But before your father, I loved Alice.”

“What other secrets are you keeping from us?”

“What - you want to hear about my sex life? How women have intimacies with other women? I can tell you -” (Goto 196)

Kumiko is not bothered by standard conventions of sexuality but instead views it as a personal entity that bears no relevance to her current existence or even needs any approval from others. Viewing her romantic history as an internal matter speaks volumes about her personality. She is an open-minded yet discreet woman who values her freedom. This freedom includes choosing to love who she wants, regardless of gender.

Hiromi Goto states, in the novel's author's notes, that the lack of representation when it came to more senior queer women of colour motivated her to write *Shadow Life*, Goto notes. She also wanted to write about brave old women who were not relegated to cliché roles or served as a punchline of a joke. Instead, she desired to write about complex female characters who underwent journeys and faced challenges (Goto 362) – a task she has accomplished with *Shadow Life*.

8.4: Encounters of Another Kind – Kumiko’s Battle and Character Growth

Like Hiromi Goto’s previously discussed novels, *Shadow Life* reveals how ghosts and other spectres can help a character overcome trauma. Like Goto’s *Half World* and *Darkest Light*, *Shadow Life* involves confrontations with actual supernatural creatures that are not just figments of Kumiko’s imagination but spirits that everyone on the brink of death can see, as the following phone conversation between Alice and her confirms:

“What on earth is Death’s shadow? The Grim Reaper?”

“No, I don’t think so....Oh, I don’t know. I think it comes for you when it’s your time.” (Goto 185)

While some of these beings pose an actual threat to her mortal existence, others are revealed to be benevolent, often taking on the role of companion and protector. For example, the ghostly chick that spawns off the cat-like shadowy spectre – a reference to the *bakeneko*³⁸, a

³⁸ More information about this creature can be found in the [appendix](#).

spiritual cat entity – becomes her sidekick. Unlike the protagonists in *Half World* and *Darkest Light*, Kumiko is less in need of guidance and is more than prepared to fight for her survival: “I think my Death’s Shadow wanted to take me right away. Not like yours. But I didn’t want to go yet, Alice. You know?” (Goto 185). In many ways, she has already gone through trauma, which has prepared her emotionally and physically for the hardships she has to face, relying on Japanese myths from her childhood: “When I was little we threw salt³⁹ after Great Uncle’s funeral to keep Death from following us home” (Goto 92).

However, just because Kumiko is self-reliant and able to face her internal and external demons does not mean there are no lessons in store for her. While Kumiko lies in the hospital, she undergoes a pilgrimage that takes her to an underwater-like environment where a spidery figure chases her. This figure – a reference to *Jorōgumo*⁴⁰, a spider-like demon that entraps its victims via silvery threads – wishes to finally lay claim to Kumiko as she escaped its grasp when her husband died: ““Then, you stole from me when you escaped drowning when I came for your husband!”” (Goto 292).

In order to capture her, the spidery figure wraps Kumiko up in a cocoon that restricts her movements. Kumiko finds herself trapped and realises she can do nothing alone. While this frustrates her, she does not lose the will to keep fighting: that tenacity and determination inspire others around her, especially Alice: ““She might be trying to come back! I heard her voice...”” (Goto 313).

Thus, when Alice realises – with the help of the ghostly chick – that a thread connected to Kumiko’s head is endangering her life, she cuts it in half. This action enables Kumiko to break free of the cocoon, swim towards safety, and then wake up from her coma. Once Kumiko has woken up, the ending implies that she is free of danger and more comfortable sharing her life with others. Not only that, but she understands that relying on others is not necessarily bad but can offer comfort and a sense of increasing security.

This action is a positive development for Kumiko because—up to this point—she has led a somewhat solitary and isolated life. Even before escaping from the elderly care facility, Kumiko kept to herself. While this may have resulted from the fact that she lost her husband

³⁹ More information about Japanese [burial rites can be found in the appendix](#).

⁴⁰ More information can be found in the [Jorōgumo](#) section of the appendix.

Samuel in a traumatic manner, a younger Kumiko was also a stubborn person who followed her own path in life.

This independence often came at a cost to others close to her, especially Alice. While Kumiko loved Alice, she was unwilling to compromise on her ideals and could not make the other woman understand why this was the case. Currently, this tendency to keep her issues to herself shows when she keeps daily contact to a minimum instead of talking to her daughters.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, Kumiko is very private and sometimes aloof. For example, her daughters were unaware of her past relationship with Alice, even though it was formative during her younger years. Furthermore, Kumiko's private nature also extends to other people: she respects other people's decisions without passing any judgement.

However, her lack of desire to confide in others and her distant behaviour makes it harder for her to form meaningful relationships. The direct result is that her daughters do not understand her but make assumptions about Kumiko, especially regarding her health and ability to look after herself. They never had a proper chance to get to know their mother as an individual. Only through interactions with other people do Kumiko's daughters begin to appreciate how strong-willed she is.

Kumiko's interactions with the shadowy figure of death make her less guarded and, thus, more open towards sharing her vulnerabilities with others. The first instance of this occurs when she reconnects with Alice: Alice becomes the first person Kumiko tells about her supernatural experiences. This event is the first step towards Kumiko connecting with others and leaving her previously lonely life behind.

Conclusion - The Gothic and its Healing Effects

Conclusion

While the Gothic mode will always be associated with feelings of dread, Hiromi Goto's novels and short fiction have shown that using the strategies related to this mode can also help overcome trauma. Not only because a confrontation or encounter with one's demons forces a person to address a previously concealed issue but also because such an encounter will trigger a metamorphosis, positive or negative.

The transition caused by such an event may be as simple as gaining confidence or involving a person becoming more open towards others. Still, the fact remains that things have altered: a previously sheltered and seemingly established existence is a misconception. With the illusion shattered, characters comprehend the fluidity and instability of the reality around them. Such an experience is the first step towards breaking free from the chains of trauma: this is because – especially in terms of anxiety – people are often held back, stuck in an existence of inertia that keeps them from moving on.

In a way, accepting trauma means shedding comforting falsehoods: it means coming to terms with a painful reality. Not only that, but it also requires sacrificing a safety net that kept a person going till then. Often, this sacrifice means accepting the loss of a loved one, coming to grips with one's past mistakes and dealing with the effects of no longer ignoring suppressed emotions; it is more than just a conscious upheaval of turbulent emotions, but also a means of challenging one's life and relationships with other people.

Of course, such a shattering of previously held beliefs can be traumatic in itself, and Hiromi Goto's novels show how, sometimes, not every person can deal with such an upheaval in their lives. For example, when Naoe leaves the household in *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, her daughter Keiko breaks down, and it takes a few weeks for her to recover emotionally. In *The Kappa Child*, the narrator only fully processes her childhood trauma once confronted with the fact that her father was abusive and that she is worthy of being loved. Similarly, in *Darkest Light*, Gee can only be redeemed once he accepts that he must go through the cycle of suffering himself.

However, the fact that Hiromi Goto's characters do not always recuperate immediately provides her novels with an honesty and realism that mirrors how recovering from a traumatic event is not linear but – instead – full of ups and downs. Not only that, but Hiromi Goto also shows how people of different ages react to trauma: older characters such as Kumiko withdraw and try to figure out things on their own, while teenaged characters such as Gee or Melanie either lash out or want more mature characters to solve their problems for them.

Furthermore, the fact that Hiromi Goto uses a diverse set of characters from different genders and age groups shows how trauma affects everyone, not just the young but also the elderly. It proves that no one is exempt from dealing with their spectres but that life will always require a re-evaluation of one's fears and experiences. Once again, this shows how genuine Hiromi Goto's writing is as her novels deal with the fragile nature of life itself and how human beings respond to change, revealing, in the process, that people are complex beings that never stop growing or developing.

Ultimately, Hiromi Goto gives her characters the hope that, once they have dealt with their traumatic experiences, they can construct a better existence for themselves and their loved ones. In this sense, the ghosts that haunt these characters are not evil but benevolent, offering an alternative viewpoint that allows for a redefinition of one's previous life decisions.

Appendix

***Kitsune* – The Shape-Shifting Fox**

Nisan Ryan states in an online article for *Ancient Origins* that the term *kitsune* 狐狸精 refers to the Japanese fox spirit, which – “mostly viewed as an evil creature” (1) – seeks out the company of humans “to suck away their life force or to even eat human flesh and thereby steal any powers that person might have along with all their memories, knowledge, and even their human form” (1). A fox spirit’s power grows with age, as “the more people whose life-force it ha[s] leeches away [,] the more powerful it gr[o]w[s]” (1).

Serena A . A . Ceniccola states the kitsune shares “specific traits with the Chinese *Huxian* and the Korean *Gumiho*” (1) and has become a popular figure in manga, anime, plays, and light novels, amongst other media – a “familiar presence even in American literature and media” (1). As a shapeshifter, the *kitsune* can create illusions, such as “being able to change into a beautiful woman [...] to trick men” (2).



Figure 2: A *kitsune* as depicted in Sawaki Suushis’ *Hyakkai Zukan* (百怪図巻) (by Wikipedia, public domain).

***Yūrei* – The Ghost Trapped Between Two Worlds**

According to Brenda Jordan, “[i]n Japan, it is thought that the spirit of a deceased person travels from this life to an eternal world” (25). However, “there is yet another world between these two where the spirit must reside before moving on and becoming an ancestor spirit” (25). Jordan says that “[t]his in-between world is uncertain and ambiguous [and] in this state,

angry or unhappy ghosts can reappear to wreak havoc and haunt their former residences” (25), brought back by strong emotions such as sorrow until they are released from their obsession (Jordan 25).

AMC says that “[t]he paranormal roots of Japanese horror can be traced to *kaidan*, or traditional ghost stories designed to both entertain and send a moral message” (1). In Japan, “people believe belief that humans carry a god inside them, one that is released upon death and “infused with supernatural power”” (1). Adequately taken care of, these spirits return to the afterlife, but if a spirit “has any lingering business, that [i]s when it is said to manifest as a *yūrei* in the afterlife” (1).

AMC states that what ties spirits to the moral world is “not always as malicious as movies would have us believe” (1); whatever emotions prompt the spirit also influence the form it takes on as a *yūrei* (AMC 1). For example, “[i]f a person dies consumed with rage or feelings of revenge, [...] their soul may become an *onryō*, or vengeful spirit” (1). According to ancient folklore, “natural disasters were explained as an *onryō*’s wraths” (1). Such spirits may find peace by fulfilling their purpose or “[p]erforming Buddhist and Shinto rituals in an attempt to placate an angry spirit” (1).

The *Kappa*’s Appearance and Habits

Michael Dylan Foster states that the *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀), which is considered “one of the earliest extant written documents in Japanese history” (2), contains the earliest mentions of the *kappa* with “records that in the year 379 a *mizuchi* (water snake) living in the Kahashima River in the Province of Kibi was harassing people” (2).

Foster further explains that initial depictions of the *kappa* “from the Edo (c.1600-1867) or Meiji (1868-1912) periods reveal a grotesque and potentially deadly creature, one with some very odd and unpleasant habits” (2-3). More recent portrayals, however, “brought it back to life as a cute, harmless creature” (3). The *kappa* is one of the best-known creatures in Japanese folklore, usually associated with water and “its manifestations cut across genre lines, appearing in folk religion, beliefs, legends, folktales, and folk metaphors” (3).

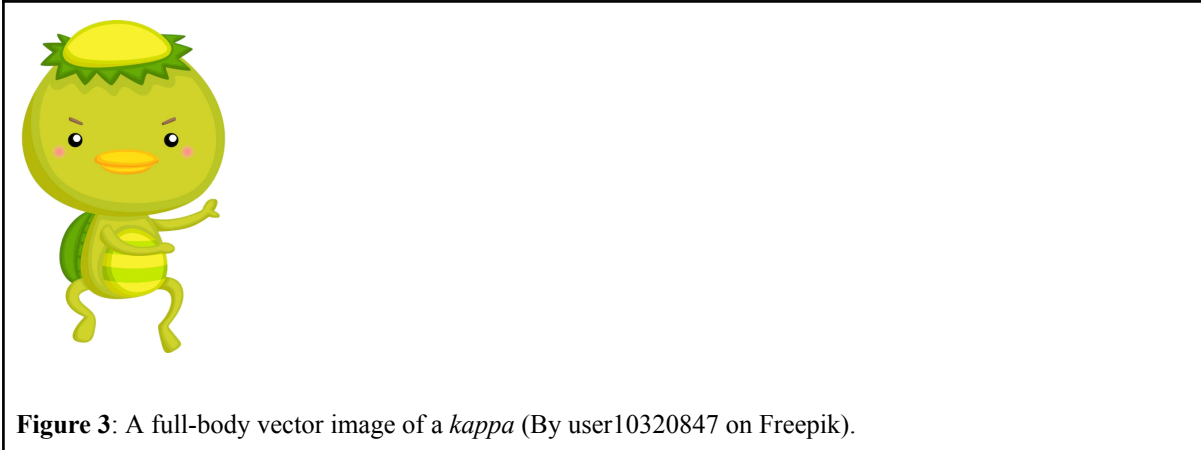


Figure 3: A full-body vector image of a *kappa* (By user10320847 on Freepik).

Regarding its appearance, Foster says the *kappa* “is small, about the size of a three-to-four-year-old child” (4). According to reports, “the entire body is covered with hair, while in other data it is covered with scales” (4). Its odour is fish-like, with its reported colour “often blue-yellow, with a blue-black face, but there are countless variations of these elements” (4). What remains consistent in these reports is that the *kappa* “has a carapace on its back, and its face is sharp with a beak-like mouth” (4).

Another characteristic of the *kappa*, Foster maintains, “is the dish-like cavity on top of the kappa's head” (4). According to urban legends, this “dish, or *sara* 皿 contains a liquid usually described simply as water that [...] represents the life force of the kappa” (4). “If it dries up or spills, the kappa loses its power” (4) and dies because the liquid is no longer present.

Linda Lombardi describes that one of the stranger aspects of the *kappa* is that it aims to drown people to obtain their *shirikodama* 尻子玉 - “a ball that supposedly is found inside the human anus” (1). Further, its obsession with the human orifice leads the creature “to hide in toilets and try to stroke women's buttocks” (1).

***Ubasute*: The Disposal of the Elderly in a Forest**

DHWTY, in an article *for Ancient Origins*, states that the ancient practice of a *ubasute* in Japanese folklore “literally translates to [...] ‘abandoning an old woman’” (1). This form of senicide “is an ancient practice from Japanese folklore in which a sick or elderly relative is dumped in a remote place to die” (1). According to folklore, one such popular area past was

“the dense forest at the northwest foot of Mount Fuji, which is known as *Aokigahara* ([...], meaning ‘Sea of Trees’” (1).



Figure 4: An image from *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon / Tsuki no Hyakushi* (月百姿) shows an older woman being abandoned (by Wikipedia, public domain).

Krissy and John Kurosuki Howard say the "legend goes that families facing [...] hard times engaged in the act" (Howard 2016). The senior person would be carried on the back by the family's eldest son, while the former “grabbed pieces of twigs and limbs from nearby trees and dropped them on the ground” (Howard 2016). These twigs were “small markers [that] would form a trail for [their] son to follow when he returned from the mountain peak, indicating that those abandoned chose to participate in the ritual, sacrificing their own lives for the long-term well-being of the family” (Howard 2016).

***Noppera-Bō*: The Faceless Ghost**

According to the *Yokai Wiki*, *Noppera-Bō* is a legendary Japanese ghost that “resemble[s] ordinary human beings in almost every way, and blend[s] in perfectly with human society” (1), but “the illusion is quickly shattered when met face to face—[a] *nopperabō* actually ha[s] no face at all” (1). Its head is a “blank orb[...] with no eyes, nose, mouth, or features of any kind” (1). This creature is “usually encountered on quiet, empty roads late at night when nobody else is around” (1).



Figure 5: An image depicting the faceless ghost (By Wikipedia, public domain).

Further, the *Yokai Wiki* states that the faceless ghost is a “transformation of [a] mischievous animal *yōkai*” (1), with its main objective being to scare humans, which it accomplishes by “often appear[ing] with a face at first, and then wip[ing] their face[-]off dramatically with their hand at the most opportune time” (1). Moreover, it often appears “in the guise of a man or a woman with his or her back turned towards the observer” (1).

Birds and Death in Japanese Mythology

In her article about Studio Ghibli's film entitled *A Boy and Its Heron*, Selena Takigawa Hoy states that a “mysterious talking heron leads young protagonist Mahito on a fantastic quest to save his mother” (1). The heron or *sagi* has been part of Japanese mythology for more than a millennium, symbolising “tie[s] to spirits, gods, death, and a link to another world” (1). Meanwhile, cranes are known to stand for “peace, luck, and longevity” (1).

A-wig and A-way maintain that roosters also play an important role in Japan, as – according to a Shinto legend – it was the presence of these birds that coerced the sun goddess Amaterasu out of her cave by fooling her into believing it was daylight - a mirror had been placed by her cave: the roosters' singing enhanced the illusion that it was daylight (*A-wig and A-way* 1). Nowadays, roosters are “kept at some Shinto shrines, while the *torii*, those gate-like structures at temple entrances, are deemed the birds' hono[u]rable perches” (1).

A-wig and A-way state that birds are mentioned “in the *Kojiki* and other ancient texts regarding the history of the Japanese people and their land” (1). In some of these stories, as *A-wig and A-way* mention, birds such as falcons and crows serve as signs or visions that would help a hero defeat their enemies (*A-wig and A-way* 1). In other instances, birds are

associated with death, with “[o]ne Japanese tradition hold[ing] that certain individuals, usually Buddhist monks and mountain ascetics tainted with spiritual pride, are reborn as kami-like beings with avian features” (1).

***Bakeneko*– The Ghost Cat**

According to *Yokai.com*, a *bakeneko* “begins their supernatural life looking almost identical to an ordinary housecat” (1). However, they “soon begin to walk about at on their hind legs” (1) and “[a]s they age and their powers increase, they can grow large indeed—up to the size of a full-grown human” (1). As they possess shape-shifting abilities, a *bakaneko* often transforms into a smaller cat or human, learning to speak the human language and is even “known to dress up as [a] human[...] with towels wrapped around [its] head[...]” (1).

Although the *bakeneko* “dance[s] around merrily” (1) in its human form, *Yokai.com* clarifies that it is not a harmless creature, posing “a menace to any house they live in or near” (1). These creatures “can eat things [...] much bigger than they are, and can even consume poisonous things without difficulty” (1). Moreover, a *bakaneko* can “eat its own master and then assume his form, living in his place” (1).

Furthermore, *Yokai.com* describes that these not-so-harmless magical cats “can summon ghostly fireballs and are known to accidentally start house fires, their tails acting like torches igniting any flammable materials in the house” (1). They also possess the “disturbing ability to reanimate fresh corpses and use them like puppets for their own nefarious purposes” (1).

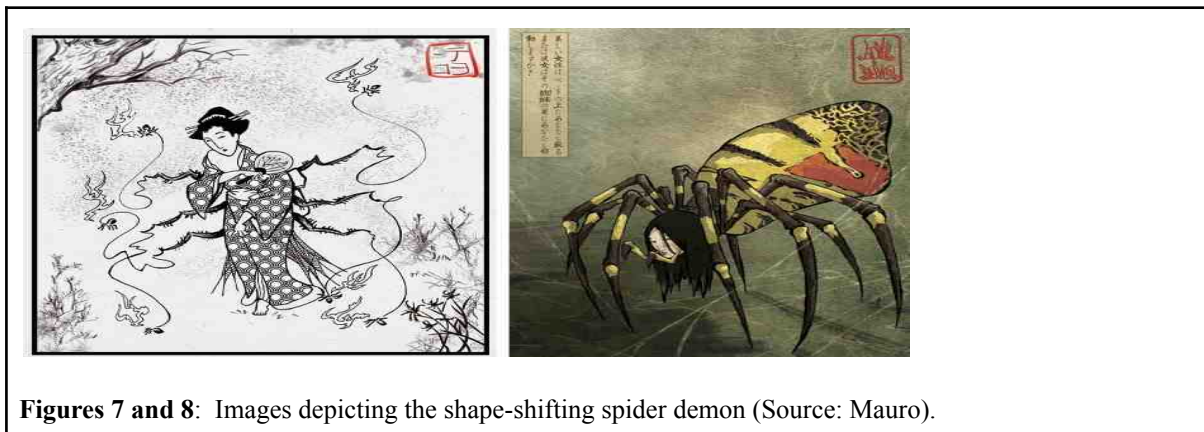


Figure 6: An image depicting a ghost or monster cat (by Wikipedia, public domain).

***Jorōgumo* – The Entangling Bride**

According to Mauro in an article for *Fukai Nihon*, *jorōgumo* 絡新婦 (Spider-Woman) is a demon that “appears in the tales and chronicles of Japan from the Edo period” (1). Furthermore, the *Fukai Nihon* states that “these creatures live a few hundred years [before] they undergo a change in their habits and change into a being that no longer eats the insects left in their web, but begins to feed on human beings” (1) instead. The *jorōgumo* “lives a solitary life and nests in caves, forests or empty houses in the cities, where it takes possession of them and becomes their dens” (1).

As *Yokai.com* states, *jorōgumo* entrap their (often male) victims “into her home with promises of affection” (1), only to trap them with “spin silk threads strong enough to ensnare a grown man so that he cannot escape” (1). These webs “have powerful venom that can slowly weaken a man day by day, allowing the spider to sav[er] her victim’s long and painful death” (1). Also, *jorōgumo* can “control other, lesser spiders, even employing fire-breathing spiders to burn down the homes of any suspicious meddlers” (1).



Figures 7 and 8: Images depicting the shape-shifting spider demon (Source: Mauro).

Japanese Burial Rites

According to an online article on *MYEND*, Japanese funeral rites are “always a combination of Shinto and Buddhist rites” (1). The merging of these two resulted from a 1638 law that “made it mandatory for every household to include a Buddhist shrine” (1). For example, one custom after a person dies is *kamidana-fūji*, which requires “relatives to close the home’s shrine and wrap it with white paper [to avoid] impure spirits [from] contaminat[ing] the shrine” (1). Another tradition, says Kobe Jones, gives salt a sacred and essential role in

Japanese rites. Consequently, attendees scatter salt around their front door during funerals, believing it will ward off evil spirits (Kobe Jones 1).

According to John D., “the rites begin nearly at the instant of death [with] the body of the deceased rest[ing] for one final night at the home where he or she lived” (1). “A futon is made up with new sheets in a common area of the home” (1), where the body is then placed and “packed with ice, and covered with a sheet” (1). Furthermore, “the face is covered with a smaller, white cloth” (1).

Afterwards, John D. states that “[m]embers of the immediate family including children of all ages, relatives living close by, neighbo[u]rs, anyone in the vicinity with a connection to the deceased will drop by to offer their condolences and to visit with the body” (1). John D. adds that “[i]t is not uncommon for visitors to sit with, touch, and talk to the body as if it were still living” (1). Additionally, he further states that “[a] priest from the deceased’s temple will be called in to offer a session of sutra reading and prayer” (1).

John D. says that the morning after, “in a slow procession, demonstrating reluctance in bringing the body towards its end, [it] will be moved to the place where formal services will be held” (1). Once the body has reached its final destination, the “body is placed into a coffin and packed with dry ice” (1). Then, the formal wake begins when “the coffin [...] is placed in front of an arrangement of sculpture and ornament, adorned and surrounded with flowers, and lamps, to suggest Paradise” (1). When the arrangement is made, “[a] black-framed portrait of the deceased is set within [it],” and incense “is lighted and must be kept burning as long as the coffin is present” (1).

During the wake, John D. explains that guests arrive “bring[ing] [...] envelopes containing money and bound with black and white string” (1). Then, the priest kneels in front of the coffin and chants a sutra while “first the immediate family, including the spouse, children and grandchildren, and their spouses, then the guests, [...] one by one, approach an alter that has been set in front of the coffin” (1). The mourners also “transfer granular incense to a burner, pray to and then bow to the portrait” (1). After doing that, “[t]he guests will finally bow to the immediate family, before returning to their seats” (1). Once all guests “ha[ve] performed the[se] ritual[s], the wake is finished” (1).

John D. explains that the funeral occurs after the wake, and “[i]n form it is precisely the same as the wake, but the atmosphere is more formal” (1). John D. adds that “there may be warmth, smiles, and handshakes” at the wake, but that at the funeral, “there is [a] solemnity, [and that] [t]he bows are more precise [and] [e]xpressions are dour” (1). When the funeral ends, “flowers are taken from their arrangements and given to the family members” (1). Moreover, the coffin is “opened and the flowers placed inside, around the body” (1). Then, the “cover will be closed again, and may be nailed in place” (1).

After the funeral, John D. says that the “coffin is brought to the crematorium [and] [w]hile the fire burns, the family will adjourn for the funeral feast” (1). After the feast, the “family will assemble in a chamber where the slab bearing the deceased’s bones [...] is brought” (1). The crematorium staff then carries out a short tour concerning the skeleton, after which “family members from toddlers to the aged [...] take up chopsticks, one bamboo and one willow to signify the physical and the spiritual worlds, and transfer bones from the slab to an urn” (1).

John D. says that Buddhist traditions “prescribe[...] memorial services every day for the first seven days after the funeral, then once a week until the 49th day, one on the 100th day, and then one every year until the 50th year” (1).

Abstract - English

In fiction, the Gothic mode is a destructive force that usually challenges a character to face an unspeakable event or lingering trauma. Due to its disruptive energy, characters in those novels abandon their preconceived notions of the world to confront the ghosts that come knocking at night. While these themes of calling into question accepted norms have been critical topics in previous academic dissertations, there needs to be more mention of how confronting one's demons can mentally and physically strengthen someone.

The main research question of this dissertation is to discuss how characters in the fictional worlds of Hiromi Goto overcome past traumas by confronting the ghosts that have haunted them rather than focusing on how supernatural events and spectres desensitise them. By analysing the healing effect of these ghouls and monsters, this dissertation aims to showcase

a different method of reading Gothic literature by disputing the notion that encountering ghosts is an antagonistic experience.

The focal texts for this dissertation are five novels – including a graphic one – and an anthology of short stories by Hiromi Goto, which depict how characters become emotionally stronger and move past trauma. From dealing with an abusive childhood to addressing the conscious destruction of one's cultural identity, each of the works investigated in this dissertation demonstrates how the characters in these works become more confident after an encounter with spectres of their past.

This dissertation further demonstrates how Japanese culture, its myths, and narratives shape Hiromi Goto's fiction. Her work shows her characters slip between identities, becoming neither Japanese nor Canadian but a fusion of both. Additionally, this underappreciated writer displays the hybrid nature of Japanese-Canadian fiction by creating intertextual links to other Japanese-Canadian novels, such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*.

Abstract - German

In der Erzählkunst erscheint im Schauerroman meist eine zerstörerische Gewalt, die Charaktere dazu zwingt, sich einem schrecklichen Vorfall oder einer langanhaltenden traumatischen Erfahrung zu stellen. Ihre zerrüttende Wirkung veranlasst die Figuren im Schauerroman, ihre bisherige Weltsicht aufzugeben und sich den Gespenstern zu stellen, die sie in der Nacht aufsuchen.

Während das Thema der Infragestellung von akzeptierten Normen in diesen Romanen in früheren Arbeiten über die Tradition des Schauerromans in verschiedenen Ländern/Kontinenten und Kulturen schon bisher eine zentrale Rolle spielte, ist in diesen kaum die Rede davon, wie auf diese Weise die Begegnung mit den eigenen Dämonen die Figuren geistig und körperlich stärken kann.

Statt dem Fokus auf der Immunisierung von Figuren durch übernatürliche Ereignisse und Geister ist es das zentrale Anliegen dieser Dissertation zu untersuchen, wie Charaktere ihre Traumata überwinden, indem sie sich den Geistern stellen, die sie heimsuchen. Durch die

Analyse der heilenden Wirkung dieser Dämonen und Gespenster zeigt die Dissertation einen anderen möglichen Weg für die Lektüre des Typus des Schauerromans, indem sie bestreitet, dass die Begegnung mit Gespenstern nur eine negative Erfahrung darstellen muss.

Die Dissertation widmet sich fünf Romanen, einschließlich eines graphischen Romans, und einer Sammlung von Kurzgeschichten der kanadischen Erzählerin Hiromi Goto, die illustrieren, wie man in seinen Gefühlen stärker werden und Traumata überwinden kann. Während die Themen der Bücher von Missbrauch und Gewalt/Leid in der Kindheit bis zur Zerstörung der eigenen kulturellen Identität reichen, zeigt sich in jedem der Erzählwerke, die in dieser Dissertation behandelt werden, wie die Hauptfiguren nach einer Begegnung mit Gespenstern aus ihrer Vergangenheit an Selbstvertrauen gewinnen.

Weiteres zeigt die Dissertation auch, wie die japanische Kultur, ihre Mythen und Erzählungen Hiromi Goto als Schriftstellerin prägen. Die Charaktere in ihren Werken zeigen eine kulturelle Identität, die weder japanisch noch kanadisch ist, sondern eine Mischung aus beiden. Des Weiteren beweist diese relative unbekannte Autorin, wie hybrid die japanisch-kanadische Literatur ist, vor allem durch die intertextuellen Beziehungen zu anderen Werken wie z.B. Joy Kogawas *Obasan*.

Works Cited

- A Ahmed, Asmaa Awad, and Nelly Atef Hashaad. "Self-Deception in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel". *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2804000>.
- Ancuta, Katarzyna. "Asian Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic*, Cambridge Companions to Literature, edited by Jerrold. E. Hogle, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 208-223. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139151757>.
- "Bakaneko." *Yokai.com*, <https://yokai.com/bakeneko/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.
- Banerjee, Mita. *The Chutneyfication of History: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee and the Postcolonial Debate*. Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg, 2002.
- Beeler, Kathrin. "Japanese Canadian Girl Meets Laura Ingalls: Re-Imagining the Canadian and American West(s) in Hiromi Goto's The Kappa Child." *American and Canadian Literature and Culture across a Latitudinal Line: Papers from the Saarbrücken Mediation Project*, edited by Klaus Martens and Paul Morris, Amarant Presse, 2008, pp. 55-70.
- Béjar, Alba de. "Identity and Belonging in Hiromi Goto's Chorus of Mushrooms." *PROCEEDINGS 31ST AEDEAN CONFERENCE*, edited by María Jesús Lorenzo Modia, Universidad de Vigo, 2008, pp. 619-626.
- Berndt, Katrin. "The Ordinary Terrors of Survival: Alice Munro and the Canadian Gothic." *The Short Stories of Alice Munro*, special issue of *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 55, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010, pp. 19-35. <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1079>.
- "BIRDS IN SHINTO AND JAPANESE CULTURE." *A-wig and A-way - The Influence of Birds on Culture*, WordPress, 30 Aug. 2015, <https://awingandaway.wordpress.com/2015/08/30/birds-in-shinto-and-japanese-culture>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.
- Bjerre Ærvold, Thomas. "Southern Gothic Literature." *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia*, 28 June 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.304>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "DissemiNation." *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, Routledge, 1990, pp. 291-323.
- Bruhm, Steven. "The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge Companions to Literature, edited by Jerrold. E. Hogle, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 259-279. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521791243>.
- Byron, Glennis and Sharon Deans. "Teen Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic*, Cambridge Companions to Literature, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 87-104. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139151757>.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Ceniccola, Serena A. A. "Kitsune: Reimagining the hybrid from a transnational perspective" *Academia.edu*,
https://www.academia.edu/50892700/Kitsune_Reimagining_the_hybrid_from_a_transnational_perspective. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

"Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population." *Statistics Canada*, 15 Nov. 2023,
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

"Child Sexual Abuse: Online Grooming." *Cybertip.ca*, Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc., <https://www.cybertip.ca/en/child-sexual-abuse/grooming>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Clingman, Stephen. *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Cuder-Domínguez, Pilar. "The Politics of Gender and Genre in Asian Canadian Women's Speculative Fiction: Hiromi Goto and Larissa Lai." *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, edited by Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008, pp. 115-131. <https://doi.org/10.51644/9781554581399-007>.

"Fred Wah | Poetry Foundation." *Poetry Foundation*, 5 April 2024,
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/fred-wah>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

D., John. "The Way of Death" *Green Shinto*,
<https://www.greenshinto.com/2012/03/04/the-way-of-death/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Davison Margaret, Carol. "Introduction – the corpse in the closet: the Gothic, death, and modernity." *The Gothic and death*, edited by Carol Margaret Davison, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 2-18. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9781784992699.003.0001>.

DHWTY. "Ubasute: Is the Ancient Tradition of Dumping the Elderly in a Forest Encouraging Modern Murder?." *Ancient Origins*, 24 Feb. 2019,
<https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-asia/ubasute-0011538>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Edwards, Justin D. *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature*. The University of Alberta Press, 2005.

Evans, Christopher. "Our Inherent Creaturehood: An Excerpt and Interview from Hiromi Goto". *PRISM international - Contemporary writing from Canada and the world*, 10 April 2017,
<https://prismmagazine.ca/2017/04/10/our-inherent-creaturehood-an-excerpt-and-interview-from-hiromi-goto/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Foster Dylan, Michael. "The Metamorphosis of the Kappa: Transformation of Folklore to Folklorism in Japan." *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1, Nanzan University, 1998, pp. 1-21.

Gibert, Teresa. "Spectrality in Margaret Atwood's "Death by Landscape." *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, Universidad de Zaragoza, 2018, pp. 83-100.

“Gothic novel.” *Oxford Reference*, Oxford University Press,
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095901381>.
 Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Goto, Hiromi. *Chorus of Mushrooms*. NeWest Press, 1994.

---. *Darkest Light*. Razorbill, 2012.

---. *Half World*. 2009. Viking, 2010.

---. *Hopeful Monsters*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004.

---. *The Kappa Child*. 2001. Red Deer Press, 2002.

--- and Ann Xu (illustrator). *Shadow Life*. First Second, 2010.

Grant, Gavin J. “Hiromi Goto Interview | IndieBound.org.”
IndieBound, <https://www.indiebound.org/author-interviews/gotohiromi/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Hayes, Tracy. “Darkest Wessex: Hardy, the Gothic Short Story, and Masculinity.” *Victorian Popular Fictions*, vol 2, Victorian Popular Fiction Association, 2020, pp. 76-94.
<https://doi.org/10.46911/NBIQ9295>.

Herk, Aritha van. “ABOUT – Aritha van Herk.” *AvH: Aritha van Herk*. WordPress, 1 May 2016, <https://www.arithavanherk.com/about>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

“Hiromi Goto – Asian Heritage in Canada.” *Asian Heritage in Canada*, Toronto Metropolitan University, <https://library.torontomu.ca/asianheritage/authors/goto>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Howard, Krissy and John Kurosuki (ed). “Inside Ubasute, The Legend Of Abandoning Elderly In The Woods.” *All That is Interesting*,
 9 Nov. 2016, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/ubasute>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Hoy Takigawa, Selena. “How centuries of Japanese folklore inspired ‘The Boy and the Heron’.” *National Geographic*, 15 Dec. 2023,
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/heron-japan-myth-folklore>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

“The Importance Of Salt In Japanese Culture And Cuisine.” *Kobe Jones*, 21 March 2016,
<https://www.kobejones.com.au/the-importance-of-salt-in-japanese-culture-and-cuisine/>.
 Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Laurence, Margaret. *The Stone Angel*. 1964. McClelland and Stewart, 1988.

Lee Xia, Lui. “Half of Canadian kids witness ethnic, racial bullying at school: study.” *UBC News*, The University of British Columbia, 19 Oct. 2021,
<https://news.ubc.ca/2021/10/19/half-of-canadian-kids-witness-ethnic-racial-bullying-at-school-study/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Lombardi, Lina. "Kappa: Japan's Aquatic, Cucumber-Loving, Booty-Obsessed Yokai." *Tofugu*, 16 June 2015, <https://www.tofugu.com/japan/kappa/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Löschnigg, Maria and Martin. *Uni-Wissen: Kurze Geschichte der kanadischen Literatur*. Klett Lerntraining GmbH, 2001.

Ludlow, Judy. "Survival on the Plains: Iconic Women in The Stone Angel and Plains Song." *Heritage of the Great Plains*, vol. 45, no. 1, Emporia State University, 2012, pp. 58-72. <http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/3377>.

Jay, Paul. *Transnational Literature: The Basics*. Routledge, 2021.

"Japan: Suicides & Shinto Funeral Rites." *MYEND*, <https://myend.com/country/japan-suicides-shinto-funerals/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Jordan, Brenda. "Yūrei: Tales of Female Ghosts." *Japanese Ghosts and Demons: Art of the Supernatural*, edited by Stephen Addiss, 1985, pp. 25-33.

"Jorōgumo." *Yokai.com*, <https://yokai.com/jorougumo/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Kang, Nancy. "Ecstasies of the (Un)Loved: The Lesbian Utopianism of Hiromi Goto's The Kappa Child." *Queerly Canadian*, no. 205, The University of British Columbia, 2010, pp. 13-31. <https://doi.org/10.14288/cl.v0i205.192857>

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 1981. Hunter Publishing, 2012.

Kröller, Eva-Marie. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, Cambridge Companions to Literature and Classics, edited by Eva-Marie Kröller, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521814413>.

Magnusson, Lynne A. "Language and Longing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*." *Magic & Other Realisms*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 116, The University of British Columbia, 1988, pp. 58-66. <https://doi.org/10.14288/cl.v0i116>.

Maruzi, Kristine and Michelle J. Smith. "Introduction." *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others*, Gothic Literary Studies, edited by Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi, University of Wales Press, 2021, pp. 1-14.

Mauro. "Jorōgumo 絡新婦 Spider Woman." *Fukai Nihon*, 31 Jan. 2023, <https://www.fukainihon.org/en/japanese-culture/folklore-and-more/jorogumo-spider-woman-yokai.html>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

McCormack, Donna. "Hopeful Monsters: A Queer Hope of Evolutionary Difference." *Somatechnics*, vol 5, issue 2, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp. 154-173.

Ryan, Nisan. "Beware the Kitsune, The Shapeshifting Fox of Japanese Folklore." *Ancient Origins*, 10 Oct. 2024, <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-asia/kitsune-0012027>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

“Noppera-Bō.” *Yokai.com*, <https://yokai.com/nopperabou/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

O'Neill, Aaron. “Japan: Religious affiliation in Japan 2021” *Statista*, 30 Aug. 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/237609/religions-in-japan>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Oneka, Lucy. “Japanese Writers Fill a Void in Canadian History.” *New Canadian Media*, 21 July 2016, <https://newcanadianmedia.ca/japanese-writers-fill-a-void-in-canadian-history/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Pal, Anita. *Hybrid Identities*. 2011. University of Vienna, Mag.Phil. 10.25365/thesis.17756.

Pearson Gay, Wendy. “Cruising Canadian SF’s Queer Futurity: Hiromi Goto’s *The Kappa Child* and Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*.” *Canadian Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror: Bridging the Solitudes*, edited by Amy J. Ransom and Dominick Grace. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 185-201.

Pivato, Joseph. “Hiromi Goto | The Canadian Encyclopedia.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, 8 Oct. 2009, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hiromi-goto>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Prorokova-Konrad, Tatiana. “Of Immigration, Cosmopolitanism, and Diversity: Lost Identity and the Challenge of Integration for Women in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*.” *Journal of Research on Women and Gender*, vol. 9, Texas State University, 2019, pp. 96-109. <https://hdl.handle.net/10877/12905>.

Racine, Nicole and Shainur Premji. “Child poverty is on the rise in Canada, putting over 1 million kids at risk of life-long negative effects.” *The Conversation*, 29 Jan. 2023, <https://theconversation.com/child-poverty-is-on-the-rise-in-canada-putting-over-1-million-kids-at-risk-of-life-long-negative-effects-221565>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

“Religion in Japan.” *Japan Guide*, <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e629.html>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. 1977. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Ruthven, Andrea. “Unnatural Mothers, Mothering Unnaturally: Technologies of Reproduction and the Politics of Maternity in Hiromi Goto’s *Hopeful Monsters*.” *Illuminating the Dark Side: Evil, Women and the Feminine*, edited by Andrea Ruthven and Gabriela Mádlo, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010, pp. 33-40. https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848880443_004.

Tai, Chuen-shin. “The Voice of Silence in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*.” *Chaoyang Journal of Humanities and Social Science Volume*, Chaoyang University of Technology, 2012, pp. 203-222.

“The Early Years.” *Japanese Canadian History*, Japanese Canadian History, <https://japanesecanadianhistory.net/historical-overview/general-overview>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

"The Ghosts of Japan." *AMC*, Washington Post, 2 Aug. 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/brand-studio/amc/the-ghosts-of-japan/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Trowbridge, Serena. "Past, present, and future in the Gothic graveyard." *The Gothic and death*, edited by Carol Margaret Davison, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 21-33. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9781784992699.003.0002>.

Ty, Eleanor. *Unfastened: Globality and Asian North American Narratives*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

---, and Christl Verduyn. *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008.

Sasano, Mari. "Words like Buckshots: Taking Aims at Notions of Nation in Hiromi Goto's Chorus of Mushrooms." *Athabasca University*, 15 Feb. 2015, <https://canadian-writers.athabascau.ca/english/writers/hgoto/essay.php>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Shu, Meng. "Peter Pan Syndrome" or Psychological Therapy: Fairy Tales and Self-maturity in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*." *Canadian Social Science*, vol. 15, no.7, 2019, pp. 70-75. 10.3968/11220.

Sigurðsson, Snorri. *The Gothic: Function and Definition*. 2009. University of Iceland, BA. <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/2883>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Slapkauskaite, Ruta. "Exploring Intertextuality: Fairy Tale Motifs in Joy Kogawa's 'Obasan'." *Literary Environments: Canada and the Old World*, edited by Britta Olinder, Peter Lang, 2006, pp. 29-38.

Smaro Kambourelli. "Introduction." *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*, edited by Smaro Kambourelli, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 3.

Sternberg, Meir. "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis." *Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations*, vol. 2, no. 4, Duke University Press, 1981, pp. 221-239. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772500>.

Sugars, Cynthia. *Gothic Canada: Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self-Invention*. Gothic Literary Studies, University of Wales Press, 2014. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhhzf>.

Sumpter, Sarah L. "From Scrolls to Prints to Moving Pictures: Iconographic Ghost Imagery from Pre-Modern Japan to The Contemporary Horror Film." *Explorations: The Undergraduate Research Journal*, UC Davis, 2006, pp. 5-24.

Sunahara, Ann. "Japanese Canadians." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 31 Jan. 2011, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/japanese-canadians>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2024.

Wu, Guangwei. "Psychological Realism -Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque as an Example." *International Conference on Humanity, Education and Social Science (ICHESS 2016)*, Atlantis Press, 2016, pp. 84-88. 0.2991/ichess-16.2016.19.

Young, Judy. "No longer 'apart'? Multiculturalism policy and Canadian literature." *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal*, vol. 33, issue 2, Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal, 2001, pp. 88-116.