ชีวประวัติเชิงบันเทิงคดีกับการสร้างใหม่ของอัตลักษณ์อันเกี่ยวข้องกับเพศสถานะ ในผลงาน *เดอะ เทล ออฟ มุราซากิ* ของลิซา ดอลบี *เธาแซนด์ พิสเซส ออฟ โกลด์* ของรูเธนน์ ลัม แมคคันน์ และ *คอมฟอร์ต วูแมน* ของนอรา อกจา เคลเลอร์

นางสาวนิธินา ปรีชาทวีกิจ

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FICTIONAL BIOGRAPHY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDENTITIES IN LIZA DALBY'S *THE TALE OF MURASAKI*, RUTHANNE LUM MCCUNN'S *THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD* AND NORA OKJA KELLER'S *COMFORT WOMAN*

Miss Nithina Preechathaveekid

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in English
Department of English
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นิธินา ปรีชาทวีกิจ : ชีวประวัติเชิงบันเทิงคดีกับการสร้างใหม่ของอัตลักษณ์อันเกี่ยวข้องกับเพศสถานะ ในผลงาน *เดอะ เทล ออฟ มุราซากิ* ของลิซา ดอลบี *เธาแซนด์ พิสเซส ออฟ โกลด์* ของรูเธนน์ ลัม แมคคันน์ และ *คอมฟอร์ต วูแมน* ของนอรา อกจา เคลเลอร์. (FICTIONAL BIOGRAPHY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDENTITIES IN LIZA DALBY'S *THE TALE OF MURASAKI*, RUTHANNE LUM MCCUNN'S *THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD* AND NORA OKJA KELLER'S *COMFORT WOMAN*) อ. ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: รศ. ดร. พจี ยุวชิต, 216 หน้า.

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ศึกษาการสร้างใหม่ของอัตลักษณ์อันเกี่ยวข้องกับเพศสถานะในชีวประวัติเชิงบันเทิงคดีสามเรื่อง คือ *เดอะ เทล ออฟ มุราซากิ* (2000) ของลิซา ดอลบี (1950-) *เธาแซนด์ พิสเซส ออฟ โกลด์* (1983) ของรูเธนน์ ลัม แมคคันน์ (1946-) และ *คอมฟอร์ต วูแมน* (1997) ของนอรา อกจา เคลเลอร์ (1965-) โดยใช้หลักรหัสในบทบรรยายทั้งห้า (Five Codes of Narrative) ของโรลองด์ บาร์ธส์ และบรรยายเรื่องวิทยา (Narratology) ของเจอราร์ด เจเนต์ในแนวทางโครงสร้างนิยม ผลของการวิจัยเสนอความคิดว่าชีวประวัติเชิงบันเทิงคดีทั้งสามเรื่องซึ่งเขียนโดยนักเขียนสตรีสะท้อนประสบการณ์เฉพาะของเพศหญิง นำเสนอการต่อสู้เพื่ออิสรภาพของสตรีในสังคมและวัฒนธรรมของพวกเธอ และสร้างอัตลักษณ์อันเกี่ยวข้องกับเพศสถานะของตัวเอกสตรีขึ้นใหม่โดยใช้องค์ประกอบที่แต่งเสริมเข้าไปและกลวิธีในการบรรยายของผู้เขียน *เดอะ เทล ออฟ มุราซากิ*ใช้กลวิธีเขียนเลียนแบบอัตชีวประวัติของตัวเอกซึ่งเป็นนักเขียนเพื่อหวนรำลึกถึงชีวิตที่ผ่านไป และนำเสนอแนวคิดการส่งมอบมรดกทางวรรณกรรมของสตรี การสร้างอัตลักษณ์อันเกี่ยวของกับเพศสถานะ และการเติบโตทางจิตวิญญาณของเพศหญิง *เธาแซนด์ พิสเซส ออฟ โกลด์*ใช้การบรรยายแบบมุมมองบุคคลที่สามจำกัดอย่างตรงไปตรงมาเพื่อสะท้อนแง่คิดในการใช้ชีวิตของตัวละครเอกซึ่งไม่รู้หนังสือในขณะที่เธอสร้างอัตลักษณ์ใหม่ของตนขึ้นในสภาพแวดล้อมใหม่ ทั้งยังเพิ่มตัวละครที่นำเสนอความเชื่อและค่านิยมต่างวัฒนธรรมซึ่งตัวละครเอกเรียนรู้ ส่วน*คอมฟอร์ต วูแมน*ใช้กลวิธีการบรรยายแบบสัจนิยมมหัศจรรย์เพื่อสะท้อนประสบการณ์อันเจ็บปวดของตัวเอกซึ่งเป็นนางบำเรอทหารที่เสียชีวิตไปแล้ว และกอบกู้อัตลักษณ์ของตนผ่านความสัมพันธ์อันแน่นแฟ้นเป็นน้ำหนึ่งใจเดียวกันกับสตรีด้วยกัน

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NITHINA PREECHATHAVEEKID: FICTIONAL BIOGRAPHY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDENTITIES IN LIZA DALBY'S *THE TALE OF MURASAKI*, RUTHANNE LUM MCCUNN'S *THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD* AND NORA OKJA KELLER'S *COMFORT WOMAN*. ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. PACHEE YUVAJITA, Ph.D., 216 pp.

This thesis analyzes the reconstruction of gendered identity in three fictional biographies: *The Tale of Murasaki* (2000) by Liza Dalby (1950-), *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1983) by Ruthanne Lum McCunn (1946-), and *Comfort Woman* (1997) by Nora Okja Keller (1965-) through Roland Barthes's Five Codes of Narrative and Gerard Genette's Narratology in a Structuralist approach. It argues that, through their fictive elements and narrative techniques, the three fictional biographies written by women writers reflect on the experiences exclusive to women, illustrate women's struggle for liberation in their society and culture, and ultimately reconstruct the gendered identities of their female protagonists. My analysis of *The Tale of Murasaki* explores how the fictional biography assumes a pseudo-autobiographic form as the own writing of the protagonist, who is a writer, to reminisce on her lived life and illustrate the theme of female literary inheritance, construction of gendered identities, and female spiritual maturation. My reading of *Thousand Pieces of Gold* suggests that the fictional biography employs a straightforward third-person narrative to reflect on its illiterate protagonist's cross-cultural insights on life as she reconstructs her new identity in her new surrounding. It also includes additional characters to represent the cross-cultural beliefs and values she is exposed to. My study of *Comfort Woman* illustrates that the fictional biography employs surrealistic narrative techniques to reflect on its dead protagonist's traumatized experiences as a military prostitute and the reclaiming of her identity through female bonding and solidarity.

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CONTENTS

PAGE

ABSTRACT (THAI)..iv

ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)………………………………………………….… v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS…………………………………………….… vi

CONTENTS……………………………………………………………….. vii

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION…………………………………….... 1

CHAPTER II REMINISCING ON THE LIVED LIFE IN…………………... 27
THE TALE OF MURASAKI

CHAPTER III RECONSTRUCTING A NEW IDENTITY IN……………..… 74
THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD

CHAPTER IV RECLAIMING LOST VOICES IN……………………............ 133
COMFORT WOMAN

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION………………………………………... 189

REFERENCES……………………………...………..…………………..201

APPENDICES……………………………………………………..…206

APPENDIX A VITA SACKVILLE-WEST AND *ORLANDO*………... 207

APPENDIX B ROLAND BARTHES'S STRUCTURALIST.................211
METHODS AND GERARD GENETTE'S
NARRATOLOGY

VITAE……...…………………………………………………........216

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Fictional biography is a relatively contemporary genre – a curious hybrid between fiction and biography. It possibly results from the humanistic desire to feel how it is like to become another person, to make meanings out of that other life lived and dead, as well as the realization that history or traditional historiography alone is inadequate to 'relive' the genuine lives of people in the past – especially of those who left scarce records of their lives, or were among the large body of nameless people considered to be without identity worthy of being recorded into history.

In general, while autobiography is a "direct" means to convey the autobiographer's identity and experiences to readers, fictional biography works in a more complicated manner; after gathering information on the subject's life through historical and cultural research and crafting his/her personality from the materials available, a biographer imagines how the life of that other person could possibly be and writes it out. At times, the writer of a fictional biography deliberately or necessarily adds some details, such as a fictional character, a dialogue or an event, in order to fill out the "gaps" left by the inadequacy of historical records, or to support particular thematic ideas that the author wants to raise in his/her works, using the life of his/her subject as an example or illustration.

To write a fictional biography, it is essential that the author enter a "negotiation" process with the "subject" of the biography in imagining himself/herself in the subject's circumstances. In other words, the author becomes emotionally and mentally involved with the subject in each period of his/her life. As a result, it is highly possible that the subject of a fictional biography possesses some attitudes of the author. Thus, he/she becomes a character whose fictional existence and identity are reconstructed from the selection of relevant historical and cultural materials, as well as the imagination of the author, who arranges all components in a narrative order.

"Because of the centrality of the real-life orientation in the works in question," writes Ina Schabert, in *In Quest of the Other Person: Fiction as Biography*, "the genre is considered as a special kind of 'biography' rather than a subgenre of the novel" (4). She further explains that the adjective "fictional" "indicates the essentially imaginative approach to the task of re-enacting and communicating the reality of life" (4). And that the fictional biography "is engaged in the comprehension of real historical individuals by means of the sophisticated instruments of knowing and articulating knowledge that contemporary fiction offers" (4).

As fictional biography can be a suitable means to narrate the lives of those with inadequate historical evidence for a fully researched biography, it is often employed to narrate the lives of marginalized people of lesser or even no importance to the historical events occurring at large in their lifetimes. Such groups of people are, for example, the ethnic minorities, the disabled, and women. History, largely dictated by the mainstream – specifically men of power in the case of women – has been shown to neglect many aspects of women's lives, as remarked by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929): "by no means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in any one of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past. Nor shall we find her in any collection of anecdotes. … She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her" (44).

Many feminist scholars who have done research on the subject of fictional biography consider Virginia Woolf the progenitor of the genre. Ina Schabert sees Woolf as the "pioneer of fictional biography as concerns both its theory and practice" (4) because her "reflections on the generic potential and the limitations of fiction and of biography led her on to experiment with fictional modes of writing that would inscribe the individuality of real person" (4). Likewise, Susanna Scarparo, in *Elusive Subjects: Biography as Gendered Metafiction*, notes Woolf's preoccupation with history, raising particularly such questions as "Whose lives are worth living? Whose lives are worth writing about? Whose lives are worth remembering?" (xi). With regard to Woolf's question in *Jacob's Room*: "whether or not history should focus only on the biographies of great men," stresses Scarparo, "[h]er answer …develop[ed]

and discuss[ed] in most of her works, is emphatically negative" (xi). Scarparo sees that "Woolf's interest in biographical writing is closely tied to her reading and writing about 'the lives of the obscure,' which, she believes, overlap more often than not with the lives of women" (xi).

Another key issue that Woolf has stressed in the writing of biography is "personality." While her essay "The New Biography" (1928), published in just less than one month after she began writing her first fictional biography *Orlando* (1928), is not the first work to stress the importance of "personality" in biography writing, it clearly outlines the two polar elements that make up a biography: "On the one hand there is *truth*; on the other, there is *personality*" (95, my italics). She also remarks that while truth is what we think of as "something of granite-like solidity," personality is as "something of rainbow-like intangibility," and "the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole" (95). Scarparo views the key matter reflected on by Woolf as "the delicate balance that … ought to exist between fact and fiction in the writing of biography" and the difficulty of trying to find a way to write "that might do justice to both the 'granite' and the 'rainbow'" which has become the inherent "particularity as well as the challenge of this genre" (xi).

Woolf considers the welding of truth and personality such a "stiff" problem that it is no wonder that "biographers have for the most part failed to solve it" (95). She defines the "truth" in biography as facts gathered by vigorous research: "truth in its hardest, most obdurate form" and "truth out of which all vapour of falsehood had been pressed by the weight of research" (95). However, Woolf believes that accurate 'truth' alone cannot make a good biography. As such, she criticizes Sir Sidney Lee, the author of *A Life of William Shakespeare* (1899) and *King Edward VII* (1925) as well as *Principles of Biography* (1911), for being too occupied with 'truth'. She ironically quotes Lee's statement that biography "is the truthful transmission of personality" at the beginning of her essay, and proceeds to criticize that Lee's biographies are "dull" and "unreadable" because "though both are stuffed with truth, he failed to choose those truths which transmit personality" (95).

Consequently, Woolf proposes that "in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity" (95). Thus is Woolf's emphasis on the significance of imagination in the selection of 'truth' as well as its presentation in a biography to convey the personality of the subject. She remarks, "[I]t is obvious that it is easier to obey these precepts by considering that the true life of your subject shows itself in action which is evident rather than in that inner life of thought and emotion which meanders darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul" (95).

Regarding the revelation of such 'inner life,' Woolf praises James Boswell, whose biography of his mentor Samuel Johnson, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), has become the exemplar of biography in her opinion. Boswell, who, according to Catherine N. Parke in *Biography: Writing Lives*, "valued character over plot and thus made character the organizing principle of his *Life of Johnson*" (43), is considered by Woolf to have written the biography in a way that "describes Johnson in acute sensory detail, cueing the reader palpably how the man actually looked and sounded when he spoke the words recorded by his biographer" (44). In this acknowledgement, Parke aligns herself with Woolf in emphasizing the importance of imagination in writing biography. Parke remarks, "Boswell's Johnson, however fully described, is not the man himself but a captured and hence necessarily restricted version," and adds, "The hero of a biography, like the hero of a novel," is "as a result of this artificial, albeit unavoidable, constriction" (44). Thus, the subject of a biography "differs violently from the living people we know" (44).

In "The New Biography," Woolf continues to contemplate on how biography has changed with the emergence of the twentieth century. First is the reduction of size from the sheer conglomeration of authentic evidence and personal records and little analysis. Second is the inward change in the point of view that the biographer is "no longer the serious and sympathetic companion" (97) who praises his subject for upholding the Victorian virtues, but "an equal" who "preserves his freedom and his right to independent judgment" and "sees his subject spread about him" (97). She concludes, "He chooses; he synthesizes; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist" (97).

Woolf gives *Some People* (1926), by Harold Nicolson, as the example of "the new attitude to biography," (97) stating that it "is not fiction because it has the substance, the reality of truth" and yet it "is not biography because it has the freedom, the artistry of fiction" (98). While Woolf never mentions the term 'fictional biography,' it can be assumed that she would see the work as such. Woolf gives a very positive review of *Some People*, even though she acknowledges the limitation of mixing the "truth of real life and the truth of fiction" (99). She explains that Nicolson "can only do it by using no more than a pinch of either. For though both truths are genuine, they are antagonistic; let them meet and they destroy each other … [T]he one casts suspicion upon the other. Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously" (99).

Nevertheless, Woolf concludes the essay in an "optimistic, progressive tone in proposing the responsibilities and possibilities associated with this genre[biography]" (Parke 68). While "[t]ruth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible," Woolf believes that "the biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity, he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact" (100).

Eleven years later, Woolf wrote a new essay "The Art of Biography" (1939) after having taken the task of writing a biography of her friend, the artist and art critic Roger Fry. The optimistic tone in her former essay had gone and her attitude to biography writing had become more solemn. Parke states that in the essay Woolf "distinguishes between biographer and novelist, the latter who enjoys the delights of perfect freedom, the former who is humbly responsible to truth" (69) and characterizes the biographer's task as "more complex, if less explicitly imaginative, than the novelist's" (69). The change in Woolf's attitude probably resulted from her undertaking to write the traditional, 'proper' biography of Roger Fry, which differs largely from her more imaginative and less restrictive fictional biographies, *Orlando* and *Flush* (1933). However, Woolf's ideas in "The New Biography" still contribute a great deal to the writing of fictional biography, which offers more liberty in the

presentation of researched facts than does a ‘proper’ biography, and also employs a much more imaginative process in its writing.

Moreover, as equally significant in the history of fictional biography as Woolf’s theories are the examples of the new genre she has written herself. There are her two fictional biographies: *Orlando* and *Flush*, and a short narrative about Judith Shakespeare – a fictitious sister of Shakespeare, whose plausible – and quite tragic – fate is constructed in *A Room of One’s Own* to illustrate the inadequacy of records on a woman’s life in history. Woolf justifies for this use of imagination to substitute the lack of facts with the reason that “facts are so hard to come by” (46). Thematically, the short narrative on the life of Judith illustrates how being a woman prevents her from achieving success and recognition for her literary potentials, given that she is as equally gifted as her brother. While her brother has the opportunity to study Latin and literature, act, and write for the theater, Judith has little time to read because she has to do the housework. She also has to write in secret, burning her scribbles later so no one else can see. When forced to marry, she runs away from home to London, trying to find work in the theater – as does her brother. However, in that period the acting profession is never allowed to a woman, and eventually she kills herself after becoming pregnant with an actor-manager who “took pity on her” (46-7). This short narrative of Judith Shakespeare, as well as Woolf’s essays and a longer work of fictional biography, *Orlando*, has contributed greatly to the significance of imagination in the writing of biography and fictional biography of women.

Orlando is notable in many ways as a predecessor to later modern fictional biographies, especially feminist ones. Firstly, it challenges the existing convention of biographical writing. Secondly, it questions the notions that biography must be about a real, existing person, and that biography should be written in a realistic manner. Thirdly, it illustrates how imagination can intertwine with facts to produce a surreal, yet truthful and historically credible fictional life with distinctive personality and identity.

Woolf’s challenge of the conventional biographical writing possibly stems from her exposure to her father’s works involving biography. Woolf’s father, Sir

Leslie Stephen, was the editor of the first few volumes of *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1891), which aims to "give factually accurate accounts of notable figures in British history from the beginnings to the present" (Parke 71). As editor, Stephen emphasizes that facts must be of primary importance and argues that "ideas and the discussion of ideas had no place … in encyclopedic biographical accounts, which could not undertake to narrate a history of ideas" (71). As a biographer of the lives of notable men in British literature, he acknowledges the importance of the ideas of his subject, but put them in a separate section from the information about their lives (Whittemore 60-1). In *Orlando*, Woolf dominantly scrutinizes her father's commitment to facts, while at the same time she criticizes the Victorian biographical convention for its commitment to idealized commemoration and decorum (Parke 71). As stressed in "The New Biography," Woolf values personality over facts in the writing of biography. *Orlando* is by no means an account of primarily factual details arranged in a chronological order from the subject's birth to death as in the case of a 'proper' biography in Stephen's sense. Nor is it a biography of a 'saintly' subject with virtues and morals worthy of commemoration in the Victorian sense.

Orlando further breaks the barrier between fact and fiction by raising the question of whether a biography should be restricted to the life of an actual person, based exclusively on facts and written according to the convention of realism. In *Orlando*, Woolf "created a fictional protagonist, allusively based on a real person who lives an extravagant, supernatural life in order to give the lie to conventional notions of linear time as the mainstay of biographical narration" (Parke 73). The protagonist Orlando was inspired by Woolf's real-life friend, the novelist and poet Vita Sackville-West[1]. Orlando's personality is modeled from that of Sackville-West, and the story of Orlando's life is partly based on the Sackvilles' long family history. However, it is pure fiction that a real person can, like Orlando, live through many centuries, undergo an unexplainable sex change from male to female, and meet historical personages in each era s/he lives in. At the same time, Woolf's portrayal of each era in Orlando's life contains relevant historical facts, which are selectively included to reflect the spirit or the values of each era as well as their influence on Orlando's character and thinking.

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[1] See Appendix A for a summary of *Orlando* and its basis on the life of Vita Sackville-West.

By welding fact and fiction together, Woolf succeeds in illustrating how they can merge with one another to produce a fictional life with distinctive personality and identity. This transmission of personality is indeed Woolf's ultimate goal in writing biography. Though portrayed in different statuses and affected by a variety of factors, such as changes in age, sex, and the values of different eras, Orlando has his/her unique, coherent core of personality and identity. Parke remarks, "*Orlando* is filled with uproarious incidents and action, but the novel's emphasis falls, nonetheless, on the namesake character's qualities, the characteristics of the several centuries in which s/he lives, and the felt sense of living more than one life, while somehow embodying, nonetheless, a coherent recognizable identity" (72). Ultimately, through writing *Orlando*, which blurs the lines between fact and fiction, history and psychology, and public and private life – such opposite poles clearly delineated in the convention of biography, Woolf "demonstrates … how history is a phenomenological category that invents and is simultaneously driven by a period's conception of personal identity, particularly as identity relates to gender, sexuality, perception, and imagination" (Parke 72). Particularly for feminist writers and critics, Woolf's essay "The New Biography" and the biographical novel *Orlando* have made way for the new vision of how women writers can express themselves as well as their fellow women through writing the life of another person, whether real or fictitious, in order to express how a woman's identity can develop under the influences of their sex, gender(s), presuppositions and values regarding women in their particular society, as well as women in general.

Along the same line as Woolf's work on the principles of biography, Feminism has also opened up many creation and reevaluation of literature and the particular genre. Blanche Wiesen Cook accredits the feminist movement in the late twentieth century for changing the contours of our learning traditions and thus transforming the craft of biography (xi). The first wave of feminism in America, built upon the philosophical foundations established by Mary Wollstonecraft, the British social theorist and novelist who authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ushered American women to demand for their right to vote. It then persisted in attempting for equal rights for women even after they had won the suffrage in

1920. During this period, there was a broad range of stances of feminism in America – from liberal feminists or mainstream feminists, Marxist feminists, radical feminists or separatists, to Black, Latina, Native-American, Asian-American, and other "minority" feminists who "speak from a position outside the mainstream to emphasize the relations between ethnicity, race, and gender" (Warhol 308). This first wave of feminism serves as the progenitor of the second wave, which has been operating on the American political scene since the women's movement began in the 1960s. This particular wave has raised "the issue of equality in the workplace, reproductive rights, and female representation in government" (308). Both movements have influenced the knowledge and presuppositions of how women are, as well as how they view and express themselves – or are viewed and expressed through the work of biography and autobiography. In addition, Linda Wagner-Martin observes that feminist biography has alerted to ways "literary history has sometimes prevented women from telling stories – their own, those of their female friends and relatives" (x). She states that feminist biography identifies and embraces as part of its task the problematic recognition of its female subject in relation to men as a daughter, wife, and mother, rather than an individual, as well as her struggle "both to fit into her family and community and to avoid the restrictions that those entities might create for her" (x-xi). Furthermore, feminism also challenges the traditional category of subject of biography as a "publicly lauded, typically male" individual worthy to have his life written out, and it opens the way for "an obscure or minority figure" such as a woman to be selected as a subject of biography who represents her marginalized group (Heilbrun 18-9). In fact, Parke writes, "Feminist biography counterbalances a lives-of-the-great notion of history not only by taking women as its principal subjects, but also by narrating history as group movements rather than acts of individuals" (93).

Feminism in America has also been particularly influenced by French feminism. According to Kari Weil in her article "French Feminism's *Écriture Féminine*," the works of prominent French feminist writers in the 1970s and 1980s, which came to be called French feminism in the United States, "promoted an exciting, new approach to thinking about women, their bodies, and their desires, which changed both the shape and the locus of feminist thinking within the US academy"

with its "emphasis on language as both the ultimate tool of women's oppression and a potential means for subverting, if not escaping that oppression" (153). For French feminists, "language is itself patriarchal," and this results in the impossibility to find expression to women's desire as this desire is "what is most oppressed and repressed by patriarchy" (153). French feminism also introduced the word "*jouissance*" – French for orgasm or "a pleasure so intense that it is at once of the body and outside it" as a term of literary theory for "an intensity which, like woman's pleasure, is outside language" (153). According to Weil, French feminism transformed the focus of literary study from "the status of women as producers of literature" or "the representation of women's experience in literature" to "the production of the 'feminine' in literature" and that it tries either to "reveal the blindness and misogyny of patriarchal representations of women" or to "discover an alternative female-authored tradition" (154).

As the "foremother" of French feminism, Simone de Beauvoir proposes that women are "the sex" and "the other" of men. In her book, *The Second Sex* (1949), she writes "For him she is sex … She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (xxii). Weil comments that the book "focuses largely on the way women have been made into man's other and so robbed of their own ability to define themselves" (155) as well as how " 'one is not born but becomes a woman' through changes wrought on women's bodies – changes which prepare them ultimately for maternity" (155-6). De Beauvoir discusses how male authors perpetuated the myths and fears of women in their literary works, while female authors were concerned with the negative experiences women had with their bodies. Namely, these experiences are "the pain, disgust, and ultimately shame they sense from their bodily changes and functions," as well as "the way that women, too, come to regard their bodies as alienating" (Weil 156) or "something other than herself" (de Beauvoir 29). As such, de Beauvoir proposes that a woman should not accept the role of a mother or being "the feminine woman." Instead, she encourages the concept of "the modern woman" who "accepts masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as

men" (718). In other words, a woman has to "den[y] the difference of her feminine body and all that it may imply" (Weil 156) in order to incarnate the norm that the masculine represents "authentic" humanity. However, while Simone de Beauvoir was regarded as the "intellectual mother" (155) of many of the later feminists in many respects, later French feminists rejected her adoption of patriarchal values and standards (155). Rather, they chose to empower women by reversing de Beauvoir's disdain for woman's body and affirming its particularities and desires (156).

Another significant concept introduced by the French feminists to feminism in America is the term "*écriture féminine*" or "feminine writing" promoted by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig. The term was first coined in Cixous's essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) in which she asserts that "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement" (347). Dianne Chisolm states in her article "French Feminism" that each of the four female authors has her own distinct writing practice, but they share the criticism of phallogocentricism – the privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning – and the promotion of this "writing of the feminine" (329-30) concerning with what Elizabeth Weed calls the "preoccupation with the ineffable, the unnamable" (274) in her article ""Feminist Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." They seek to " 'unwrite' … discursive privileging of masculinity, which inevitably, in patriarchal society, translates into institutional power for men as the predestined bearers of phallus," and *écriture féminine* is "a variety of textual strategies" they deploy to "destabilize, decenter, and dis*organ*ize the phallocentric order" (Weil 330, original italics). The four feminists regard "the feminine" as "a repressed semiotic potential that has been exiled to the cultural margins since the Greeks," and Cixous and Kristeva "re*orient* the discourse of woman toward Eastern (Egyptian, Chinese) … or poetic (pre-Oedipal, transhistoric) writing" in their attempts "to recover the feminine from the residues and reserves of Western discourse" so that they can discover the feminine as "the other" (330, my italics).

However, Chisolm adds that the French feminism is essentially "antihumanistic" and "antifeminist", which superficially tends to contradict the humanistic or feminist approach. It argues that "*woman* cannot be defined" and that "*she* does not exist either as pure essence or pure difference" (330). Thus, Cixous "denounces the movement for political identity and equality as phallofeminism, calling instead for women to write themselves into history by figuring their sex, their joy, their love in excessive violation of patriarchal taboos," while Irigaray "appeals to women to assemble among themselves to learn to speak (as) woman in gestural and syn*tactical* turns of phrase, which mime women's morphological and cultural differences and forge the foundations for a woman's society" (330, original italics). Irigaray considers women to be in "a state of social and symbolic dereliction" as "the exiled" driven out by patriarchy, and so she argues that they "must create a sacred (but not sacrificial) knowledge of women's divinity" (330-1). Weil states that mimicry is Irigaray's principle strategy to reverse "the position and gender of speaking subject and spoken subject" and that "[m]imicry … has subversive potential, but only as it also acknowledges women's imprisonment in a male language" (163). However, Weil further writes that, for Irigaray, mimicry is only a first phase to subversive writing, and it is to be followed by "a more specific attempt at a "*parler-femme*" or "speaking (as) woman" (165). This hints at finding the means to express in language women's repressed desires and pleasure, or *jouissance*. In her book, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) Irigaray posits that "woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's" (25) and that, because "[w]oman has sex organs more or less everywhere" (28) women's libido and sexuality has no proper bodily part. Weil considers this to correspond to Cixous's idea that woman is "capable of losing a part of herself without losing her intergrity" (quoted in Weil 165). As for Kristeva, she is concerned with the "semiotic" or the signifying process in *écriture féminine*. She considers the semiotic to be "the key to any change, any revolution and meaning" and she associates it with "the infant's bodily rhythms and instinctual drives, which will be repressed by so-called symbolic language. Even as this prelinguistic form of signification can only be known through symbolic language, it nevertheless has the power to 'destroy the symbolic' " (164). However, Weil states that Kristeva also warns of the dangers of the drives associated with the semiotic for

the psyche and culture, quoting from Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) that the drives are "always already ambiguous, simultaneously assimilating and destructive … The semiotized body [is] a place of permanent scission" (quoted in Weil 164). Weil further concludes that, as such, Judith Butler considers Kristeva's theory "self-defeating" because its possibility to lead to psychosis and the breakdown of cultural life "alternately posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal" (quoted in Weil 164). Kristeva is also marked by her championing of "motherhood as an ethical model, a 'herethics,' representing the ambiguity, the otherness within all subjectivity" (166). Weil remarks that Kristeva's experimental prose "is explicitly linked to the maternal through the semiotic – those bodily rhythms and pulses which create a signifying bond between mother and infant both in the womb and in the period after birth" (166). These are the drives that will be repressed by what Sigmund Freud calls the oedipal phase and what Jacques Lacan calls the symbolic, which are associated with the paternal law that forces the infant to give up his attachment to his mother and becomes an independent subject. Weil also states that "Kristeva's focus on the semiotic is an attempt to displace the Lacanian emphasis on the father's role in the production of language and to give prominence to mother in organizing the drives into a presymbolic or pre-oedipal signifying system" (166).

Indeed, French feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray emphasize motherhood, in contrast to de Beauvoir's denunciation of motherhood and femininity. Weil cites Cixous's identification of feminine writing with mother's milk in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), in which Cixous states that "she writes with white ink" (quoted in Weil 166) as well as Irigaray's comparison of woman's speech to exchange of fluid in *This Sex Which Is Not One* – as "a flux that never congeals or solidifies" (quoted in Weil 167). Weil also considers that "Kristeva's identification of maternal and semiotic … seems to reinscribe patriarchal definitions of the mother as other, outside culture, potentially psychotic, and in need of the paternal law to be spoken" (167). The association of *écriture féminine* with motherhood suggests that woman must "imagine her relation to her mother's body, in order to reverse the devaluation of her origins and her 'imaginary' within culture" (168). Ultimately, Weil concludes that "French feminists used *écriture* as a weapon not to represent the feminine but to

create it through experimental poetics. By creating the feminine in their own work, they hope to provoke women to participate in reimagining their lives and their world. Such a provocation has immense political and aesthetic possibilities that are still untapped today" (169).

Not only is modern fictional biography affected by different schools of feminism, be it French, American, or British, it is also affected by other factors, such as ethnicity. Like sex and gender, it has been widely studied and acknowledged that ethnicity and society both play pivotal roles in the shaping of one's sense of identity. Schabert clearly stresses that, in order to get to know the other person, "of primary importance is the other person's particular mode of participation in his or her social world, the person's unique perspective on the social structure, the person's specific manner of relating to the group to which he or she belongs, and the changes in his or her attitude towards the group" (1). She stresses that "[i]t is by *reconstructing* those manifold and varying relationships that the knowledge is obtained of a unique person, different from everybody else. The search for the other in literature is directed towards the point where the person's social identity merges with his or her subjective, existential, creative identity" (1-2). In line with Schabert's view, Parke even gives more weight to the ethnicity and social standing of the female subject. She notes: "When a woman is the principal figure, sex and gender typically become the chief consideration, unless the subject's race and class, variables whose effects tend to predominate over gender in life as in life writing, figure more significantly" (94). As such, biographies of women are written as an expressive and communicative means to share the experiences of – but not limited to – women who belong to other races than the Western people, most notably the African-American women, and more increasingly Asian-American.

The African-American people, who have been long faced with subjugation and discrimination as slaves and descendants of slaves brought to the New World, found their voice and self-expression through various means, such as slave narratives, poetry, novels, and autobiographical narratives. Unfortunately, African-American female writers in later eras, for example, the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s, tended to be overshadowed by their male counterparts and many of their works have

only been rediscovered just recently, as pointed out by Ann duCille (26). However, the works of these African-American female writers deal with issues remarkably distinct from those of the male ones. For example, Angelo Costanzo states in "African-American Writing: Literary Criticism" that Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), her veiled biography in the form of slave narrative, "has contributed to the understanding of how a woman's description of the slave experience differed in emphasis and expression from a male's account of bondage. What is revealed in Jacob's work is a life story involving sexual integrity, familial attachments, and a sense of community – themes found in many of the later texts of women of color" (40). Following this tradition, African-American writers in the following periods have included in their writings these aspects of sexuality, family, and community. They also focus on the status of women as they have been in their respective eras. "While many of their black male contemporaries looked to an imaginary African and a romanticized rural South for subject matter," remarks duCille, African-American female writers "focused their attention on the here and now of the burgeoning and burdened black communities around them and on many of the issues most pertinent to modern African-American women: gender, race, and social relations; men, marriage, and motherhood; sexuality; labor, love and leisure" (26). She further states that "[l]ike their nineteenth-century predecessors, they were concerned with defending the name of black women, but they also attempted to assert and insert into the public consciousness a new sense of a vital, passionate (rather than passionless) black womanhood" (26). Furthermore, duCille traces how contemporary black feminist texts are linked together by their mutual focus. She states that the novels of African-American women of the 1940s and 1950s "are united by their explicit concerns with gender relations and sex roles and in their figuring and refiguring of woman as wife, as object of desire, attempting to assert both her own sexuality and her own individuality" (27). Many of the female characters in that era are "willful wives who in quite different ways rebel against the 'proper,' particular roles society has determined for them" (28).

Later, in the 1960s, further texts "ushered in a wave of black feminist fiction concerned with sexism, sexual politics, and the historical effects of racism and

patriarchal gender ideals on the lives of black women and children" (28). African-American women's quest for liberation and self-expression has been faced not only with the sexism and racism of the white men and women, but also with the sexism of their black "brothers," who wished for them to leave work for the white people and remain at their own homes, whereas, in fact, "it often was (and is) the labor of the black and other women of color domestic workers that made it possible for white women to work outside the home" (28). Thus, African-American women were "dominated by white women on the one hand and by black men on the other" and were not afforded "much of a sense of presentness, place, or voice" (28). It has been since the 1970s that the African-American women have enjoyed the resurrection of their voices, through the rediscovery of works by their foremothers, as well as a myriad of new writing by their contemporaries (28), most notable in the field of biography being Maya Angelou's autobiographical narrative, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), the first book in the six volumes of autobiography that was soon to come. The book details how racism, rape, family, and female sexuality, among many other elements, have shaped Angelou's identity as an African-American woman. As critic Susan Gilbert states, *Cage Bird* is not only a person's story alone, but also the collectives (104-5).

As for Asian-American writing, this classification was formalized much more recently than its African-American counterpart – in the 1970s. Like the African-American people, the Asian-American have been faced with similar discrimination from the Whites. However, their predicaments are somewhat different, and this has affected their writing. Asian-American writing, as the writing of a very – and even inadequately – broad group of ethnicities, is characteristically distinct and diverse at the same time.

On the one hand, the literature of Asian-American women usually concerns how they find themselves in inferior position to men – or even white women – as well as in the universal feminine roles of a daughter, a wife and a mother, similar to those of African-American descent. It is noted that there are "strong reasons to discuss Asian-American women's writing as a distinct body of work – for these women share a common history of discrimination against Asians as a minority group, as well as a

common relationship to United States policies of immigration, labor laws, and institutional policy" (Lowe 67). On the other hand, it must be cautioned that any generalizations should not be made about African-American and Asian-American writing, as well as different groups of the various ethnicities within the term "Asian-American." While both African-American and Asian-American women find themselves in the 'universal' subordinate statuses and roles of daughters, wives, and mothers, the predicaments that shape their identities can also be vastly different. Possibly because of the broad range of ethnicities among the Asian-American, it is hard to find pieces of Asian-American literature unanimously agreed on as 'canons,' even though it can be said that they clearly "exemplify a different relation to traditional notions of aesthetic unity and therefore may be said to function differently in the production of culture" (Lowe 67).

Predominant among these Asian fictional biographies are those which feature the Eastern Asian ethnicity and culture – namely the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ones in contrast to modern Western ideas. In these fictional biographies, both the Eastern and the Western cultures and ideas play pivotal roles by conflicting, balancing, and reconciling with each other in the process of creating the identity of their female subjects, who often find themselves in between the two polarities, as well as under the influences of other factors, such as their gender and sexuality. As such, this thesis aims to study three selected fictional biographies featuring Eastern Asian, or Eastern Asian-American women as their subjects in order to explore how the three pieces of work serve to reconstruct the gendered identities and experiences of their female protagonists through structuralist methods.

In Structuralism, various kinds of literature are each treated as a genre using a certain pattern of narrative and consisting of certain elements. For example, elements of a fictional biography may include plausible dialogues, fictional characters and situations, all of which function to create meanings from the life of another person. Having roots in linguistics, Structuralism's original aim is to study how the way a series of words is structured to form meanings and thus it can be highly applicable for fictional biography. Schabert elaborates on this idea:

> To acquire knowledge of another person as an individual is not only an epistemological and a psychological venture but also a venture with regard to the use of language and literary forms. The knowledge of the other's particular personality would have to be conceived, expressed, communicated in words; yet words, with the exception of the other's proper name, have a generalizing effect. … When the knowledge of the other person takes the form of a biographical narrative, one more set of generalizations is introduced which, again, tends to reduce the unorthodox to orthodoxy, the individual life being adapted to *an existing stock of narrative patterns*." (2, my italics)

As such, this thesis employs a) Roland Barthes' Narrative Analysis and Five Codes of Narrative and b) Gerard Genette's Narratology in the Structuralist Approach[2] to study the three works in a form similar to those of two existing studies by Schabert and Scarparo, who have done research on fictional biography according to their specific interests[3]. Like Schabert, through the three novels of my choice, 1) *The Tale of Murasaki* by Liza Dalby, 2) *Thousand Pieces of Gold* by Ruthanne Lum McCunn, and 3) *Comfort Woman* by Nora Okja Keller, I want to study "a figure of the past of whom the author could not have direct, personal experience" (3), and like Scarparo, who quoted in her book the French philosopher Alain (Émile Chartier)'s observation that "each human being has two sides, one appropriate to history, the other to the novel," the thesis "is interested in the side which is accessible only or mainly to fiction" (6). Furthermore, like Scarparo, I wish to further "explor[e] the intersection of history and fiction as it has been manifest in the writing of women's lives … to analyse fictional biographies in which … women feature as authors, narrators and biographical subjects" (xiii).

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[2] See Appendix B for a summary of the methodology used.

[3] Schabert's *In Quest of the Other Person: Fiction as Biography* concerns how fictional biography can make one know the subject as "the other" or a genuinely different being, while Susanna Scarparo's *Elusive Subjects: Biography as Gendered Metafiction* studies fictional biography as gendered metafiction.

Two out of three of my selected works are written by Asian-American authors who have similar backgrounds to their subjects; McCunn, who writes about the Chinese pioneer woman Polly Bemis (1853-1933), is a Chinese-Scottish American, while Keller, who writes about a fictional Korean comfort woman and her American-born daughter, is a Korean-German American. The American anthropologist Dalby who writes about the Japanese woman writer Murasaki Shikibu (c.973-c.1014 or 1025) is not of Asian-American ethnicity, but she has a solid training and interest in the Japanese culture to render the life story of Murasaki so plausibly that it is worth studying along with the two fictional biographies by McCunn and Keller. Specifically, *The Tale of Murasaki* can be an example of how modern ideas and research in Japanese literature and culture can aid in the exploration of the "possible" and "plausible" identity of the Heian woman writer who has created her own *écriture féminine*.

However, my aim differs from those of Scarparo's and Schabert's to some extent. Scarparo focuses on fictional biographies "with varying degrees of self-reflexive metafiction" – a kind of fiction using techniques which make readers aware of its fictional illusion and devices as a work of art which, nevertheless, contains "truth," while the forms of the works I have selected range from a fictional autobiographical memoir (*The Tale of Murasaki*,) which comes along with a letter and the 'fabricated' ending to the protagonist's work of fiction, a chronological third-person biographical narrative (*Thousand Pieces of Gold*), to a first-person, magical realist autobiographical narrative closest to metafiction as it alternates between the point of view of the daughter and that of her deceased mother (*Comfort Woman*). As for Schabert, our categories of works studied and our hypothesis largely differ. While Schabert formerly hypothesized that "due to its foundation in empathy, fictional biography would be an essentially female genre" (6), she "had to give up the idea" because "[m]ost of the novels where the quest for the other is successful, are written by men" (6) She states that feminist psychologists explains that the status of women authors with regard to fictional biography is problematic because "female identity differs radically from the concept of separate personal identity" (6). She proposes that "If, as feminists assume, female identity is 'less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible

than male individuality,' if women typically experience 'a continual crossing of self and other," the otherness of other persons would not come into their view" (6-7). The result is that "Authors would tend to merge with their characters" and that "fictional biographies written by women ... play down historical and individual particulars in order to represent the female condition" (7). Like Scharbert, Parke acknowledges this concept in *Biography: Writing Lives*, but views it in a different way. She states that feminist historians observe that "Woman's 'I' … has always been handicapped in a variety of ways" (92). As a result, "Women's history is thus nearly synonymous with a 'history of their specific oppression, of the opposition the system has raised to their fulfillment and the power of resistance they have developed' " (92). She then concludes, "Hence the biographer of a woman must, with particular care and distinct emphasis, be true to the facts of both the individual life and the condition of women in history, since the meanings, limits, and ideology of woman have been defined by the patriarchal system" (92).

Clearly, the above assumption does not go along with Schabert's original hypothesis that fictional biography is a female genre. However, the idea that the historical and individual particulars may be downplayed by female writers in order to represent the female condition suits my purpose, as my intention is to argue that the "female condition" is one of the important influences in the construction of identity of a female person; it affects many aspects of reality that create experiences in her life. Therefore, I would like to propose the idea that fictional biographies featuring Asian or Asian-American women written by female writers naturally reflect the subjugation and the construction of the female protagonists' identities in relation to their gender, race and culture.

Through analysis, I have found that the three novels employ what is quite similar to what Barthes calls '*the semic code*' or elements that are linked to theme and constituting a 'character' when organized around a particular proper name. Female characters that function prominently are usually the protagonist's mother and women friends. Generally, their roles are to reflect the bond between women present in many feminist narratives, in which the protagonists identify themselves with their female relatives and friends. Furthermore, many of these women characters also illustrate the

conditions of women in their particular society. As for male characters, both three novels employ imaginary male characters as well as men who actually existed in their protagonists' lives in varying roles – either supportive or antagonistic to the protagonists. Also functioning similarly are the *symbolic codes*, or symbolic elements related to the particular themes of the fictional biographies, as well as the contrasts and pairings which lead to binary oppositions relating to the themes of the novels. This ranges from basic binary oppositions, such as male-female, Western-Eastern, and death-life, to paired contrasts that are specific to each story such as Chinese-Japanese, real-fictional, or worldly-spiritual. *Proairetic codes*, or codes indicating actions, often function simultaneously as *symbolic codes* when they indicate actions specific to female experiences. Such actions include, but are not limited to, rape, breastfeeding, dressing, and acts of beautification which involve self-torture – such as foot binding and corset wearing.

Nevertheless, it must be cautioned that the three novels belong to the bases of varying cultural backgrounds and historical periods, and I am aware of these differences. However, the focus of my thesis is on the comparison of their use of narrative codes, rather than the contrast of such historical and cultural differences. Instead, the differences emphasized in this thesis are those in the three works' narratological techniques. In terms of narration, the three novels are structured very differently, and they employ distinctive narratological techniques to narrate the lives of their subjects/protagonists as well as those around them in order to suitably represent the reconstruction of the protagonists' identities.

Liza Dalby's *The Tale of Murasaki* employs the narratological techniques to create the illusion that the text was genuine as the subject/ protagonist's own writing. It concerns the life of Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji*, one of the masterpieces of Japanese literature which centers on the lives of Hikaru Genji – a fictitious son of an emperor, his many wives and lovers, and their descendants. As a woman writer and poet in the Heian period (794-1192), the height of classical Sino-Japanese culture in Japan, Murasaki Shikibu also left a collection of poems and a diary, *Murasaki no Nikki*, or what is currently believed to be a fragment of it. However, information as to who she was and how she lived is surprisingly sparse; her

real name is not even known[4]. Dalby based her reconstruction of Murasaki's life upon the historical knowledge about women and politics in that era, as well as Murasaki's authentic fragmented diary and poems.

The structure of Dalby's novel is illusive and multi-layered. To discuss it in Genette's terms, the novel begins with a *frame narrative* (the first narrative of the story) with *internal focalization* (the viewpoint which belongs to a character in the story) through a *homodiegetic* narration (the narration that belongs to a character present in the story.) The *frame narrative* assumes the form of a letter written by the first narrator Katako, Murasaki's only daughter, and it is addressed to her own daughter. Katako tells her daughter about a memoir written by Murasaki, which she has found after her mother's death, along with the final chapter to *The Tale of Genji*. Katako entrusts both manuscripts to her daughter in the hope that they can be revealed to the public at an appropriate time. The fictional biography then moves on to an *embedded narrative* (the narrative which comes second): Murasaki's memoir, written also with *internal focalization* through the *homodiegetic focalizer*/narrator Murasaki herself. The memoir proceeds chronologically in reminiscing on the events in her lived life from the death of Murasaki's mother in Murasaki's youth to her decision to renounce the world and become a nun as a middle-aged woman. A second shift takes the readers back to Katako's letter, which concludes the death of Murasaki and remarks on her mother's view of the world. Finally, the last section of the story is the fictional ending to *The Tale of Genji*, which is actually written by Dalby to reflect the spiritual maturation of her Murasaki. This pseudo-ending is written in *zero focalization* (or omniscient point of view) with a *heterodiegetic* narrator (the omniscient narrator outside the story). The chapter continues the story from where the original tale was supposedly left unfinished: when Ukifune – the heroine of the latter part of the tale – flees her husband Kaoru and her lover Prince Niou, both of whom seek to take her away from one another, to a nunnery and takes the tonsure. Dalby's Murasaki chooses to liberate Ukifune from the grasps of both men by having her

[4] It was customary for ladies-in-waiting in the Heian period to go by pseudonyms, often assigned by their peers. Murasaki Shikibu's pseudonym consists of the name of one of Genji's most beloved wives. Murasaki, the ideal lady, and Shikibu denotes that her male relative (in this case her father) worked in the Bureau of Ceremony.

struck blind by a bolt of thunder. Niou is appalled by her empty gaze and gives up his pursuit, while Kaoru, who considers himself a religious man, finds himself preferring the blind Ukifune to her former clear-sighted self and fixates on her as an untouchable ideal love object. The peace of mind which Ukifune eventually gains in the end mirrors that of Murasaki's after she has been free from constraints of worldly matters, including the pressures of men and the court upon her writing.

Dalby has thoroughly planned the structure of her book so that it appears as genuine as the memoir of the famous Heian lady. She incorporates parts of Murasaki's actual diary into it seamlessly and makes use of the Heian literary culture in which the learned keep diaries, converse through poems, and exchange letters. She has also made use of the fact that Murasaki had one daughter, who was very accomplished as a lady-in-waiting, as a link to illustrate how Murasaki's assessment and reminiscence on the construction of her identity as a woman in the fictional memoir can be passed down from her daughter to her fictitious granddaughter in order to sustain them and her fellow women. This can be read through Cixous's concept of women's writing as the mother's milk. Moreover, Dalby also takes the liberty to add a final chapter to *The Tale of Genji* which clearly parallels Murasaki's state of mind to that of Ukifune and this illustrates both women's realization that language – as a patriarchal construction – does not constitute reality.

In contrast, the structure of Ruthanne Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is much more straightforward and chronological. Divided into parts denoting by the year(s) when the events take place, it narrates the life of Lalu Nathoy, or Polly Bemis, a Chinese farmer's daughter who is sold to the bandits during a village raid and eventually smuggled into America. There, she is forced to become a barkeeper and sexual slave to her Chinese master in Warrens, Idaho, and is doubly alienated because of her female sex and "inferior" ethnicity. However, she later regains her freedom through the help of a liberal American man, Charlie Bemis, and she reconstructs her identity anew in America as a self-sufficient person, rejecting marriage and childbearing as the norms of a woman's life – in the way of the "modern woman" proposed by de Beauvoir. Polly opens a boarding house to make a living, becoming a respectable and beloved pioneer woman in her community due to her

hospitality and generosity. Nevertheless, even as a free woman, her sense of alienation as "the other" remains until she accepts Charlie's proposal of marriage – on the condition that they do not have children – and retreats to live with him on a farm, where she realizes years later that it is the place where she belongs and can finally feel at peace after her husband's death.

Thousand Pieces of Gold is told in *internal focalization*, with Lalu Nathoy, or Polly Bemis as the protagonist and *homodiegetic* narrator of the fictional biography. It begins from the time when Lalu is a thirteen-year-old daughter of a farmer in China and ends when she dies in America at the age of eighty. This choice of narrative style is possibly affected by the nature of the historical Polly Bemis, who had no children all her life and was assumed to be illiterate in both Chinese and English (McCunn 330). Therefore, a limited omniscient point of view through the eyes of the protagonist without any "veiled" writing techniques is considered more suitable for Polly's fictional biography.

For Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, the structure of the story is the most complicated. It can be divided into two interloping narratives: one of Beccah, or Rebeccah, a Korean-American woman who discovers the fact that her mother had been a surviving comfort woman in World War II just after her mother's death, and the other of Akiko, Beccah's deceased mother, which details her experiences as a comfort woman in the Japanese soldiers' recreation camp, her escape from the camp and into America, as well as the trauma she tries to deal with through her ability as a spirit medium, which enables her to strengthen her bond with the spirits of her dead mother and female friends and reclaim her true name and identity through her daughter's remembrance. The novel can be categorized as belonging to the genre of magical realism as both the magical and the realistic coexist in the novel, and the magical becomes unquestioningly 'real' in certain circumstances. The genre itself is also a curious hybrid like fictional biography, in which the real combines with the fictional. Ana María Manzanas writes in *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures* that "as an oxymoronic construction, magical realism seems to cancel itself out in its very formulation; magic and realism are clustered together in an 'impossible' unifying term" (38). Furthermore, according to Kathryn Hume in

Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature, the genre combines two impulses at the heart of literature: "These are *mimesis*, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and *fantasy*, the desire to change givens and alter reality – out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defenses" (20). As a magical realist narrative, *Comfort Woman* culminates in the discovery of the lost mother's voice – the image of the pre-oedipal mother as the semiotic which is posited by Kristeva – by allowing the dead mother to speak out and resort to the magical to seek and find the signification she lacks as well as her moment of *jouissance*. It also illustrates that the female identity consists of impersonation, or mimicry as it is called by Irigaray, while the women oppressed by the patriarchal institutions deeply rooted in verbal language seek to express themselves and communicate with their fellow women through the invention of their own nonverbal and tactile means – ultimately resulting in their *parler-femme*, or "women's speaking" in English. This is delivered through the voices of the mother and the daughter in their intertwining narratives.

These two narratives are *intrusive*, meaning that they move back and forth between one and the other. The alternation takes place with the change of each chapter, and the name of the *homodiegetic focalizer* is placed at the beginning of each chapter. Both narratives are in the first-person point of view. Beccah's narrative is the *frame narrative* and Akiko's the *embedded narrative*. The handling of time in both narratives is not in a chronological order but can be classified as essentially *analeptic* (flashing back) to some extent. To pinpoint the exact time each part of Akiko's narrative is told is rendered more problematic by the fact that Beccah announces at the end of the first chapter that her mother is dead, even before her mother's narrative is presented next, as if it were her 'ghost' that speaks out. However, the choice for these fragmented narratives is possibly because it is suitable for illustrating the state of mind of a traumatized female subject with shamanistic beliefs like Akiko, who moves back and forth between her painful past as a military prostitute and superstitious fear for the well-being of her daughter. These fragmented narratives connect with each other to tell parallel stories of the American-born daughter ashamed of her

psychologically troubled mother and her sexually victimized Korean mother, as well as the socially victimized grandmother in the later part of the story.

In some aspects, the alternating narrative technique of *Comfort Woman* is also similar to that of *The Tales of Murasaki* in that it involves a daughter learning about her mother from what the deceased mother has left – be it a memoir or a cassette tape. Upon learning about the mother, the daughter also learns about their foremothers and fellow women as well. However, even though *Thousand Pieces of Gold* lacks this alternating point of view between a mother and a daughter, it compensates for this through the use of its *semic codes* or characters, by presenting Polly acting as beloved and memorable member of the white community in Warrens. Furthermore, it also portrays Polly as a mother figure for Gay Carrey, a white girl who is taken in by Polly during the time she stays in Warrens for schooling and is very fond of the Chinese woman.

In conclusion, while consisting of similar elements in terms of characters and symbols to convey its thematic ideas, fictional biography can employ various structures and narratological techniques which suit the intention of the author of the particular work as well as the specific circumstances of its subject and his/her state of mind. Such structures function to convince readers of the truthfulness of the story being told as well as its sentiments, so that readers are more likely to suspend their disbelief that it is not the real subject's life that is being narrated. Ultimately, they can feel that the 'life' they are reading about is genuine and conveys to them messages they can understand: the reconstruction of the protagonist's life as the woman she has become.

CHAPTER II
REMINISCING ON THE LIVED LIFE IN *THE TALE OF MURASAKI*

In the "Foreword" to the *Tale of Murasaki*, the author Liza Dalby states that she has "pieced the existing historical fragment of [Murasaki Shikibu's] diary into an imagined reminiscence, much as an ancient vase might be reconstructed by setting the original fragments into a vessel of modern day – a sort of literary archaeology" (xv). She further writes that "The shape of the shards dictates the structure of the vessel, so my tale is in the form of a poetic diary, a literary genre well established in Murasaki's day. And while the material of reconstruction is new, I have blended into it eleventh-century sensibilities, beliefs, and preoccupations" (xv). She states that she has also included poems belonging to Murasaki Shikibu and those of the people she engaged in poetic dialogue in the story, explaining that the poetry of the era "was a primary mode of communication for men and women in Murasaki's circle" (xv), and concludes that she "imagined Murasaki writing this memoir at the end of her life, and that it was found, after her death, by her daughter, Katako" (xv). Discovered along with the memoir is the final chapter of the *Tale of Genji*, which was in fact made up by Dalby to reflect the state of mind of the "Murasaki Shikibu" in her fictional biography. From all these, it is clear that Dalby has made a great effort in planning the structure of her historical novel/fictional biography so that it renders such an authenticity as Murasaki Shikibu's own writing as possible that readers are inclined to suspend their disbelief and treat what they read as a 'text of truth' – the reconstruction of how the life of the illusive woman writer of a piece of classical Japanese literature with such psychological depth as the *Tale of Genji* could be.

The whole of the work can be divided into three narratives: 1) Katako's, 2) Murasaki's, and 3) Ukifune's. The narrative that is presented first, or the *frame/primary narrative* as it is called by Gerard Genette, belongs to Katako, Murasaki's only daughter. It is told in the first-person point of view, with Katako as the *homodiegetic focalizer*. In the framework of the story, this narrative has an intended recipient: Katako's daughter, who is also Murasaki's granddaughter.

Katako's narrative is a letter addressed to her daughter. This first narrative is divided into two parts. The first part serves to introduce the situation concerning Murasaki's memoir, which the pregnant Katako has found after the death of her mother years earlier. She entrusts the memoir to her grown-up daughter for reading and safekeeping until a passage of time appropriate for the revelation of the memoir to the public. Then, the second part of Katako's letter, which comes after Murasaki's narrative, serves as a brief conclusion to Murasaki's life as well as the introduction to Ukifune's narrative, the final chapter to *The Tale of Genji*, which, as Katako considers, should be revealed to the world at the right time along with the memoir.

Next, the first *embedded/secondary narrative*, which belongs to Murasaki, begins after the first part of Katako's narrative. This central narrative makes up the majority of the story, and is modeled after the well-established form of *écriture féminine* of the Heian literary culture[1]: a *nikki*, loosely translated as "poetic diary" – a combination of prose and *waka*[2] poems written by female writers of that time. The fictional Murasaki, then a nun in her retreat, begins this memoir in recollection of the memories of her life, based on the journals she has kept since her youth. Murasaki's narrative properly begins with the death of her mother when she is fifteen years old. It moves on chronologically through the passage of time as she encounters various incidents and experiences life as a woman. She recounts her study of Chinese – then the language reserved for men of high education, her writing *The Tale of Genji* as a youthful romance, her rape by a guest of her father, her unrequited love to a Chinese man, her marriage and the birth of her daughter, her widowhood, her court service and

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[1] The Heian period (794-1192 A.D.) is considered the golden age of the Japanese imperial court as well as classical art and literature (Bowring 1). The literature of the period is marked by the influence of the Chinese language and symbolism, while at the same time the *kana* letters were invented as a native alphabet. On the one hand, part of a male courtier's education was the teaching of Chinese language and poetry. As such, poetry, historical records, as well as men's diaries written in Chinese characters were highly regarded in the era. On the other hand, women took up the *kana* letters to write in the genre of *nikki*, or diary, as a means of expressing themselves. The *kana* letters, which were mainly used as the means of communication or expression by both sexes, were also used in *waka* poetry. Both genres of women's writing in *kana* letters culminated into *uta nikki*, or poetic diary, a hybridized genre characterized by the inclusion of *waka* poems in a *nikki*. *Nikki* or *uta nikki* usually deals with the feelings of its female author, her domestic affairs, as well as self-reflection (Shirane 84-87, 130).

[2] The *waka* poem is the longer precursor to the present-day *haiku* poem. While the haiku is written in a three-lined, 5-7-5 syllabic form, *waka* or *tanka* ('short poems') is a 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic form (Bowring in Murasaki xix).

the following pressure and disillusionment brought by it, and finally her decision to become a nun. Throughout the memoir, she also recalls her women friends, each of whom meets various fates, such as becoming resigned to the life of a married woman and mother, committing suicide to escape her marriage, tolerating sexual abuse of her patron in court service, and becoming a nun like Murasaki herself.

Finally, the third and last narrative belongs to Ukifune, the female protagonist of the last part of *The Tale of Genji,* which is often called “The Ten Uji Chapters.” This narrative is set apart as the epilogue and titled “The Lost Last Chapter of Murasaki’s *Tale of Genji*.” To understand this narrative requires prior knowledge of the *Tale of Genji* since it takes over the *Genji* story supposedly left unfinished: at the point when Ukifune – who escapes both her husband Kaoru and her lover Prince Niou by becoming a nun – is discovered by Kaoru. In this fictional ending, Ukifune is struck by a bolt of thunder, resulting in the blindness which liberates her from the pursuit of both men. It seems that only when Dalby’s Murasaki is now free from the pressure of meeting the demands of those around her can she grant Ukifune peace of mind in a similar manner.

When elements in the three narratives are analyzed through Barthes’ codes of narrative, they point out to the thematic ideas of the fictional biography in a connected sequence. Katako’s narrative sets the theme of female literary inheritance, which carries on into Murasaki’s narrative and introduces the theme of gendered identity construction; specifically, it is the experiences of Murasaki which are passed down to her female descendants as literary inheritance. Then, after Murasaki’s narrative is finished, Ukifune’s narrative concludes with the theme of female spiritual maturation, with Ukifune as Murasaki’s final artistic product and means of reflection on a woman’s liberation in her era; it is only after Murasaki has reconstructed her gendered identity can she reach the spiritual maturation that is reflected in Ukifune’s resolustion.

Apart from giving the background information on Murasaki and *Tale of Genji*, Katako’s narrative also sets many important *symbolic codes*, one of the five codes of

narrative posited by Roland Barthes in his book *S/Z*[3], in terms of paired comparisons and contrasts. The birth of the next generation is intertwined with the death of the older one in the opening sentence: “I was pregnant with you when my mother died” (1). Secondly, stark contrast is drawn to the dull reality of women’s lives in the Heian period and the colorful fiction of *Genji*: “I was surprised at the crowd that gathered for her final rites. At least a dozen ladies endured the inconvenient all-day trip to Ishiyama Temple. They must have been Genji readers who preferred the life they found in my mother’s stories to their own dull husbands or difficult situations” (1). Thirdly, there is another contrast between Murasaki’s real child, and the child of her imagination: Genji and his story:

> I’m sure my mother became a recluse in order to disentangle herself from Genji. The work had come to envelop her life. Yet Genji was also her child. She had created and nurtured it, but then, as children do, it grew up and eventually slipped from her control. I was a much more compliant child than the book. I never gave her as much cause for concern as did Genji. (1)

Nevertheless, Katako muses that both kinds of offspring share a surprising similarity; it grows and has a life of its own, out of parental control. “[A] work of fiction is a perverse child. Once created, it makes its own way without apology, brooking no influence, making friends and enemies on its own,” she writes, “Perhaps it’s not so different from a flesh-and-blood child, after all” (2). The real and the fictional are yet put into another contrast between Murasaki the author and Murasaki the character in *Genji*, the embodiment of the perfect woman in both three central feminine roles: daughter, wife, and mother. Katako writes, “Perhaps because people were infatuated with the heroine of her novel, they confused my mother with that character … Readers of the tale seemed to think they knew her because they knew Genji’s Murasaki” (1-2). In Murasaki’s narrative, it is soon revealed how unconventional and unlike her fictional character the “real” Murasaki is. This will be explained further in

[3] See Appendix B.

Murasaki's narrative. Finally, another paired comparison lies in the idea of sustenance from the mother. Katako compares how she is mentally and spiritually nourished by her mother's memoir, while at the same time she breastfeeds her infant – in other words, giving the baby physical nourishment. Katako writes in her letter, "Over the following months I divided my time between milk and paper – your greedy little plum-bud mouth and my voracious eyes. You sucked sustenance from me and I from those texts" (5).

Among each of the pairs in this narrative: mother-child/daughter, death-life, fictional-real, is a complex relationship. The death of the mother occurs simultaneously with the birth of the child, as shown through Murasaki's death during Katako's pregnancy. Symbolically, Murasaki is also 'dead' as soon as Genji's story is read by a reader, who may perceive it differently from Murasaki's original purpose and intention. This is remarkably similar to Roland Barthes' ideas in his essay "The Death of the Author" (1967). Barthes argues that, once finished, the text or discourse no longer remains under the author's control, and that a reader has the liberty to interpret the text on his/her own – out of the looming shadow of the author's intention. Barthes also uses the parent-child analogy to explain this relationship many assume to exist between an author and the text – before he proceeds to denounce it:

> The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after. *The Author is thought to nourish the book*, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as *a father to his child*. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now. (my italics)

Barthes's essay ends with "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author". In Murasaki's case, she is symbolically dead when her tale is perceived by another reader – or "the modern scriptor" in Barthes' words. She is also physically dead when Katako finally gets the chance to read the memoir she has left, thus figuring out how her mother's life has been when her mother can no longer be contacted or understood in person. Nevertheless, the dead and the fictional can nourish the living and the real. The writing of the dead Murasaki nourishes the souls of its readers. The *Tale of Genji* has entertained many of the readers who come to Murasaki's funeral, whether their perceptions of the tale align themselves with Murasaki's own thoughts or not. Furthermore, it is the breast milk of her mother's thoughts and memories that gives a daughter like Katako further maturity. Thus, she passes down the memoir to her daughter in the hope that it can provide nourishment to her as well as other people who care to read it:

> Now that you are grown, you should read your grandmother's memoir in order to understand who you are by virtue of what you have come from. I suggest you keep it to yourself until you give it to your own literary descendant someday. In the future, if the *Tale of Genji* is still being read, sensitive people may find Murasaki's private thoughts of interest, and the gossip will be too old to do any harm. (6)

The first part of Katako's narrative ends with her recalling a poem written by Murasaki for someone else: "*As life flows on, who ever will read it – this keepsake to her whose memory will never die?*" and voicing Katako's opinion: "I can't help but think someone will" (7). Then, the fictional biography of Murasaki properly begins.

Like Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*, Liza Dalby's *Tale of Murasaki* is another fabricated fiction. Even though facts are researched and meticulously included into the fictional construction to create the illusion of authenticity of this reconstruction of Murasaki's life, it is undeniable that Dalby's work as a whole relies on imagination on the author's part as much as the historical information she has

gathered. Therefore, Katako as a *semic code* can both represent a daughter who inherits her mother's memories and wishes to pass them on to the next generation and covertly voice the author's justification in creating this fictional reconstruction of Murasaki's life: because fiction can reveal "truth" in one's life and serve as a kind of mental and spiritual nourishment.

The next narrative belonging to Murasaki is the longest and most detailed one. It is heavily based on the historical information in existence, both on her life as well as the society and culture of her period and knowledge of the *Tale of Genji* and Heian literature. As such, it creates an intricate web of intertextuality. However, the structure of the work, as well as its fictional characters and events, is undeniably the selection of the author. Paired contrasts of foremother-daughter, life-death, and fictional-real play a dominant role throughout the narrative.

At the very beginning of Murasaki's narrative, attention is drawn to her foremothers – both her literary predecessor and her birth mother. Murasaki's narrative begins with a prologue-like chapter called "My Gossamer Hermitage." The title is inspired by another preexisting poetic dialogue: *Kagerō Nikki*, the *Gossamer Years*, or the *Gossamer Diary* as it is called in the *Tale of Murasaki*. It was written by a woman who is known only as "the mother of Fujiwara no Michitsuna" and a secondary wife to Fujiwara no Kaneie. This poetic diary is described by Dalby's Murasaki as "a diary of her suffering as the secondary wife of a man who philandered" (47). In *The Bridge of Dreams – A Poetics of 'The Tale of Genji'* Haruo Shirane states that the poetic diary concerns the sufferings and marital difficulties of its author (107), who soon became disillusioned with her marriage into the leading Fujiwara family as his visits became sparse. Richard Bowring, in the introduction to his translation of *The Diary of Lady Murasaki*, states that the author "was trapped at home, at the mercy of her husband's slightest whim; he had official business and other love affairs to keep him busy" (Bowring in Murasaki xv). Soon she desired to become a nun, but tarried because of the concern she had for her son. Eventually, she became resigned to the separation from her husband and dedicated herself to raising her son and an adopted

daughter. Her diary gives the insight into the Heian marriage customs[4] as well as the plight of women of weaker social positions in that era. Shirane states, "Heian literary diaries such as the *Kagerō Nikki* … go beyond the first-person, confessional form to adopt a third-person, fictive point of view" (85), and in *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, Christina Laffin states in her introduction to *Kagerō Nikki* that the work gives rise to "a new form of self-expression and psychological exploration that expanded the potential of *kana* prose writing and influenced subsequent woman's writing, including the *Tale of Genji*" (223).

As the author of the *Kagerō Nikki* and Murasaki's maternal grandmother were both Fujiwara no Tomoyasu's daughters, Dalby speculates that the historical Murasaki must have read the *Kagerō Nikki*. She states on her webpage that it is plausible that the two, "given the overlap of their ages and nature of their maternal connections," may have met. In the novel, the *Kagerō Nikki*'s author is depicted as Murasaki's distant relative, whom she affectionately calls 'Auntie' (Dalby xvii). In a chapter called "Ruri, Blue like Lapis Lazuli," Murasaki, then twenty-one, is sent to her auntie's mountain retreat to escape from the outbreak of smallpox in the capital. There, she meets her ordained aunt, who is portrayed as a feministic figure devoting herself to the worship of the female Bodhisattva Kannon[5].

> She was a devotee of Kannon and had placed the gilded wooden image of the elegant bodhisattva in the center, with smaller

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[4] Marriages in the aristocratic Heian society were mostly arranged for financial support or political power. Since men and women were forbidden from seeing one another face-to-face, courtship usually came in form of poem-and-letter exchange. Marriage ceremonies were simple; the groom was obliged to come to spend the night with the bride three nights consecutively, and then sent customary rice cakes to the bride's family in the fourth morning. The wife then stayed at her parents' house or moved into her own residence, where the husband either stayed with her or made visits. There was no concrete form of divorce, but simply ceasing to visit on the man's part was considered akin to divorce. In this polygamous society, the position of the principal wife was not defined by being the man's first wife, but by the aristocratic rank and status of the wife's family. Men might have a powerful principal wife of a high birth while keeping a number of secondary wives of lower status. In the case of the writer of the *Gossamer Years*, she was born into a provincial governor's family and was considered fortunate to be married to a powerful Fujiwara courtier. However, she had little domestic happiness because of her husband's philandering ways.

[5] Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of mercy in Chinese.

> statues of Amida Buddha off to the side. Though this arrangement raised a few clerical eyebrows, she was the sort of person who managed to do things her own way. I immediately felt the appeal of the serene Kannon, who postponed entering Nirvana to remain in the world as a guide and solace to all suffering souls. When, after an eternity, the myriad sentient being all attained enlightenment, then Kannon would enter Nirvana – *as a woman*, Auntie believed. I took everything she said quite seriously at the time, although I learned later that her theology was rather idiosyncratic. (46, my italics)

Dalby's Murasaki further admits,

> I had been very influenced by my auntie's *Gossamer Diary*. What struck me most when I first read it was a statement early in the text. She had been depressed, and, seeking to distract herself by reading the old romances, found none that could speak to her situation. "They were," she wrote, "masses of rankest fabrication." So she decided to record a real life, dreary as it was, rather than a fairy tale.
>
> Of course some people dismissed the result as the ravings of a demented harpy. Others found the *Gossamer Diary* embarrassing in its frank admission of jealousy, despair, depression, and other such emotions one prefers not to acknowledge publicly. But I have always thought it extremely brave of her to bare her soul to the world, no matter what her other motives may have been. It remains the most moving piece of writing I have ever encountered.
>
> As part of her religious vows, Auntie renounced all writing. She says she once had something to say but then said it and had nothing more to add. I think her writing allowed her to congeal and expel some of the poisons that were making her sick. Her tranquility now was enviable. (56-7)

As both women are writers, Murasaki's life is shown to gradually take a similar course to that of her aunt. Both of them feel the need to write, are disillusioned with worldly life, eventually retreat into seclusion, and stop writing. In the "My Gossamer Hermitage" chapter/prologue, Murasaki writes,

> For some reason deep in my karma, I have always felt compelled to set down a vision of things I have heard and seen. Life itself has never been enough. It only became real for me when I fashioned it into stories. Yet, somehow, despite all I've written, the true nature of things I've tried to grasp in my fiction still manages to drift through the words and sit, like little piles of dust, between the lines. The histories are even more unsatisfactory than tales in capturing the essence of things. (7)

Though acknowledging that writing is inadequate as an act of expression, Murasaki, as a nun, resolves to write one last time, so that she can reach the "truth" she desires. Therefore, she states her determination at the beginning of her memoir; "I have thought to rummage back through my journals and set down my life, including my long relationship with Prince Genji. Perhaps by engaging the fact of my fiction I will at last be able to come to some sort of truth" (7). Then, at the end of her long reminiscence, Murasaki gives her final remarks after narrating how she takes the tonsure and retires to the little house in the hills near Kiyomizu Temple, which she has named "the Gossamer Hermitage," possibly after the *Gossamer Diary*.

> Tying off this last thread, I should have been at peace, but strangely, something still nagged at the edges of the tranquility I strove fore. I recalled the story of the old man who one day simply had to dig a hole and talk into it because "one feels flatulent when there is something inside one needs to express."
>
> Thus I took up my brush and my leftover paper and wrung out what remained to be expressed. By this endeavor I have gradually come to realize that I was deluded in thinking truth was

> ever the goal of my writing merely because I tried to avoid magical tricks. Reality was neither the subject nor object of the tales, for Genji created his own reality.
>
> Amazingly, I find after all this that I still have some paper left – but I think I have written enough. (398)

It is after Dalby's Murasaki has set down her life through the act of writing that she can gain the enviable tranquility of her aunt, who "had something to say but then said it and had nothing more to add" (46). The opening of Murasaki's narrative states her reason for writing the memoir and pays homage to her literary foremother – part of what has shaped her writing and her life. Even though historians do not know about the last years of Murasaki's life – including when she died and whether the historical Murasaki became a nun or not, and proposed that her daughter became a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Dowager Shōshi after her mother's death (Shirane 222), the historical Murasaki has, like her fictional counterpart, shown interest in renouncing the world in her diary – a fact which Dalby has put to use.

> Whatever others might say, I intend to immerse myself in reading sūtras for Amida Buddha. Since I have lost what little attachment I ever had for the pains that life has to offer, you might expect me to become a nun without delay. But even supposing I were to commit myself and turn my back on the world, I am certain there would be moments of irresolution before Amida came for me riding on his clouds. And thus I hesitate. I know the time is opportune. If I get much older my eyesight will surely weaken, I shall be unable to read sūtras, and my spirits will fail. It may seem that I am merely going through the motions of being a true believer, but I assure you that now I think of little else. But then someone with as much to atone for as myself may not qualify for salvation; there are so many things that serve to remind one of the transgressions of a former existence. Everything conspires to make me unhappy. (Murasaki 58, tranlated by Bowring)

In the fictional biography, Murasaki's recollection begins in the following chapter "The Early Journal," the first event she writes of being her mother's death and cremation. In fact, the chapter's first sentence is a stark revelation: "My mother died when I was fifteen" (7). This would seem a curious point to begin the story of one's life – at fifteen when her mother dies. Nevertheless, it contains symbolic significance. Unlike historians' speculation that Murasaki's mother probably died when her daughter was an infant, given that "an unusual number of characters in the *Genji* … lose their mothers in infancy" (Shirane 217), Dalby's Murasaki loses her mother at a much later age, but surprisingly, she rarely mentions her mother in comparison to her other relatives.

Like the intertwining of death and birth in Katako's narrative, the literary Murasaki is born soon after the death of her natural mother; it is after her mother's death that she realizes the significance of memories in life. Murasaki writes, "I remember her cremation vividly, for it was there that I suddenly awoke to the change" (8), and that, despite her inability to think of a commemorative poem for the cremation at the urge of her father,

> I did, however, resolve to begin keeping a journal, for I saw that I had the power to affect things – if only a wisp of smoke. Yet, even so, this was something to keep track of. I had awakened, suddenly clear-eyed, from a disturbing dream with the ability to concentrate my will and influence something of the world. It became desperately important to me to keep this awareness, and I sensed words would be the key. (9-10)

Much later, Katako's second part of narrative reinforces this point by calling the memoir "the long meditation on her writing life" (400). The death of Murasaki's mother gives birth to her writing self and signals her initiation into the reconstruction of her identity, shaped by gender as much as other factors. As such, further points require analysis in relation to relevant historical and literary information in order to understand the fictive elements Dalby has complemented into the fictional biography

so that it illustrates the reconstruction of Murasaki's identity in relation to her gender, race, and social class among many other factors.

Indeed, the historical Murasaki Shikibu makes an interesting subject of a fictional biography to begin with – especially for those interested in feminism and women's writing. The Heian period saw both the subjugation and literary triumph of women, even though the latter has begun to be appreciated from much later periods onward[6]. Furthermore, Murasaki's literary work, both the *Tale of Genji* and her own diary, shows her remarkable perception of male-female relationship and psychological depth as a woman writer. This, along with the historical circumstances of the Heian women, is significantly elaborated on by Dalby, through her selection of *cardinal functions/ nuclei* (the key events in the story), *indices proper* (key characteristics in the characters, settings, and atmospheres), *semic codes*, and the *symbolic codes*.

Bowring states that Heian women had an important role in the politics as "vital pawns, 'borrowed wombs' as the saying went, and depending on their strength of character, might wield considerable influence" (Murasaki xv). In Murasaki's lifetime, this could not be truer; emperors were mostly dominated by their regents – more than often their matrilineal kin or fathers-in-law. For example, Emperor Ichijō (980-1011), whose consort Empress Shōshi (988-1074) Murasaki served, was crowned at six years old and remained under the influence of the Fujiwara clan all his life. At first it was Fujiwara no Kaneie (929-990), his maternal grandfather. After Kaneie's death, his son Michitaka (953-995) took over the position and married his daughter, Teishi, to the emperor as an imperial consort. However, after Michitaka's death, his brother Michinaga (966-1027) rose to power due to the influence of his

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[6] Even though the Heian aristocratic women enjoyed some privileges, such as the right to own property and the exposure and mastery of art, music, poetry and prose written in the *kana* letters, they were restricted to the roles of women as a daughter, a wife, and a mother, and given few alternatives to marriage – such as court service or ordination as nuns. Custom forbade them to be seen by men who were not their husbands or close relatives, and thus they were usually subjected to sedentary lives behind screens and blinds. Moreover, Heian women were not recorded in history by their own names, unless they were royal wives or princesses. Another major literary disadvantage is that they were forbidden from studying Chinese. While poetry and prose written by Heian women authors, such as Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*, Sei Shōnagon (966-1017)'s the *Pillow Book*, and Izumi Shikibu (974?-1034?)'s poetry are considered masterpieces of the Heian era at present, Contemporary Heian peers did not value women's writing as much as the Sino-Japanese poetry and prose written by male scholars.

sister, the Empress Dowager Senshi, Ichijō's mother, who "persuaded" the young emperor to favor his uncle. Michinaga also married his daughter Shōshi off to Ichijō. In this kind of arranged marriages, the power of women depends largely on their ability to produce offspring. Shirane states,

> If a Fujiwara daughter did not produce a child upon becoming an imperial consort, it was a serious political blow to the parents and brothers and an unending source of shame for the woman. The competition inherent in polygamous marriage demanded that women bear children. (In the *Kagerō Nikki*, for example, the author laments that she has only one child, whereas her rival Tokihime has numerous offspring, who provide her husband with the means to enhance his power.) (54)

This is reflected in Dalby's fictional biography. Murasaki hears that Michinaga urges the emperor to appoint the late comer Shōshi, who has yet to give birth to a male heir, as empress, while the position is already occupied by Teishi at the moment. So she asks her husband Nobutaka, whose rank allows him to enter the emperor's private residence within the palace grounds, about the rumor. To her surprise, Nobutaka replies that both Shōshi and Teishi are going to be promoted. Shōshi will become the empress and Teishi will be elevated to a newly invented post. Murasaki then argues that such an incident has never happened before.

> –But there's no precedent for that, I protest. It doesn't make any sense.
>
> –On the contrary, my husband corrected me. There may be no precedent, but it makes a great deal of sense.
>
> On a moment's reflection, of course he was right. From Michinaga's point of view it made all the sense in the world. So we were to have two empresses – one with children but poor karma; the other with riches and excellent connections, and youth. (Dalby 194)

In this specific case, Teishi is compensated by being appointed to another newly invented post. Without the support of her deceased father Michitaka and her brother Korechika, who has fallen out of power after his exile due to a crafty plan on Michinaga's part, she is in no position to refuse. Then, when Teishi died in childbirth and Shōshi gave birth to Prince Atsuhira (1008-1036), Michinaga had his way; the emperor had to favor Shōshi's son as crown prince, over the motherless prince born to Teishi. Thus, Michinaga soon had another generation of emperors securely in his control. Throughout his life, Michinaga was brother-in-law to two emperors, uncle to one, uncle and father-in-law to another, and grandfather to two more (Bowring in Murasaki xiii-xv). This clearly illustrates how the royal family in the Heian period was manipulated through a series of marriage ties to the Fujiwara clan. Fujiwara women function as marriageable daughters, royal wives and mothers – bearers of more male heirs that their male relatives could exert influence on.

In the historical Murasaki's diary, however, there is no criticism of such kind of control. Bowring proposes that "Murasaki herself … ignores the wider political and historical context and we are immediately cast into a world with which familiarity is assumed. Not that Murasaki is unaware of this context; but it is common knowledge – perhaps one of the main reasons for her record – and so goes unsaid" (Murasaki xli). The reason, as speculated by Bowring, is because her own status does not allow her to voice her own opinion on this matter: "[T]here is little overt sign that she saw the *status quo* as anything but immutable. It is tempting to deduce that she simply was not in a position to do anything but praise Fujiwara power and elegance. The cavalier way that the Emperor is treated, for example, is seen to be simply how things are" (Murasaki l).

The fictional biography carries this point further; it is upon Michinaga's demand that Murasaki records the birth of the prince and concerning ceremonies so extensively in her diary in the first place (Dalby 315), as evidence of his time of glory. In contrast, in the fictional memoir, written when she has left the court and become a nun and not intended for an outside reader, Murasaki can allow herself to be more open about such matters. For instance, she voices her disapproval with Michinaga's decision to move his pregnant daughter back into the palace, which will make it more

difficult for her to return to her mother's house in her advanced state of pregnancy to give birth according to the Heian tradition. Murasaki also wonders about how Shōshi herself feels about being put in the position of a political pawn:

> We were all speculating whether Michinaga had gone mad, although we should have known better, of course. There was always a good reason for anything Michinaga did.
>
> It soon became clear. Michinaga publicly announced that he felt the emperor was becoming too lonely with Shōshi away for such an extended period, and he thought it only right that she come back to be with her husband for a while until the progress of the pregnancy made it imprudent to stay longer. Ichijō was forced to acknowledge his father-in-law's kindness, although from what I could see he seemed none too happy. Then we found out about the girl. It seemed the emperor had become attached to his junior consort, Akimitsu's daughter, whom he wished to promote to the third rank.
>
> …
>
> It was impossible to tell what Shōshi thought of being pulled about like this. She always accepted her father's will with perfect acquiescence. (305-6)

Nevertheless, even though Heian women were tied to the roles of a mother, a wife, and a political tool, they could wield considerable power in their own rights. Inheritance was passed down in a matrilineal manner – from a mother to a daughter. As such, Heian women could own property, and they had certain rights and income that made them "unusually privileged in comparison to women in later ages" (Bowring xv). Royall Tyler, translator of the most recent complete English version of *The Tale of Genji,* writes in his essay, "Marriage, Rank and Rape in *The Tale of Genji*," that "Women could own, inherit, and pass on property, and the author of *The Tale of Genji* demonstrates as well as anyone that they could be highly cultivated and

accomplished; but, as so often elsewhere, men enjoyed by far the greater degree of sexual license." The Heian aristocratic marriage customs somewhat attest to this, as stated by Shirane: "As a rule, the wife did not leave her family after marriage. She received her husband at her own home, reared her children there, and continued to be supported by her family. Economic dependence on one's husband … was considered shameful and demeaning for an aristocratic lady" (48). This arrangement was becoming old-fashioned in Murasaki's time, however. In her contemporary Heian society, husband and wife were more likely to live together in another residence, which belonged to the wife. Such was Michinaga's case with his principal wife, Rinshi, who owned the Tsuchimikado mansion, where Shōshi stayed during her pregnancy. (Shirane 48, Bowring in Murasaki xv). Likewise, in the *Tale of Murasaki*, Dalby's Murasaki inherits a house which belongs to her grandmother (157), but unconventionally, she later moves into the Six Avenue residence built by her husband (177). This particular residence becomes the basis for the fictional Genji's grand mansion, where he gathers most of the women he has been involved with so that he can take care of them.

Nonetheless, despite the power and prestige that some Heian women enjoyed, Bowring admits, "It is much more difficult … to determine the true position of women in society at large" (Murasaki xv). He states that literature of the period, much of which was written by women of a lesser class, "draws a picture of women subject to the usual depredations of their menfolk, prey to the torment of jealousy, and condemned to live most of their sedentary lives hidden behind a wall of screens and blinds" (Bowring 3, Bowring in Murasaki xv). The *Kagerō Nikki* is one example of how a secondary wife suffers from the lack of attention and care of her husband in the polygamous society, and many examples of women's restricted lives and sexual abuse by men can be found in *The Tale of Genji*.

The Heian custom forbade aristocratic women to be seen by men who were not their direct relatives. For this purpose, fans, screens, blinds, and shutters were used to separate the world of men and women. This somewhat harem-like practice gave rise to the literary convention of *kaimami*, or, literally, 'a view through the fence.' "A direct view of a woman was a rare and tantalizing moment," writes

Shirane, "since a proper aristocratic lady never intentionally allowed herself to be seen by the opposite sex… Here the so-called *kaimami* … enables the narrator to describe the woman through the eyes and consciousness of the intrigued young man" (46). The usual pattern is that the hero of a *monogatari*, or the genre of the romantic tales to which *Genji* belongs, often peers through the fence to see a beautiful woman and falls in love with her. In *The Tale of Genji*, however, such a sight can have dire consequences. For example, Tamakazura, Genji's adopted daughter, whom he plans to put into court service, has to be suddenly married off to Higekuro, one of her suitors, who sneaks into her quarters with the help of one of her ladies-in-waiting, and forces himself on her. In another case, Genji's nephew Kashiwagi catches a glimpse of Genji's young wife, the Third Princess, when her cat runs out of the bamboo blinds. He then becomes so obsessed with her that he later sneaks into Genji's mansion with the help of her lady-in-waiting and violates her – as hinted in the original tale by the historical Murasaki: "The culprit [Kashiwagi] would come to her as though in a dream, whenever he was mastered by an excess of desire, but she found his visits infinitely repellent" (657). Similarly, Dalby's Murasaki states with a shocking frankness, "The girl was raped practically under Genji's nose" (388).

Dalby elaborates on the manifestations of the sighting and violation of women in two incidents of Murasaki's sexual encounters out of her marriage. The first one in the chapter "Morning Glory" deals with Murasaki's rape in her late teens by the lieutenant captain of the imperial archers, who spends the night at her father's home as a guest. As a woman who is not used to the ways of men, Murasaki is never aware that he has a hidden agenda for the visit: "He could have chosen one of the neighbors' homes, but he came to ours. I did not think too much about it, presuming he knew my father's reputation as a Chinese poet. Probably he thought it would be more interesting to drink with a congenial soul and compose some Chinese rhymes" (35). After drinking, Murasaki's father retires to his room, while the lieutenant captain remains in the study next to her room: "Pretty soon, I heard a tapping on the wall separating the study from my little room. It was not hard to guess that he was somewhat drunk, and clearly he knew that my father had daughters. My heart started to pound, but for a ridiculous reason – this was like something out of Genji!" (35).

As a writer and reader of *monogatari*, Murasaki is absorbed in this pattern of *kaimami* – of a courtier trying to meet the young woman in the house, having imagined variations of this scene so many times. However, that is a romance, not reality. When she replies to his poem, she does not anticipate such dire consequences; he traps her in the back corner of her room, and proceeds to rape her while reciting lines of poetry. The scene sets a stark contrast between what Murasaki has imagined as Genji's sexual advance that soon turns into consensual intercourse with Oborozukiyo in the "Night of the Hazy Moon" chapter, which directly precedes "Morning Glory." Oborozukiyo, a young lady in the palace, is taken by Genji on a night with the clouded moon. Their sexual contact plays out as a fantasized romance in the tradition of the *uta monogatari*, or "poem-tale" in which "the hero discovers love outside the formal institution of marriage, either in illicit liaisons with high-ranking ladies or in affairs with women below his prescribed social sphere" (Shirane 43). In the *Tale of Genji*, Oborozukiyo is the daughter of Genji's political enemy, and is intended by her family to be married to the crown prince. Even though this backup story is not presented in Dalby's Murasaki's earlier version of the tale, making love to an unknown woman in the quarters of the royal wives alone is a bold transgression. However, Oborozukiyo does not find Genji's advance a danger or disgrace to her honor. Instead, she responses to the seduction and becomes a willing partner, simultaneously fulfilling her own fantasy and pleasures.

> As much as she had fantasized being alone with a handsome stranger (even Genji himself had been the object of some of her dreams), she was terrified when suddenly swept off her feet into exactly such a situation. At the same time, the fragrance of the expensive scent Genji wore seemed to soften the edge of danger. She liked some of what he was doing with his hands – it was even more intense than any sensation she had ever aroused in herself. The combination of Genji, still a little bit drunk from the earlier banquet, the moonlight, and the fact that this adventure had gotten so far was irresistible. The girl did not resist. (30)

After they have made love, Genji asks for her name. Instead, Oborozukiyo tells him through a poem that he should seek for the answer himself. Genji, who unconventionally "like(s) a woman who [is] not afraid to show her learning" (31), then intends to find the answer himself because he has fallen for her.

In contrast, Murasaki's first sexual encounter with a man is by no means as romantic as that of her character Oborozukiyo. At first, she expects a refined and amiable conversation: "I quoted some lines from the same poem I thought I heard him recite. I hardly had my wits about me to plan what I would do next. I probably thought he would respond with another poem, and we might begin a conversation. I was definitely not prepared for what happened" (36), but what she is exposed to is physical violence and one-sided, self-centered miscommunication.

> He was very strong. I had never before been pulled about and pinioned that way. I tried to say "Wait! Stop!" but my breath was pushed out of my body. He was on top of me forcing my legs open with one hand and holding my head by the hair with the other. He kept on talking, breathing harshly into my ears, as if he would distract me from the violent activity his hips were perpetrating below while his mouth wheezed lines of poetry into my ear. I discovered it was less painful when I stopped struggling. Soon he gave a moan and relaxed his grip. I felt a wetness welling over my thigh and thought I was bleeding.
>
> I lay still. The lieutenant lifted himself up and pulled at his trousers. Unbelievably he continued to talk, pledging everlasting love and quoting five or six poems about lovers' regrets at parting. He did not seem to notice that I said nothing. After he had collected his things he fell silent. Then he coughed rather self-consciously and exited my room the same way he had entered. (36-7)

Murasaki's first reaction is shocked numbness. She asks herself, "Had I invited this attack by replying to the Chinese poem?" (37). Nevertheless, in the

morning she recovers. She considers the experience a step to be taken in life – a ritualistic death before she is reborn a wiser woman: “The experience had been terrifying, but I had crossed it and was now feeling oddly elated. One thing I knew with certainty – it would never happen to me like that again. I had been foolish and innocent, but now I would be wary” (38).

For modern readers, how quickly Murasaki gets over the traumatic experience of rape and the loss of her virginity may seem strange. However, it becomes understandable when one considers that virginity is not a serious issue in the Heian culture. In *Women's Role in Heian and Edo,* Maiko Kawase writes, “Virginity, except for perhaps principal wives, was not a requirement before marriage, and casual affairs were very common.” Similarly, Gregory Smits states in *Topics in Japanese Cultural History* that “Virginity was not prized among either sex. Indeed, remaining a virgin for an unusually long time was a sure sign of possession by one or more demons. Sexual relations in the Heian period were a mixture of promiscuity and restraint, the restraint deriving not from moral codes or legal sanctions, but mainly from the demanding requirements of good taste.” On top of that, the marriage ceremony at that time was quite simple; “To confirm the marriage,” writes Tyler in his essay, “the man spent three nights in a row with the woman at her house. The attendant ceremony is described in chapter 9, when Genji marries Murasaki.” Dalby's Murasaki considers that the lieutenant may decide to propose marriage to her by the Heian standards, and whether he intends to marry her or not, he is customarily expected to send her a morning-after letter, “Surely, given all the poetry he had spouted, he would at least send a morning-after letter. I waited all day, but again things did not go as expected. There was no message. I found myself resenting the many romances I had read over the years. In those books, heroes always sent a morning-after poem. I was annoyed at how poorly reading prepares one for real life” (38).

As a letter never comes, Murasaki reacts against the convention by taking the initiative, “By the following morning I was resolved. A poem must be sent, or else my experience the night before last would mean nothing” (38). She sends him the poem “*Uncertain if it happened or not, gray dawning, dimly perceived morning glory flowers*” (38) along with a morning glory flower. Nevertheless, Murasaki is “almost

disappointed to have received a reply" (39). She anticipates a most banal verse, but finds a poem instead: "*Where did it come from? As I was wondering, the morning glory flower faded into pitiful nothingness*" (39). The lieutenant apparently denies having known and taken her. Murasaki muses,

> He must have been angry that I challenged his right to initiate the exchange. […] I feel perversely glad to have been able to provoke his displeasure. He had been able physically to overpower me that night, and he seemed to think it was also in his power to shape my response. How shocked he must have been to receive my poem first. Instead of acting, he had to react. It was odd that in the face of his rejection I felt nothing so much as triumph. (39)

As such, Murasaki turns this incident of rape into her own victory by intimidating the man. The incident also leads to her decision that Genji, her ideal hero, will never reject a woman with whom he has had an intimate relationship. It can be seen from the incident that Murasaki resolves to shape the character of Genji to express her own opinion of how a man should take responsibility for a woman he has claimed; writing *The Tale of Genji* becomes a means for her to be in control of what she has no control of in reality.

The second sexual encounter – a liaison with her patron, Fujiwara no Michinaga – takes place much later when Murasaki is a widow, new to the court service. Again, the situation is by no means romantic, and it greatly influences Murasaki's opinions on male-female relationship. She begins to view men as egotistical beings, proud of keeping many female lovers as proof of their male prowess. After a few days in the palace, Michinaga orders Murasaki to meet him in private. The other ladies-in-waiting immediately know what is going to happen, and Murasaki's friend Saishō, who has entered court service earlier, explains to her that it is customary for most of Shōshi's ladies-in-waiting to yield themselves to him at least once.

> She expressed surprised that Michinaga had moved so quickly to invite me to meet with him in private. Usually he waited several months before inspecting a new lady who joined his daughter's entourage. Saishō also said this was something most of the ladies in the empress's employ went through, and I shouldn't feel ashamed. Dealing with Michinaga was just one of the inconvenient facts about palace life one had to accept. Even so, things were better now than they used to be, she said. And, if it were any consolation, after satisfying his initial curiosity, Michinaga usually left one alone. The women referred to this encounter as their initiation. The fact that it looked like I would accomplish mine in record time called for congratulations.
>
> I listened in disbelief to my friend's matter-of-fact-tone. Women who spent their lives at court did indeed become cynical. (252)

In Dalby's fictional biography, this philandering side of Dalby's Michinaga perhaps stems from the assumption that Genji's personality in the middle part of the tale are influenced by that of Michinaga (Shirane 221) and that "Tradition has it that she was one of Michinaga's concubines, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support this" (Bowring 4). Parts of the historical Murasaki's diary may give hints to such a kind of relation. For example, there is an incident in which Rinshi, Michinaga's principal wife, sends floss-silk damp with dew soaked from chrysanthemum to Murasaki. In the Heian period, it was believed that wiping the face and body with chrysanthemum dew will get rid of one's traces of old age. Therefore, the particular action can be interpreted as a form of sarcasm intended to mean that the recipient of the gift is old. Murasaki is prompted to send it back with a retorting poem, but later she thinks there is no point in doing so and lets the matter pass (Murasaki 7, translated by Bowring). The incident is depicted in the *Tale of Murasaki* with additional details (Dalby 312-3) as Murasaki is indeed Michinaga's concubine. However, the affair occurs not out of Murasaki's own intention, but is forced upon her, like many women in the *Tale of Genji* who have no choice but to yield to men's advances.

However, it is interesting how her fellow women react to Michinaga's coercion; they treat it as a common inconvenient fact of a woman's life. In fact, Saishō – the only one whom Murasaki divulges the secret that Michinaga merely talks to her about poetry and hints that he wants to be recorded in the *Tale of Genji* – is more frightened by the fact that, at their first private meeting, Murasaki converses face-to-face with Michinaga rather than being sexually taken advantage of.

> Saishō tried to hide her reaction, but I know she found this admission of intimacy more shocking than the sexual encounter she had first assumed.
>
> –When I met privately with Michinaga, she said primly, it was dark. At least he never saw my face.
>
> In her opinion I had suffered a familiarity with Michinaga far more invasive than the intimacies the rest of the ladies had had to endure. (258)

Ten days later, Michinaga calls Murasaki to his quarters again, and the situation becomes different: "This time he behaved the way he usually did with serving ladies. I was incensed and came back to my room in a huff" (258). Murasaki is further infuriated by Saishō's response; she tells Murasaki that she is relieved to see Michinaga treats Murasaki like the other ladies-in-waiting, claiming, "There was something unnatural about the way you were carrying on … Conversing face-to-face like that" (258). However, Murasaki soon accepts her relationship with Michinaga. In fact, it reaches the point when she has mixed feelings towards his advances – even though she doubts whether a man like him can really understand any woman.

> When a woman allows herself to be swayed by a man's blandishments, and grants intimacies, even once, it is difficult to pretend later that it doesn't matter. I could not forget the times Michinaga told me I was unlike all the others. I knew he couldn't possibly have talked with any of them as he did with me. He was no Genji, that was certain, but I had at least felt that, in his own way, he cared for me.

> But I wondered if a man like Michinaga could ever really understand any woman. So utterly direct and accustomed to getting his way, how could he imagine the lives of those waiting upon his favor? […] More often than not, a woman's feelings are forced away from their roots into strange contortions. I myself had no right to claim Michinaga's favor, and I flinched from revealing to myself how much my life hung upon our meetings. I lived for them and dreaded them at the same time. (294)

Murasaki's friendship with the other ladies-in-waiting makes her aware of the effects of Michinaga's philandering ways on their lives and the fact that she is "not alone in [her] perverse and contradictory desires" (295). She shares her feelings with a fellow lady-in-waiting, Koshōshō: "Koshōshō had been one of Michinaga's favorites for years, having entered the palace a virgin at seventeen. No other man had dared approach her since he staked his claim. Of course this meant that most of the time she slept alone" (295).

Apart from the matter of sexual abuse and sedentary life, Heian women could find themselves restricted in another important aspect: how they could be acknowledged and express themselves through writing. Heian women, apart from imperial consorts, were seldom known by their names; in fact, the "names" of well-known female writers in the Heian periods – Sei Shōnagon, Izumi Shikibu, Akazome Emon, and Murasaki Shikibu herself – were pseudonyms assigned to them by their peers in court service – a combination of their character or family name with the post held by one of their close male relatives. In Bowring's words, "they existed rather in the shadow of titles held by brothers and fathers, borrowed labels". (Bowring in Murasaki xv). Consequently, Dalby's Murasaki grows tired of this label, as people usually associate her with the character Murasaki, the ideal lady who is one of Genji's wives. In the part of letter that comes before the memoir, Katako writes, "Perhaps because people were infatuated with the heroine of her novel, they confused my mother with that character … Readers of the tale seemed to think they knew her because they knew Genji's Murasaki" (1-2).

Then, in a much later chapter, "Spider," Dalby's Murasaki states her opinion on herself and the Murasaki of *Genji*: "I had come to the conclusion that my character Murasaki has outlived her usefulness. I had created such a perfect woman that there was nothing left for her but to die. The fact that people called me Murasaki was, by this time, quite tiresome. I wanted to get out from under her shadow" (368). She then goes on to contemplate Genji's Murasaki: "Murasaki was ideal in every respect – beautiful, compliant, thoughtful, sensible. She never flew into resentful rages or turned a cold shoulder when Genji strayed. … Murasaki would always be there, to forgive" (368). At this point, Dalby re-examines Genji's Murasaki through the eyes of her *semic code*/*focalizer*, the fictional Murasaki Shikibu.

In the original *Tale of Genji*, Murasaki is the daughter of a secondary wife of a certain prince. Genji accidentally discovers her when she is a young girl living with her maternal grandmother, a solitary nun, in a mountain monastery, her mother having passed away and her father not acknowledging her. Genji is drawn to the girl because of her striking resemblance to the royal consort Fujitsubo, his stepmother, for whom the motherless prince secretly harbors an Oedipal infatuation. Thus, when the nun dies and the girl seems to be left with no patron to care for her, he fetches the girl before her real father does. Genji then places her at the west wing of his residence at Nijō, bringing her up and educating her to be as he pleases. He marries her after the death of his principal wife Aoi, daughter of the Minister of the Left who was a proper match for him in an aristocratic marriage. Unlike Aoi, Murasaki is not in the social position to marry a high aristocrat in a proper arrangement (Shirane 49), as she has no estate or property inherited from her mother. Nevertheless, *Genji*'s Murasaki proves to be an exemplary model in good conduct as a daughter, wife and mother. Shirane remarks that, when Murasaki is young, Genji acts as her "surrogate parent, guardian, and teacher" and that Murasaki is "the perfect 'daughter,' pupil, and wife" (91).

When Genji marries her, she tolerates his many affairs and never lets her jealousy – the worst of women's sins, according to Dalby's Murasaki – show. And even though she is barren, Murasaki is entrusted with the care and education of her stepdaughter born to the Akashi lady, Genji's secondary wife – a task which Murasaki has accomplished so magnificently that the girl becomes an empress when she grows

up. Throughout her life, Murasaki belongs solely to Genji. In fact, even the "name"[7] by which she is called comes from the poems in which Genji alludes to her through the motif of *wakamurasaki*, a species of gromwell plant used to make the exquisite purple dye prized by the Heian people, who considered it a color of affinity and erotic linkage. This name also suggests that she is both a connection and a substitute for Genji's unattainable Fujitsubo lady, whose name literally means "wisteria court/pavilion," of which the plant component of the name has purple blossoms as well (Shirane 46-7). It should also be noted that even though Murasaki is once accidentally seen by Genji's son by his first wife, Yūgiri, in "The Typhoon" chapter, she is never subjected to any shameful liaison like Tamakazura or the Third Princess, who are either deliberately or accidentally seen by men in the story.

In the first part of *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki's situation seems like that of a fairytale romance; she is rescued from her plight by the hero and is married to him in the fashion of a "happily ever after" ending. However, in the second part of *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki is faced with unrestrained jealousy and disillusionment when Genji unexpectedly marries the much younger Third Princess, who immediately assumes the position of the principal wife because of her higher rank. Realizing the transience of domestic happiness and male-female relationship, Murasaki wishes to renounce the world and become a nun, but Genji, who loves her more and more as he sees how deficient his new childish bride is as a lady of high rank, refuses to grant her request. Shirane states that the chapters involving Murasaki's psychological troubles "are more 'realistic' than the earlier chapters, not just in the sense of being more faithful to contemporary norms, but in the way they demystify or decode the conventions of the social romance" (112), and that "Murasaki does not become what E. M. Forster calls a "round" character until the "Wakana" chapters, when the generic constraints of the monogatari break down and Murasaki becomes a vulnerable and tragic figure" (113).

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[7] The "names" the characters in *The Tale of Genji* go by are by no means their personal names (Bowring 71, Tyler xxii). For example, in the original Japanese version, Murasaki is often identified by titles such as "the lady of the west wing" or "the mistress of the house." Nevertheless, it seems that the need to assign some kind of common names to the characters arose in Murasaki's lifetime, and readers called them by names usually associated with their court positions, dwellings, or allusions in poems relating to them.

Dalby's Murasaki Shikibu considers the character Murasaki completely dominated by Genji himself. She writes: "She had worked hard to be perfect in Genji's eyes, but now Murasaki began to doubt whether perfection was enough … She felt she no longer had a voice at all" (368) and contemplates:

> Ever since Genji had taken her in as a child, Murasaki had bent her life to pleasing him. What a good pupil she had been. Genji nurtured her like an exquisite flower, encouraging her bloom of womanhood, nipping inconvenient emotions like jealousy in the bud. But now, what had begun as a passing shadow over the love she bore Genji settled into a permanent dark crack in her heart, and eventually the crack deepened. (368)

However, Dalby's Murasaki's plan to eliminate this ideal Murasaki is initially met with so much protest from readers that she has to revive Murasaki again. This corresponds to the original tale in which Genji's Murasaki survives the attack of the vengeful spirit of one of Genji's dead lovers. She remains physically weak thereafter, however. Genji is adamant about not allowing her renunciation, and eventually she dies without having her wish granted. On the symbolic level, this can allude to Dalby's Murasaki desire to be free from the pressure of both her contemporary readers – including the empress, who does not approve of the realistic and anti-romantic tone of the later part of her tale, and Michinaga, who wants himself written into the character of Genji. This is first recounted in Katako's narrative at the beginning.

> I think my mother grew tired of the letters and visits from people of all ranks, including imperial personages, whom, of course, she could not ignore. It had gotten to the point where readers became so involved with her characters that they importuned my mother to create particular scenes to satisfy their imaginations. They came to expect things of Genji, and my mother grew equally tired, I'm convinced, of meeting their expectations and thwarting them. (2)

Genji's story, which initially started as Murasaki's artistic product, is tampered with by expectations or purposes of its readers, especially the patrons of the author. "Michinaga wants to be Genji," (257) says Murasaki to Saishō after she is summoned to see Michinaga in person; "He wants those who read the tales of Genji in the future to know they were inspired by the glorious reign of Michinaga" (257). This corresponds with scholars' speculations as to why the second part of *The Tale of Genji* assumes a darker and more political tone and loses much of its formerly romantic and idealistic notion. In *The Tale of Murasaki*, even Dalby's Murasaki herself can sense that her vision of the formerly idealistic and romantic hero Genji is changing through her exposure to Michinaga and the actual court life, as well as her own experiences of male-female relationship. She writes, "[O]n the whole, I had become disillusioned at how sordid life could be in the royal enclosure. Genji's world was probably unrealistically dignified" (266). She also admits, "My feelings toward Genji had slowly changed since I began writing under Michinaga's shadow. I may have deluded myself into thinking that Michinaga was becoming a little more like Genji, but in fact what had happened was that Genji had become more like Michinaga" (284). Murasaki, then, views her resolution to have Genji take care of every woman he has been involved with in another light, thinking that he has becoming "slightly repulsive."

> Genji was too satisfied with his own virtue in taking care of all the ladies he had ever been involved with – especially the ones who were queer in some way, like the fusty Safflower-Nosed Princess. How good he was, he told himself, to provide for a creature like that, whom anyone else would have shaken off long ago. Because of my own obsessions, Genji had become a caricature. His lovers filled the wings and pavilions of two houses like an assortment of rare and curious objects. (284)

Murasaki sees Michinaga in Genji and thus turns the character Genji into that of Michinaga, a typical nobleman in her society, who cannot understand women and deeply scorns them because of their weak, petty nature.

> Like Genji, Michinaga was self-absorbed and didn't even notice. When Genji's women were possessed by evil spirits and spoke their rages, Genji thought they had succumbed to a woman's worst failing – jealousy. Michinaga and Genji both thought of themselves as objects of women's envy. Neither considered the fact that women really have no other way of escaping the afflictions brought upon them by men unless they die or become nuns. But my other readers understood. When my characters spoke with the voices of demons or wandering spirits, any woman who had lived at court knew the demons spoke what the ladies themselves dared not say. (284)

As such, we can see that in Murasaki's narrative, the paired contrasts between the fictional-real, man-woman, romance-reality are highlighted to show the reconstruction of Murasaki's identity and her process of maturation as a woman writer who is affected by the people and circumstances around her. As a result, *The Tale of Genji* becomes her lifelong work, as well as the only *tsukuri monogatari* (fabricated tale) written by a woman to have survived to the present day. Bowring states that *The Tale of Genji* "was a remarkable phenomenon – a work of fiction of such sophistication and psychological insight that one could mention it in the same breath as the best of modern European novels" (95). The fact that *The Tale of Genji* was produced centuries earlier accentuates how it "contains so much that one recognizes, despite its alien setting … [I]t deals with human desires and disappointments in realistic rather than fantastic fashion" (Bowring 95). *The Tale of Genji* gained acclaim in the west due to Arthur Waley's translation in six volumes during 1921-33. Then, further and more scholarly accurate full English translations were completed by Edward Seidensticker in 1976 and Royall Tyler in 2001, making three full versions of English translations in total. At present, translations of the *Tale of Genji* are available in English, French, German, Chinese, and more (Bowring 95).

The Tale of Genji is written in the tradition of a *monogatari*, the meaning of which is given by Dalby herself as "a story – literally a telling of things" (xv). Shirane

explains that the word means "either gibberish, idle talk, or a work of prose fiction in the vernacular" (xv). He explains that the *monogatari* in the Heian period can be considered a 'women's genre' because this kind of "vernacular prose fiction" was intended for female readers and was "considered a frivolous pastime suitable only to women and children who could not read Chinese, the official language of government and religion" (xvi). However, at the same time it can also be considered a 'men's genre' because it was mostly written by male authors. Shirane posits that Murasaki Shikibu was probably not the first woman to write in such a genre, but "she was no doubt the first to write a *tsukuri monogatari* ("fabricated tale") of lasting literary value: no earlier prose fiction by a woman survives today" (84). He then explains how earlier *tsukuri monogatari* are predominantly written by men, "specifically scholars of Chinese literature" because of the Chinese expressions used in them (85). However, the Heian society never deemed this kind of tales serious literature worthy of recognition; male scholars would leave their names on *waka* poems and other factual records in Chinese, but never on *monogatari* (Shirane xvi).

In the Heian period, Chinese culture and literature remained much influential among the aristocracy, and Japanese phonetic alphabet or *kana* letters, largely used for composing *waka* poems as a means of communication between men and women at that time, had just been invented. It was the poetry and prose in Classical Chinese, the latter being written in form of "biographies, histories, religious tracts, or philosophical essays" which "served a practical or didactic purpose" (Shirane xvi), that was highly esteemed. All of these could be presumed to be written by men, as women were discouraged from learning the Chinese characters. Bowring states,

> Chinese … remained very much a male practice. Most women were not taught Chinese and were thereby effectively excluded from participation in the power structure, and in order to perpetuate this state of affairs the useful fiction was generated that it was 'unbecoming' for the female to learn Chinese. We know from their diaries that by the end of the tenth century women did not always acquiesce in this fiction, but there were nevertheless

> powerful cultural constraints laid upon them. There can be no doubt that the acquisition of Chinese by women was seen as a threat, a subversive act of considerable, if undefined, moment. (11)

Even the historical Murasaki Shikibu herself wrote in her diary of the criticism and gossip she was subjected to as a woman having learned Chinese.

> There is a woman called Saemon no Naishi who, for some strange reason, took a dislike to me. I heard all sorts of malicious, unfounded rumors about myself. His Majesty was listening to someone reading the *Tale of Genji* aloud. 'She must have read the *Chronicles of Japan*!' he said. 'She seems very learned.' Saemon no Naishi suddenly jumped to conclusions and spread it abroad among the senior courtiers that I was flaunting my learning. She gave me the nickname Lady Chronicle. How very comical! Would I, who hesitate to show my learning even in front of my own servants at home, ever dream of doing so at court?
>
> When my brother, Secretary at the Ministry of Ceremonial, was a young boy learning the Chinese classics, I was in the habit of listening with him and I became unusually proficient at understanding those passages that he found too difficult to grasp and memorize. Father, a most learned man, was always regretting the fact: 'Just my luck!" he would say. 'What a pity she was not born a man!' But then I gradually realized that people were saying 'It's bad enough when a man flaunts his Chinese learning; she will come to no good,' and since then I have avoided writing the simplest character. … And as for those 'classics' or whatever they are that I used to read, I gave them up entirely. Yet still I kept on hearing these remarks; so in the end, worried what people would think if they heard such rumours, I pretended to be incapable of reading even the inscriptions on the screens. (57-8)

Even when Murasaki Shikibu was asked by Empress Shōshi to teach her Chinese, they thought that it should be done in secret, despite later support from the empress's father Michinaga and her husband, Emperor Ichijō, when they learned of it – even though no exact reason was attributed to this secrecy:

> Then Her Majesty asked me to read with her here and there from the collected works of Po Chü-i [Bai Jūyi][8], and, because she evinced a desire to know more about such things, to keep it secret we carefully chose times when the other women would not be present, and … I started giving her informal lessons on the two volumes of 'New Ballads.' I hid this fact from others, as did her Majesty, but somehow both His Excellency and His Majesty got wind of it and they had some beautiful copies made of various Chinese books, which His Excellency then presented to her. That gossip Saemon no Naishi could never have found out that Her Majesty had actually asked me to study with her, for had she done so, I would never have heard the last of it. (Murasaki 58)

The historical Murasaki Shikibu's sentiments on Chinese learning, as reflected in her diary, are carried on into Dalby's fictional biography, but divided into in separate sections. The matter of learning Chinese in her youth is written about in the second chapter of Murasaki's memoir, titled "The Early Journal."

> Nobu [Murasaki's brother] was forced to sit and memorize Chinese every morning. I found I could easily recite all his lessons by heart just from listening to the droning repetition issuing from his room. If I glanced at a text, the Chinese characters wrote themselves on my mind, and I had little trouble reproducing them when I sat at my writing table. Because it was so easy for me, I became impatient

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[8] Po Chü-i, or Bai Jūyi (772-846), was a Tang dynasty Chinese poet whose work formed the foundation of a courtier's knowledge of Chinese poetry in Murasaki's time (Bowring, in Murasaki 58).

with Nobunori. He could not remember, let alone understand, anything he was taught. I found him mumbling his lessons in the garden … Each time he stumbled on a line, I gritted my teeth. Finally I recited the section he muddled. He looked up at me …

–It's not fair, he burst out. I'm telling Father!

–Just my luck, Father sighed. What a pity this daughter was not born a boy. She is the one who seems to have inherited the family talent.

Yet when he realized I had overheard his remark, he quickly added,

–It's not a bad thing at all – a girl born into a scholarly family – despite what people say…

And he gave me the task of drilling Nobunori in Chinese. In this way I obtained a thorough education in the classics. (10)

Then, in the chapter "The Moorhen," Empress Shōshi's secret Chinese lessons and Saemon no Naishi's gossips are presented together, though in the opposite order from the diary.

I had been spending some time privately with [the empress], since during the discomfort of her pregnancy she asked me to teach her Chinese. We carefully arranged times when the other women were not around and read from the two books of Bai Juyi's *New Ballads*. Amateur that I am, I suggested that the empress engage a real scholar like my father, but she insisted that she only felt comfortable studying with me.

Earlier in my palace career I had been mercilessly taunted about my Chinese learning. There was a woman called Saemon no Naishi who took a dislike to me from the start. I began to hear all sorts of malicious rumors about myself that I discovered were traceable to her. Once, when the emperor had been listening to someone read aloud from my Genji tales. He apparently remarked.

> –This author must have read the *Chronicles of Japan*. She sounds very learned indeed!
>
> Saemon no Naishi heard this and began spreading rumors among the senior courtiers that I was flaunting my knowledge of Chinese. She gave me the nickname “Our Lady of the Chronicles”! How mortified I was at the time. To think that someone such as I, who hesitated to reveal my learning even in front of my women at home, would think of doing so at court! Only the support of understanding friends allowed me to get through those terrible times of self-doubt and chagrin.
>
> There followed a period when I avoided writing even the simplest Chinese graph, and I pretended to be unable to read so much as an inscription on a screen. But the empress took me aside and told me not to mind people like Saemon no Naishi. When she asked me to read to her from the collected works of Bai Juyi, though, we chose times when no one was around to overhear. We each had our reasons to keep these sessions secret. Eventually Michinaga found out about his daughter’s interest and had some beautiful copies made of various Chinese texts for her. He thought of it as a good way to educate the child in the womb, naturally assuming it was a boy. Thank goodness Saemon no Naishi never found out that Her Majesty had actually asked me to study with her. I would never have heard the end of it. (306-7)

Not only does the above passage in the biography refers to the events mentioned in Murasaki’s diary about the stance on women’s Chinese learning, but it also clarifies the reason as to why Michinaga allows Empress Shōshi to study Chinese – that it is not entirely to satisfy her desire to learn, but for the royal baby boy he assumes would be simultaneously ‘educated’ in her womb. Since Michinaga’s intention is not mentioned in Murasaki’s diary or any other historical record, Dalby’s taking the artistic liberty to make up the reasoning why Empress Shōshi’s Chinese lessons are allowed by her father serves to strengthen the fact that, in the Heian

period, Chinese was the language of educated men, and to propose that women's Chinese learning in the novel is tolerated as long as men can benefit from it. Even the historical Murasaki herself was privately employed as Shōshi's lady-in-waiting because of her fame as the writer of *The Tale of Genji*, of which a sum of chapters had been in circulation and made their way into the court for some time before she entered service to the empress (Bowring 4). In the fictional biography, Dalby's Murasaki is well-aware of this reason when Michinaga first asks if she can enter court service through her father, Tametoki, as he tells her what Michinaga says to him: "Your daughter could teach my daughter a lot … And the emperor will be more inclined to visit Shōshi's apartments if there are interesting stories being read" (242). This clearly illustrates how Murasaki, a strange woman by the Heian people's standards due to her knowledge of Chinese, is made use of by a powerful male figure like Michinaga. Likewise, it is usually presumed from her surviving diary that the historical Murasaki acted as "cultural companion-*cum*-tutor with few specific duties to perform" (Bowring 4) so that she had time to record the ongoing events, for example, the birth of Shōshi's first son, Prince Atsuhira, while she was supposed to wait on the empress. In the fictional biography, Dalby again takes the artistic liberty to specify that Murasaki is personally asked by Michinaga to record the birth and concerning ceremonies as his "most glorious moment" (315). In fact, it is upon Michinaga's request that her diary is written in the first place.

Being a woman who knows Chinese clearly affects both Murasaki's life and her writing. Dalby writes of many instances in which the knowledge of Chinese sets Murasaki apart from her peers in a negative light. For example, Murasaki states in her teenage that her maternal grandmother "had been needling me about the unladylike way I studied Chinese and gently but constantly tried to steer me toward *waka* instead" (13-4). On another occasion, Murasaki talks with her childhood friend, Chifuru, about the matter:

> My father had mentioned to some of his friends that I memorized the Chinese classics my brother was supposed to be learning. He said it with a touch of pride, for he saw nothing wrong

> with a woman being learned, but he should have realized that it wasn't something to brag about. Many people found it odd if not humorous, and I was naïve enough to be stung. My friend Sakiko, who had served at court and was extremely well connected as a gossip, told me she heard Yoshinari's eligible sons laughing about "the girl who knows Chinese."
>
> –So your reputation is ruined, said Chifuru … Now you will never find a decent husband. (16)

Much later in the story, the widowed Murasaki is even subjected to the gossip of her own serving women at home:

> The bookcase … was full of Chinese books that I had carefully collected over the years. When loneliness loomed, I would take one or two out to look at only to become aware of my serving women whispering behind my back,
>
> –What kind of lady is it who reads Chinese books?
>
> –This is why she is always so miserable.
>
> –In the past, proper ladies did not even read sutras,
>
> –Let alone Chinese!
>
> I feel like turning to them and saying,
>
> –Yes, that's what is always said, but I've never heard of anyone living longer simply because of observing such prohibitions!
>
> But what good would that have done? They would only have seen it as further proof that I was abnormal, and so I held my tongue. Besides, what they said was only reasonable. I was fully aware that I was my own source of misery. (356-7)

Ironically, however, Murasaki's fame and literary talents have their roots in her knowledge of Chinese. Shirane points to the fact that the *Genji* tale makes so many allusions and citations from a lot of literary and religious texts – many of which are in Chinese. He posits, "Murasaki Shikibu, well aware of the low position of the

monotagari, alluded extensively to those literary forms – *waka*, Chinese poetry, and historical chronicles – that were highly esteemed by the aristocracy" (xvii). However, she also blends in the *Genji* tale deep psychological observations that are usually found in the feminine *uta nikki*, or poetic diary. The result is that her tale welds both the masculine genre of *monogatari* (by virtue of its largely male authorship and prevalence of Chinese expressions) and the feminine genre of *nikki* together. Shirane further states, "though the *Genji* belongs generically to the *tsukuri monogatari*, the work is stylistically part of the women's literary tradition" (86). Not only is *The Tale of Genji* unique in its union of characteristics of the masculine and feminine genres, but it is also unique in its fulfillment of fantasy of the purposefully romantic *monogatari* and counterargument of the romantic elements in it.

Like *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki's life in *The Tale of Murasaki* takes such turns of polarized development. In her writing life, she starts out as an imaginative and romantic youth, neither entirely feminine nor masculine, before being shaped into a woman writer who questions her romantic ideals in contrast to the ways of men and women in her society. Throughout the process of this fictional biography, Dalby has based incidents in Murasaki's life on the historical and cultural knowledge of the era to give the narrative the illusion of authenticity. The structure of the narrative which highlights the polarized oppositions also leads to the thematic significance that the identity of the fictional "Murasaki Shikibu" is, like *The Tale of Genji*, uniquely constructed in between many two poles: male-female, truth-fiction, romantic-cynical. She has to reconcile with both sides of the opposites in order to be at peace with her own self, and this reconciliation comes after putting down the reconstruction of her identity through writing. Only after Murasaki's narrative is complete, then, can the story move on to the epilogue: Ukifune's narrative.

Ukifune's ending, as conjured up by Dalby's Murasaki, serves as the final product and conclusion of Murasaki's writing life. By the fictional end of the *Tale of Genji*, the girl, whose pseudonym means the "floating/sorrowful boat" (Shirane 192), has passed through many steps in womanhood and realized that her soul can only be at peace when she forsakes her femininity – even though the path taken is harsh and stretches long before her. In the *Genji* tale, Ukifune is an illegitimate daughter of a

prince. As she is born to a serving-woman, her father does not acknowledge her as a daughter, and thus Ukifune's mother marries the governor of Hitachi, a lower-rank aristocrat, and raises the girl in the country. Kaoru, the male hero of the second part, who is known to the world as Genji's youngest son by the Third Princess (but in reality is fathered through a secret affair by Genji's nephew), seeks her after the death of his beloved Oigimi, the oldest legitimate daughter of the prince. He takes Ukifune to the late prince's old residence near the town of Uji and visits her from time to time, unable to make her his principal wife because of her low status. As Kaoru plans to move Ukifune to the capital, Prince Niou, a grandson of Genji and his rival, sneaks into the Uji mansion and forces her to have an affair with him. Ukifune, then, is torn between the religious and reliable, but stiff Kaoru, who sees her as merely the shadow of his lost love, and the passionate, philandering Niou, who is already married to her second elder sister of higher rank. She jumps into the Uji River hoping to drown herself.

However, Ukifune is saved by the Yokawa bishop and his nun sister, who sees Ukifune as the substitute for her lost daughter. Ukifune then comes to live in the Ono nunnery and soon decides to take vows to avoid the pursuit of men, despite the nun's encouragement that a woman as young as her should instead get married to the husband of the nun's deceased daughter, who is a nobleman. The original *Tale of Genji* then ends indecisively at the point when Kaoru discovers Ukifune's whereabouts and sends her younger brother as a messenger, but Ukifune, despite missing her brother, refuses either to receive or acknowledge him. Kaoru is left wondering if the wavering Ukifune is hidden by another man. This indeterminate ending has prompted many scholars to speculate that the tale is in fact left unfinished. It is upon this ending that Dalby's Murasaki draws a resolute conclusion.

As illustrated by the fictional biography, Heian aristocratic women had few choices in life; even though they could wield power in the position of a wife and a mother and could inherit property, they usually remained secluded at home, could fall prey to sexual abuse, and probably found so little joy in reality that they sought it in fantasized tales. Secondary wives or women who lost their parents or male guardians often fared worse than the more powerful principal wives and high-rank aristocrats'

daughters in this polygamous society. To escape the restraints of marriage, women can consider either entering service at court, which can be quite difficult and has been shown by Murasaki to be equally problematic, or becoming Buddhist nuns – a step also taken out of necessity by women who have lost their husbands or guardians, or those whose mistresses have taken the holy vows. Shirane states that "the nunnery also represented an alternative to marriage and the world of men" and that "many female characters in the Genji take holy vows – but for the most part their motives are secular" (196). In final phase of the tale, which can be regarded as the "spiritual quest," Shirane considers the focus of the narrative as "the woman's desperate and lonely struggle to lead a religious life," and that "the last chapters reveal that taking the tonsure is only a step in the direction of individual salvation and that the most difficult step comes not before or with renunciation but after" (197). Dalby's Murasaki has observed such plights and resolutions from her various female companions, mainly her childhood friend Chifuru, her cousin Ruri, and her lover-*cum*-sister Kerria Rose. She then puts what she has seen from them into Ukifune's circumstances and guides the character of Ukifune in the direction which Murasaki herself desires.

Chifuru is the first of Murasaki's women friends to be introduced in Murasaki's narrative. She becomes close to Murasaki when they are seventeen and sixteen respectively. From hearsays, both girls become engrossed with the splendor of court life and dread marriage. "If learning Chinese could prevent marriage, I would study too," says Chifuru, "Unfortunately it wouldn't do any good" (Dalby 16). When her father is posed as the governor of the faraway city of Tsukishi, Chifuru is to be married to the widower governor of Bizen, who recently lost his wife and is looking to marry a woman from the capital (Dalby 18-9). Murasaki misses her so much that she writes the early chapters of the *Genji* tale for Chifuru, and dreads "the thought of Chifuru being intimate with a man" (Dalby 26), the gap between them grows wider as Chifuru becomes a mother and is occupied with taking care of her children. Eventually, their contact ceases and Murasaki learns much later that Chifuru dies of an illness (198). Chifuru represents a woman who, estranged from her women friends, becomes resigned to the daughterly, wifely and motherly duties demanded from her –

as Murasaki follows suit in the course of the narrative and Ukifune does when Kaoru places her in Uji as his mistress.

Her second woman friend, Ruri, is probably the one who has the most influence on the shaping of Ukifune's character. Ruri, with whom Murasaki spends a lot of time at Auntie's retreat, is portrayed as an unconventional woman; she neither blackens her teeth nor plucks her eyebrows according to the Heian beauty standards, and Murasaki remarks that she "utterly lacked the coy manner one would expect of someone whose mother spent so much time in the palace" (48). Nevertheless, Murasaki finds Ruri a trusted and sensible confidante that she even thinks, "What a perfect wife she would be … But she was no more interested in marriage than I was, and given her unladylike features and manner, even less likely to be wooed" (51). However, while living in Echizen when her father is posed governor there, Murasaki learns that Ruri commits suicide by throwing herself into the Uji River when she is forced to marry (102). Murasaki remarks, "Ruri, who was more comfortable out in the elements than sequestered behind screens. Perhaps only someone like Ruri could have chosen those savage roaring waters to carry her away from her misery" (103). Years later, Murasaki makes Ukifune attempt suicide in the same way, but this fictional character inspired by Ruri survives.

Murasaki's third woman friend, Kerria Rose, is both a homosexual lover and sister figure to Murasaki. As the two women meet at the memorial service of their sisters – they consider themselves kindred spirits and so make contact with each other. Kerria Rose also cannot "abide the thought of marriage," and she even thinks that "one doesn't need a man to experience love" (226). Having refused to get married until she contracts smallpox and becomes terribly disfigured, Kerria Rose suddenly takes vows and becomes a nun (236). From that point onward, she does not continue to be in close contact with Murasaki, but remains understanding of her and is the one to accompany her to take the tonsure. Like Kerria Rose, Ukifune suddenly takes the holy vows despite the disagreement of people around her.

Not only does Ukifune embody the sentiments and circumstances of Murasaki's women friends, she can also be thought of as part of Murasaki's later self.

Murasaki states in her narrative that she feels she shares a deep psychological link to Ukifune: "Caught between [Kaoru and Niou], this lady was like a boat unmoored, tossed about by her own conflicting passions as well as the whims of her lovers. In Ukifune I felt I had created a heroine whose heart I could delve into" (389). Murasaki feels so connected to Ukifune that she is dismayed at Shōshi's negative reception of her post-Genji tales involving the two men and this one woman.

> When my heroine sought to end her life in despair, the empress was shocked.
>
> –Her behavior is unreasonable, Shōshi admonished me. Have her choose one man or the other and be done with it. …
>
> –I would have thought, I ventured, that she would rather be done with both of them and escape to a nunnery.
>
> –Well, said Shōshi doubtfully, I suppose you can have her try that, but please don't leave her there. It's too depressing.
>
> And so I continued to fret. It seemed the very thing I felt most compelled to pursue also caused me the most pain. I went through black moods when I felt it was all worth nothing. Yet somehow I was driven to continue writing, no matter what the empress or the other ladies said. (390)

Likewise, Shirane views Ukifune's situation in the original tale in the similar light: "Ukifune is surrounded by people who do not understand her: the [bishop], his sister, the nuns, [the husband of the nun's daughter], and finally Kaoru. Each of these individuals, a prisoner of his or her own narrow perceptions, attempts to determine Ukifune's destiny with little understanding of her own deeper thoughts and aspirations" (198-9).

As the last heroine of the *Tale of Genji*, Ukifune becomes the embodiment of Dalby's Murasaki's later ideas on the sufferings of a woman, who, sooner or later, seems inevitably to yield to the desire of a man. And thus, she feels that the best solution for Ukifune is to reject both her pursuers: "I tried to make a convincing case

for the heroine Ukifune to turn away from both men. Everyone else in the tale tried to make her into an object of their own desire, or keepsake in place of someone else … Only when left alone to quietly reflect on the scriptures did Ukifune begin to sort out her life" (Dalby 391). Like Murasaki, Ukifune also finds peace of mind when she is engaged in writing practices: "More and more, Ukifune discovered, she liked to write. It was a pity she found herself having to resist so often. She had been pulled into circumstances where she is forced to give everything so often, that now, writing was the only thing she felt was hers to withhold" (412).

In the fictional final chapter of the *Genji* tale, titled "Lightning," Ukifune has become a nun for six months. She recounts her circumstance of having been pursued and taken the tonsure, based on the last two chapters of the original *Genji* tale. Dalby's new material is included when Ukifune sees a solitary pink bedflower (dianthus) outside her window. She then writes a poem comparing herself to the short-lived bedflower: "*The rough hedge makes the bedflower appear even lonelier – it will not last to see the autumn dew, let alone for you to tire of it*" (413). Pitying the flower for having to endure the upcoming storm, Ukifune goes out to pick it on impulse. After the storm dies down, she is found unconscious underneath the charred remains of a lightning-struck tree, becoming blind as a result.

It may seem that Ukifune's blindness deprives her of the main means of expressing herself. However, her blindness miraculously solves many of the problems. The bishop's sister, who up until now has been opposing Ukifune's ordination, vows to Kannon to offer her utmost help so that Ukifune can keep her holy vows, in exchange for saving Ukifune's life once more (415). The worldly Prince Niou abandons his quest for her when he sneaks in and finds himself looking into her blank eyes.

> It was good that he had taken the trouble, Niou told himself later. Otherwise, he might have pined uselessly for something that no longer existed. He was taken aback at the young nun's story of how Ukifune had been struck by a lightning and blinded, thinking it

> a tale concocted by Kaoru to keep him away. The gaze of those sightless eyes makes his skin crawl. He would creep away quietly. No use to send in a poem, because she wouldn't be able to read it. Better if she never knew of his visit. (416-7)

In contrast, Kaoru still clings to his self-deluding image of Ukifune. Even before she becomes blind, he has egoistically thought that he will forgive her, if she is indeed swept away by another man.

> He was not so naïve as to believe that Ukifune had actually shut herself off from the world. If such a serious student of the scriptures as he himself had been unable to disentangle his life from the concerns of society, how was it possible to suppose that a languid butterfly like Ukifune could have managed to do so?
>
> But he would be magnanimous. Lord Counselor Kaoru lost himself in a reverie imaging Ukifune's embarrassment when prodded out of hiding, and then her gratefulness when he offered to take care of her despite these lapses. He was the steadfast one, after all. Everyone knew his sober reputation. (408)

Moreover, Kaoru tells himself that if Ukifune has become a nun, the situation will be even better after all.

> But what if she actually had become a nun? The thought bothered him until it gradually dawned that the situation might be even better that way. No one else would concern himself over her, and he alone would visit, all with due propriety, of course, and they could talk about religious matters and exchange poems of exquisite regret. If she was a nun, he needn't feel any compunction about pulling aside her screens, even holding her hand. In this way, dare he hope, he might yet find the ideal subject upon which to fasten his long-frustrated yearnings. He would have her, yet not in the way a

> sullied philanderer like Niou had his women. Best of all, he would never have to face the disappointment of becoming sated with her. (408)

In some twisted way, Kaoru considers that the status of a nun will make Ukifune solely belong to him – not in body but in spirit. Then, after Ukifune has been blind, Kaoru insists that he be permitted to see her, until the abbess relents, hoping that after seeing Ukifune's current state, the man will give up his pursuit.

> Ukifune remained as she was … Kaoru drank in her image. She didn't look at him. Of course not, he reminded himself. She can't see. He beheld her boldly, paying not the slightest attention to the old woman sitting fiercely at his elbow. Yes, she had that blank unwavering gaze of the blind, but otherwise her beauty had not been touched. Kaoru was relieved. He spoke softly to her, telling her not to be afraid, that he felt their spiritual kinship now more than ever. Ukifune appeared to be listening, although her responses were minimal. (418-9)

After their meeting, Kaoru assures the abbess that he will not try to coax Ukifune into returning, but he is very fond of her and so he asks to visit her from time to time. Then he leaves.

> Kaoru took his leave, feeling inexplicably buoyant. He liked this new Ukifune very much. A lttle guiltily he enjoyed the fact that he could look at her without feeling self-conscious as he usually did around women at the palace. She couldn't see him watching her. And she was a good listener. Yes, he looked forward to visiting the nunnery in Ono in the future. (419)

However, what still trouble Ukifune are her other senses – especially the olfactory faculty. Even in the original *Genji* tale, Kaoru and Niou are distinguished by

the different fragrances they give off. Kaoru's is an enigmatic heavenly fragrance, which he is reputed to have been naturally born with, while Niou's comes from his incensed clothes. Shirane notes, "Karou is distinguished by his bodily scent, which can be appreciated even in darkness and which is associated with the incense used in Buddhist ceremonies" (187) and that "In contrast to the word *niou* with suggests a beautiful, youthful, and lively luster, color, or smell, the word *kaoru* embraces both the spiritual and the erotic: in the Buddhist context it evokes the scent of ceremonial incense, and in the poetic tradition the fragrance of flowers" (188). Ukifune remembers the scents of both men as she "had at one time or another been accused by each of them of harboring the lingering scent of the other" (Dalby 410). Dalby's Murasaki demystifies the ethereal fragrance of Kaoru even further by revealing that "Ukifune knew that Kaoru's exotic fragrance came from the special sachets he tucked in his clothing" (410). Even in her state of blindness, the presence of the men still haunts her because of their scents, but eventually these scents subside and leave her alone for good. For Niou, his scent simply fades away as he makes his leave silently: "She knew that Prince Niou had managed to find his way to the nunnery because she detected the faint echo of his perfume one afternoon. Perhaps he had convinced the nuns to grant him a glimpse of her – she didn't know, but in any case he did not speak to her, nor did he write anything. And then the fragrance faded away" (416).

Nevertheless, it seems much harder for Ukifune to get over the overwhelming scent of Kaoru, as visible in the second-to-last paragraph. The scent becomes the reason he misunderstands her lack of responses, and yet she overcomes it one last time.

> In her darkness, Ukifune had been almost suffocated by Kaoru's perfume. Ever since her encounter with that searing flash of light her senses sometimes became confused by strong stimuli. The counselor's fragrance was so loud she could barely concentrate on what he was saying in the trickle of words that lapped her ear without cease. Words unmoored, she thought. Wild, floating words, Kaoru's problem was mistaking words for reality. It was the sort of thing one couldn't explain with – well, words. In consequence, she had mostly remained silent. Protected by her impenetrable black

> screen, she no longer felt hounded, and indeed almost felt sorry for Kaoru. He was the one groping in the dark, not she.
>
> … She groped toward the door of her room and pushed it open, letting the autumn breeze rush through, sweeping out all traces of the lingering scent. (419-20)

This fictional final chapter of *The Tale of Genji* reflects its heroine's success in gaining her freedom – even at the cost of her physical disability. Only when Ukifune turns blind, oblivious to the world of sight around her, can she be free from the pressure of meeting everyone's demands – especially those of the men. The epilogue puts a sharp contrast between the two men, Niou and Kaoru, and between the men and the woman, Ukifune. The two men see; one gives up because he no longer feels that the woman can satisfy him, and the other deludes himself by fixating on her unseeing and untouchable body as a kind of ideal love object. The woman can no longer see, write, or read, but she has gained a deep spiritual insight – even though she is not yet fully enlightened. As the final product of Murasaki's imagination, Ukifune becomes Murasaki's representative in embarking upon the spiritual quest, and she has gone farther than has any character in the tale, despite the fact that her quest is far from being completed. Taken into consideration along with the two preceding narratives of Katako's and Murasaki's, Ukifune's narrative, serving as the epilogue, illustrates the theme of female spiritual maturation, as Murasaki believes that a woman in the Heian period can prevail in her spiritual quest after she has renounced the world, while men's existence is still concerned with worldly matters and fades away from her religious life like their ephemeral scents.

In conclusion, Liza Dalby's *The Tale of Murasaki*, as a fictional biography, combines facts gathered through vigorous historical and cultural research with the fictional structure, characters and events in order to portray its thematic ideas of female literary inheritance, construction of gendered identities of women, and women's spiritual maturation. Its main techniques include the employment of the existing literary genre in its subject's historical period, and *semic codes* and *symbolic codes* that create the binary oppositions which point to its thematic ideas.

CHAPTER III
RECONSTRUCTING A NEW IDENTITY IN *THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD*

While *The Tale of Murasaki*, as a fictional biography, employs a complex, reminiscent and pseudo-autobiographic style of narrative to reflect the sophisticated social and literary backgrounds of its protagonist as an educated court woman and writer, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* has a much more simple and straightforward narrative style with Lalu/ Polly Bemis as the only *homodiegetic*, *internal focalizer*/narrator. The story is written as if it were told straight through Lalu's eyes as she experiences each period of her life, from her childhood in China to her death as an old widow in America. The novel's structure is divided into a total of seven parts, each with its main turning point, and is designated by year numbers. However, despite the simple storytelling style, Ruthanne Lum McCunn has included in the novel historical details that relate her protagonist's personal circumstances to 'the bigger picture' of sexual and labor exploitation and racial discrimination of the Chinese immigrants and some other marginalized people in America in the late nineteenth century, as well as Polly's keen observations and recollections that symbolically reflects her insight and understanding of her life, status, and gendered identity.

The straightforward narrative style is likely selected to reflect the protagonist of the story, who is believed to be illiterate in both English and Chinese. McCunn states in the Reader's Guide at the end of the novel that Polly is definitely illiterate in English, according to an interview in which Polly said that she had no time to study when school finally came to Warrens because she had to make money (324). Moreover, "Given her background and the absence of any evidence to the contrary," writes McCunn, "I'd assumed [Lalu/Polly] was illiterate in Chinese as well as English" (330). Even Polly's Chinese signature in her testimony for her deportation case in 1894 is speculated by the author to be written by someone else; further research reveals that the Chinese characters in the signature, pronounced 'Gung Heung,' belong to a male name and are supposedly written "as a deliberate act of

malice" (331) because the two characters are homophonic with the words "provided for public enjoyment," possibly referring to prostitution (332). Unlike Dalby's protagonist Murasaki, whose historical counterpart involves a wealth of literary works to emulate from, Lalu Nathoy or Polly Bemis has left no authentic self-written records whatsoever.

Like many of the Chinese American writing since 1970, the period in which, according to Amy Ling, "literature on life in the United States and on the struggle to achieve a bicultural identity has experienced a virtual explosion in comparison to what came before" (186), *Thousand Pieces of Gold* partly shares a similar theme with Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1975) : "the struggles of a young Chinese American woman to achieve a sense of self and coherence when caught between American traditions of independence and individualism and Chinese traditions of dependence and community responsibility" (186). Ling posits that this fictionalized biography also explores another major theme in Chinese American literature: "the retrieval and revisioning of Chinese American history," by demonstrating "the heroism of a pioneering nineteenth-century Chinese woman homesteader, who had been abducted as a child, shipped across the Pacific, and sold as a slave on the auction block in the Far West" (186). She also remarks that *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is one of the "revisions of history and stereotypes" in which "Chinese Americans are finding their own voices, retrieving their past, and expressing the variety and complexities of their bicultural identities" (186).

Geographically and symbolically, the story can be divided into two parts – the former one set in China, about Lalu Nathoy[1], and the latter set in America, about Polly Bemis – the change of the protagonist's name in the narrative reflects the change in her own perception of her identity, as she considers her old self as Lalu dead in America and reconstructs her identity anew as Polly. The first part in China can be said to be more heavily conjured up than the second part. McCunn, having

[1] Regarding this non-Chinese sounding name, McCunn writes in her Reader's Guide that post-writing research reveals that the name Lalu means either 'Islam' or 'long life' and Nathoy is pronounced *Nasoi*. Polly's name, birthplace, and physical looks point to the Mongolian ethnicity, some of whom settled in Han area to farm in the mid-nineteenth century and adopted Islam or Hun customs such as foot binding (McCunn 329).

become so interested in the real Polly Bemis's story that she subsequently managed to gather as much material on Polly's life as possible, admits that she cannot write a full-length, factual biography of the well-known yet elusive Chinese pioneer woman because

> Unfortunately, there were many conflicting "facts" and huge gaps of information, especially about her life in China. It soon became clear that unless I passed over those years, I could not write a nonfiction book. I felt very strongly that in order to understand Polly in America, it would be crucial for the reader to know about Lalu in China. Instead of a biography, then, I decided to write *a biographical novel*. That did not mean I was willing to take liberties with the truth. Rather, it meant I threw myself into the kind of intensive research that would, I hope, help me sort through the disparate facts and fill in the gaps. (312, my italics)

McCunn's standpoint in writing this fictional biography is made clear in the epigram she has selected: "There is no history, only fictions of varying degrees of plausibility" by Voltaire. In Lalu's case, the lack of historical evidence in her biography is substituted by McCunn's fiction. Lalu's story in China is plausibly recreated as the 'necessary' foundation for Polly's story in America. Furthermore, McCunn's choice to reconstruct the life of Lalu/Polly Bemis in a fictional biography from her protagonist's childhood enables her to explore many gender-and-culture-related themes associated with the Chinese and American cultures of the late nineteenth century.

McCunn states, "I read dozens of books, particularly those dealing with village life, bandits, and the flora and fauna of nineteenth-century Northern China. I studied the crops, when to plant, when to harvest, the various cycles of cultivation, the farm implements used, daily routines, and the holidays and the folklore of the area until I knew it as intimately as if I had lived there myself" (312). It is upon this thorough research of historical and anthropological details of the area that Lalu's childhood in China in the first part is reconstructed, combined with McCunn's

imagination, to create a story that would compensate for the lack of evidence and record.

Historically, what is known about the real Lalu Nathoy in China is that she was born to impoverished farmers in an area in the north frequently ravaged by bandits. Her feet used to be bound, but later unbound. When she was eighteen, a prolonged drought and a bandit raid forced Lalu's father to sell her to the bandits for enough seeds to plant another crop that would help the rest of the family survive, and she might have been sent to America through the port in Shanghai (313). Lalu's life is portrayed with much additional details that contribute to her character and the theme of the novel. She is the eldest surviving daughter who takes care of her two younger brothers, acting like a mother figure for them. As the only daughter in the family, Lalu's parents love her so much. In fact, her father calls her "qianjin" or "thousand pieces of gold" (20). The term, as stated by McCunn in an online interview, is "a Chinese term of endearment for daughters." However, it can also be interpreted that daughters are assigned monetary value because of the price they may be able to fetch from marriage brokers. Moreover, as this term is adopted as the title of the fictional biography, Jun Xing states in his book, *Asian America through the Lens: History, Representations, and Identity*, that it takes on "a double metaphor for both her courage and early Chinese immigrants' vision of America as the 'Gold Mountain' " (128). Additional details are also added to support why Nathoy, Lalu's father, seems to cherish her more than what readers may expect from a typical Chinese father, who is more likely to value a son who is to carry on his name more than a daughter; Apart from Lalu, Nathoy has three other sons and has lost his first-born daughter, as reflected in a conversation between the farmers who argue why Nathoy will never sell Lalu away to compensate his loss, even when he is gambling all of the family's hard-earned savings and his mortgaged farmland on planting the winter wheat, which the villagers deem too risky. Nevertheless, the conversation strengthens both ideas that Nathoy cherishes his daughter so much and that he is capable of unpredictable actions, which is *proleptic*, or foreshadows a major turn early in the story.

> "Good thing his daughter is so pretty."
>
> "Mmm. Just the right age to fetch a good price."
>
> "Don't be absurd. Nathoy wouldn't sell her. When his oldest girl died from small pox, he mourned her like a son."
>
> "And when Pan lost all his pigs last year and wanted to sell his youngest girl to buy a new brood sow, Nathoy tried to talk him out of it."
>
> "No, he would never sell his Lalu, his thousand pieces of gold."
>
> "Did you ever think he would risk everything he has on a crop of winter wheat?" (20)

Nevertheless, despite being loved and cherished possibly more than an average Chinese daughter, Lalu's earlier life in China shows the clear gendered labor division and the attitudes towards women as inferior. The first chapter opens in a year of plentiful harvest, in which everything in the family seems to be going well and her father opens the pot of coins they have saved through the years. Still, there is subtle *proleptic* foreshadowing that a misfortune is going to take place, and that there is something unequal in the predicaments of Lalu and her mother. While Lalu's father is counting the coins, her mother suggests that they spend the money on two more mu[2] of land and a cow for plowing. However, her father immediately dismisses her suggestion and firmly decides that they will risk planting winter wheat (16). Lalu's mother tries to protest and begs him, "Think of your sons. What will you leave them?" (17). To this, Nathoy replies, "The farm is my concern, not yours. I will hear no more about it" (17). the above conversation shows a clear gendered labor division and property rights in Lalu's family. When Lalu's mother tries to give a sensible advice to her husband, he argues that a woman cannot interfere with the farm because it is a man's concern. Another interesting point is that the mother hints that the farm will be inherited by the sons, while Lalu, expected to be married away to a good family, supposedly will have no share in the farmland, according to Chinese culture.

[2] A Chinese unit of area measurement. One mu approximates 666 ⅔ square meters, 797.3 square yards, or 0.1647 acres.

Lalu's illiteracy, which corresponds to her status as a simple farmer's daughter and the Chinese culture that does not encourage literacy in women, is visible early in the novel. When her family unearth the pot of coins, Lalu asks to count the money from the pot, but A Cai, her younger brother, argues that he will count it instead because "I go to school, you don't" (15).

Unlike her brother, Lalu does not go to school but learns to perform house chores with her mother, who is portrayed as a strong yet conservative woman. In some way, Lalu's mother is the "angel of the house," the Victorian term of feminine ideal – a submissive wife and sacrificing mother who selflessly devotes herself to her husband and her children, the concept which is heavily criticized by later feminists including Virginia Woolf. Even though Lalu's family is in no ways related to Victorian culture, Chinese culture similarly dictates that her mother performs the roles of the perfectly selfless wife and mother. She takes care of everything in the house, and she consoles and encourages the other family members in times of worry. Lalu recalls,

> [D]uring the year of famine … her mother had quieted their terrible, gnawing hunger with little round bits of yeasty dough which swelled in their stomachs, giving them the illusion of fullness. And when they went into debt for a flock of brood hens and the bandits stole every one, her mother had merely pinched their solemn faces and said, "Heaven gave us life, Heaven will give us succor. We'll manage."
>
> In every crisis, her mother's confident, "We'll manage," had brought them through. (24)

Lalu's mother strongly hopes that Lalu will manage to get a good husband. Thus, she carefully binds the girl's feet in order to transforming them into what is called in Chinese as the 'Golden Lotus[3],' even though a foot-bound girl is not

[3] *Golden Lotus* is a Chinese euphemism for the foot binding of women. The custom possibly began during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1178) in the court circles. Then, it spread among the upper class and later the lower classes. The idea was to keep women's feet very tiny by folding the toes under the foot and tightly binding the bent foot with cloth, which results in deformation. There had been attempts to ban the practice during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), but it continued into the early twentieth century (Weightman 233)

practical for farm labor: “Every day for two years, her mother had wound long white bandages around each foot in ever tightening bands, twisting her toes under her feet and forcing them back until her feet had become two dainty arcs. They were not as small or as beautiful as those of a girl from a wealthy family who would not need to use them at all. But they were useless for heavy labor” (24).

Partly because of her bound feet, Lalu’s realm of work has become restricted to household chores, especially those related to clothing. In one instance, such works are described as “chores her parents said were not fitting for A Cai, a son” (31). As such, even when Lalu is allowed to perform a man’s farm work because A Cai is too young for heavy labor, she takes the responsibility of household chores as well when her mother’s pregnancy advances, because A Cai is not allowed to do a woman’s chores. Like other women in the area, Lalu and her mother are only allowed to help in the farm during harvests:

> Even during the two years of foot binding, when she could not walk, she had not been idle, learning to sew and spin and weave. And after her feet became little four-inch lotus, when she was no longer allowed to work in the fields, she had helped her mother at home. Except for the harvests. Then she and her mother joined the other women and girls, threshing wheat and millet, picking peanuts, and preparing sweet potatoes, turnips, cabbages, and other vegetables for storage. (30)

Lalu’s transgression of the gendered labor division into the realm of men’s work begins when the winter wheat fails and her family has money only enough for the land taxes. It is understood that Lalu must be sold away for the survival of the other family members, but she refuses to be separated from her family and tries to find another alternative. Despite the fact that Lalu knows she must obey her parents’ will, she cannot help but struggle: “All Lalu’s training in the four virtues of a woman told her she must accept the inevitable. She must be sold so the family could live. Nevertheless, her mind raced like a cornered rat searching for escape” (25).

Therefore, Lalu suggests that they dismiss their laborer, Chen, and let her work in the fields in place of her brother, A Cai. Lalu's father, apparently not wanting to part with her, lets Lalu offer him her suggestion, which seems somehow against the virtue of obedience demanded from a Chinese daughter. However, Lalu understands that "It was her life she was fighting for, and her father knew it. Why else was he allowing her to speak?" (25). Even though her father tries to protest, he does not exert his authority as much as he can and, perhaps, ought to. When he argues, "Only sons become farmers" (26), Lalu reassures him, "I won't be a farmer, just your helper, and only until A Cai is bigger" (26). She counters her father's claim: "We'd be the laughingstock of the whole village" (26) with the sensible answer: "We already are" (26) for the failed winter wheat. Even her mother proposes that she will unbind Lalu's feet and assure that they "will make it possible" (27). Lalu's father eventually gives in to her insistence. However, the necessary unbinding of Lalu's feet proves not to be an easy task, but an excruciatingly painful process:

> Her mother had tried to make unbinding Lalu's feet as easy as possible, loosening the bindings gradually, soaking, massaging, stuffing cotton between the toes so they could gradually expand outwards, but the toes had not flattened in time for spring planting. Chewing her lips to keep from crying, Lalu had carried heavy buckets of fertilizer into the fields, making her feet swell. … [S]he had trampled the ground with her swollen feet. At night, when she took off the loosened bindings, the smell of decaying flesh had made her too ill to eat. (30)

The actions of foot binding and foot unbinding can provide multiple interpretations based on Barthes's five codes of narrative. Both can be seen as *the proairetic codes* (providing indication of actions), *the cultural codes* (containing references out beyond the text to what is regarded as common knowledge in the culture of the character/author/reader) and *the symbolic code*s (linking to the theme). They are *proairetic codes* in the direct sense that they indicate actions. They are *cultural codes* in that they are related to the practice of foot binding in Chinese

culture. According to Wang Ping in *Aching for Beauty: Foot Binding in China*, lotus feet in late imperial China are "the synonym for femininity, beauty, and eroticism. In other words, feet were the place of honor, identity, and means of livelihood for many women" (xi). Similar to the corset in Western history, foot binding is practiced for aesthetic purpose as to attract the best suitors possible. Ping states, "To be beautiful, or to look beautiful, is an aesthetic impulse as primary, strong, and persistent as the survival instinct. It is quite understandable that … women would do anything to have a perfectly bound pair of feet in order to prepare themselves for the marriage market, which in a patriarchal society provides their livelihood, identity, and social status" (53). Finally, they are symbolic codes as they can be compared to the restriction and emancipation of women respectively. Ping claims that "[T]he concept and practice of enduring violence and pain, mutilation and self-mutilation in the name of beauty can be found in almost every culture and civilization" (xi). In this case, pain and deformity resulting from foot binding are tolerated by women in exchange for aestheticism, decorum, and social security. The process comes to represent a form of control over women as it significantly limits their physical mobility to the point of pain and disability. Moreover, it has been argued that foot binding is not practiced for aestheticism *per se* but for easier control of women as well as men's sexual pleasure. In *Dragons and Tigers: A Geography of South, East and Southeast Asia*, Barbara A. Weightman claims, "Judging by poetic references, the bound feet was an erotic sight to some men. Moreover, foot binding created a gait that would eventually restructure the pelvic bones to enhance men's pleasure during sexual intercourse" (233).

At first, Lalu with her bound feet is kept restricted in the house. But then, before she can be allowed to work outside home like a man, her feet must be unbound even though it causes so much pain. It is interesting to note that Lalu's transgression of a gender taboo by taking up men's work occurs simultaneously with the unbinding of her feet. Both actions subsequently lead to physical and emotional pains respectively, but they also give her an extent of freedom in physical movement and psychological perception of her self. Before her feet are unbound in preparation for farm labor, Lalu dimly recalls the time when she can walk and run freely on unbound feet as "the time when her stride had been more than a few ladylike inches and she

could run across the meadow, teasing a kite into the wind" (27). However, as her feet have become deformed, Lalu cannot help but question, "Could her feet really become large and sturdy once again?" (27). Lalu's liberation, combined with pain and her experiences of former restriction, is not the same as the innocent freedom she had enjoyed as a child.

Another interesting point related to Lalu's bound feet is how she metaphorically perceives them after learning that her mother will unbind them. Lying on her bed, Lalu feels her feet, which are "no larger than a pair of newborn chicks" (27). The following narration further compares her bound feet to a bird doomed to die, to which Lalu performs mercy killing according to her father's suggestion:

> Her hands curled around [her feet], just as they had around the little featherless sparrow she had found last spring.
>
> Her father had told her death was certain, and she should drown it so it would not suffer. Obediently she had plunged the tiny creature into a basin of water. Its beak opened and closed soundlessly as it struggled for air and its featherless wings pushed desperately against her clenched fists. She released the bird. But it was too late. Unable to rise above the surface of the water, its wild convulsions became shudders, and one by one, the ripples diminished until the water became as still as frozen ice.
>
> Was it too late for her? (27)

The comparison of Lalu's bound feet to the dying sparrow conveys an ominous prediction that Lalu's physical and symbolic liberation will not be successful, which it indeed is not at this point, in a sense. Even though Lalu struggles hard not to be sold away from her family, even to the point that she willingly accepts the pain and humiliation inflicted on her by the unbound feet and uncaring gossips from her neighbors, all her efforts do not pay off because she is eventually sold to the bandits for the survival of her family.

Nevertheless, Lalu's increased freedom in physical movement also corresponds to her freedom to discover what she really wants to do, which can only be found when she is not restricted to women's chores inside the house. When the pain subsides, Lalu is able to walk and run again, having developed a peculiar rolling gait. Once, with A Cai on a wheelbarrow carrying firewood, she "raced down the hill in her strange, rolling lope … her long, thick braid flying straight out behind" (32). At the same time, working on the farm has helped Lalu discover another side of herself – her love for farming. She feels a new sense of self-importance as she becomes more and more capable at farm work:

> [S]he felt only pleasure in her second year in the fields. She paid close attention when her father explained the proper way to fertilize a field or plant a sweet potato vine, feeling enormous pride as he entrusted her more and more with work that needed skillful, knowledgeable hands. There were even guilty moments when she was almost glad the wheat had failed, for she loved everything to do with farming: the preparation of the soil, the planting, the careful nurturing... (31)

Lalu feels even prouder when A Fa, another younger brother, reveals that she is allowed to share better meals with their father as if she were a man because she works alongside him:

> Like all the other men, Lalu's father was fed first, before his wife and children, and with the better food. As a child, Lalu had asked why, and her mother had explained, "Men are the pillars of the family. We depend on them for our lives, so they must be fed well." Now she, Lalu, was to eat first too!
>
> Her eyes brimmed with tears. It didn't matter that the farmers said her father was turning Heaven and earth upside down by allowing his daughter to work by his side. Or that their wives told her mother, "Your daughter's face is passable, but those big feet are laughable." Or

> that A Cai's friends called her a carp on herring feet, and her own friends avoided her. Her parents understood! (33)

However, Lalu's pride comes to a rather quick end when her mother calls her to come inside the house immediately after A Fa reveals the news. She makes Lalu wear a bodice. Again this action represents multiple codes. Firstly, it is a straightforward action, which makes it a *proairetic code*. Secondly, it is a *cultural code* as it reflects the Chinese custom which considers flattened breasts as a sign of propriety. Lastly, it is a symbolic code as the bodice represents another restriction for women, and it also serves to remind Lalu of her sexuality, as her mother warns, "You're fourteen, a woman. Look how your sweaty outer jacket clings to you. Do you want to be called a wanton?" (34). Forced to try on the bodice, Lalu protests that it suffocates her, metaphorically like her gender. She also protests that if she wears the bodice, she will not be able to exert the physical energy needed for farm work. Just then, Lalu's mother expresses her regret for not selling Lalu away to keep her conformed to the gendered customs so that she can have a better prospect of marriage in the future, despite Lalu's argument that she loves working in the fields. Lalu's mother argues, "If we had sold you, we would have found you a good mistress, one not too far away, and you would be doing decent woman's work in a good household, not bitter labor … And when you became of age, your mistress would have found you a good husband, and you would have been free again" (34-5). Then she questions, "Now you're neither snake nor dragon. You are a woman, yet you work like a man, a laborer. Who will marry you?" (35). She reminds Lalu yet again, "You're a woman. You should be growing sons, not vegetables" (35), and she also claims "a large footed woman tarries, for no one wants to marry her" (35). As Lalu's mother continues speaking, Lalu is reminded that the prospects of her marriage have become very low not only because of her unbound feet, but also because of her gender transgression: "it's not just your feet. You're doing what no woman in this village, this district, has done, and your name is on every gossip's tongue. What decent, modest woman will take you for a daughter-in-law now?" (35). Then, when Lalu has to desperately think of the work she can do if she manages to get away from the bandits she is sold to, she bitterly reflects on the fact that farmwork has diverted her from women's chores, such as

needlework and cooking: “What kind of work could she do? No one would hire her as a farm laborer, but her fingers, used to a hoe, no longer held a needle with ease, and she had never learned to cook” (71).

Because of her strange circumstance, Lalu remains unmarried even at eighteen. She bitterly reflects on this fact when she becomes the bandits’ captive and awkwardly tries to seduce Chen, the bandit leader, so that she can be spared the fate of becoming the bandits’ sex slave by becoming his wife instead: “Her stomach rebelled at the thought of such an ugly old man for a groom. But hadn’t her mother warned her that no decent family would take her for a daughter-in-law? That was why, at eighteen, when all her friends were already mothers, she remained unmarried. Unwanted” (56).

In historical accounts about Polly Bemis, it is simply told that “when Lalu was eighteen, there was a prolonged drought, during which her father was forced to sell her to the bandits in exchange for enough seed to plant another crop that would, he hoped, saved the rest of their family from starvation” (313). In addition to the drought, McCunn portrays the situation more dramatically by creating the character of the bandit leader, Chen, who used to be the laborer working for Lalu’s father. During the bandit raid, he comes to Lalu’s house, yanks her out of her hiding place, and forces Lalu’s father to sell her to him right before her eyes. Even though the reason for Chen to instigate this betrayal is not directly stated in the story, it can be implied that Chen holds grudge against Lalu’s father for dismissing him from work, and Lalu is partly responsible for that because she suggests that she take up his work instead. So, this is his revenge on her and her family. Metaphorically, Chen can also represent the man as a worker who is replaced by a woman and retaliates because he cannot accept his dismissal and replacement by “the weaker sex.” It is clear that Lalu’s father has no choice but to sell her, haggling with Chen for another bag of seed for the survival of the other family members:

> [Chen] threw a bag in front of Lalu’s father. It burst, scattering soybeans.

> Lalu stared at her father, willing him not to pick them up. He reached out, hesitated, then looked up at Lalu, his eyes pleading for understanding. She twisted her face away, a sob strangling in her throat. Behind her, she heard him snatch the bag and scoop up the spilled seed.
>
> "Two bags," her father begged. "She's worth two bags of seed." (50)

Chen and the bandits serve to introduce Lalu, as well as the readers, to the threats of physical violence, sexual assaults, and sexual exploitations faced by women in Lalu's Northern Chinese society. When Lalu recognizes him during the raid, he tells her, "When the drought came, I joined the bandits and led a raid on my own village. Sold my children and gave my wife to the rest of the men to use. That's why they made me chief" (49). He also tells Lalu and her father that he is going to buy her for sex:

> He held Lalu at arm's length, examining her like a farmer about to purchase livestock. "Pretty face. Nice white teeth and shiny hair. But such big feet! The brothels in Shanghai like bound feet and smooth white skin. You are burned black." He smiled lasciviously. "Of course, my men wouldn't care. You could be a common wife to them. My wife lasted a week. But you're tough. I'm sure you'd last at least a month." He nuzzled his scratchy beard against her cheek. "Then again, maybe I'll keep you for myself." (49)

As a Chinese country girl in the nineteenth century, what Lalu knows about sexual matters and rape is quite limited. Her knowledge of such topics is mainly associated with the taboo of extramarital sex and the notion that it is a dishonor for women to be raped:

> [F]rom the accumulated knowledge gleaned from years of whispers, she sensed it was something that was all right if it happened

> between husband and wife, shameful and terrible if the man and woman were not married.
>
> Nevertheless, it happened. In places called brothels. During bandit raids. Sometimes with soldiers quartered in the village. And once, she had heard her mother and some of her friends whispering about a neighbor who had suddenly vanished because she had "disgraced" herself. (54)

Lalu also recalls the story of a villager's wife who is raped by a bandit and commits suicide to reclaim her honor, or rather, her husband's and her family's honor. The example stirs Lalu to think if she should follow suit: "After Pan's wife was used by a bandit, she had hung herself. Everyone agreed she had done the proper thing, and her husband had built a paifang to commemorate her courage and virtue. Should [Lalu] try to kill herself?" (54). Before considering this alternative, Lalu ponders whether she should escape and try to find some way home. However, she gives it up because "even if she did somehow elude her captors and find her way home, her parents would not dare take her back. She had not been kidnapped. She had been sold. She belonged to Chen" (52).

Lalu resorts to another way of survival; she tries to use her femininity to seduce Chen so that he claims her as his wife – another undesirable but more tolerable and socially acceptable option in Lalu's notion. In that instance, Lalu reflects on the problems of arranged marriage she has heard of: "even good matches did not guarantee good husbands. Marriage brokers often lied, and everyone knew of girls who thought the red chair was carrying them to rich households with young, handsome husbands only to find they had been cheated" (56). However, Chen only harasses Lalu by fondling her breasts, but then stops and says that he cannot be fooled easily. Lalu feels humiliated by this harassment. Her attempt to survive by relying on her femininity fails, but Lalu still retains her strength as she reminds herself that she is not only a woman, but also a farmer. So, she must be strong and try to strive as best as she can:

> "I'm a farmer, not a wanton," she wanted to cry. "Then act like a farmer," a voice inside her said. When bandits, insects, disease, rain, or drought wiped out a crop, a farmer did not crumple and cry like a disappointed child, he began the whole process of fertilizing, plowing, and reseeding once again. Even now, with the drought into its third year, the farmers in her village remained undefeated, searching for ways to save their land and their families. Could she do any less? (57)

As evident in the above passage, Lalu's experiences and identity as a farmer has strengthened her will to struggle against all odds so much more than how it would have been if she had not been working on the farm. As such, Lalu does not give up on her hope. She steals some jewelry from a bride's wedding trunk in the bandits' hideout and tries to escape in the commotion during a soldiers' attack on the bandit camp. However, before she can get away, the bandits catch her and bring her along. To get away from the soldiers and compensate for their lost cache, Chen changes his mind to sell Lalu to a brothel and divide the money among the bandits. Ding, a bandit who seems to be more educated than the others, offers to keep watch on Lalu, speaking of her as a piece of property. He calls her "our little bag of gold" (68) and ensures Chen that he will not let Lalu get lost or get damaged (68).

As a fictional character, Ding plays the role of Lalu's unexpected helper. Plot-wise, he functions as an important character or *semic code* who keeps Lalu safe from the sexual threats of the other bandits. However, Lalu wonders if he is genuinely friendly to her, or if he just guards her like some property:

> [W]hen they became rough or tried to force themselves on her, Ding held them at bay, reminding them that their futures depended on Lalu and the price she fetched.
>
> It was also Ding who found a scrap of coarse netting to protect her from the mosquitoes, and Ding who made sure she got a portion of any food they forced from frightened woodcutters and farmers in isolated hamlets. Ding. A friend who cared about her as a person? Or

> an enemy looking out for his own interests, protecting her like a landlord protects his property? She had to find out. (69)

When Lalu argues with Ding, reprimanding him for taking her along because she could have gotten away from the soldiers by herself and find work, Ding reminds Lalu of the harsh reality of a woman's life. He is certain that no matter how well Lalu's parents have taught her to be careful, a woman like her has no chance to travel alone safely but can be easily taken advantage of – "kidnapped or raped or killed" (71). Furthermore, even though she manages to find work as a nursemaid or servant, she is also at risk of unwanted pregnancy. He tells her, "[B]efore you knew what was happening, you would have found yourself with life inside you from the master or one of the men servants" (71) and cautions, "It's not a matter of home teaching … You would have had no more choice than I or any of the others here had a choice to become bandits. And when you were discovered with child, it would have been you who were blamed and thrown out into the street" (71-2).

The novel shows that Ding firmly believes in fatalism. He thinks humans have no choice but to be led by their fate, whatever it may be. His back story is delivered to Lalu in his own words: "I was a magistrate. … A sudden change in the political situation forced me to flee for my life. I sent my wife and children back to her parents for safety and joined the bandits to seek revenge" (72). In this way, Ding as a *semic code* also performs another role in relation to an important *symbolic code* in the first part of the story; he serves as a mouthpiece to convey the idea of fatalism, which contrasts with Lalu's belief that if she struggles hard enough, she will find her freedom. In one instance, Ding tells Lalu, "I know your mother and father did not raise you to be sold to a house of leisure, just as my parents did not raise me to be a bandit, but we have no choice except to follow the paths Heaven has allotted us" (72-3). Nevertheless, Lalu "vowed she would never accept the path Ding claimed Heaven had assigned her" (73). Ding further suggests that Chen sell Lalu to a high-class brothel and advises her to try to be subservient so that a man will buy her out as his concubine or secondary wife: "I know from my days as a magistrate that this house serves only rich, famous, refined gentlemen. Do as you are told, try to please, and you

are bound to be bought out soon and installed as a concubine or perhaps even a secondary wife in some wealthy household" (79). In a way, Ding believes that a woman like Lalu has no choice but to depend on men and please them in order to survive. However, Lalu rejects his idea immediately and devises her own plan – "one that depended on her sale price being kept as low as possible" (79). She decides that she will negotiate with the madam to lower her price and buy her freedom with the jewelry she has found.

Apart from Ding, another important character in this first part is the Madam of the brothel who buys Lalu. Like Ding, Lalu finds it hard to determine whether the Madam means well to her, or just tries to use her for her own personal gains. At first the Madam appears cold and uncaring, viewing Lalu as only a piece of goods. When Chen slaps Lalu for talking back to him, the Madam merely said calmly, "You're damaging you merchandise" (83). Chen's conversation with the Madam reflects on the matter of prostitution – how a woman's virginity and body are offered for sale. Disappointed with the price at which the Madam will buy Lalu, Chen blurts out, "I know what you charge for one night with a virgin" (83). The Madam then retorts, "This is not the kind of house you frequent. Virgin or not, we cannot offer our guests an untutored peasant obtainable for free from their own servants' quarters. Before your 'niece' can serve as a daughter of joy, she will need time and money poured into her for lessons in singing, dancing, and all the other techniques of her new profession" (83). However, Lalu decides to let the Madam buy her rather than remain with Chen so that she can buy her freedom from the Madam with the jewelry because Lalu assumes from how the Madam treats her that "she might be hard, but she would be fair" (84).

Nevertheless, the Madam refuses to let Lalu buy herself out and tells her to keep her jewelry because it may be useful to her someday. This leads to Lalu's argument: "If it can't buy my freedom, what use can it have?" (85). The Madam later reveals to Lalu that, in reality, she does not have the authority to let Lalu buy herself. Even though she is surrounded by riches and can live in luxury, she is like a cormorant bird which fishermen use to catch fish. In a way, the Madam as a prostitute

and procuress is compared to the animal imagery of the cormorant as they are both tools for making money and they have no freedom for themselves:

> "Do you know what a cormorant is?" the Madam asked.
>
> "It's a bird that eats fish," Lalu said, puzzled.
>
> "Have you seen how fishermen use them to catch fish?"
>
> "They put rings around the birds' necks so the birds can catch the fish but not swallow them, But what..."
>
> The Madam interrupted. "Like the cormorant, I have a person I work for. You saw me pay for you, but you are not mine to do with as I choose."
>
> Lalu fought back tears. Had she, like her father, gambled and lost? "I don't understand."
>
> The Madam pointed her ringed fingers at the rich silk hangings, bowls of semiprecious fruits, antique vases, and carved jade and ivory bric-a-brac that filled the room. "All this is the result of my labor, yet it is not mine any more than the fish a cormorant catches is his. I work for a high government official who offers me the protection I need to live. ..." (86)

The Madam, like Ding, is fatalistic. She sees that Lalu has no choice but to be sold and bought. Instead of fighting overtly against what she is sure to lose, the Madam advises that Lalu be covert and learn to act compliant to survive: " 'Lalu, you have great strength. Don't waste it on fighting for the impossible,' the Madam said. She pointed to a scroll on the wall. 'Look at that bamboo. It's strong, but it bends in the wind, just as you must learn to do' " (86-7). She further consoles Lalu, "Normally, I would not be able to buy a scrawny, dark-skinned girl with feet like dragon boats, but today I have a special buyer who does not care about such things, someone who will take you to America" (87). The Madam's final words end the first part of the novel and signal the beginning of change for the second part, which deals

with Lalu's arrival in America and the start of her new life in the mining town of Warrens.

The Chinese characters, all of whom are fictional, serve to portray the traditional patriarchal and fatalistic ideas Lalu is exposed to in China, which she finds hard to accept but unable to deny. At the same time, Lalu herself is portrayed to possess a strong, unyielding spirit. This is apparent in how she questions the authority in the form of gods and destiny. During the drought, she doubts whether the gods in heaven can even hear their prayers. Seemingly out of fear, her mother acts as if to punish her for such blasphemy so that the gods do not become angry with them:

> Earlier, when her mother was lighting yet another stick of incense, Lalu had suggested that perhaps their village was too small and too far north for the gods to hear their prayers. Her mother had quickly knocked her head against the dirt floor, calling loudly on Heaven to ignore her daughter who should know better than to question the gods' supremacy and knowledge of everything that went on, even in the most faraway corners of China. (21-2)

Lalu also questions the credibility of the moral lessons of old Chinese tales she has heard – one reflecting the obligation of children to sacrifice for their parents, and the other concerning the sacrifice of the Bodhisattva Guanyin as the female manifestation of mercy. When Lalu ponders whether her father would sell her if his winter wheat fails, she recalls the legend of Guo Ju, the filial son, which has been told to her by her father:

> "Guo Ju was poor," her father had said. "Too poor to support his mother, his wife, and his child. So he told his wife, "The child is eating food my mother needs. Let us kill the child, for we can always have another, but if my mother dies, how could we replace her?"
>
> "His wife did not dare contradict him and Guo Ju began to dig a grave. Suddenly, his spade struck a deeply buried vase which

> shattered, spilling hundreds of gold pieces, a gift from Heaven to Guo Ju, the filial son."
>
> "What if there were no gold?" Lalu had asked.
>
> "There was gold. More than enough for the rest of their lives," her father had said.
>
> "But what if there wasn't?" Lalu insisted. "Would Guo Ju have killed his child?"
>
> "It's just a story from the Twenty-Four Legends of Filial Piety," her mother said. "To teach us we must honor our parents and do whatever we can to make their lives happy and comfortable." (19)

The tale not only foreshadows that Lalu, like Guo Ju's child, will have to be sacrificed for the rest of the family, but also illustrates Lalu's ability to question the authority. It can be interpreted that the tale demands absolute obedience on part of the child and instigates the belief that the virtuous and the grateful will be rewarded in the end. However, Lalu realistically thinks of another much worse possibility that can happen if heaven does not intervene. Later, she yet again challenges the credibility of the tale of Guanyin's saving the Han people from starvation by sacrificing her breast milk and blood to nourish their ears of rice:

> "We depend on Heaven and the Goddess Guanyin knows that. After all, it was she who took pity on the Han people when they were still living by hunting and gathering. When she saw how they suffered starvation because their ears of rice were empty, she went secretly into the fields and squeezed her breasts so her milk would flow into the ears of rice plants. Near the end, she had to press so hard that a mixture of milk and blood flowed into the plants, yet she did not stop until all the ears were filled." (22)

Lalu's mother unquestioningly believes in the tale, while Lalu again questions the credibility of the tale in comparison to Guanyin's supposedly immense power. She

does not think it is sensible for Guanyin to make such an unnecessary sacrifice when she could have achieved more than that with her power:

> If she were a goddess like Guanyin, she would have filled the empty ears of rice with a mere flick of her wrist, and she would stop this storm at once and replant all the wheat that had been destroyed or washed away. Then she would make the wheat harvest so plentiful that her father would be the richest man in the whole village. No, not just the village, but the whole district! (22)

Furthermore, Lalu's dream reflects how she wishes for power to eliminate whatever obstacles in her way. However, if the sacrifice of Guanyin foreshadows and parallels that of Lalu's, Lalu is also powerless against the inevitability that she must be sold and taken further away from home to save her family.

In the first part, it can be seen that Lalu, who has been raised in a traditional way ever since she was a young girl, has a rebellious and questioning side to her supposedly meek and submissive persona. It is perhaps because of this side that she is able to adopt farm work like a man. Even though all her attempts to avoid being sold and remain with her family fail in a way, they express how Lalu struggles as best as she can with what her limited experiences and skills can give her. It is this undefeated spirit that she retains throughout the story of her life.

The second part largely deals with Lalu's arrival in America. It explores the plights of the discriminated and the marginalized in America in the nineteenth century, among whom is Lalu herself. Lalu's life becomes involved with the larger history of America in relation to slavery and exploitation of the minorities. The first chapter of the second part portrays the smuggle of Chinese women into America for sexual exploitation through Lalu's eyes as she passes through the customs with forged papers and learns how some women will be sent to brothels with unfair conditions and others to the auction block. Lalu recalls the harsh conditions of the travel. Communication between fellow women is forbidden, and there is a comparison of the

feeding of smuggled women with that of the pigs. This metaphor can also have a larger implication that the women are no different from livestock to be sold:

> Lalu thought of the sweltering, airless heat and thirst that had strangled the words in her throat, making her stumble when she recited for Li Ma, earning her cruel pinchings and monotonous harangues. The aching loneliness that came from homesickness and Li Ma's refusal to permit the girls to talk among themselves. The bruising falls and the tearing at her innards each time the ship rocked, tossing her off the narrow shelf that served as bed, knocking her against the hard wood sides of the hull. The long, black periods of waiting for the hatch to bang open as it did twice a day, bringing a shaft of sunlight, gusts of life-giving salt air, the smell of the sea. The struggle to chew the hard, sour bread and swallow the slop lowered down as though they were pigs in a pen. (93)

On the auction block, the women are further humiliated as they are forced to be stripped naked and 'appraised' by prospect buyers. The old woman reasons that "Women in the Gold Mountains are scarcer than hen's teeth and even a plain or ugly girl has value. But when a man has to pay several thousand dollars for a woman, he likes to see exactly what he is buying" (101). Her words reflect how the smuggled women are degraded and dehumanized into commercial items to be inspected and purchased. Then, the narrative describes how "Lalu closed her eyes against her own nakedness and the men who milled around, poking, prodding, and pinching" (104). Moreover, she witnesses how physical violence is used as punishment and warning for other slave girls:

> [Li Ma] grabbed a tight-lipped, thin, dark girl from the back of the group. The girl stared defiant as the old woman ripped off her jacket and pointed out scars from a deep hatchet wound, puckered flesh the shape of a hot iron. "Look carefully and be warned against

> any thought of disobedience or escape." She threw the girl's jacket onto the floor. "It will be the bagnio for you. If you're lucky." (101)

She also learns from the particular girl how direr the conditions of other more unfortunate slaves can be; those hidden in more restricted and suffocating places may face death or injuries that prevent them from being sold. Thus, they are discarded and left to die along with the African-American female slaves who have become unwanted or diseased:

> "There are women far worse off than you. Like those smuggled into the Gold Mountains hidden in padded crates labeled dishware or inside coal bunkers. Many of them don't survive the journey or arrive so bruised and broken they cannot be sold. … Those women are taken straight to the same 'hospitals' as slave girls who have ceased to be attractive or who have become diseased. There, alone in tiny, windowless cells, they're laid on wooden shelves to wait for death from starvation or their own hand." (102-3)

The girl with scars, a nameless fictional character who appears only in this one scene, tries to console Lalu with the fact of her better fortune. She tells Lalu, "[Y]ou made the journey with papers and a woman to look out for you. You're thin, but beautiful and sound" (103), to which Lalu uncaringly replies, "What does that change except my price?" (103). Nevertheless, the girl advises Lalu that she must learn to become emotionally indifferent in order to survive as a slave: "The girl took Lalu's hands in hers, holding them tight, quieting their trembling. 'You must learn as I have to let your mind take flight. Then you won't feel, and if you don't feel, nothing anyone does can hurt you' " (103). As such, Lalu tries to hold on to this principle as well. However, she could not help but doubt it as she has seen evidence of how the girl has been hurt, both physically and mentally: " 'If you don't feel, nothing can hurt you,' She repeated the thin, dark girl's words, reminding. But then she saw again the hurt in the girl's defiant black eyes, the puckered flesh, scars real and deep" (107).

It is implied in many instances that the smuggled women are taken advantage of because of the Chinese social convention of arranged marriages and their illiteracy. As marriages are arranged by matchmakers, who go between the families of the grooms and the brides without their meeting in person, some girls are tricked into believing that they are traveling to America to be married to merchants overseas. Some women argue that they have marriage contracts, but then the old woman who is one of the smugglers challenges them to read their contracts and reveal that they are in fact prostitution contracts. In other words, the smugglers exploit the country women's illiteracy to force them into prostitution.

> "Does anyone here read?"
>
> The women looked hopefully at each other. Some shook their heads. Others were simply silent. None could read.
>
> "Then I'll tell you what your contracts say." Without looking at any of the papers, the old woman continued, "For the sum of your passage money, you have promised the use of your bodies for prostitution."
>
> "But the marriage broker gave my parents the passage money," the young woman persisted.
>
> "You fool, that was a procurer, not a marriage broker!" (98-9)

Lalu learns that she is one of those without contracts, or those whom the old woman calls "the lucky ones" (98). For those with contracts, she says, "Their fates have been decided, it's prostitution for them, but if you play your cards right, you may still get the bridal chair" (98). Hope for a proper marriage or life of luxury is used as a psychological persuasion to urge the smuggled women to 'behave' themselves for the auction, as the smugglers tell the girls to act meekly and make themselves attractive: "There'll be merchants, miners, well-to-do peddlers, brothel owners, and those who just want to look. They'll examine you for soundness and beauty. Do yourself up right, smile sweetly, and the bids will come in thick and fast from those looking for wives as well as those looking to fill a house" (101). It is also clear that the slavers

use threats of imprisonment, further discomfort and worse living conditions as a tactic to make their slaves more cooperative and submissive as well.

> "Depending on your looks, you can be placed in an elegant house and dressed in silk and jewels or in a bagnio."
>
> "Bagnio?"
>
> "On your way here you must have seen the doors with the barred windows facing the alleys, but perhaps you did not hear the chickens inside, tapping and scratching the screens, trying to attract a man without bringing a cop. Cry, make yourself ugly, and you'll be one of those chickens, charging twenty-five cents for a look, fifty cents for a feel, and seventy-five cents for action." (100)

Then, when a woman tries to console those who have no other choices except for becoming prostitutes by encouraging them to look forward to the end of their contracts, the old woman argues that the days they have menstruations each month, as well as any other sick days, will be added to their remaining work time. This unfair condition ensures life enslavement for the smuggled women.

> "I put my mark on one of those contracts, and I knew what it was for." Her face reddened. "I had to," she added. ... "The contract specifies the number of years, five in my case, so take heart sisters, our shame will not last forever."
>
> "What about your sick days? ... The contract states your monthly sick days will be counted against your time: two weeks for one sick day, another month for each additional sick day."
>
> "But that means I'll never be free!"
>
> "Exactly."
>
> Like a stone dropped in a pond, the word started wave after wave of talk and tears. (99)

In contrast to the harsh reality revealed in the smuggling and the slave trade, the fictional biography also introduces and counter-argues the idea of "American Dream" from Part Two onward. During and after the harsh ship voyage to San Francisco, Lalu desperately clings on to the dreams that she can become rich in America, called 'the Gold Mountains' by the Chinese people in the story. Lalu recalls how the Madam of the brothel tells her, "I have never been there, but Li Ma, the woman for whom I bought you, says there is gold everywhere. On the streets, in the hills, mountains, rivers, and valleys. Gold just waiting to be picked up..." (91-2). In reply, Lalu whispers to herself "Gold that will make me rich. So rich, no one, not even the Old Man Yang, will dare speak against me if I go home" (92). However, Lalu does not intend to start her life anew in America yet, it is apparent that she wants to seek wealth so that she can bring it back home to support her family and make them proud of her. Once, she tells Jim, her only Chinese friend in Warrens, that "When my father came back from Mongolia … he made my brother and I learn the saying - the copper corner of one's hometown is more precious than the gold or silver corner at the end of the earth" (130). During the harsh voyage, Lalu clings to her hope; "Hugging herself inwardly, she had pictured her parents' and brothers' faces when she gave her father the gold that would make him the richest man in the village. The pride they would have in her, their qianjin. And she had held fast to this picture, as to a talisman" (92). And once, in another instance, Lalu tries to drive away the memories of the horrible journey by convincing herself, "That was all over. Behind her. No more than a bad dream. She was in America, the Gold Mountains. And soon, just as soon as she gathered enough gold, she would go home" (93). However, Lalu soon becomes disillusioned by the truth she learns about the prostitution and life enslavement of other fellow women. For her, America no longer seems to be the land of freedom where she can expect to accumulate wealth and seek a better life.

> She had been duped, she realized. By the soft voiced, gentle Madam, a cormorant who had nothing to give except to its master. By Li Ma, the foulmouthed procuress charged with Lalu's delivery to the auction room. By the talk of freemen whose dreams could never be hers. For the Gold Mountains they had described was not the America

> she would know. This: the dingy basement room, the blank faces of women and girls stripped of hope, the splintered boards beneath her feet, the auction block. This was her America. (102)

The counterbalance between the myth of the "American Dream" and the reality of marginalization and discrimination are prevalent throughout the rest of the novel. Lalu as a *semic code* functions as the main representative of the female experiences of slavery and sexual exploitation as she comes into contact with other marginalized and exploited people. For women, there are the smuggled Chinese women, the most notable one being the dark-skinned, scarred girl. There are also the hurdy-gurdy German girls in Warrens, one of whom Lalu's master, Hong King, pays to dress her as a saloon girl. Lalu learns from Jim, the Chinese porter whom Hong King hires to escort Lalu to Warrens, that the hurdy-gurdy girls are put in some kind of debt similar to that of the Chinese girls. However, possibly because they are white women like the majority of the immigrants, they seem to enjoy more freedom and have more opportunity to become free if a man helps clear her debt: "Jim had told Lalu that the hurdy gurdy girls in Warrens were recruited from Germany, that they owed the price of their passage to an agent, and that they paid it off by working at the saloon, dancing, encouraging the customers to buy more drinks. But often, a miner wanting a wife would pay off the balance due, making her free to marry" (120). According to Jim, the German girls do not necessarily have to work as prostitutes. Lalu also finds out that they have access to guns for self-protection, as the hurdy-gurdy girl shows Lalu her gun and advises her to get one for herself:

> The girl drew a derringer from inside her bodice. She nodded toward the door that led to the saloon. From the other side came the sounds of stamping feet, table thumping, shouts for Polly. "You need."
>
> Lalu gaped at the tiny gun. Jim had said the hurdy gurdy girls were not required to give favors. He had not told her that they had to carry guns to ensure it. (121)

There is also another group of marginalized people: the Native Americans whom Lalu sees from the distance during her journey to Warrens. On the way, Lalu spurs her mule to run away on impulse when she fears that she will have to prostitute herself to the men of Warrens. Alone, she reflects on where she can go, finding nowhere. She thinks of the Native Americans as "the barbarian demons who made their villages in the open spaces beyond the filthy mining camps" (108) and considers them a threat: "they were frightening too. Armed with bows and arrows, small, sharply honed hatchets, and sometimes rifles, they threatened violent death, and when any approached, she could sense angry fear in the white demons she had run from" (108). Nevertheless, despite their barbarism, Lalu cannot help but notice how the Native Americans have their own different, alienated way of living, and how they seem like 'homeless refugees' she has seen back in China. Through the eyes of Lalu, who apparently does not know about the history of the oppression of the Native Americans, McCunn implies that it is ironic that the Native Americans have become the marginalized and the exiled on their own land. While America becomes home and hope to the white immigrants seeking new opportunities and wealth, the land's original inhabitants suffer from oppression at the hands of the newcomers.

> Dirty and black haired, they wore strange combinations of feathers, beaded skins, and demon shirts and pants, and they lived in tents that looked like funnels turned upside down. Their voices, when they demanded liquor and trinkets, were insolent, their manners arrogant. *Yet they seemed sad, their black eyes as mournful as those of the homeless refugees she had once seen pass through her village.* (108, my italics)

Similar to the Native Americans, the Chinese in America can hardly attain their "American Dream" in this land. While the white people look down on the Chinese, the Chinese hold both fear and contempt for the white men and are wary of them. Westerners are called "dead ghosts" or "demons" by the Chinese. One instance in which Lalu finds out that America is not as wonderful a land she has expected is when some white boys throw stones and mud balls at her and the other Chinese

women after they have passed through the customs. Lalu reacts by throwing stones back at them, driving them away, but Li Ma scolds her.

> "Stop that you dead foolish girl or you'll have the authorities after us."
>
> "But they started it."
>
> "Are you so dim-witted that you don't know you're in a demon land? The laws are made by demons to protect demons, not us. Let's just hope we can get to Chinatown before they come back with officers or we'll find ourselves rotting in a demon jail." (97)

In another instance, Lalu reflects on the characteristics of the Western men, or the so-called demons. She has heard from another woman that the Western men act like children. However, Lalu still thinks that they are fearsome because they have power:

> The woman who had taken Lalu to Portland had said the white demons were merely overgrown children, unable to control their selfish desires and passions. But Lalu knew they could not be dismissed so lightly. Armed with guns and knives, they were as quick to fight and shoot as the bandits who had snatched her from her village. Only these "bandits" had the power to make laws, laws that made people like Li Ma afraid when Lalu had thrown stones back at the demon children who had attacked them. (109)

It becomes apparent to Lalu that the whites dominate the Chinese and other people by their law and might. Some Chinese miners are controlled by the white masters called 'China herders,' and Lalu becomes afraid that, in the saloon, she will have to service them as well: "[Jim] had pointed out China herders, demons who jumped claims for Chinese miners and guarded them while they worked. But to Lalu, the China herders had looked the same as the other demons: tall, brawny, hairy, and dirty. Like the demons in the saloons in Lewiston. The ones in the saloon where she

would be forced to work" (109). The Chinese's fear of the white is accentuated in their refusal to risk making confrontation or dispute, even to protect their rights or their fellow people. According to Jim, the number of the Chinese miners is much higher than that of the white men: "There are sixteen hundred men in Warrens, twelve hundred Chinese, four hundred or so whites" (106). However, when Lalu is harassed in the saloon by the white men, Hong King, her master, becomes angry at Lalu for not being able to protect herself, whereas Jim and the other Chinese present simply retreat.

> Suddenly, as she was being tossed to another demon, Lalu realized he was gone. All the Chinese had vanished. Except Hong King. And he was red with fury. At her, not the demons, she was sure.
>
> She was alone. Just as she had been this afternoon when she rode into camp. Just as she had been since Chen took her from her home. (125)

Instead Lalu is saved by Charlie, a white man who easily demands that the men put her down. Soon after, Jim comes back to Lalu and "explained how when he had seen her in trouble, he had gone to fetch Charlie" (126). Jim praises Charlie's shooting ability, but Lalu argues that Jim can shoot equally well as he does. However, Jim then reveals that he should not keep his guns with him when he is in the camp. Lalu becomes infuriated and retorts that even the hurdy-gurdy girls have guns. To this, Jim replies that he and the Chinese cannot risk getting into a fight with the white men, lest they will kill him and many other Chinese men.

> "If I had tried to help you, I couldn't have just walked in like Charlie did and say, 'Put her down,' I would have had to shoot to kill, and you can be sure I'd be strung up on a tree by now, with a half dozen Chinese beside me."
>
> "But you said the Chinese in this camp outnumber the demons."
>
> "The white men have the power." (127)

In contrast to the powerless Jim, Charlie, as a white man, represents the authority not only because of his ability but also because of his 'superior' race. However, Jim trusts Charlie and assures Lalu, "Charlie is a good man. Trust him, he'll be a true friend to you" (127). In some way, Jim and Charlie are friends and kindred spirits. However, they do not share an equal status in the eyes of other people. As Lalu remarks, Jim may be as capable as Charlie. However, he cannot demand respect as Charlie does because he is Chinese, even though Lalu notices that Jim has adopted much of the Western culture and can give her much helpful advice as one who has lived in both worlds. In this way, Jim as a *semic code* has multiple functions. Firstly, he is a foil to Charlie. Secondly, he serves as Lalu's advisor, the last link to her Chinese background, and possible love interest. Thirdly, he represents the Chinese workers who come to seek better opportunities in America. Fourthly, he is a *symbolic code* relating to Lalu's disillusionment of the American Dream.

In *The Tale of Murasaki*, Dalby has similarly created a male character named Ming-gwok as a fictitious love interest for Murasaki when she follows her father to Echizen. Dalby states on her webpage that Ming-gwok, the romantic Chinese man, "may be the least plausible of the totally fictional characters in is made visible early in the novel, but he is not impossible." In an interview with Sally McLaren, Dalby again states, "Ming-gwok is fictional and it's a stretch, but not impossible." He is the son of Master Jyo, the leader of the Chinese delegation who meets Murasaki's father in Echizen. Then, he and Murasaki become involved in a short love affair which seems to make a long-lasting impression on both of them. In relation to the central themes of *The Tale of Murasaki*, the romantic Ming-gwok who respects and values Murasaki as she is and treats her as an equal may not play an important role. However, Ming-gwok's meeting with Murasaki serves as the basis for Murasaki to start viewing her Japanese culture differently in comparison to the Chinese one as the other culture. Dalby states on her webpage, "[H]aving an outsider like Ming-gwok gives Murasaki a chance to reflect on things that otherwise she would have taken for granted." And in the interview by McLaren, she says, "Without Ming-gwok there is no reason for Murasaki to talk about things like the seasons, poetry and the Heian

fascination and admiration for Chinese culture. Through him we learn more about Heian Japan."

Similarly, Jim performs the role of a go-between between the Chinese and American culture for Lalu, as he speaks the same northern dialect as she. Lalu sees how Jim has adopted much of the Western culture, and yet makes her feel as if he were her older brother: "From a distance, with his queue coiled beneath the bulge of his Stetson, his red flannel shirt and corduroy pants stuffed into high leather boots, he could be mistaken for a demon. He even wore guns in his belt and chewed tobacco like they did. And he used a demon name. Yet he had treated her as kindly as he would a younger sister" (110). For Lalu, Jim is an important advisor who teaches her how to survive in this alien land. When Lalu seems unable to accept the fact that she must learn to work in the saloons and the fact that Jim is drilling her with English words for that purpose, he tells her frankly, "I know the saloons gave you a bad shock. That what I said and the way I said it was brutal. But when you see a demon, you must confront it. Only then will the demon disappear" (111). In addition, Jim is well aware of the fact that he will not be able to protect Lalu every time she is in need of protection and reminds her thus: "I'm a packer … In camp for two, three days, gone for three weeks, a month. If you're to survive, you must stand alone" (115).

Because of the closeness Jim and Lalu share as they can communicate in the same language and travel together for a long time to get to Warrens, a romantic, mutual bond grows between them. It is visible that their love starts to grow even during the trip: "Lalu would lie wide awake, savoring the shared closeness of their talk, promise of a deeper intimacy. A promise all the more precious as ... the distance separating her from her master shorter" (114). As such, she feels desperate and betrayed when Jim is not there to help her when she is harassed by the white men: "Where was Jim? She knew her refusal to meet his gaze had betrayed her shame. But he had said he was her friend. Always. Then why wasn't he helping her?" (125). And after Lalu has begun working in Hong King's saloons, "She live[s] for [the days Jim returns to camp]. And her day of freedom" (128). The bond with Jim becomes a significant emotional support to Lalu, and thus the main reason why it is included in the novel, even though Jim's roles in the fictional biography may deviate from the biographical fact in which the

historical Lalu/Polly recalls in her interview, as quoted by McCunn. The historical Polly states in her interview that “Old Chinee-man he took me to Warrens in a pack train” (314). This purposeful deviation on the packer’s age may serve to shorten the age gap between Jim and Lalu so that they can become possible love interest to each other, as well as to turn the character of Jim into the embodiment of the young, once romantic Chinese workers in search of the American Dream.

This leads to the third function of Jim’s character. He represents the Chinese workers coming to America in pursuit of the American Dream. At first when Lalu meets him, he seems to have been successful, to some extent, in achieving his dreams. He used to be an indebted laborer, but has managed to win his freedom and now owns a pack train. So, he tells Lalu to look forward to the time she too will become free: “Eleven years ago, when I came to America, all I had was my strength. So I sold it to a company that contracted labor. At that time a healthy Chinese man marketed for four to six hundred dollars, one with extraordinary ability a thousand. It took me six angry, bitter years to work off my debt, but now I am my own man. And you will be your own woman again, I promise you” (112).

Fourthly, Jim ultimately functions as a *symbolic code* representing Lalu’s disillusionment with the American Dream, as well as the end of her tie to China. At the end of Part Two, Jim unexpectedly dies falling off a cliff in an accident, and Lalu almost cannot bring herself to accept it: “Still, she could not believe Jim's broken body lay rotting beneath the damp earth and decaying leaves on which she knelt. He was ... [t]oo alive to become mere memory” (133). After Jim’s death, Lalu opens up to Charlie and admits that her former self, Lalu, is also dead in America.

> Without a word, Charlie laid down his fiddle and took Lalu in his arms. She leaned against him, shaking, her body racked with huge sobs as she wept.
>
> For Jim.
>
> And for Lalu.
>
> Both dead forever in a strange land. (134)

This is the last point in the fictional biography that the protagonist is referred to as "Lalu." From Part Three onward, Lalu is referred to as "Polly" until the end. Jim's role as Lalu's advisor and reminder of her homeland ends at the same point as well.

Regarding the theme of oppression, the presentation of the oppressor/colonizer in *Thousand Pieces of Gold* is not limited to the idea that the white oppress those of different ethnicities. Lalu as a slave is doubly colonized – as a Chinese and as a woman. Lalu's master, Hong King, is not a white man, but a Chinese man who has come to seek new opportunities in America. Now he owns a saloon and buys Lalu to increase the number of his customers. On her way to Warrens, Jim tells Lalu that she is wanted by Hong King for financial reasons like the hurdy-gurdy girls – to entertain the men in Warrens, whose number far exceeds that of the women: "Only [his saloon] is empty of customers. That's why he bought you" (106). It is also implied that Lalu's Chinese ethnicity will attract male customers to Hong King's saloon by virtue of exoticism for the white men, and familiarity for the Chinese. Jim says, "[T]here are eleven women. Three are wives, two are widows, and a half dozen are hurdy gurdy girls. But they're all white. You'll be the only Chinese woman, an attraction that will bring men, Chinese and white, from miles around" (106). Hong King's tactic seems to work, as evident in Lalu's words: "the number of customers has quadrupled since I came" (130).

When Lalu arrives, Hong King immediately exerts his power by forcing her to accept a new, European name: " 'A slave does not choose her own name,' he snapped in Chinese. 'From now on you are Polly. Is that understood?' " (117). He also forces himself on her the first afternoon she arrives, taking her virginity and claiming that "The first taste will be mine" (117). The rape, apart from being a *proairetic code*, is a *symbolic code* denoting Hong King's subjugation of Lalu. The short scene is portrayed hardly with any erotic desire on Hing King's part, but with his need to show Lalu his superiority as a man and her master – despite the fact that Hong King visibly has physical difficulties: "He blamed Lalu for his lack of arousal. Her feet were so big and her hands so coarse he thought he was in bed with a man. And her ignorance was not to be believed. Did he have to tell her everything?" (118). Nevertheless, he succeeds in his act and "in the stain of blood that proved his victory,

Lalu saw the death of yet another dream" (118). It is implied that Lalu despairs because she thinks she cannot get married when she has lost her virginity to Hong King. She then inevitably becomes Hong King's sexual slave and is harassed in the saloon on her first day of work. As such, Lalu is dominated by men of both Chinese and Western ethnicities – except for Jim and Charlie. The metaphor of the 'demon' used by the Chinese to describe the white people is questioned and reverted in Lalu's furious remark toward the white men: "How can you call them men when they act like demons?" (127) and Jim's retort: "Would you call Hong King who used you like a whore a man and the man who saved you tonight a demon?" (127).

Not only is Lalu's identity erased through the denial of her real name, she is called by various epithets that either objectify or misidentify her. These epithets are such as "[t]he china doll" (116) and "kimono girl" (122). Lalu is often described as a doll because of her short stature, as described by one of the men: "[a] little doll, no taller than a broom" (124). However, the word also carries the connotation that Lalu is not a human with feelings and thoughts, but a lifeless plaything. Similarly, the epithet "kimono girl" misidentifies her ethnicity as Japanese and implies how Western people generalize Asians of different ethnicities as having no difference. Lalu also sees the men as predatory animals and she herself the inferior prey: "They were all the same. Hungry. Like the coyotes she heard howling in the night. And she was their prey" (123).

Lalu's reaction to her new status in this part is a mixture of indifference, resignation and defiance. When she is bought off the auction block, Lalu reacts indifferently: "Lalu knew she had not been purchased for a wife. She no longer cared" (104). Then, when Jim reveals to her the purpose that Hong King purchases her, Lalu considers trying to escape on the way, but then becomes resigned and gives it up because there is practically nowhere safe for her to go: "Where would she go? To return to Lewiston or Portland or San Francisco would mean capture, possible mutilation, the bagnio, or perhaps even the 'hospital.' " (108). Lalu dreads the idea that she has to put on Western dresses like the hurdy-gurdy girls and entertain the Western men by dancing with them and probably prostituting to them: "Did her master expect her to dress like these half-naked, painted demon women? To dance

with hairy, unwashed demon men? To lie with them, one woman among sixteen hundred men?" (107). However, she finds no escape from her predicament and eventually has to accept Ding's idea of fatalism.

> If only she could gather up enough gold, she could go home. But the gold she had expected to find lying everywhere was buried in hard rock or in beds of ice cold mountain streams. She would need pick, shovel, and pan. Her hand dropped to her waist. The jewelry hidden in her waistband might buy the needed outfit and with luck, she might even find a gulch that had not already been worked clean. But without protection, she would never live to take home the gold she found.
>
> Ding was right. She could not escape her fate. (110)

Nevertheless, despite her condition as a slave, Lalu shows her defiance in many instances. Arriving at Warrens, Lalu is lifted off the mule by a Western man and called by the name "Polly." In stead of submitting, she firmly attempts to make them acknowledge her real name by repeatedly voicing out, "Lalu. Me Lalu" and "My name Lalu" (116). Furthermore, when Hong King grabs Lalu and declares that she is to be called Polly from now on, Lalu cannot accept his first order meekly. She has to restrain her anger: "Lalu knew ... that she should lower her eyes and bow assent, yet she could not. Her grip hardened, the long nails digging through the thin fabric of her jacket and into her flesh" (117), and then simply answers "Yes, I understand" (117).

A set of actions that serves as *semic codes* that constitute the *symbolic code* for Lalu's domination and defiance involves her dressing up for her first time at work. She is forced to change from her Chinese bodice to the Western corset, which similarly connotes another form of restriction for women: "The corset which replaced her Chinese bodice squeezed the breath out of Lalu, and the whalebone stays cut into her flesh. Did demon women's bodies naturally curve like the necks of vases or did the lacing of the corset work like foot binding cloths, changing the shape of the body after years of suffering, Lalu wondered" (120). Corset-wearing is also a *cultural code*

regarding the beauty standards of the new culture Lalu is being exposed to. Similar to foot binding, corset wearing is meant to improve women's physical desirability to me, as the hurdy-gurdy girl tells Lalu, "Small pretty. Good for catch husband" (120). Lalu then reflects on the girl's words: whether small waists can really make her more attractive for marriage, and whether she can get married to another man and become free even though Hong King has taken her virginity: "Was this girl trying to tell Lalu that tiny waists, like bound feet, were necessary for a good marriage? That marriage was still possible despite Hong King?" (120).

Like the unbinding of Lalu's feet, Lalu's major act of defiance in Part Two involves how she adjusts her Western saloon girl's clothes in her own way. Before Lalu comes out of her room to meet the customers as 'Polly,' she reflects, "She was Hong King's slave, his to use as was his right, but she had not yet become a whore" (122). Lalu then readjusts her clothing to look more modest and comfortable:

> [S]he unhooked the high-heeled boots and slipped on her soft cloth shoes. She took out pitcher and washbowl from the commode and scrubbed her face clean of rouge, powder, and paint. She recombed her hair, smoothing out the silly finger puffs. Finally, she wrapped a lace shawl around her naked shoulders.
>
> She looked at her image in the mirror. The sad-eyed woman she saw was not the girl her family had known, but the face was clean and honest. (122)

In this part, Lalu seems to be trying to find a solution to whether she should resist the oppression brought upon her as a woman and a Chinese among the white, or yield to her oppressors in order to survive. There is no clear, definite choice. When Jim mentions how Hong King uses her "like a whore" (127), she bitterly asks, "How could I stop him?" (127). To this, Jim consoles her, "Lalu, you did, and you will continue to do what you must in order to live. There's no shame in that" (127). Obviously Lalu has to suffer some sacrifices – but the question remains: to what extent? Lalu resorts to force herself to work in Hong King's saloon and satisfy his

desires with the ultimate hope that one day she, like Jim, will be free. At the same time, she holds on to Jim as her model of freedom and patiently waits, wondering "It had taken Jim six years to buy his freedom. Would it take her as long?" (129). She also hopes to buy her freedom with the gold dust she secretly hoards from the sweepings from the saloon floor. She jokes with Jim that now she is the one to exploit Hong King in the end: "White men mine the rich claims. Chinese mine the ones that have been worked over, Hong King mines the miners, and I mine Hong King" (129).

However, as Lalu clings on to this hope of freedom and home, Jim tries to warn her to face reality without encouraging her to keep her hope too high. Lalu recalls, "From the day she had run from the saloons until this moment, Jim had never again mentioned her freedom, and since her delivery to Hong King, the unkept promise had lain like a stillborn child between them" (130). Jim sees through Lalu's yearning for her home in China and frankly – even harshly – discourages Lalu from making any false hope because she can no longer expect her family to take her in or even miss her. He says, "When we were on the trail, I heard you call in your sleep for your father, and I've seen your face when you sneak out to hold Mrs. Saux's baby. It's not Melina you're crooning nursery rhymes to, it's your baby brother. And when you look at the sky and sniff the air and feel the wind, you're halfway round the world again, in your father's fields. Your family means everything to you. But you're dead to them" (131). When Lalu refuses to listen, Jim says that she is not only enslaved by Hong King, but by the self-delusion she has created to protect herself. When Jim says, "Face it! You're dead to them" (132), Lalu retorts, "No … I'm their qianjin" (132). To this, Jim ultimately warns her, "If you still believe that, you're as much a slave to your own falsehoods as you are to Hong King" (132).

To summarize, the concepts of oppression and marginalization in Part Two are gradually developed as Lalu comes into contact with the culture and peoples of America – especially the marginalized. The oppression she is faced with becomes much more complex as she is doubly enslaved because of her sex and ethnicity. Lalu reacts to it by selectively yielding to her oppressors when necessary, covertly defying the oppression in her way, and continuing to dwell on the hope that one day she will be free and be able to return to her family as a defense-mechanism, even though such

hope can be impractical. Jim and Charlie, two new main characters, are introduced as Lalu's advisor/helper. Jim has a more important role in this part as he functions as multiple codes of narrative, and his death signals the end of the second part as well as the change in Lalu's perception of her identity.

Then, Part Three illustrates Polly's resolution to acquire her freedom in her own way, Charlie's help in achieving it, and his acceptance of Polly as an equal. Charlie has more important roles in the story as he replaces Jim as Lalu's advisor, helper, and lover. In Part Two, Lalu once complains to Jim, "[Charlie] watches over me like a China herder. If there's any trouble, I just run out the door and wait in his back room until he straightens it out. … But we can't talk. Not like you and I do" (132). To this Jim replies, "That way you can't argue" (132). As such, the main barrier between Lalu and Charlie in the previous part is their inability to communicate, possibly because Lalu has not yet learned enough English, and she sees Charlie as no different from the other white American 'demons.' But then, the barrier gradually dissolves after Lalu and Charlie accidentally meet when she comes to offer some food and spirit money at Jim's grave and Charlie comes to put some flowers at his grave and play him some songs on his fiddle. They open up to each other in Jim's absence, and by the beginning of Part Three, they have become lovers even while Polly remains Hong King's chattel. However, a new conflict surfaces when Polly learns from a black customer that she should have been free: "You ain't no slave, honey … They is no slaves in America, not fo' ten years" (138) and feels betrayed that Charlie, who should be aware of this fact, never reveals it to her: "The words should have filled her with joy. Instead, she felt a sense of betrayal as strong and deep and painful as when her father had picked up the bags of seed. For if the black man was right and she was not really a slave, why hadn't Charlie told her?" (138).

Throughout the chapter, Charlie's family background and his personality are revealed to emphasize the idea that he is the embodiment of freedom. He is portrayed as a self-made and educated man who loves independence and honesty. This is evident in Polly's summary of his background: "Charlie, your father doctor, and you have fine education and beautiful home in Connecticut. But you run away because your father try make you surgeon and you not want. You work as deck hand on ship,

and when you reach San Francisco, you hear about gold rush, and you try mining. Now you saloon keeper and gambler. But if you want change again tomorrow, nothing stop you. You free" (144). She also acknowledges how the people of Warrens consider him a respectable mediator: "He was always reading books and newspapers so he had to know the law. In fact, he was often asked by miners to solve minor disputes, for his knowledge and reputation for honesty made his judgments respected even when disliked" (138). From all this, Charlie seems to represent the image of the ideal self-made and just American man. And thus, for this reason, Polly feels doubly betrayed by his silence as he is both her lover and the particular image: "She could understand why no Chinese had spoken. Those loyal to Hong King would not, and the others either did not know or did not dare to speak. And the white men and women had no reason to interfere. But Charlie?" (138)

Thus, she decides to confront Charlie on the matter. Polly's summary of the circumstances of the African American people compares her to them and highlight their similarities, as she is taken away from home and sold as slave like them: "Black man come to saloon tonight. He tell me his people come from Africa. Like me, stolen from village and bring here, but man name Lincoln make war and they free. He free, I free" (139). However, Charlie points out to the difference in their circumstance by saying, "The Civil War was fought to free Negroes" (139) and specifies that, while the African Americans are now free by law, the law enforcement puts Polly at a disadvantage. Then, in the end he consoles Polly that she has much better living conditions than the black slaves in the past – she can enjoy a life of comfort, convenience, security and safety.

> "The Negroes had terrible lives," she heard him say. "They came to America in chains and were forced to work under conditions you can't begin to imagine. Many of them barely had enough to eat. They were at the mercy of their masters and overseers. Whipped. Raped. Sold at will. Things aren't so bad for you here.
>
> He lifted a corner of her silk skirt, rubbed it between his fingers meaningfully, pointed to the snow white petticoats beneath. "You have

> beautiful clothes and plenty to eat. I keep the men in line and Hong King..." He paused.
>
> "You're better off than a lot of free people," he finished abruptly. (142)

The above passage implies that Charlie acknowledges that Polly does not have the freedom to refuse Hong King's sexual advances or working in his saloon, but he persuades her to focus on the supposed advantages of her conditions instead.

Through the same conversation with Charlie, the complexity of Polly's situation as an illegal immigrant is revealed; she cannot go to government officers to report her enslavement by Hong King or else she will be deported to China. Charlie states, "Years ago, special laws were passed in California to forbid the kind of auctions and contracts that made you a slave, but the laws only raised the price of slave girls" (139). When Polly asks why the law cannot deter illegal slavery of the smuggled women, but instead make them more expensive, he replies, "Because girls started running away and it cost their masters a great deal of money to get them back" (140). Charlie explains how Hong King can make the sheriff arrest Polly on some false charges. He can also pay bribery or exploit the problems in translation and legal technicalities to ensure that he gets Polly back.

> "The system works something like this … If you ran away from Hong King, he would trump up some charge that would force the sheriff to come after you. Then, when you were caught, Hong King would get a friend of his to bail you out, and once he got you back, he would drop the charges."
>
> "You tell judge Hong King make me slave."
>
> "I wish it were that simple, but judges and lawyers are not always indifferent to bribes, and there's a problem with language and translators, and technicalities in the law. There are the highbinders from the tongs as well. They've been known to kill those who've tried to escape and those who've helped them too." (140)

Charlie tells Polly that if she wants to try, he will help. Nevertheless, he warns her, “[Y]ou should know that the majority of women who have braved the courts have lost, and of the few that have won, most have been deported” (141). This forces Polly to consider what she can do if she were to be sent back to China. She knows she can make a living by farming and she can buy some land with the gold she has saved. However, the problem is that she cannot remain single in China and has to marry according to the Chinese tradition.

> What would happen to her if she were sent back to China? … Either her mother and father were dead, or she was dead to them. Either way, she could not go home.
>
> But the gold she had saved would buy some land. Land she could farm like her father had taught her. If the villagers permitted. She thought of the widows’ struggles in her own village. The suspicion and hostility a single woman would arouse. And she knew if she went back to China, she would have to marry. (141)

Polly, then, begins to doubt about marriage: whether performing the duties of a daughter, a wife and a mother can ensure a woman’s happiness. She recalls how she has hoped to become Chen’s or Jim’s wife in order to be free. At this point, Polly realizes that being a daughter, a wife and a mother is not unlike a slave, as a woman is defined by the man to whom she belongs or is related, not who she really is. She then views marriage as change of a woman’s master instead.

> All through her childhood she had believed what her mother had told her, that getting married and birthing children were a woman’s happiness. Even after she had begun working in the fields and doubts had seeped in like dust from a summer storm, she had not really questioned the truth of what her mother had said, Wasn’t marriage for a woman as inevitable as birth and death? When Chen had bought her, she had tried to offer herself to him, to be his wife, thinking that would make everything all right. And during the journey

> into Warrens she had hoped and even prayed that Jim would buy her for his wife. Now she was not sure, Her mother had said a woman belongs to the father of her sons. If she married, wouldn't she be exchanging one master for another? (141-2)

As a result, Polly becomes disappointed with Charlie for suggesting that she should remain in Hong King's protection and not seek freedom. She realizes how she has never told him what she has endured as a slave in this unfamiliar land because she thinks he can understand her without her having to speak, but that is not true.

> For more than two years now, they had shared the same bed. But what did he know of her life beyond his bed and cabin and Hong King's saloon? She had never told him about the long weeks crammed into the hold of the ship, scarcely able to breathe the stale, stinking air. The humiliation of standing naked on an auction block. The way her gorge rose each time Hong King mounted her. Her fears that if she did not obey she would be sold to a bagnio or sent to a "hospital." She had not told him because she had thought he could understand without words. She had been wrong. (143)

Polly's love of freedom is accentuated by the author's reference to one particular incident in the life of the real Polly Bemis. In the Reader's Guide, McCunn states, "Polly loved animals and often made pets out of wild creatures" (323). When Polly was living in Warrens, she took in a nest of orphaned robin chicks and raised them, letting them fly freely. They came to demand meat scraps from a butcher's clerk and, as a result, he killed them out of annoyance. In the fictional biography, the incident is recounted as a *symbolic code* relating to Polly's love of freedom. It is stated that she lets the birds out of the cage because she cannot bear to ignore their cries to be free: "But their cries tore at her, and finally she opened the door, letting them fly where they pleased" (143). Symbolically, the incident hints that Polly will not regret dying or being killed striving for her freedom herself. Polly recounts how she is told that the birds' lives would have been spared if she had imprison them, and

how Charlie, who can enjoy freedom to pursue his choices in the beginning, cannot understand her way of thinking:

> [I]f she had kept them in the cage Charlie had made for them, his clerk would not have killed them.
>
> Charlie had told her the same thing, and she had tried to explain why, even though she mourned the birds' deaths, she did not regret leaving them uncaged. But he had not understood. Then how could she make him understand her own need to escape the cage that held her? (144)

In this part, Polly decides to tell Charlie, "I only daughter of farmer who cannot read or write. But I too want be free" (144). Even though Polly has not had the same privileges as Charlie – a white, educated, independent man, she makes it clear that she too has the right to be free. It is then that Charlie reveals to Polly that both he and Jim know that Hong King will never sell her, no matter how high the price. However, Jim has asked Charlie to promise that he will not tell Lalu so that she can keep the will to go on living: "Jim made me swear I wouldn't. He said hope was all you had to live for, and he couldn't rob you of that" (145).

The revelation becomes a major turning point of Part Three as it drives Polly to plot murdering Hong King so that she can finally be free. Having stolen Charlie's shotgun, Polly goes out to practice shooting in the mountains. She finds a fool hen and selects it as an easy target. At first, Polly is reluctant to shoot it as she hesitates to kill Hong King, thinking that it would be better to wait for him to die naturally for her freedom: "[The fool hen's] tiny beadlike eyes made Polly think of Hong King and his refusal to let her go. Abruptly, she lifted Charlies' rifle. Just as abruptly, she lowered it, swallowing, her mouth suddenly dry. Hong King was not a bird, but a man. And old man who would surely die before many years passed, leaving her free, without blood on her hands" (149). But then, another animal imagery is included – that of the dragonflies Lalu's brothers used to abuse as children until the animals die. This is the first of the series of the animal images which present the animals exhausting

themselves "going between" two ends without being able to stop. It is implied that Polly, as a slave woman, is like those dragonflies – she will have to continue changing masters until she herself dies. The thought turns Hong King into an image – the representative of the "master" which Polly is convinced that she must destroy by her own hands for her freedom:

> [S]he thought of the dragonflies her brothers used to catch and tie with thread then force to fly from one boy to the next. After a while, their gossamer wings would fall off but, captives still, they could not stop. So they crawled from one master to the other until, exhausted, they died.
>
> Polly's hold on the rifle tightened. Hong King was not just any old man. He was her master. And if she wanted her freedom, she would have to kill. (149)

As such, Polly kills the fool hen and plans Hong King's murder, which she believes can be accomplished very easily; "Polly planned her strategy. It should not be difficult, for like the fool hen, Hong King had grown complacent, leaving her to run the saloon while he played fan-tan or poker. If she waited until he came to pick up the night's earnings, she could shoot him without witnesses, and he would be dead before he realized that *behind his slave's placid mask lay a woman scheming for freedom*" (151, my italics).

Nevertheless, Polly never has the chance to carry out her plan. When she returns from the mountains, she finds Charlie and Hong King playing a game of poker in the saloon. Polly becomes frustrated but can only keep on watching until she hears Charlie persuade Hong King to stake her. Upon learning that he is gambling to win her as his prize, Polly is "burning with the same anger and shame she had felt on the auction block" (157). The unexpected turn of events infuriates Polly even more, when Charlie has won her from Hong King and asks if she will not thank him. Angrily, Polly thinks, "A thank-you? For what? For humiliating her? For forcing her to break her promise that when she left Hong King it would be as a free woman. Or for

teaching her that a slave had no right to make promises, especially to herself" (159). When Charlie reasons, "It was the only way to free you" (159), Polly sharply retorts "That what you believe. Just like Jim believe I better off if I not know Hong King not sell me. Maybe Jim right. Or maybe you right. But this my life. Not Jim life. Not yours. Mine" (159). However, Charlie clarifies that he has challenged Hong King only to genuinely help her. He says, "I would never stake you" (160), in a voice "surprised and hurt" (160). When Polly retorts, "I your slave. You can do anything" (160). He affirms, "I didn't win you from Hong King so you could be my slave. You're free" (160).

This revelation, as well as Charlie's consistent treatment of Polly as an equal, enables her to open her heart to him, and thus Polly tells him her utmost desire: to become a free and self-sufficient woman – not having to depend on any man to survive: "All my life I belong someone. My father, the bandits, Hong King. And I promise myself when I free of Hong King, I belong no man, only myself … You know I have gold I save to buy myself from Hong King. I want use that to build a house, start my own business. A boarding house like Mrs. Schultz" (162). When Charlie immediately argues that she cannot open a boarding house, Polly assumes that it is because she is an unmarried woman and affirms, "Because you think I not wife like Mrs. Schultz, not respectable, people say it bawdy house? You see, I show them they wrong" (162).

Then, Charlie reveals, "A Chinaman can't own land" (162). The myth that America is the land where anyone can be free and have equal opportunities is again proven to be false. To Polly's argument: "But you say America have land for everyone. That people from all over the world come for the land. Rich. Poor. All the same. Anyone can have land. You said," (126) Charlie replies, "Any American. You're from China" (162). Still, Polly misunderstands that the problem lies in his assumption that she is determined to return to China someday, while actually "she intended to remain in America. She would become American and buy the land for her house. Land that would keep her free and independent always" (163). And so, she tells Charlie, "I never go back to China. I become American" (163) only to be told that "The only way a Chinaman can become an American is to be born here" (164).

Seeing how she has no other options, Polly realizes that she cannot become as independent as she wishes: "She laughed. A short, bitter laugh. Here or in China, slave or free, it was the same. She needed a protector" (164). She then proceeds to "mechanically" begin "unbuttoning [Charlie's] shirt" (164) as if it is her duty to serve him and satisfy his desire. However, Charlie reacts differently: "He took her hands in his, holding them still. 'Polly, I meant what I said. You're free. Let me be your China herder and build a house for you. You can do whatever you want to in it, invite anyone, refuse anyone. It's yours, I promise you.' He smiled weakly. 'You don't even have to have me ... And yes, you can pay for it too' " (164). At this point, the third part focusing on Polly's quest for independence and her liberation through Charlie's assistance ends with Polly's joy that she has finally achieved the freedom she has so wanted through her defiance as well as Charlie's understanding and support: "She laughed, a joyous peal clear as ringing bells. Hearing it, Charlie's smile grew stronger, deepening into laughter that became one with Polly's. And suddenly, within the circle of their laughter, she felt finally, wonderfully free" (164).

Then, the later parts until the end of the fictional biography show how Polly has proven herself to be able to live independently and self-sufficiently as well as to become a respected and beloved member of the community of Warrens. However, despite the economic independence, social acceptance, and close relationship she enjoys, Polly is unable to feel totally at ease as she is alienated from the others because of her unique status as the only Chinese woman in Warrens and her cross-cultural identity. Because of this, Polly feels a deep sense of inner loneliness and exhaustion that she is never 'at home.' As the fictional biography progresses, Polly is able to clear away such feelings as she agrees to marry Charlie on the condition that they do not have children, and together they retreat into a farmhouse in a secluded valley with him. However, those feelings resurface after Charlie's death, compelling Polly to travel to different cities and visit many of her friends until she realizes that her true home is where she has spent her life with Charlie. The rest of the story then serves as the denouement to Polly's life as she returns home and lives there by herself until she becomes hospitalized and passes away.

The narrative in the later parts of the story often provides details that concern Polly's capability to live self-sufficiently. For example, she learns to goldsmith while at the same time she opens a boarding house: "Charlie had taught her to goldsmith, and she often hammered out trinkets for sale in Mr. Grostein's store" (167). And after she moves to the farm with Charlie, both of them grow farm produce to trade for other necessities: "On his trips to check on his saloon in Warrens, Charlie traded Polly's produce for the few necessities they could not grow or make, like coal, oil, fabric, thread, and shoes. Polly did not accompany Charlie on these trips, for she had sold her boarding house. Everything and everyone she wanted was either already in the canyon or would come to her here" (224).

Polly is shown to enjoy a good relationship with the white people of Warrens. She often baby-sits for the townspeople, earning their gratitude. For example, one mother claims, "If you hadn't taken Katy off my hands so I could rest up, I don't know how I'd make it" (175). Katy, a sick girl, is so attached to Polly that she cries for Polly when she has a fever (183), and Polly can easily persuade the girl to drink bitter medicine. Then, after Charlie's death, Polly moves back into Warrens for some time and offers to let a girl named Gay stay with her while schooling, as Gay lives on a farm further away and has problems staying with another woman: "Gay's tears vanished once she moved in with Polly. ... [I]n the late afternoons and early evenings before ... Gay slept, Polly's cabin filled with laughter, the warm buttery fragrance of popping corn, the sweet stickiness of taffy pulls" (283). Childless all her life, Polly compensates for her choice not to have children by acting as foster mother to many children. It is also clear that she thoroughly enjoys taking care of them; "With the children, Polly found even the most ordinary tasks took on new color and life" (283).

Furthermore, Polly helps the townspeople by taking care of those who are sick or injured. She often brews herbal remedies for them. In one instance, a townsperson claims that Polly is a "lifesaver" (176). Bertha, a close friend of Polly's, tells her that another townsperson "[s]wears the medicine Polly gave him for his rheumatism makes him feel twenty years younger" (176). Once, when Polly and Charlie rescue an injured boy in their home valley, Charlie tells the boy that he can be sure he is in a good hand, as Polly is "the Angel of the Salmon River" (229). In fact, even as a lone,

old widow, there are still many people who remember and care about her, as obvious in the nurse's words to the hospitalized Polly: "You have lots of people asking for you. Mr. Klinkhammer, Mr. Shepp, Mrs. Holmes, Mrs. Shultz, Mr. Cyczik, Mrs. Long..." (305).

Polly's relationship with Charlie is shown to be especially close after Part Three, and Polly and Charlie now share a strong mutual bond and understanding: "In the fifteen years since he had won her freedom from Hong King, the barriers of misunderstanding which had been torn down that night had never again come between them, for they spoke openly of everything to each other" (167-8). Charlie constantly treats Polly as an equal and supports her as much as he can: "Neither had Charlie once wavered from the promise he had made, building her this boarding house beside his cabin and giving her the protection she needed while respecting her independence" (168).

However, amidst the security of life and the warm treatment from people around her, Polly is not yet at ease with her identity. She feels a deep loneliness as the only Chinese who can mingle with the white, the loneliness she describes as "a loneliness Charlie's caring presence could ease but not entirely vanquish" (178). Even in the Fourth of July party in Charlie's new dance hall, Polly suddenly "realized that in this brightly lit room alive with music, laughter, and goodwill, there were no Chinese except herself" (177) and is seized with loneliness. She tries holding the child she is baby-sitting to comfort herself, but the fact that the child is not her own makes her feel even lonelier: "No matter how often it happened, the realization caught her off guard, leaving her feeling cut adrift, acutely alone. She hugged the sleeping baby to her, hungry for his warmth, his innocent trust. But the baby, not hers, only underscored her loneliness" (177). Polly has similar feelings when she nurses the sick Katy: "Watching the tiny, fever-ravaged body relax into sleep, Polly felt a familiar flash of regret that the children she nursed so lovingly were never her own, and she began a lullaby her mother had sung, beating back the shadow on her happiness with song" (184).

In order to become independent in America, Polly eagerly learns to be westernized so that she can live among the white people. In fact, she is so well-loved by them that when the severely wounded Charlie asks Polly to marry him legally so she inherits his property, the mayor of Warrens guarantees to her, “No one I know in Warrens would want to cheat you. ... But you know what the law is. It’ll be safer if you marry” (189). Nevertheless, Polly still feels alienated as she is not ‘one of them.’ She feels further doubly alienated as she is a stranger to the Chinese men in the Chinatown of Warrens as well, similar to how Polly is doubly colonized because of her ethnicity and her female sex:

> Since her freedom from Hong King, she had determined never again to suffer the ignorance in which he had kept her. She had become knowledgeable of Western foods, customs, and laws, a part of the community, counting the dancers, the men on the porch outside the "dance hall" as friends. Yet she was a stranger to them. Just as she was to Li Dick and the men of Warrens' Chinatown who could not forgive her past, her choice of Charlie for a mate. (177-8)

Nevertheless, Polly still yearns for her lost home in China as she watches the Chinese procession from the Chinatown on the Fourth of July:

> Behind the huge star-spangled banner held aloft by freshly scrubbed prospectors and miners, dragon flags fluttered above two hundred Chinese marching to the crash of cymbals, gongs, and stringed instruments. Watching their proud, clean-shaven faces and handsome black queues swinging below their waists, Polly felt a rush of nostalgia for her village, the processions which ended at the temple where soul tablets marking generations gave an aura of permanence and security. (171)

She sees the Chinatown's similarities to her home village, but at the same time acknowledges their differences, as they lack women and children, and the Chinese workers do not stay there for long but move from place to place to find better jobs.

> The Chinatown in Warrens was as large as her home village, and the sounds and smells were the same. There was even a small temple. But without any women or children, the men drifted in and out, always hoping that the next camp, the next job would be able to satisfy the false promises that had brought them to the Gold Mountains, and the Chinatown they created was an echo of their loneliness and disappointment, a hollow imitation of the villages they had left behind. (171-2)

She also realizes how insecure and harsh the lives of the Chinese workers are: "She knew the Chinese in Warrens did not own the stores and laundries where they worked … Weren't the ones who came to Hong King's saloon always complaining about the loneliness of lives without wives and children, the brutish manners of white men, unfair taxes, and harsh laws? And didn't they always end their grumbling with talk of home, their eagerness to return to families left behind?" (163). On the surface, the situation when Polly is operating her boarding house in Warrens is peaceful, but the Chinese in Warrens' Chinatown know that "It won't last" (172), as Polly overhears two Chinese men, Li Dick and A Sam, talking to each other:

> "The Chinese coming in from the coast say the demons are trying to pressure the government into kicking us out," [Li Dick] continued.
>
> "They tried that in '86 and we're still here," A Sam said.
>
> "Those of us who weren't burned out, beaten, or killed."
>
> "None of that happened in Warrens."
>
> "No," Li Dick admitted. "But people and places change."
>
> Despite the hot rays of sun beating down on her, Polly shivered, remembering Charlie's worried frown when he had read

> about the formation of Anti-Chinese Associations that vowed to force all Chinese to leave the Territory, her own agitations when news came of boycotts against Chinese merchants, laundries and stores in Chinatowns blown up, entire populations of Chinese marched out of towns at gunpoint. (172-3)

It is further revealed through Polly's thoughts that the discrimination and racism, again, are not directed to only one group of the marginalized. She comes to hear of the Mormons as yet another discriminated group because of their different religion, while at the same time she worries that violence can break out against the Chinese in Warrens as well: "Through all of it, there had been no real violence against the Chinese in Warrens, and now the troublemakers had turned their fury against a group of white people called Mormons. But she could not forget the resentful talk against the Chinese that had spilled out of the camp's saloons. Could that resentment be simmering, waiting for an opportunity to explode?" (173)

Feeling uneasy at the situation, Polly confides to Charlie as she recalls a performing monkey she has once seen in China. The monkey provides another animal image similar to that of the tied dragonflies – the image of going between two ends and exhausting one's self. However, the image of the monkey is different in that it does not go from one master to another like the dragonflies; one of the two ends can symbolize the Chinese customs Polly knows, or the Chinese identity in her, while the other end symbolizes the American customs and identity. Polly finds herself swaying back and forth between them and thus feels that she can neither rest nor feel at ease at either end:

> "I remember one time a man bring a performing monkey to my village," Polly said. "The man divide the audience in two and give each side one end of a rope to hold. Then the monkey walk carefully back and forth between the two sides. At each end, he stop a little bit, but he cannot stay, and so he walk again until he so tired, he fall."

> She pointed down to Warrens, so clearly divided into two camps. “Sometimes I feel like that monkey.” (178-9)

The image returns once more in Polly’s nightmare after she discovers the body of a Chinese man lynched because he is accused of stealing a pair of boots from a white man. This time she sees herself walking on the tightrope like a monkey before she sees the dead man’s body:

> The dream, when it came, was always the same. The tightrope stretched taut. Herself edging forward. Tired. Anxious to reach the end.
>
> She could not see the place she was struggling to reach. But she could feel its contentment, a sense of repletion. And then, without warning, a branch snapped, knocking her off balance. She fell. The bark peeled off the branch, and she found herself staring into the eyes, red and bulging, in a face swollen black, the tongue, distended, choking off a silent scream. (214)

While Polly’s uneasiness rises and the racists move to drive away the Chinese, there comes another turning point in the fictional biography, based on Polly Bemis’s real life. Charlie is severely wounded by a gunshot that shatters his cheekbone. Some of the bullet fragments remain buried in his body and can cause fatal blood poisoning. Bertha encourages Polly to help treat Charlie, emphasizing how strong she has been in confronting past obstacles in her life: “Polly, you were only a girl when your father sold you, but you were strong. Strong enough to cross the ocean to a new world. Strong enough to forge a new life for yourself. Aren’t you strong enough to keep fighting for the life of the man you love?” (196). Charlie, then, asks Polly to marry him so that she can live in America legally and does not have to face deportation. At first Polly frankly refuses because she thinks Charlie wants to marry her so that they can have children together and makes it clear that “I will not have children because I do not want children” (204). She further reasons that she does not want to marry Charlie because she does not want him to be alienated and ridiculed because of her, as

are the white men who marry Native American women and their half-Native American children. When Charlie argues that Polly is not a Native American, Polly implies that they and the Chinese are not different, as they are similarly discriminated by members of the dominant white race:

> “I know what people call men with Indian wives. Squaw men. They do not live in town and not with the Indians. They belong nowhere, Their children too. Strangers to their father’s people and their mother’s.”
>
> “You’re not Indian, Pol.”
>
> “It’s the same.” (205)

After Polly discovers the dead body of the lynched Chinese man and Charlie takes her to a serene valley where he wants to live with her, Polly relents. However, she still feels troubled on the matter of having children and decides against it, as she thinks that she cannot ensure the future of her half-blood children:

> She pictured the photograph ... [I]t was she and Charlie with their own babies, children who would know only the joy and peace the canyon offered. After all, hadn’t her father and his fathers before him lived in the same village for generations? But her mother, like the other women, had come from another village and, if she had not been sold, there would have come a day when she would have had to leave her family to go to a husband’s home and village. And Jim, Li Dick, A Sam, the hundreds of Chinese men in the hold of the ship, in Warrens, and all the other towns and camps, hadn’t they left their fathers’ villages like Charlie had left his?
>
> The Gold Mountains teemed with men and women on the move, chasing dreams from coast to coast, city to city, mining camp to mining camp. Her dream, the end of the tightrope, was here. But she could not answer for the dreams of the children she and Charlie might have. (218-9)

Charlie immediately accepts Polly's condition, claiming, "It's you I want, Pol, nothing more" (220). And so they become married and live farming together in the valley.

As a middle-age woman, Polly has gained much more experiences in life and is now able to accept her unique identity as it is. The wisdom of life she has gained is reflected when she bakes some bread in her farmhouse and recalls how, back in her childhood home in China, her parents used to bake New Year cakes that would predict the family's fortune for the year. She comes to realize that human lives can be compared to dough in that they have their turns of rise and fall, and it is skill and strength that are, like the right ingredients, ensure the success in one's life: "It was not luck that determined the rise and fall of cakes or bread or lives, but skill, strength, the right ingredients" (233). Polly, then, is determined to live successfully as "She had skill and strength. And she would create the right ingredients" (233-4). Another incident that reflects her wisdom and strong spirit is when Polly convinces herself to move on even after the loss of her home and her favorite dog in a fire, and Charlie's death. She recalls the long-legged wading birds she has seen, and determines to emulate them in taking flight again after she has regained enough strength: "Sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs, they stood absolutely motionless on the rocks at the edge of the Salmon [River], waiting to regain their strength. She had seen a full day pass, even two, before a bird took wing again. But always, no matter how tired and faltering their first nervous flutters, the birds pressed inexorably back into flight" (274). Polly also has to learn to accept changes after leaving Warrens for almost three decades, returning to find that the children she has taken care of are now adults with children of their own, and the Chinese workers have all left Warrens:

> There was a time when there would have been no need for questions, when every child knew her just as she had known them, their birthdays, their likes and dislikes. But after almost thirty years absence, only a few were faintly recognizable as children of the children she had nursed and loved. More were as unfamiliar as Warrens itself, with the hundreds of Chinese who had placered Warrens Meadow gone, the meadow carved into craters by steam-

> powered shovels, and the buildings in the camp all new since the fire in 1903. (280)

After Charlie's death, Polly moves back to live in Warrens for some time before she decides to go sightseeing in other cities. During the trip, McCunn includes yet another symbolic scene in which Polly, as an old woman, overhears a conversation between two Chinese men, one old and one young. The old man considers China his homeland and asks the young man to go back and help develop their country. However, the young man is born in America. He considers himself American and America his home:

> [T]here had been two male Chinese voices, low and intense.
>
> "When I was a young man, there was no food in my village. I had to come to America, but China is different now. Won't you change your mind and come with me?"
>
> "No, Uncle. This is my home."
>
> "I have worked here forty of my sixty years, but I do not call it home."
>
> "I was born here."
>
> "An old man like me goes back to China to die. But you are young. You can help build our country, make it strong."
>
> "My country, my home is here." (290)

Their conversation moves Polly to reflect on where her home actually is. This question consumes her more and more as she travels and sees a Charlie Chaplin's film. The reference to Charlie Chaplin functions as a *cultural code* and *symbolic code* that links Chaplin's comedy with its reflection on the hectic life of the modern people to Polly's fear of stopping:

> "And where is my home?" Polly had whispered. Not in China, a faded memory. Or Warrens. Or Grangeville. Or Boise. Then where?
>
> The question had repeated itself during her tour of the big city stores, the White City park, even during the motion picture with the

> short, funny-looking tramp called Charlie. His tiny black mustache, bowler hat, and crazy antics had made her laugh. Yet there had been a frantic sadness about him, as though he dared not stop.
>
> Like herself. (290)

Nevertheless, as Polly feels homesick and realizes where she yearns to be, she has finally discovered the resolution to her problem: "All at once, a wave of homesickness engulfed Polly, sweeping away doubts and fears in a crest of longing. She knew where she belonged" (291). She returns to the valley where she has lived with Charlie. When her young neighbor Pete finds out that Polly has unexpectedly returned, he comes to ask "Is something wrong?" (293). Polly then gives him a cryptic answer, "For a long time, yes. But not now, not anymore" (293) before explaining her problem and discovery: "You see, after Charlie die, I hurt so much, I think I must get away. But I wrong. Charlie's not just here in the canyon. He's inside me, and it does not matter where I go, Warrens, Grangeville, or Boise, he be there. There and not there. That is what hurt. But nothing will change that, and this canyon is my home. Our home. So I come back" (293). She lives there for the rest of her days, as the fictional biography comes to its denouement and epilogue concerning the end of Polly Bemis's life.

In conclusion, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, the fictional biography of Polly Bemis, is reconstructed as a straightforward narrative with Polly herself as the only *focalizer* so that it is suitable to portray a narrator who is illiterate. Both Lalu's childhood in China and Polly's subsequent life in America reflect the historical inequality between the two genders and various ethnicities, as Lalu/Polly experiences oppression as a woman on various occasions and comes into contact with different groups of the marginalized and the oppressed. Additional *semic codes* or Chinese characters such as Chen, Ding, the madam, and Jim are invented to contribute to Lalu's experiences as a woman in various ways as well as to present the patriarchal and fatalistic ideas that persuade Lalu to accept her oppressed conditions without struggle. Likewise, those who historically existed are given different personalities for similar purposes, the most notable being Charlie, who is portrayed as a sympathetic

and liberal American man who treats Polly as his equal, despite her sex and ethnicity. Furthermore, the author enriches the narrative in Polly's viewpoint with multiple-functioning narrative codes that symbolize the oppression and emancipation of women, as well as the imagery that reflects her keen observation and insight, especially those of animals and nature. These fictional components contribute to the portrayal of Polly Bemis as a woman who has experienced living in multiple cultures, is adamant in her quest for freedom, and eventually becomes at peace with her cross-cultural identity as she discovers where she belongs.

CHAPTER IV
RECLAIMING LOST VOICES IN *COMFORT WOMAN*

While Dalby's *Tale of Murasaki* and McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* employ 'realistic' narrative techniques to reconstruct the lives of their protagonists, *Comfort Woman* employs a surrealistic style of narrative. For the *Tale of Murasaki*, Dalby emulates a specific genre of 'women's writing' that existed in her fictional protagonist Murasaki's period as the basis of Murasaki's self-reflection and creates an ending to her protagonist's supposedly unfinished manuscript. Whereas McCunn, the author of *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, employs a simple style of third-person narrative that moves forward in a chronological order, and is structurally divided at key points in her protagonist's life. In contrast, the narrative of *Comfort Woman* is surrealistic in many aspects. Firstly, the series of presented narratives is not in a chronological order but is thoroughly fragmented and *analeptic (*flashing back), moving back and forth between the past and the present. Secondly, the fictional biography involves supernatural elements, such as trances and spirits, presenting them as unquestioningly existing and real in the eyes of its protagonist Akiko, once a Korean comfort woman in the Japanese military's recreation camp in World War II. As such, the novel can also be considered a magical realist narrative. Thirdly and most importantly, when and how Akiko can narrate her life to her readers is rendered problematic by the fact that she is now dead – a fact stated by her half-American daughter, Beccah, at the end of the very first chapter.

The style of alternating first-person narratives between mother and daughter in *Comfort Woman* is similar to that of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). While *The Joy Luck Club* is a series of first-person narratives belonging to three pairs of Chinese American mothers and daughters: Ying-Ying and Lena, Lindo and Waverly, An-Mei and Rose, and a daughter who has lost her mother, Jing-Mei, *Comfort Woman* concerns a series of first-person narratives between the Korean mother Akiko and her American-born daughter Beccah. In addition, like Jing-Mei, who seeks to understand her dead mother and her heritage as a Chinese American, Beccah seeks to understand

her dead mother and her heritage as a Korean American. Nevertheless, both novels differ in a sense that, while the voice of Suyuan, Jing-Mei's dead mother, is absent from the narratives of the four sets of mothers and daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* because she is dead and her experiences are left solely to Jing Mei's interpretation, in *Comfort Woman*, the mother herself is able to narrate her story to the readers though she is announced to be dead before her narrative commences.

As such, *Comfort Woman* is similar to *The Tale of Murasaki* in that it concerns a daughter's learning about and understanding her dead mother's identity through the heritage her mother has left behind. In *The Tale of Murasaki*, Katako learns about her mother through the lost, secret memoir recording Murasaki's reminiscence, whereas Beccah discovers the cassette tape recording Akiko's voice, which narrates her traumatic past as a comfort woman. However, the source of the mother's voice that largely speaks for the majority of the fictional biography is unclear. Readers may assume that it comes from the cassette tape Akiko has left for Beccah after her death, even though this speculation is never confirmed in the fictional biography. Nevertheless, the presentation of Akiko's voice as the voice of a disembodied spirit has a symbolic significance and is closely related to the themes of this particular fictional biography: female inheritance, female interconnectedness, and women's liberation through the reclaiming of their own identities. In a sense, Akiko as the disembodied voice of a subjugated woman is transformed into the embodiment of the comfort women, the colonized Koreans, and the female gender.

The structure of the fictional biography is a series of first-person alternating narratives between Beccah and Akiko. Beccah's narrative is the *frame narrative* as it is presented first, while Akiko's narrative is the *embedded* one. Both narratives resonate to and parallel with one another; Beccah's recollection of her childhood as an Americanized Korean American woman alienated from her mother is presented in contrast to Akiko's recollection of her traumatic experiences as a comfort woman and her subjugation as the converted Asian wife of a Christian American minister in America. However, both protagonists never communicate with each other directly. Tina Chen, in *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture*, describes the structure of the novel as "a series of first-person narratives"

that are "inextricably interconnected," and yet "a reality emblematized by the choral effect of their alternating narratives, their alienation from one another, both as mother and daughter and as Korean and Korean American, is textually reflected in the discreteness of each re-telling: Akiko and Beccah never tell their stories to each other directly" (119).

Chapter 1 opens with Beccah's recalling Akiko's confession that she kills her American husband. Beccah's narrative proceeds to outline how she grows up in the absence of her deceased father and how she is unable to understand her mother's frequent spiritual trances and thus labels her mother as "crazy." When her mother's employer, Auntie Reno, discovers Akiko's "gift" as a medium through her spirit possession, she sets Akiko up as "a renowned fortune-teller and spirit medium in Japan and Korea" (Keller 11) and makes a flourishing business that saves both Akiko and Beccah from financial ruin. Beccah then recalls Akiko's explanation that she kills her husband with curses of death wishes and reflects that it takes nearly thirty years for Beccah's childhood wishes for her mother's death to come true.

Chapter 2 shifts to Akiko's narrative and begins with the statement, "The baby I could keep came when I was already dead" (15). It then illustrates how Akiko symbolically dies at the age of twelve when she is forced to become a comfort woman. On the one hand, Akiko's narrative concerns her survival from the various oppressions she faces as a comfort woman, wife to the Christian minister Richard Bradley, and immigrant in America, through the subversion of her identity as well as her reliance on shamanism and the spirits of women she has known. On the other hand, Beccah's narrative concerns the alienation she faces while growing up as 'the haole' or 'foreigner' in Hawaii, America. Unable to associate herself entirely with her mother or other American people, Beccah blames Akiko for her estrangement and lack of self-identification. When Akiko is alive, their strained relationship is portrayed as a push-and-pull struggle between Beccah's yearning to love and understand her mother unconditionally and her desire not to associate herself with the mother – the other, an alienated object of peculiarity and ridicule in the daughter's half-Westernized mindset.

Both narratives proceed until Akiko's fragmented narration of her survival, her mother's identity, and her rebirth is complete and she reclaims her true name, Soon Hyo, which coincides with Beccah's narrative at the point when she discovers the letter with her mother's true name, news clippings involving Japanese military prostitutes, and a cassette tape with her name on it. Recorded in the cassette tape are Akiko's description of her mother's death and feast, her homage to the women she has known and bonded throughout her life, and the narrative of her past as a comfort woman. After Beccah learns about her mother's identity in connection to Akiko's past as a comfort woman and the subjugation she faces along with many other women, she eventually understands her mother and performs a proper funeral for her in the end. This completes the illustration of the three themes of women's inheritance, interconnected identities, and liberation through the reclaiming of their lost voices and identity throughout the novel.

Like *The Tale of Murasaki*, one of the themes of *Comfort Woman* is female inheritance, though not in a strictly literary sense. Female heritage in this particular fictional biography is hardly in the form of self-written records like Murasaki's memoir, but a combination of similar physical traits, items for remembrance, stories and wisdom orally passed down, and – most significantly – memories. Akiko becomes the main conductor of memories for women around her, especially those of her mother and the other comfort women, which she succeeds in passing on to Beccah at the end of the novel.

In the novel, shared physical characteristics of a mother and her daughter(s) become *symbolic codes* of their heritage. Physical attributes carrying physiognomic interpretations are used to show not only the looks daughters receive from their mother, but also their shared mental characteristics and problems they are likely to face as women. The most notable physical attribute involves the round head shape shared by Akiko's mother, Akiko, and Beccah, as visible in Akiko's narrative: "I love her roundheaded perfection, my daughter's head shape so like mine, and like my mother's when she was a child." (149). As a child, Akiko remembers how her mother studies her four daughters for "signs of herself" and makes "pronouncement binding us to her and to our fates" (149). Most the physiognomic attributes of the daughters

hint at trouble or suffering they may have to face, and the harshest, yet most cherished characteristic belongs to the youngest daughter. Akiko or Soon Hyo reminds her mother of the hard-headed revolutionist she had been when she was younger. They share the same shape of the head, which hints at hard life and stubbornness: "When she would look at me as if she was seeing both me and a memory, I knew what would come out of her mouth: Rockhead. Just like me, she'd say, shaking her head. You'll have a hard life, always banging against the current. Worse than a boy, more stubborn than a stone" (149). However, Akiko notes, "she would say these things with pride, so I would know that she loved me" (150). The round-headedness and innate stubbornness in Akiko and her mother are consequently shown to be passed on to Beccah. When her baby is born, Akiko admires Beccah's head shape, describing it as "round as a rare and perfect river rock polished by the force of water" (149). Thus, she takes painstaking care to preserve the round shape of Beccah's head, despites her husband's protest: "This is hard work, and I do it in secret because I do not want to hear my husband talk about God and genetics. I know better, because of my mother, than to think that head shape is fixed for life" (152). Akiko believes that, because of her roundheadedness and her living in America, the strong Beccah will have a much better opportunity in life than she and her mother: "[H]er head is round. I cup her tiny head in my palms and whisper, I am so proud of you. You are a rockhead like your mother and your mother's mother. Only a thousand times better" (154).

Not only is Akiko's and Beccah's head shape like that of her mother's and grandmother's respectively, Beccah gradually notices how her body grows to resemble that of her mother's. For example, when Beccah is made to wear one of Akiko's white ceremonial gowns for her ritual of transition to puberty, she realizes that she now shares the same height as her mother: "when the hem dropped to my ankles, I realized I had grown to my mother's height" (189). Then, when Beccah is performing the funeral rites on her mother's body, she places one of her palms against that of her mother's and realize that they are 'mirror images' (209). These shared characteristics signify the women's continuation of their identities and heritage, as Beccah remarks, "[S]omehow, without my marking the exact day, without my even noticing until now, my hand had become my mother's" (209).

Like physical traits, storytelling is shown as an important means of inheritance from a generation of women to another generation. As a child, Akiko often asks her mother to tell her a story because she hopes "to learn more about [her] mother and, in turn, about the secrets of [herself]" (150). Even though Akiko is born into a poor cow trader's family, her nameless mother orally passes down the story of her life as a high-class educated woman to her daughters. Thus, Akiko is filled with the stories of the life of her mother, who tells her, "[t]he most famous fortune-teller in Seoul, paid to read her head at birth, said that she was the most roundheaded baby she had ever seen. In a roundheaded family that valued head shape along with auspicious birth charts, this was the highest praise" (150). Akiko is also told that her mother's childhood is "filled with parties in Seoul and candy and fancy Western dresses" (151). And she substitutes most of the things in her mother's life which she has never seen with what she can find in her own life and thinks each of them is the "[s]ame thing, only one thousand times better" (151). For example, one thing that keeps reminding Akiko of her mother even after she has moved to America is the taste of ice cream. As a child, Akiko "had no reference for it" (151) and thinks that her mother "seemed very magical, like a princess from heaven, when she talked about ice cream" (151). Later she recounts, "When I came to America, I was surprised to see how common and how cheap ice cream was" (151). Ice cream becomes a means through which Akiko remembers her mother and discovers more about her past experiences. As such, she buys and tries out every flavor she can find. However, her husband does not understand Akiko's craving for ice cream and misinterprets it: "At first my husband encouraged me, glad that I was *becoming American*. But then he found out that I was also eating ice cream for lunch and for breakfast. And that I cried after eating a bowl of a particularly good flavor, because it reminded me that when my mother was a roundheaded child princess, she took a bite out of heaven" (152, my italics). Not knowing why Akiko is attached to ice cream, her husband puts her on a diet. This particular incident both illustrates the importance of the memories Akiko has of her mother and her husband's inability to comprehend her feelings and actions.

Even though Akiko's mother's life as an educated, metropolitan, and revolutionary woman is completely changed after the massacre resulting from the

demonstration that is part of the March 1st Movement to declare Korean independence from the Japanese occupation, she manages to preserve the story of her "true" identity by combining her storytelling with her keeping of the material evidence: the news clipping of the riot and the nail clippings Akiko's grandmother has cut for her mock funeral in a "special box, in which [she] stored treasures from her past life or for her daughters' future ones" (179). She shows them to her daughters and passes on her story to them. Similarly, Akiko resorts to the same means of storytelling combined with the collection of the items she chooses to pass on to her daughter to continue this inheritance: "On the twenty-second anniversary of my mother's death, I try to think of what I will tell my daughter about her grandmother, and I remember the box. In her special box, my mother kept treasures for times other than the present" (181). Akiko then resolves,

> I will tell my daughter a story about her grandmother. I sift through memory, and this is what I say: She was a princess. She was a student. She was a revolutionary. She was a wife who knew her duty. And a mother who loved her daughter, but not enough to stay or take them with her.
>
> I will tell my daughter these things, and about the box that kept my mother's past and future, and though she will never know her grandmother's name, she will know who her grandmother is. (182-3)

Like Katako, who acts as the medium of communication between Murasaki and her daughter, Akiko acts as the medium for her nameless Korean mother and her Korean American daughter Beccah through the blood ties that link the three women together. In the same way, Akiko acts as a spirit medium by profession, transforming herself into a conductor through which spirits' remaining worries and regrets in the physical world can be conveyed to their living descendants. She also passes down her own heritage to Beccah in the forms of the shamanic and cultural knowledge, fairytales, and the river song which she always sings – the song Beccah remembers as "the only song my mother ever taught me" (45). Furthermore, Akiko emulates her

mother's method; she leaves to her daughter the box containing her jewelry, Beccah's traditional one-hundred-day baby dress, a lock of the cut baby's hair and the dried umbilical cord, the letters with her true name on them, and – most importantly – a black cassette tape recording her secret past. Even though Akiko's American husband forbids her to reveal her own past to their daughter, claiming that he does so to spare Beccah from shame: "Think of how she would feel, knowing her mother was a prostitute" (196), Akiko records her voice as she narrates her experiences as a comfort woman, as well as the names and memories of other 'forgotten' women she has known and bonded in her life, in the cassette tape. She hopes that the tape "will, eventually, preserve a few of the pieces, the secrets, of [their] lives" (183). Akiko keeps it in her own treasure box of memories for Beccah and reflects, "Later, perhaps, when she is older, she will sift through her own memories, and through the box that I will leave for her, and come to know her own mother – and then herself as well" (183). The tape thus doubly becomes the means of heritage and liberation for Akiko at the same time, as through the recording she can reclaim her true name for Beccah to remember: "I start with our names, my true name and hers: Soon Hyo and Bek-hap. I speak for the time when I leave my daughter, so that when I die, she will hear my name and know that when she cries, she will never be alone" (183). She also reclaims the names of the women she has known and passes them on to Beccah: "I sing the names by which I have known you, all of you, so that you will remember. So that I will remember. So that those who come after me will know. Induk. Miyoko. Kimiko. Hanako. Akiko. Soon Hi, Soon Mi. Soon Ja. Soon Hyo. … So many true names unknown, dead in the heart. So many bodies left unprepared, lost in the river" (192).

The concept of inheritance through memories is not limited only to blood relatives such as mother(s) and daughter(s), but also through foster/surrogate mother(s) and daughter(s). For example, Akiko is taught how to find lost things with her spiritual power by Manshin Ahjima, an old shaman woman who has converted to Christianity. Akiko says that the skill is "something she taught all her daughters, because, she said, a woman must always find her own way" (59). Thus, it can be assumed that Manshin Ahjima considers Akiko as one of her daughters and that they have shared a mother-and-daughter relationship for the short period they travel

together, even though it becomes clear in the end that Manshin Ahjima obviously escorts Akiko to the missionaries for money. Manshin Ahjima's status as Akiko's foster mother is emphasized in the scene in which Akiko cries for Manshin Ahjima as well as her own mother as she is left with the missionaries (62).

Heritage can also be passed down from fellow women who share the same experiences and endure the same oppression – specifically the comfort women who console one another through their companionship. As a survivor, Akiko becomes a living heritage to the comfort women, the proof that they once existed. The novel accentuates the idea of Akiko as a living heritage further as she can communicate with the spirit of one defiant comfort woman, Induk, and be possessed by Induk's spirit. As such, Chen states that *Comfort Women* is one of the novels in which "comfort women who have suffered unjustly return as ghostly presences to remind others of histories that cannot otherwise be remembered" (115). Akiko vividly remembers and subsumes the identity and the spirit of Induk, or Akiko 40, who challenges the Japanese soldiers by breaking their rule of silence and reclaiming her true name and identity as "Induk":

> To this day, I do not think Induk – the woman who was Akiko before me – cracked. Most of the other women thought she did because she would not shut up. One night she talked loud and nonstop. In Korean and in Japanese, she denounced the soldiers, yelling at them to stop their invasion of her country and her body. Even as they mounted her, she shouted: I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive. I am seventeen, I had a family just like you do. I am a daughter, I am a sister. (20)

Akiko further recounts, "All through the night she talked, reclaiming her Korean name, reciting her family genealogy, even chanting the recipes her mother had passed on to her" (20). Induk's act of speaking out is the reclaiming of her identity as much as the impartment of her own heritage to the other women and Akiko in particular. The contents of her speech largely involve her self, her identity, and the heritage she has received from her mother. However, as Induk's act of speaking out

infuriates the soldiers, they kill her. "Just before daybreak," narrates Akiko, "they took her out of the stall and into the woods, where we couldn't hear her anymore. They brought her back skewered from the vagina to her mouth, like a pig ready for roasting. A lesson, they told the rest of us, warning us into silence" (21). That night the women of the camp remain silent, but Akiko thinks that they hear Induk's name being called by the frogs as if to remind them to remember: "That night, it was as if a thousand frogs encircled the camp. They opened their throats for us, swallowed our tears, and cried for us. All night, it seemed, they called, Induk, Induk, Induk, so we would never forget" (21).

Akiko considers herself killed in place of Induk, who sacrifices her physical body so that her true identity can be revived. Akiko believes, "The corpse the soldiers brought back from the woods wasn't Induk. It was Akiko 41; it was me" (21). Induk's heritage is passed on to Akiko through the *symbolic code* concerning Soon Hyo's rechristening as Akiko. Through this renaming and substitution, Akiko manages to survive her traumatic experiences as a comfort woman by disassociating her defiled self from the name Soon Hyo and re-identifies herself as Akiko – as the heritage as well as the continuation of Induk and the series of Akikos before her. Upon this matter, Chen reflects in her article that "Induk's murder sets into motion a complicated cycle of death and rebirth: Akiko 40 dies so that Induk might reclaim life, Soon Hyo is symbolically murdered so that the new Akiko 41 might live, and eventually, Akiko will call upon Induk's spirit to possess her" (123). After escaping from the recreation camp, Akiko encounters Induk's spirit, who guides her to safety and becomes Akiko's intimate partner for life. In a sense, Induk and the other comfort women live on through Akiko's remembrance and regain the meanings of their existence, even in a foreign land like America. Akiko passes on the name Induk to Beccah as "the Birth Grandmother, the spirit assigned to protect and nurture the children of the world" (49). Beccah recounts, "Every year on my birthday, my mother would place an offering of sweet rice cake on our shrine, thanking Birth Grandmother for the blessing of my birth. I was taught to pray to her, calling her by name – Induk – if ever I was in trouble or frightened" (49).

As a child, the young Beccah shows an innocent eagerness to receive this heritage, to know and please her mother. She believes her mother's stories and at times wants to identify with her. In one instance, Beccah recalls, "Sometimes when I massaged my mother, I felt my arms disappear up to the elbows, my body reabsorbed by hers. In those moments, I knew I was truly my mother's daughter, that I nursed her with my light" (85). Nevertheless, as the ultimate, cross-cultural recipient of all this heritage, Beccah is alienated from its giver – her mother – both culturally and spiritually; she lacks the shared experiences of her mother's oppression in Korea as well as her mother's ability to communicate with spirits of the dead. This lack of knowledge results in her inability to understand. "This lack of mutual understanding," writes Chen in her article, "even inflects the verbal communication that does take place between the two women" (119). Chen uses the narratives concerning Akiko's confession that she has killed Beccah's father as an example. Beccah does not really believe that Akiko has killed him, but "she is concerned with how Akiko's trances signify a time when she has to become the caretaker, forced into the responsibility of caring for her mother" (119). Chen further highlights that, even in a society like Hawaii, America, where its members constitute of many of the mixed races, Beccah feels alienated from it because of her exposure to her mother's world of spirits. Instead, she views her mother's possession by spirits as insanity:

> Even in Hawai'i, where Beccah's identity as the hapa-haole daughter of an Asian mother and a white father doesn't so much set her apart as make her an expected part of a racial spectrum that comprises a creolized society, her mother's bouts with ghosts and spirits that haunt her make her unintelligible to many and contribute to Beccah's sense of herself as someone who doesn't possess the kinds of cultural competencies that would make her fluent in two very different worlds of school and home. The very fact that Beccah thinks her mother is insane gestures to a lack of cultural knowledge that would give her the hermeneutic tools to explain the otherwise unexplainable; "insanity" becomes a convenient category to explain the otherwise unexplainable. (120)

As Akiko deviates from the norms of 'a good mother' who takes care of her child because of her inability to function in the physical world during her unpredicted spiritual trances, Beccah cannot feel connected to her mother and instead yearns for an ordinary mother who will take care of her and congratulate on her success at school (127). In her adolescence, Beccah even grows to hate her mother for her incomprehensible superstitions and eccentricity. For instance, Akiko believes that embedded in Beccah's body are invisible arrows of curse called "*sal*," planted there from "the barbs the doctor who deliver [Beccah] let loose into the air with their male eyes and breath" (73). Beccah recalls, "I often wished the *sal* had killed me outright so that I would not have had to endure my mother's protection" (73). Once, Beccah finds Akiko walking down the street from their home to her school, throwing rice along the way in a ceremony to purify her daughter's routine route of *sal*. Beccah witnesses Akiko's being taunted by some children and teenagers, who are soon driven away by the vice principle. However, Beccah slips away when the vice principle calls her to come to her mother, not answering to Akiko's call: "At that moment I was called upon to claim my mother, I couldn't. Instead I ran away, and the farther I ran from my mother, the smaller I seemed to shrink" (89).

It is after her mother's death that Beccah realizes she does not know how to properly write an obituary for her mother, despite her profession as a journalist responsible for writing obituaries or "record[ing] the lives of the dead" (26), as she claims: "[W]hen it came time for me to write my own mother's obituary, … I found that I did not have the facts for even the most basic, skeletal obituary. And I found I did not know how to start imagining her life" (26). Beccah doubts the reliability of the stories her mother has told her about her life, for example, of how she meets and falls in love with her father; in one version Akiko tells Beccah that she is a famous singer in Korea (26) and her father meets her while she is performing on the stage, whereas in the other version Akiko is helping in an orphanage in the war when she meets Bradley, who is one of the missionaries. This version has Bradley help people in Akiko's village escape, walking over the mountains of Korea before finally getting to America (31). Beccah is confused as she believes that "even then I must have recognized her story as an adaptation of *The Sound of Music*" (32). As a result,

Beccah grows "cautious of [her] mother's stories, never knowing what to count on or what to discount" (32). However, because she does not want her mother's bouts of insanity to replace her coherency, Beccah is afraid to challenge her mother's story even though she herself does not believe it: "When she spoke to me, calling me by name, I never wanted to do anything to spoil the moment. I feared my own words might break the spell of normalcy" (32). Once, when Beccah is singing in the bathroom, Akiko does not understand that her daughter is practicing and fears that Beccah hears the spirits singing and demanding to her as she does. The incident culminates in Akiko's entering a trance right in front of Beccah's eyes. Beccah then puts her hands over her ears and repeatedly chants, "I can't hear you" (26). The words become a *symbolic code* as it signifies how Beccah is unable to communicate with her mother, even years after.

Only at the idea of the grandiose funeral Reno has planned for Akiko, where many of her customers are expected to attend, does Beccah fully realize, "despite her reputation and the hundreds of people who paid in time and money to see her, no one knew her. Not even Auntie Reno, who gave her her first job and decided she was a fortune-teller. Not even I, her daughter – the only person who loved her, at least part of the time – really knew her" (140). In ironic humor, Beccah laughs and exclaims, "We are having a funeral for a *yongson*!" (140) – an exclamation that Sanford, her incompetent lover, misinterprets as a term of honor and wrongly replies, "Yes, your mother was a wonderful woman" (140). However, Beccah goes on laughing, uncaring to correct him that "a *yongson* is the ghost of a person who traveled far from home and died a stranger" (140), which indeed fits her idea of the unknown life of Akiko.

Nevertheless, Beccah feels the need to understand her mother after she has lost her. As such, she tries placing offerings for the spirits in the house as her mother has done in the hope that her mother's spirit will give her guidance on what to do: "I performed the actions of my mother, caring for the spirits of the house, in order to feel my mother once again. I wanted to be able to feel her next to me, to sense her spirit – for if there really are such things, I knew she would come to me, feeling my need for her in death as she rarely did in life" (169). Beccah tries to remember Akiko's stories and instructions for her funeral but doubts the reliability of her own memory and

understanding: "I find myself second-guessing my interpretations of her stories, and wonder, now that she is dead, how I should remember her life" (171).

Even while she is listening to the cassette tape labeled her name, at first Beccah thinks that the tape is not *actually* for her; it is given to her but intended for someone else – for her mother's mother – as it describes Akiko's mother *chesa*, or death anniversary ritual: "Not once did my mother sing my name. And though primarily in English, this tape was not for me, was addressed not to me but to her mother, a final description of her mother's death and feast. Faithful in performing the death anniversary *chesa*, my mother proved to be dutiful and dependable as a daughter in a way she never was as a mother" (192). But then, Beccah is shocked at the truth she discovers and does not know how to perceive her mother and the heritage she has left behind: "Without reference, unable to recognize any of the names, I did not know how to place my mother, who sounded like an avenging angel recounting the crimes of men" (194). She cannot bring herself to consider her mother as a survivor, let alone imagine how she survives: "I could not view my mother, whom I had always seen as weak and vulnerable, as one of the 'comfort women' she described. Even though I heard her call out 'Akiko,' the name she had answered to all my life, I could not imagine her surviving what she described, for I cannot imagine myself surviving. How could my mother have married, had a child, if she had been forced into the camps?" (194).

Beccah's problematic contemplation and comprehension of her dead mother possibly parallels that of "the modern readers" who attempt to comprehend and understand the experiences of the traumatized oppressed, the psychological inheritance of the marginalized other, which has become the inspiration for *Comfort Woman*. Tina Chen cites Keller's statement in her Reader's Companion that, after hearing a former comfort woman Keum Ju Hwang[1]'s 1993 testimony of her

[1] Keum Ju Hwang, or Hwang Geum Joo, claimed to be an authentic comfort woman. She testified that she was recruited into "a commodified rape center" at nineteen as "Emperor Hirohito purported to order all unmarried girls to work in Japanese military factories" (De Ming Fan 395). Along with the other fifteen comfort women, Hwang Geum Joo filed a lawsuit in America in 2000 mainly demanding the Japanese government's declaration of their violations of international treaties as well as compensation to the comfort women. However, the case was dismissed on the ground that the American court had no jurisdiction over the plaintiff's claims. The case has come to be known as the *Hwang Geum Joo, et al. v. Japan* case (Comfort Women: U.S.).

sufferings and survival from the experiences in the comfort station, she found her own dreams haunted, "filled with images of war and women, of blood and birth" (114). And in order to deal with the ghosts in her dreams, she had to imagine herself surviving "their daily lives, their physical and emotional anguish, the aftermath" (115). Chen considers this act of imagination as the act of identification that expands the imaginer's perception of identity:

> To imagine yourself as one of these women – even as you know that what you imagine is woefully inadequate and can only approximate the shape of these experiences – is to engage in an act of identification so profound, so intense, that it will either illuminate the limitations of imagination or challenge the borders of identity by which you perceive your place in her world. Maybe it will do both. (114)

Chen continues, "Such an act of imagination potentially has the power to rupture the seams that suture identity to identification. Such an act of imagination can be, in essence, an act of impersonation through which we can all be held accountable for the recognition or erasure of such witness" (114). For Keller, the act of imagination and taking on the identity of one of the imagined comfort woman results in this fictional biography in which Beccah must learn about her mother's traumatic past as the comfort woman and accept her mother's experiences as her female heritage. Only then can she be able to know her mother and subsume Soon Hyo's identity as part of her own identity.

Another main theme of *Comfort Woman* is the theme of female interconnectedness. The novel illustrates that, unlike a man's identity, the identity of a woman cannot be considered apart from her relations to other women. Instead it is collective, diverse, fluid and interconnected. The identities of Akiko, Beccah, Induk, and Akiko's mother are collective as they share the same roots in their gender, race, and culture to varying extents. As Keller wrote *Comfort Woman* as a means to relive how one can survive from such a situation and thus release herself from her own

haunting, Akiko, unlike Murasaki Shikibu or Polly Bemis, is not entirely based on any historically existing person in the strictest sense. She is a *semic code* representing multiple facades of the traumas and survivals unique to the female experiences: a comfort woman, a woman in the patriarchal Korean society, an Asian female immigrant in America, and a Korean mother estranged from her Americanized daughter. This corresponds to Catherine N. Parke's statement in *Biography: Writing Lives*: "[f]eminist biography counterbalances a lives-of-the-great notion of history not only by taking women as its principal subjects, but also by narrating history as group movements rather than acts of individuals" (93). Similar to biographies of the collective marginalized, the life of one person in the group is used to reflect the collective experiences. Akiko's perception of her identity is based on her relations and association with other women. Firstly, she associates herself with Induk and other comfort women as the fellow marginalized. Secondly, she associates herself with her mother as women in the patriarchal Korean society. Thirdly, she tries to associate herself to her daughter as Asian-American female immigrants, even though they are divided by different generations, upbringings, cultures and beliefs.

Secondly, the idea of female identities as 'diverse' is portrayed through Akiko's ability to impersonate a multiplicity of roles. She learns to play assigned parts, performing as expected by men in order to survive while keeping her true self hidden. Throughout the novel, Akiko performs the roles of the comfort woman in the recreation camp, the wife to the American minister, and the medium who accepts the possession of other spirits of her own body. The clothes that Akiko is made to wear become significant *symbolic codes* for her being possessed by assigned roles, similar to Lalu/Polly in *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and much attention is drawn, on Keller's part, to the descriptions of various articles of clothing which reflect the nature of the status they signify in relation to Akiko's body.

The first major set of clothes to be described is the ones that Akiko/Soon Hyo wears as a comfort woman. They are implied to be either made of sack or shaped like sacks. These "cheap packages" hint at the comfort women's quality as "disposable commodities." These clothes are oversized for a prepubescent girl like Soon Hyo, who is forced to become a prostitute even though she has not yet started to

menstruate. In addition, the clothes are labeled “Akiko.” As they belong to Induk or Akiko 40, they signify that Soon Hyo is a replacement and substitute for Induk. Akiko 41’s being made to wear Induk/Akiko 40’s clothes functions as the *symbolic code* of Akiko’s inheritance of Induk’s identity: “That was my first night as the new Akiko. I was given her clothes, which were too big and made the soldiers laugh. The new P won’t be wearing them much anyway, they jeered. Fresh poji” (21). Later, Akiko recounts that the missionaries living in the Heaven and Earth Mentholatum and Matches Company building, “[thinks] that [she is] Japanese because of the name, Akiko, sewn onto the sack that [is her] dress” (16). Considering herself tainted and having no right to use her true name, Soon Hyo lets herself be branded by the name ‘Akiko’ for the rest of her life.

The second *symbolic code* involving Akiko’s clothes is the “thin white gown” (102) she wears to her baptism and wedding to the minister Richard Bradley. The gown is given to her by a missionary woman. As this is a marriage out of necessity, Akiko does not want the dress, but its owner misinterprets her act of decline: “I tried to push the dress away, but she said, Don’t bother to thank me; it must be a dream come true” (103). As Akiko has a small frame and is underage for marriage, the American woman’s dress does not fit her: “She wrapped me in the dress, which kept slipping off my shoulders and dragged through the dust as we walked” (103). The woman orders Akiko to hold the dress up lest she is “getting it dirty” (103). However, Akiko just focuses on walking and watching “how the white cloth, the color of purity and death soaked up the earth” (103). This particular part of the narrative associates purity with defilement as the trailing hem of the dress comes into contact with dirt – like Akiko who considers the purity she used to have soiled by the Japanese soldiers’ multiple rapes of her body. She is going to be defiled yet again by the consummation of her marriage, which will sanction Bradley’s rights to use her body for sexual fulfillment not unlike the Japanese soldiers. Furthermore, Akiko almost turns her baptismal dress and wedding gown into her death clothes as she tries to drown herself in the river. She feels as if she is dead rather than reborn after Bradley thwarts her suicide attempt by pulling her from the water.

Then, after Akiko is married to Bradley and moves to America, she dresses in accordance with her husband's desire. When Bradley preaches, Akiko is put on display as an exotic trophy in her national dress: "I would stand by my husband's side in my Korean dress as he lectured on Spreading the Light: My experiences in the Obscure Orient" (107). Ironically, however, even though during his lecture Bradley wants Akiko to be in the concealing and exotic traditional Korean hanbok, for everyday wear, he wants Akiko to be clothed in Western clothes which, despite seeming proper in the Western culture, make her uncomfortable as they pronounce her shape and reveal more of her skin: "When we were not in a lecture, the minister husband dressed me in a white blouse pinched in at the waist and a dark-blue skirt that clung to my hips and barely covered my knees. I felt naked in the way the clothes touched my body, but this was the uniform I was to wear as the minister's wife" (107). Furthermore, he has a fetishistic obsession with how she wears her dark hair differently for the day and night; for the day he wants his wife to present herself as a mature woman with the traditional hair bun, but for the night he wants her to look and act like a young, unmarried virgin: "During the day, I pulled my hair back into a knot that reminded me that I was married. If I forgot and wore my hair in a long braid slung over my shoulder, the husband would scold me: You look like a little kid. And yet at night that is how he wanted me: hair down in braids to my waist … At night when he climbed on top of me, he'd take the ends of my hair, put them into his mouth, and suck" (107).

Even after Bradley's death, Akiko's choices of clothing are demanded by the spirits that possess her. This is summed up in Beccah's remark:

> [M]y mother was accustomed to wearing clothes assigned to her by others. When my mother lent her body to the spirits, they each demanded a different color. The Seven Stars preferred the yellow robe, a tent of sunrise that swallowed my mother's body from neck to toes. The Birth Grandmother craved the clarity of blue. And Saja, the pig of death grabbed at anything red, forcing my mother's body into whatever material – my T-shirts or shorts, a torn pillowcase, a fabric

> remnant from Kress my mother had planned to sew into a border for our drapes – fed his desire for red. (162)

Beccah is able to distinguish that Akiko is not being possessed by any spirit when she dies because her dead body is clad in an "orange-and-green mu'umu'u" (162). She reasons, "The bright flowers, the mix and clash of colors, was a sign that she was in her body before she died" (162). As such, she feels that Akiko's body should be allowed to wear the clothes of her own choice and disagrees with Reno, who plans to dress Akiko for the funeral in one of her old glamorous dresses: "Not once did I think about changing her clothes. The mu'umu'u was the dress she had chosen for herself; I would not assume the same power that the spirits did, as Reno did, by dressing her as if she were a doll to be played with, then posed and displayed behind a case of glass" (163).

Nevertheless, at first Beccah lets Reno arrange the funeral and dress Akiko's body because she does not know how to associate with her mother or what role to perform in Akiko's funeral as a daughter. However, when Beccah learns about her mother's past and her description of a proper funeral, and discovers how flashily Reno dresses Akiko's body for display in her style, she is infuriated and exclaims, "This isn't my mother ... This is you. Just like it's always been you" (199). It is after discovering the truth that Beccah has the courage to confront Reno. She not only demands that Akiko's dead clothes be changed and her body not be put on display for the funeral, but also voices her witnessing Reno's exploitation of Akiko's spiritual trances for her own gain: "Ever since I met you, you used us. Used my mother, treated her just like a puppet on your string." (202). She is shocked when Reno reveals yet another façade of her mother, who has been very efficient in dealing with financial matters with Reno to save her share of money for Beccah. She also learns that Reno truly cares about her mother, as she easily agrees to let Beccah hold a funeral for Akiko privately while she deals with the close-casket memorial ceremony for Akiko's clients.

On the one hand, it can be interpreted that Akiko's true identity is concealed or drowned out in the multiple impersonations she has to take on herself. Akiko thinks that she manages to survive owing to the lessons taught by her mother in hiding her true self: "Those are the same lessons my mother taught me, the morals of her stories, and because I learned them early, I was able to survive what eventually killed my mother. Hiding my true self, the original nature of my head, enabled me to survive in the recreation camp and in a new country" (153). On the other hand, this concealment of the 'true self' does not mean that her true identity is completely eradicated or lost, but rather that a woman's identity cannot be considered apart from the social constraints and expectations placed on her; they must be incorporated and consider as part of her identity as well. Likewise, Chen considers this series of impersonations the basis of Akiko's performance as a shaman or spirit medium; the erasure and/or substitution of her own identity becomes part of the diverse facades of her multiple identities: "The impersonations she performs as wife, as convert, and as comfort woman lay the groundwork for the spiritual impersonations she enacts as shaman, performances that ultimately confirm what her many experiences have taught her: that her many selves can only emerge when identity becomes that which is constituted as a performance that both questions and establishes the reality within which she lives" (126).

Next, the idea of female identities as "fluid" and "interconnected" is largely portrayed through the water motif that occurs throughout the fictional biography. The images of the water, river, and sea become a set of major symbols regarding the fluidity and interconnectedness of the female identities. Akiko tells Beccah that the concept of transitions in a woman's life is connected to the flow of blood and the liberation of the spirit: "According to my mother, the rituals that accompanied the major transitions in a woman's life – birth, puberty, childbirth, and death – involved the flow of blood and the freeing of the spirit. Slipping out of the body along pathways forged by blood, the spirit traveled and roamed free, giving the body permission to transform itself" (185). The fluidity of water, its qualities to flow on to the larger bodies of the seas, to merge with water from another source and to inhabit

whatever shape its container is in, signifies the mergence of women's identities as well as their interconnectedness.

The main motif involving the river in *Comfort Woman* is "the river song" sung by Akiko's mother. It is passed down from her to Akiko, and subsequently to Beccah. The song is first presented in the scene in which Akiko recounts that her mother gives birth to a stillborn. Akiko's mother has wrapped the remains of the baby in a cloth and cast it in the river after singing a song in Korean with this meaning: "Blue waters, how many lives have you carried away? … You should carry the sorrow of the people far, far away" (40). The lyrics highlight the contrasting negative and positive connotations of the river as the carrier of not only lost lives, but also the sorrow of the people. When the baby Beccah cries, Akiko sings this song to her, wanting her daughter to listen, to acknowledge this inheritance of sufferings and self-identification: "It's a song full of tears, but one my mother sang for her country and for herself. A song she gave to me and one that I will give to my daughter. I want to shake my baby into listening, force her to hear, but I only sing louder and louder" (71). When selecting a new house, Akiko decides to buy a house near the Manoa stream because she hears "[t]he song of the river" (124) there. Akiko asks if Beccah hears it too, but at that point she does not. Beccah later recalls that her mother relaxes with the soothing sounds of the river that she thinks she hears in her wild, overgrown garden: "In the late mornings, when the traffic died down, my mother would set up a lawn chair in that jungle and listen. She said that on quiet days she could hear the Manoa River and would dream of riding it to the ocean" (124). The murmurs of the Manoa River also become the background music for Beccah's ritual of transition into adolescence and are described by Beccah as "a white noise I became aware of only when we jumped over a small finger of water" (189). It is much later, after Beccah reconciles with the hidden façade of her mother's life, that Beccah begins to fully hear the river song at this exact spot: "About to sprinkle my mother's ashes in the garden behind our house, I heard the song of the river. The music had always seemed faint to me, but now it drummed in my ears" (212).

The song also features prominently in the fairy tale-like story of Princess Pari, which is told to Beccah by Akiko. In the story, the titular protagonist's parents are

condemned to hell because they have no sons. However, Princess Pari braves the way into hell to save their souls and succeeds in finding them because she hears "the song she recognized as the song her mother had sung when she was still in the womb" (49). When Beccah asks her mother what song it is that the Princess sings, Akiko sings to her the river song and Beccah promises, "I'll never forget it, okay, Mom? You sing that song, and no matter what, I'll find you, okay? I'll be like Princess Pari, and I'll rescue you" (50). The song becomes a symbol of recognition – one that can save the dead and the forgotten from their misery.

The river song, the song of women's lamentation, is also shown to be more powerful and more vividly remembered by Akiko than to any other songs she hears. In one instance, Akiko contrasts her song with the "silly songs" (69) containing references to Biblical figures such as Jonah and the whale, which her husband sings to put the baby Beccah to sleep; "I cannot sing to my daughter like that, in a voice full of laughter, for I never learned funny songs, songs that make you laugh and laugh. I remember only bits of pieces from those my mother sang when she was working. And they were songs that filled you with sadness, that made you want to cry until your throat swelled with salt" (69). Even the Christian song the missionaries sing in unison in a chorus, the song that stirs the lost and mentally deaf Akiko, newly arriving at the mission house, into hearing and regaining her voice reminds Akiko not of God but of the women she knows – of their sufferings, struggle, and liberation:

> [I]n that song I heard things that I had almost forgotten: the enduring whisper of women who continued to pass messages under the ears of the soldiers; a defiant Induk bellowing the Korean national anthem even after the soldiers had knocked her teeth out; the symphony of the ten thousand frogs; the lullabies my mother hummed as she put her daughters to sleep; the song the river sings when she finds her freedom in the ocean. (71)

Water becomes a *symbolic code* with multiple meanings; it is a means of death, yet of purge, change, nurture, rebirth, and freedom. The *proairetic code* signaling bathing in water in many instances simultaneously functions as the *symbolic*

code for purge and change in identity. For example, Akiko bathes in the stream to cleanse herself when she escapes just after having undergone an abortion, leaving the bloodied rags that catch the remains of her first baby by the side of the stream in hope that her baby will be "nestled in the crook of the river's elbow, nursing at its breast" (41). Later, Akiko is baptized in the Taedong River by Bradley when they are going to marry – even though she tries to drown herself in the river at that very moment. In that instance, as well as in the subsequent events recalled by Beccah that she suspects Akiko of trying to commit suicide twice by drowning, water also symbolizes death. The first time Akiko is found passed out in the bath tub, "dreaming under a thin layer of water, her nose pressed to the sluggish water drain" (47), and the other time she falls into the Ala Wai Canal (47). In the fairy tale, Princess Pari also has to go "across the deep, dark river that flowed past … the entrance to hell" (49) and swim "through schools of human souls trapped in fish bodies" (49) in search of her parents. Beccah also imagines her mother's soul leaving her body to swim in the river to hell each night in her unconscious state: "Part of me was aware of each time she turned over in bed, dreaming dreams like mini-trances where she traveled into worlds and times I could not follow to protect her. The most I could do was wait, holding the thin blue thread of her life while her spirit tunneled into the darkness of the earth to swim the dark red river toward hell" (125).

Rivers and streams become important settings in many scenes and carry symbolic significance. For example, the young Akiko compares the beating on the river rocks during cloth-washing to secret communication between women as she and her mother go up the river which is known as "Yalu Aniya" or "Older Sister to the Yalu" (17) to wash clothes. And when Akiko and her mother are "beating the clothes clean against the rocks" (17) she pretends, "my mother and I sent secret signals to one another, the rocks singing out messages only we could understand" (17). The river can also signify freedom as the comfort women are allowed to leave the recreation camp for "weekly baths at the river" (19) and it is by the stream leading to the Yalu that Akiko achieves her freedom. She claims, "Following the sound of my mother beating clothes against the rock, I floated along the trails made by deer and found a nameless stream that led in the end, like all the mountain streams, to the Yalu" (23).

There, Akiko also encounters Induk's spirit and drinks the stream water so that she feels that Induk merges with her. As such, Akiko describes the stream bank as "the place where I had discarded my empty body, and invited herself in" (36).

As Induk – the spirit of the comfort woman who becomes a larger-than-life figure in death for Akiko – is closely connected to Akiko as a substitute of her identity, many interpretations have been made on the symbolic meanings of Induk's elusive entity. In one interpretation, Chen, who explores Akiko's self and identity as a series of impersonations and possessions on the basis of Korean shamanism, posits that Induk's relationship with Akiko and her existence through Akiko is "a kind of mutual possession that transforms her by complicating her previous notions of who she was and who she is destined to become" (128). Induk can exist through Akiko's body, and at the same time Akiko can live on through Akiko 40/ Induk's possession of her body. Their selves and identities must merge with that of each other to maintain their mutual existence. For another interpretation, Begoña Simal González proposes in her article "From Identity to Alter-Entity" in *Uncertain Mirrors*: *Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures* that Induk is an alter-entity to Akiko – the other and the substitution that is opposite to her. However, like Chen, González notes the two women's coexistence and separate identities: "[E]ven though Akiko 41 is, in substitution terms, Akiko 40, she manages to remain herself at the same time. She lives for and through Akiko 40/Induk, but retains her own personal memories, her own self" (184). González sees their relationship as a give-and-take one in which the two women are bound together as 'hostages': "Akiko 41 and Induk are not univocally concerned with their own selves. The two women become mutual hostages; their responsibility is reciprocal" (186). Considering *Comfort Woman* as a magical realist narrative, González emphasizes how the genre enables the fictional biography to illustrate how selves and identities can be split and merged together through its elements of fantasy: "fragmenting, superseding, splitting, and reunifying selves proliferate in magical realist narratives. Once we discard a restrictive view of mimesis and allow for the coexistence of the magic and the real in the same discursive universe, we are ready to accept not only a fluid conception of selves, but also the very paradox of alterity within identity" (187). In contrast, Patricia P. Chu, in her

essay "To Hide Her True Self: Sentimentality and the Search for Intersubjective Self in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*," included in *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, sees Induk not as an existing spirit in magical realism but as "a transcendental Other" (70) created by Akiko and representing "an idealized, pre-Oedipal version of Akiko's mother, and embodiment of her own resistant spirit, and her motherland" (70) to sustain her through various struggles. As such, Chu defines Induk as both the "symptom of [Akiko's] extreme social alienation" and "solution" (72) acknowledged and seen only by Akiko. Despite their different interpretations, Chen, González, and Chu agree that Induk's portrayal in *Comfort Woman* suggests the fluidity and mergence of female identities. As Akiko follows Induk's form along the stream, she sees that the figure of Induk has merged with that of her own mother:

> I saw her with my eyes closed, though how I knew she was Induk I do not know, for she looked like my mother, standing there next to the river with her arms outstretched, long strips of hair coming undone from the married woman's bun at the back of her neck. It was as if without their earthly bodies, the boundaries between them melted, blending their features, merging their spirits. Now I cannot remember what either my mother or Induk looked like when she was alive and a separate person. (36)

Then, as Induk continues to guide Akiko, her figure transforms into those of not only her mother, but also her grandmother and ancestors: "I … kept my eyes fixed on Induk beckoning before me. At times, her form would blur until it doubled, then quadrupled, and she would become Induk and my mother, and in turn my mother's mother and an old woman dressed in the formal top'o of the olden days. I realized I was walking with my ancestors" (53).

However, the reason why Akiko is so special to Induk that she follows her across the world as a spirit, apart from the fact that Akiko is Induk's "direct" successor and replacement, is never made clear in the novel. Akiko remarks that she does not really

know Induk as a person, when she is alive and able to express her feelings, opinions and identity:

> I knew her only at the comfort stations, when she had to hide between layers of silence and secret movements. I want to say that I knew she would be the one who would join me after death. That there was something special about her even then, perhaps in the way she carried herself – walking more erect, with impudence, even – or in the way she gave the other women courage through the looks and smiles she offered us.
>
> But I am trying not to lie.
>
> There was nothing special about her life at the recreation camps; only her death was special. In front of the men, we all tried to walk the same, tie our hair the same, keep the same blank looks on our faces. To be special there meant only that we would be used more, that we would die faster. (143)

However, regardless of Induk's motive in visiting Akiko and guiding her, Induk associates herself with Akiko, considering both of them to be dead and thus have only the dead to rely on for guidance. To Akiko, Induk laments, "No one performed the proper rites of the dead. For me. For you. … Who was there to write our names, to even know our names and to remember us?" (38), adding "And now … there is only the dead to guide us" (38). As such, Akiko lets Induk be her guide and fulfillment. At the mission house, Akiko feels lost like an empty body without a soul until Induk returns to her:

> During the silences when we were supposed to commune privately with God, I prayed for Induk to return to me. I spiraled my mind from my body, trying to find her, to catch a glimpse of her. I listen for her in the empty spaces of my days and nights: in the spaces between the beats of words and music, of my breath and my heart. I waited, wondering if she had abandoned me; I called out, Where are

> you? Until the words lost their meaning and I was nothing but a bag of skin. (92)

It is illustrated that for Induk to coexist with Akiko, Akiko must totally submit herself to Induk. As Akiko longs for Induk to return to her when she is staying in the mission house, Induk finally does return. However, the first thing she does to Akiko is to pin her down to the floor and berate her, asking why Akiko has abandoned her. Nevertheless, Akiko does not seem to be angry at her accusation and replies, "I was afraid of becoming you" (96). Induk's next action of "wail[ing] so long and hard" (96) blasts air into Akiko's lungs, thus symbolically revives her. Showing the vision of her rotting corpse to Akiko, she then demands to her, "See me as I am now" (96). However, Akiko finds even her decaying body beautiful because Induk has come back to her, and so she touches the dead Induk intimately, giving up her body to Induk's spirit: "I grabbed her hand, and my fingers slipped into bloated flesh. I kissed it and offered her my own hands, my eyes, my skin" (96). After Akiko acknowledges and gives her body to the spirit of Induk, she feels that, in return, she is saved by Induk: "She offered me salvation" (96). Furthermore, it is strongly hinted that Induk becomes Akiko's ultimate refuge and substitution of 'God' in many instances. In the mission house, Akiko remarks, "Of God, I had no picture. But in the darkest part of the night, when my prayers were peeled back and laid bare, the face I cried for, called out to, was always Induk's" (92). Even when Bradley asks Akiko to recite her prayers after he sleeps with her, Akiko thinks instead of Induk: "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, I would say, while thinking of Induk, her body bathed in a river of light" (107).

After their mergence, Akiko and Induk share a very strong spiritual bond, as if Induk lived in Akiko's body and through her mind. Akiko states, "Induk … somehow followed me not only across the country but across the world, to become my guardian" (104). When Akiko is in labor and hallucinates that she is still being tied down and raped in the recreation camp by male doctors, Induk's presence calms her down: "[W]hen I heard that woman's voice in the roomful of men, I knew Induk was there. Slipping into the body of a doctor, she stood beside me, shadowed by mask,

gown, and a halo of light. And though I could not see her face, though it had been some time since she last came to me, I knew it was her, just as I've always known. Even the first time" (35-6).

Beccah is told, by her mother, of Induk's existence, and she regards Induk the Birth Grandmother as "the most intimate of [Akiko's] spirits" (169). She sees Induk in person once when she appears in a dream in the night Beccah experiences her first menstrual cramps. In that dream, Beccah swims to the shore and sees Induk as a beautiful woman who looks like her mother, but at the same time also resembles Beccah herself. And the woman introduces herself as Induk: "At first I thought the woman was my mother, then I realized she was myself, 'My name is Induk,' the woman said through my lips. I looked into the face that was once my own and wondered who she saw, who stood in my place looking at the body that Induk now claimed" (188). Beccah then sees her body melt and dissolve into ashes, scattered in the wind as the other woman "exhale[s], dispersing [her] ashes like pollen into the night air"(189). Like Akiko, Beccah's self must be broken down and merge with those of Induk and her mother in order to shape her own identity.

Not only is Akiko's identity affected by and merged with that of Induk's, but Beccah's identity also affects that of Akiko's and becomes a source of life for her mother. As Akiko nurses Beccah, she feels that she absorbs the baby's body warmth and heartbeat, and regains her own life: "My body feels cold against her sleep-flushed warmth, yet she still snuggles, roots against me. As she nurses, her heat invades me and become mine, her heart beats against mine, becoming mine, becoming me, and give me life" (55). Nursing or breastfeeding is also shown to be a significant provision a woman can give to her child as well as self-sacrifice. Even though Bradley prefers that Beccah be fed bottled milk, claiming, "Leave her to cry for a while. You're spoiling her. She needs to learn independence" (37) and "parroting the doctor, Give her the bottle, better than breast" (37), Akiko totally disagrees with him and breastfeeds Beccah herself, as she recounts how her mother's breastfeeding symbolizes the sacrifices she has made for her children: "I cannot. I have heard what the doctor says, but I also remember my own mother shaking her small, limp breasts at each of her daughters, laughing as we bathed together. Look, girls! See what you

did to me? She teased. See what will happen to you, too, one day when you give all of yourself to your own children" (37). Akiko reasons to herself, "if she drinks from the bottle, how will she know her mother's heart?" (37). The act of breastfeeding is, in turn, spiritually fulfilling for Akiko as well: "each night, after my husband has fallen asleep in exasperation, I bring my baby to my bed, where we sleep, cocooned. The milk from my breasts fills her as she sucks from them even in her dreams; and the warmth of her solid body, the gentle waves of her breathing, sooth my own hunger" (182). Furthermore, Beccah's dried umbilical cord, which Akiko keeps as a token of remembrance, symbolizes their union. Akiko describes it as "this one piece of flesh that was both me and my daughter" (97). She keeps it to remind herself of her duty to protect Beccah and the fact that, regardless of how Beccah's identity is going to evolve, they are part of each other: "I cupped my hand over my daughter's birth cord and vowed to keep it safe, just as I would keep my daughter safe from harm and unhappiness. I would always keep the cord so that as she grows into the person she will become, a person I do not know yet, we will both be reminded that we share one body, one flesh" (97).

Nevertheless, even though the water motifs suggest that mergence and interconnectedness of the female identities are positive and crucial part of the realization of their selves, at the same time the idea of being completely dissolved into the identity of another can be frightening, as Akiko tells Induk, "I was afraid of becoming you" (96). In that very same incident, Akiko is seized with fear as her body turns into water before Induk pins her down:

> I fell to the ground. My body turned to lead, so heavy that I could not lift a finger or a toe, much less an arm or a leg. And then it was as if I liquefied; I lost the edges of myself and began to soak into the floorboards. Waves surged through my arms and legs, rushing toward the center of my body, where I knew they would clash and explode out the top of my head. I became afraid, knowing that I would feel naked and vulnerable without my body.

> The fear grew until it pressed against my chest, until I felt I would drown under the weight of it, until it began to take shape and I saw that it was Induk straddling me, holding me down to the earth. (95)

For Beccah, this similar fear of identity mergence is portrayed through her recurrent nightmare of drowning. Even as a child, Beccah often dreams of swimming in a never-ending river and struggles helplessly against the currents, being pulled down by unknown agents. She describes them as "my dreams of drowning and sinking and struggling for breath while unseen hands wrapped around my legs and pulled" (33). The dream becomes the most violent in the night that Akiko, seemingly in an infuriated trance, accuses the spirit of Saja, the Messenger of Death, of seducing and tainting Beccah, after Beccah has secretly made love to her boyfriend Max for the first time when she is in high school. Trying to drive a bad spirit away from her, Akiko waves and throws a knife at Beccah. In that night, Beccah has a nightmare that she is killed by sharks: "That night I dreamed I drowned in blood, unable to fight the arms that pulled me under, while the fins of sharks sliced the water like knives" (135). When Akiko dies, Beccah laments on how she is unable to save her mother by taking in her identity, associating the act with swimming and diving into water: "When the time came, when she needed me, I had failed to rescue her. No Princess Pari, I could not swim to the far shores of death to pull my mother back to life; I could not even put my feet in the water" (51). Then, the dreams of drowning from her childhood recur to her twice after her mother's death. The first time she wakes up before drowning (121), and the second time she discovers that what is pulling her down is her own mother:

> When I dive in now, I swim for only a few short seconds before I am trapped, kicking at the shark that pulls me under. I twist and turn, trying to land blows on its snout with my fists as well as my feet, when I see not the jaws of a shark but the nebulous folds of a giant jellyfish wrapping itself about my lower body, trying to suck me into itself. I can feel myself dissolving where the jellyfish stings me. I

> reach out to try to tear it off me, and my hand disappears in waves of black hair dancing in the water.
>
> I realize that it is my mother wrapped around my legs, holding on to me as though I can save her. Instead I feel myself sinking. I cannot hold my breath any longer, and just when I open my mouth to drown, I wake. (141)

According to Chen, Beccah's repeated dreams suggest her fear that her self and identity will be suffocated by her mother's spirit, while in reality "[t]he intersubjective relationship that produces identity through a form of mutual possession" is "the gift that Akiko hopes to give Beccah" (130). Chen further notes, "Such a gift is one Beccah will not appreciate until she learns that her mother's spirit won't so much murder her … as become the spirit she must inhabit in order to come into a sense of herself" (130). Beccah must learn to accept the identities of Induk and the other women in her mother's life as part of herself to be able to reconcile with her mother and come into the possession of her own, complete gendered identity.

Beccah's dreams of swimming to the shore may also signify her maturity. Throughout the story, there is one instance in which she manages to swim across to the other shore and meets Induk – with the help of her mother. As Beccah suffers her first menstrual cramps, Akiko helps washing her as well as possibly performing some kind of a healing ceremony for her:

> I slept, sailing in and out of dreams, riding the waves of my first cramping. Through the night, my mother bathed my face and body with water that smell sharp, like freshly cut grass, like newly unearthed roots. And as she stroked me, I dreamed I was swimming then drowning, then climbing an embankment that eroded and dissolved as I scrambled toward the stars. I dragged myself over sand and stone, following the light, until I stepped on a bridge of fire and found a beautiful woman waiting for me. (188)

Induk tells Beccah, “You must come back against running water” (189), before making Beccah’s self dissolved and scattering it in the wind. Similar words, “You must return across running water” (189), are repeated to Beccah the next morning by Akiko, who takes Beccah to perform the transitional ceremony in the deserted spot next to the Manoa Stream behind their house. As Beccah follows her mother on the overgrown path to the stream, she feels as if she has become one with her mother through their similar movements: “I followed where my mother led … I felt my body move like my mother’s, bend and dip with hers, as if I lived within her skin” (189). During the ritual, Akiko proclaims that Beccah “has crossed the dangerous stream in search of the spirit” (190) and instructs her to dance to the song of the river to free her spirit: “Let the river speak to you. Listen to what it has to say, to what you have to hear” (189). Akiko lets down a drop of Beccah’s blood into the stream, announcing, “Spirit, fly with the river, then follow it back home” (191). Then she tells Beccah to drink the water, in which Beccah tastes “the metal of blood” (191). Finally, Akiko declares, “Now you share the river’s body … Its blood is your blood, and when you are ready to let your spirit fly, it will always follow the water back to its sources” (191).

The mergence of Beccah’s blood with the river water signifies the mergence or her identity with the collective identities of the women so that her identity will not be lost. As Beccah recounts the incident, she realizes, “Like the river in my blood, my mother waited for me to fly to her, waited for me to tell her I was ready to hear what she had to say. I never asked, but maybe she was telling me all the time and I wasn’t listening” (191). For Beccah to be able to let her identity merge with that of her mother and those of the women her mother knows, she must learn about Akiko’s past and accept it as part of her identity. It is after this acceptance that she knows who Akiko is and how she should perform her funeral as her daughter. Thus, the fictional biography comes to its resolution with the thorough description of Akiko’s funeral, which is performed solely by Beccah. She bathes Akiko’s body with blessed water, sings the river song, and speaks out to reclaim Akiko’s true name and identity. Here the motif of the river recurs as the path on which Akiko’s spirit has to travel to cross to the other realm. Beccah tells her mother’s dead body, “I will care for your body as

your spirit crosses the river" (208) and "I will massage your arms with perfumed water blessed by the running river. I will massage your legs until they are strong enough to swim you to heaven" (209). Beccah's act of looking at Akiko's dead body without guilt or judgment symbolizes her unconditional acceptance of her mother: "My mother lay naked under her dress, in the body that had always embarrassed me both in its foreignness and in its similarity to mine. I looked now, fighting my shame, taking her body piece by piece – her face, her arms, her legs, working in a spiral toward the center – until I could see her in her entirety, without guilt or judgment" (209). At the final stage of Akiko's funeral, Beccah steps into the stream and cups a handful of water over the urn of cremated ashes, inviting Akiko to share the drink with her: "Mummy ... Omoni, please drink. Share this meal with me, a sip to know how much I love you" (212). Then, Beccah's act of acceptance and mergence is completed as she imbibes the stream water in which Akiko's ashes have just been scattered, as a symbolic gesture that she has taken in her mother's identity: " 'Your body in mine,' I told my mother, 'so you will always be with me, even when your spirit finds its way home. To Korea. To Sulsulham. And across the river of heaven to the Seven Sisters' " (212). The final scene in the novel depicts Beccah's dream that night, the same, recurrent dream of swimming in the deep river and drowning, but as she readily lets her mother pull her down this time, Beccah finds out that she can swim freely through the sky, fully liberated. It is hinted in the last sentence of the narrative that she may be pregnant with a child, as her mother has hoped that Beccah has a child of her own so that she can understand how much Akiko loves her (128), or she may be cultivating her new identity – the identity that is born from the mergence of her original one with that of her mother:

> I felt the pull on my legs. I struggled, flailing weak kicks, but when I turned and saw that it was my mother hanging on to me, I yielded. I opened my mouth to drown, expecting to in such heavy water, but instead I breathed in air, clear and blue. Instead of ocean, I swam through sky, higher and higher, until, dizzy with the freedom of light and air, I looked down to see a thin blue river of light spiraling

> down to earth, where I lay sleeping in bed, coiled tight around a small seed planted by my mother, waiting to be born. (213)

In *Comfort Woman*, the themes of female inheritance, collectivity, fluidity and interconnectedness of female identities are closely linked to the theme of women's liberation through the realization and reclaiming of their gendered identities. In other words, it is necessary for women to bond with their fellow women and to cultivate fluid and interconnected identities in order to preserve their identities and be liberated from the oppression they face on the basis of their gender. Chen sees that the novel reflects "the nature of gender-based oppression and resistance" (118) and that "Akiko experiences the ways in which rape, operating as an act of both physical and symbolic import, depends upon gendered power dynamics as well as colonial definitions of sovereignty and ideological superiority" (127). Similarly, González acknowledges that "Akiko's substitution in *Comfort Woman* is painfully and significantly gendered" (187).

The subjugation of comfort women is portrayed not only through physical acts such as systematic rapes, beatings, and murders, but also through mental control and ideological instilment. Chen states,

> What Akiko resists is not only the physical violation of her body, then, but also the threatened erasure of the self ... Because the Japanese soldiers figure the nature of their possession as the obliteration of Korean identity, a reading supported by the genocidal nature of the entire comfort woman project, Akiko and Induk both realize that it is their ethnic identity that they must insist upon and reassert. (127-8)

The mental control over women as the colonized other is presented to be closely associated with verbal language. Chu states, "Keller emphasizes how language is complicit with forms of domination that tinge imperialism with patriarchy" (69) and

that "the novel repeatedly associates language itself with the objectification of women, even when the speakers are admiring boyfriends, husbands, and fathers; and it attempts to imagine alternative, feminine modes of communication that subvert the objectifying force of ordinary language and rational thought" (64). The Japanese soldiers accomplish the mental control over the comfort women as well as the erasure of their selves and Korean identities through the use language in several aspects. Firstly, they use euphemisms that distort the reality of their suppression, calling mass victims of systematic gang-rapes 'comfort women' and their prisons 'recreation camps'. Secondly, they forbid the women from verbal communication. Thirdly, they rename the women with Japanese names. Ultimately, they expose them to the racist ideologies that the Japanese are the superior and the Koreans the inferior.

Akiko recounts these language-associated forms of control early on in the her narrative. She recalls how the comfort women are deprived of the right to speak out and communicate: "At the camps where the Japanese called us *Jungun Ianfu*, military comfort women, we were taught only whatever was necessary to service the soldiers. Other than that, we were not expected to understand and were forbidden to speak, any language at all" (16). Secondly, she illustrates how the comfort women are given Japanese names associated with their physical looks and numbers to signify how many women have used those particular names: "Hanako 38, her name given because her face was once pretty as a flower. Miyoko 52, frail and unlucky as the Miyokos before her. Kimi-ko 3, with hair the color of egg yellow, which made the officers laugh when they realized the pun of her name: Kimi the sovereign, Kimi the yolk. Akiko 40, Tamayo 29" (19). The renaming is similar to how the court women call Murasaki Shikibu by the name of her character, imposing on her their presuppositions and expectations that 'Murasaki' is to be like her fictional, ideal counterpart, as well as how Lalu is forced to go by the European name Polly by her master Hong King. Through their renaming in Japanese, complete with numbers like slaves, the comfort women's identities are erased and their existences are treated only as disposable commodities. Furthermore, Akiko highlights the use of racist ideologies that the Japanese soldiers instill in the comfort women. In one instance, a Japanese doctor talks on as he performs abortion on Akiko: "He spoke of evolutionary differences

between the races, biological quirks that made the women of one race so pure and the women of another so promiscuous. Base, really, almost like animals, he said" (22). In an analogy, the doctor compares Korean women to animals – like rats – to justify the Japanese army's use of comfort women as sexual objects, claiming that the Korean women themselves are instinctively willing to mate with any male. He further adds, "Rats, too, will keep doing it until they die, refusing food or water as long as they have a supply of willing partners … Luckily for the species, Nature ensures that there is one dominant male to keep the others at bay and the female under control. And the female will always respond to him" (22) and concludes, "Perhaps it is the differences in geography that make the women of our two countries so morally incompatible" (22).

Nevertheless, even though the comfort women are forbidden from speaking, they defy their colonizers by developing other means of non-verbal communication in order to be united and save their sanity. Inversely and ironically, the Japanese soldiers become the ignorant ones as they cannot understand the Korean women's non-verbal language – or cannot even notice that it is a language, as Akiko recounts, "The Japanese say Koreans have an inherent gift for languages, proving that we are a natural colony, meant to be dominated. They delighted in their own ignorance, feeling they had nothing to fear or learn. I suppose that was lucky for us, actually. They never knew what we were saying. Or maybe they just didn't care" (16). As such, in the fictional biography there is a pair of binary opposition involving the verbal language versus the nonverbal one. On the one hand, the verbal language is employed by men to control women. On the other hand, the women retaliate by secretly taking in men's spoken words and communicating nonverbally among themselves. Akiko narrates how she and the other comfort women communicate with each other through body language and secret signs:

> [W]e were fast learners and creative. Listening as we gathered the soldiers' clothes for washing or cooked their meals, we were able to surmise when troops were coming in and how many we were expected to serve. We taught ourselves to communicate through eye

> movements, body posture, tilts of the head, or – when we could not see each other – through rhythmic rustlings between our stalls; in this way we kept our sanity. (16)

Considering men's verbal language "false," Akiko does not agree with her American husband's idea of speaking to his baby daughter in all the languages he knows – German, English, Korean, Japanese, and Polish (21) – as she "worr[ies] that the different sounds for the same object will confuse her" (21). As a result, Akiko communicates with her daughter through the nonverbal language instead: "To compensate, I try to balance her with language I know is true. I watch her with a mother's eyes, trying to see what she needs – my breast, a new diaper, a kiss, her toy – before she cries, before she has to give voice to her pain" (21). Akiko uses tactile touch to make Beccah recognize her body parts rather than calling them by assigned words: "And each night, I touch each part of her body, waiting until I see recognition in her eyes. I wait until I see that she knows that all of what I touch is her and hers to name in her own mind, before language dissects her into pieces that can be swallowed and digested by others not herself" (22). Akiko's action of identifying Beccah's body through touches contrasts with the utterances of Max, Beccah's first boyfriend in a later chapter, as his remarks about parts of Beccah's body transform them into unknown objects for her: "Each time he pointed to something about me, it was as if it fell away from me, foreign and unrecognizable" (130).

As the fictional biography progresses, the oppressors consist of not only the Japanese military, but also the patriarchal Korean society in which Akiko and her mother live as well as the Western ideologies she is later exposed to. Similar to Akiko, who considers herself dead when she is forced to be a comfort woman, Akiko's mother "died more than once in her life" (175) – once "in March of 1919 on the streets of Seoul" (175). As a student of the Ewha College, Akiko's mother joins the demonstration with her boyfriend. When the Japanese soldiers attack the protesters, the boy shields her with his body, protecting her from being trampled on. However, even though she physically survives, her identity has to be erased to allow her to get away from the Japanese authority: "In order to protect her, my grandmother

killed her daughter off. She sent my mother north, to Sulsulham, to marry my father" (179). Her mother explains to Akiko, "It was because she loved me so much … They were burning the homes of suspected revolutionaries and arresting or shooting the people who ran out" (179). Nevertheless, the new life as wife to a man she has never known is comparable to death for her: "When she arrived in Sulsulham to marry a man she had never seen … my mother felt her life was over. She was so alone that she knew she could cry forever and never again would there be any one to comfort her" (179-80). She loses her true name, and her identity is reduced to that of only a wife and a mother. In the rushed wedding ceremony, Akiko's mother's parents-in-law lecture, "Marriage is not about love but about duty. About having sons. About keeping the family name" (180). Ever since her marriage, Akiko's mother "never heard her name again" (180). Instead she is called in relation to her husband and children, and her daughters do not even know their mother's name: "When I was a child, my father would call her anae, wife, and the village ahjimas would mostly call her by my father's name, Kim Uk. Or sometimes ttal omoni, the mother of daughters. Only when the time came to bury her did my sisters and I even wonder what name my mother was born with. In the end, we merely carved Omoni, mother, into the sixth plank of her coffin, the one that faced the sky" (180).

When Akiko is exposed to Western culture through the ways of the missionaries, she is shocked by how closely Western men and women perform work and pray together, unlike how men and women in the Korean traditional society are segregated. This particular thinking illustrates how the Korean patriarchal ideology has been normalized for Akiko as she has been exposed to it at a young age:

> [The missionaries] did not behave as proper men and women. In the world before the camps, the unmarried women and men I knew lived separately. From the age of six, I was taken away from the babies of both sexes and taught the ways of women. Though we would play on the swing, standing tall as we were pushed high enough to see into the boys' courtyard, girls were not supposed to talk or look at boys. In our family's home, my sisters and I rarely saw my father. When he

> was home, we prepared his meals and served him first. After he finished eating and went into the back room to smoke or sleep, we would eat our meal. That was what was respectful. (67-8)

Even in the recreation camp, Akiko thinks that, as comfort women, she and the other women are invaded only in the bodies, but they can keep their thoughts secret; "Even in the camps, where the soldiers banged in and out of the comfort cubicles, in and out of our women's bodies, what was left of our minds we guarded, kept private and separate" (68). Thus, she considers how the Western male and female missionaries mingle improper and shameful because it is against what she has been taught all her life: "At the mission house, I was embarrassed by the disrespect between the men and the women. Lives overlapping, men and women ate and worked together. They looked into each other's faces as they spoke, laughing with mouths open. Even while worshiping, they sat side by side, unseparated by a curtain or sheet, on the same bench, thighs and shoulders almost touching" (68). Akiko's view is similar to that of Saishō, Murasaki's friend in *The Tale of Murasaki*, who considers face-to-face conversation between a man and a woman more perverse than the expectable and expected sexual exploitation. This may hint at how women, cross-culturally, have become internally implanted with the ideologies that they are inferior and that rape and physical violence towards women are acceptable as 'inconvenient facts' of women's lives.

Akiko is not only dominated by the Japanese oppressors and the ideologies of her own homeland, but also by her "saviors": the missionaries and her American husband, who use their religion and Western ideologies as subtler – but deeper – forms of mental and spiritual control. Chen states,

> Provocatively, the novel extends its critical attack on the protagonist's obvious Japanese oppressors to the West. Having critically examined the objectifying ideology that enabled Japanese authorities to view Korean women as military supplies needed for the "comfort" of Japanese soldiers, it implies that such euphemistic

> discourses had an analogy in American missionary ideology, which in this novel is portrayed as rationalizing the forced conversions of helpless orphans. (64)

Akiko first comes into contact with Christianity through Manshin Ahjima, the old, former shaman, who has converted to Christianity. The old woman claims that she will help Akiko because "that is the Christian way" (57) but instead she takes the girl to the missionaries for money, not unlike the possible motive of her conversion; Manshin Ahjima has more likely agreed to become a Christian convert, giving up her old name and identity as a Korean shaman for a new one – a generic and standard 'Mary' – in order to survive: "The missionaries had saved her from starvation and damnation, and in return Manshin Ahjima let them call her Mary" (57) as "they call all of the girls Mary" (57). The missionaries also discriminate against Akiko, comparing her to "the wild child raised by tigers … Physically human but able to speak only in the language of animals" (16). They consider her inferior and less than human, interpreting Akiko's silence as ignorance of the verbal language they speak and treating her like a child or trainable animal: "They were kind and praised me when I responded to the simple commands they issued in Japanese: sit, eat, sleep. Had they asked, I would also have responded to 'close mouth' and 'open legs' " (16). Akiko lets the missionaries rechristen her as 'Mary,' the name that Manshin Ahjima predicts will be hers. The name can also hint at the missionaries' definition of Akiko based on her sexual victimization, as one of the sisters calls her "Mary Magdalene" (66) in supposed contempt as though she assumes that Akiko has been a prostitute like her penitent Biblical namesake. Even worse, another sister considers her a seductress: "The wild child is possessed, a false light luring away the faithful" (66).

At the same time, the minister Bradley approaches Akiko on the pretense of trying to save her soul, giving her special gifts of sweets and hair ribbons so obviously that she becomes the subject of gossip and envy of other girls seeking refuge with the missionaries during the war. Akiko recalls, "Once, when questioned to his face about his treatment of me, the minister smiled, a fleeting quirk of the lips, and said, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, doth not leave the ninety and nine to go after

that one which is lost, until he finds it?" (66-7). Reciting the passage in Luke 15:4, the minister justifies his interest in Akiko by exploiting his religion and presenting himself as her savior: "Putting his hand on my head, he looked at his sheep until they dropped their eyes. Rejoice, he said to them, for I have found a lamb that once was lost" (67). Akiko's narrative often criticizes the sanctimonious characteristics of her minister husband. Similar to Kaoru, who fulfills his ego by acting patronizingly to Ukifune in *The Tale of Murasaki*, Bradley considers himself a religious man and claims that he hopes to spiritually save Akiko through marriage, while in reality he is trying to justify his desire for her. All along, Akiko secretly knows that Bradley prays for both "salvation from his sins. And the fulfillment of them" (93). Under "his mantle of piousness and humility," (94) she sees "the sin that he fought against and still denies: that he wanted me – a young girl – not for his God but for himself" (95). She recounts how she is able to discern his secret because of her experience as a comfort woman, a sex object, and how he has been denying it:

> I discovered his secret, the one he won't admit even now, even to himself, after twenty years of marriage. It was a secret I learned about in the comfort camps, one I recognized in his hooded eyes, in his breathing, sharp and fast, and in the way his hands fluttered about his sides as if they wanted to fly up against my half-starved girl's body with its narrow hips and new breasts. (94-5)

In many instances, Bradley is proud to be compared to God. When the girls praise Bradley as an honored teacher, he demurs, "I am just a child, like you all, in God's eyes" (68), but seems to take pleasure in it secretly. And when the girls claim that his voice is "like God's," (68) he "would laugh, saying, Stop! But his eyes would shine like blue glass" (69) as if he is delighted. And when Akiko refuses to tell him where she has come from, Bradley hints that he knows about her past, telling her, "[W]e cannot hide from God. Only when we share our burden with Him, only when we give ourselves over to Him, are we uplifted and relieved" (93). He suggests that she "[c]onfess and come to [him]" (94), claiming "I will lead you into the body of

Christ" (94). He reasons that because Akiko used to be a prostitute, opening up herself to God and *him* can cleanse her of her sins: "God will love the greater debtor. He has said of the fallen women, Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much. … The sins of the body will be washed away by the blood of the lamb. His body will become your body, your flesh, His. Just give yourself to Him!" (94). As he continues to persuade her, he keeps on speaking of God and himself as if they are one and the same person: "I only want you to know that God does not judge, that I would not. … Trust in Him. And me. Please, Akiko, welcome the Lord – and me – we who wait for you with open arms" (94).

Bradley refuses to acknowledge Akiko's true identity and instead perpetuates the denial of her self. When he remarks, "Rick and Akiko, our names somehow match" (93), his ignorance and refusal to understand infuriates Akiko and saddens her further, as it reminds her of her lost name and identity: "I felt as if he had slapped me with the name the soldiers had assigned to me. I wanted to shout, No! That is not my name! but I said nothing, knowing that after what had happened to me, I had no right to use the name I was born with. That girl was dead" (93). Her assessment of Bradley is hardly in a positive light. She even frankly reveals, "I hate him" (69), when she recounts Bradley's articulacy in using his words and his voice to make Beccah stop crying as well as to entice the girls at the mission house: "I hate that he can quiet her with his voice, the same voice that lulled and lured the girls from the Pyongyang mission. The same voice, sounding so honest and joyful that you want to believe, even when you know the truth. The same voice that fool everyone but me. I hate that voice because my daughter loves it" (69).

However, despite the fact that Akiko hates Bradley and thinks that he merely lusts for her even though she is still underage, Akiko agrees to marry him after the war ends because she knows she has nowhere else to return to: "When the minister told me I should marry him if I wanted to leave Pyongyang and come to America with them, I did. I made it easy for him to take me" (101). When Bradley persuades the other missionaries to let him marry Akiko, he claims to do so for *her* spiritual salvation: "I can give her a new life. God is giving me a chance to save her, to guide her into the flock by yoking her to its shepherd" (101) and "I am not sacrificing

myself, for I am answering God's call" (101). The baptism he performs on Akiko in the river contains in it an element of violence as he yanks her up by the hair, thwarting her suicide attempt, and leaves her feeling "empty, desolate, abandoned" (103) even though one of the female missionaries congratulates on her rebirth "[a]s a Christian, as a wife, and as an American" (104). Bradley's claim to Akiko, "[Y]ou are now cleansed by the washing of water with the word" (106), also implies the concept that the verbal language is the key to men's power. Then, even the subsequent consummation of their marriage is portrayed with elements of violence and force, with Akiko channeling her mind elsewhere: "He cooed to me and petted me, then grabbed and swore at me, as he stripped the clothes from out bodies. When he pushed me into the bed, positioned himself above me, fitting himself between my thighs, I let my mind fly away. For I knew then that my body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men" (106). Akiko recounts that when Bradley sleeps with her, he wants her to be submissive and still – with "eyes wide and blank; lips dropped into a pout and ready to cry" (107) like a rape victim.

Unlike Charlie, the American man who acknowledges Polly's identity and helps her achieve her freedom in *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Bradley ironically subjugates Akiko throughout their marriage by denying her identity and never attempting to get to know her as she really is. For example, he never understands that the reason Akiko craves for ice cream is that it reminds her of her mother. In addition, he never understands that the reason Akiko refuses to use public toilets and shower cubicles lies within her own traumatic experiences: "Though my husband complained, lecturing on how cleanliness was next to godliness, I could not bring myself to stand in line to use the toilets and showers. I felt cleaner skipping showers than remembering the way the Japanese referred to the recreation camps as public restrooms" (108). He does not even understand why Akiko prepares a lot of rice cake enough "for one hundred people" (119) for Beccah's one-hundred-day-after-birth celebration according to the Korean tradition "to ensure her a long life" (119) and criticizes Akiko for making a "blasphemous waste" (119).

Nevertheless, much as he tries to assert his authority over Akiko, Bradley is portrayed to be ineffectual in his attempts to rely on words and preaching. When Bradley and Akiko move into his deceased mother's apartment, Akiko can feel the presence of his mother's possessive spirit and is afraid to touch anything. As she just stands looking at things, silently refusing to help him clean them, Bradley preaches on and on about the wife's duty to her husband (112). But as Akiko remains still, Bradley is instead forced to plead her; "Then, after lecturing on cleanliness and godliness, he'd beg: Please, *please*, at least help me tidy up" (112, original italics). He is also portrayed to be hypocritical in one instance, when Akiko, pregnant with Beccah, tells him about her birth dream involving fire and a dragon – signs of yang or male energy. Akiko is scolded for her superstition: "He told me he had not heard such superstitious nonsense since leaving Korea. Didn't he teach me to leave all that behind, to give it up for the Lord? Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (116). However, she knows that Bradley is secretly delighted in the hint that he is going to have a son to carry on his name: "But still, underneath the words of disapproval, I read the pleasure and the pride in his eyes" (116).

Finally, Bradley proves to be the most ineffectual in silencing Akiko in her spiritual trance, as witnessed by the young Beccah in a nightmarish, dream-like situation in which Beccah dreams that she is being chased by a mummy she sees in a movie. She enters her parents' empty bedroom and, seeing no one to help her, waits to be devoured by the mummy. However, when the mummy, referred to by the pronoun "she," reaches Beccah, she merely turns Beccah's head toward the open window so that the girl witnesses her father helplessly begging her mother to stop dancing and talking about her past lest someone – or Beccah – hears it. The female mummy which Beccah describes as "images of the resurrected dead" (194) is symbolic for her mother because of pun between 'mummy' and 'mommy,' the use of the female pronoun, and the fact that Akiko considers herself dead. As Beccah listens, Bradley orders Akiko, "[B]ow down before God, for He alone can heal your wounds" (195). He reminds her of the woman of Luke, who is cured from a spirit infliction by Jesus and again tells her, "Bow down, Akiko, just as that woman did, and you shall be free" (195). However, Akiko retorts, "I will never, never again lay down for any man"

(195). When Bradley asks for God's forgiveness in her place, claiming that Akiko does not know what she speaks, Akiko speaks otherwise, "I know what I speak, for that is my given name. Soon Hyo, the true voice, the pure tongue. I speak of laying down for a hundred men – and each one of them Saja, Death's Demon Soldier – over and over, until I died. I speak of bodies being bought and sold, of bodies … that were burned and cut and thrown like garbage to wild dogs by the river" (195). Bradley threatens to strike her down if she continues, and does so after Akiko challenges him, "I'm the one! I'm the one to strike you down, and God down too!" (196). He manages to pin her down and claims, "It is not for me to judge. But know that 'The sins of the parents shall fall upon their children and their grandchildren.' I ask you to protect our daughter, with your silence, from that shame" (196). His request to silence Akiko, possibly to protect not only Beccah but also himself from shame, manages only to relay some time as Akiko ultimately decides to speak out and records her past for her daughter after both of them are dead.

Nevertheless, while it is obvious that Akiko never has a high opinion for any man – or even men in general, she acknowledges the necessity of men to women. She tells Beccah, "You need a good man to give you babies. Someone to take care of you" (126). And when Beccah protests, "This is the nineties, Mom. … Women need men like fish need bicycle" (126), she scolds, "Women need men for children. God listens to men, Beccah. It was your father, praying for forgiveness, wishing for a miracle, who finally pressured God into giving you to us" (127). The scene, narrated by Beccah, is tinged with irony as she pictures her father as the Biblical Abraham holding Beccah as the baby Isaac to be sacrificed to God – who takes the form of her mother. Inversely, Bradley becomes Akiko's tool in fathering a child so that she can pass on her female inheritance.

Just as in *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, America in *Comfort Woman* is paradoxically a land of subjugation and discrimination as well as freedom. However, unlike Lalu/Polly in *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Akiko never considers America as the land of freedom where she can start to reconstruct her identity anew from the beginning. It seems that Akiko sees America as merely the land to which she can make a convenient escape, and she never dreams of liberation or opportunity for

herself in this new land. On the contrary, after living in America for a while, Akiko comes to see it as "[a] country of excess and extravagance" (108) because "America was so rich that one man could own a hundred cows" (108). She also thinks, "To learn to be an American was to learn to waste. Food, paper, clothes – everything was thrown away when we got tired of it, because there were so much" (108-9). Akiko thinks that America only seems beautiful from afar but is utterly filthy when one looks closely at it: "That's what all of America was like to me. When you see it for the first time, it glitters, beautiful, like a dream. But then, the longer you walk through it, the more you realize that the dream is empty, false, sterile. You realize that you have no face and no place in this country" (110). Similar to Lalu, Akiko's nationality is misidentified in various instances; once a woman in a diner calls her "a poor little orphan Jap" (109) and the old people in Bradley's mother's apartment call her "a Chinee" (111), seeing her like a doll or a small child: "All them people are so small, see? How adorable!" (111).

Instead, Akiko's sense of belonging and feeling at home is tied to her motherland Korea and her daughter. Before leaving for America, she wishes to be always connected to her own land and consumes a pinch of the Korean soil for that purpose; "I want to taste the earth, metallic as blood, take it into my body so that my country would always be a part of me" (104). The same concept applies when Induk gathers the dust on Bradley's mother's possessions in her hands and lures the old woman's spirit there. She makes the spirit shrink and tells Akiko to consume it so that she can take over her space: "[B]ringing her fingers to my mouth, Induk told me to suck, to taste, to make this – the apartment, the city, the state, and America – home my own" (113). Later, Akiko devises a means that she believes will help her daughter feel at home in America with her. When she is pregnant with Beccah, Akiko makes some tea for herself with the black dirt in America in order to turn herself into the "motherland" for her daughter: "I drank the earth, nourishing her within the womb, so that she would never feel homeless, lost" (113). Furthermore, Akiko makes her daughter imbibe a little earth at her first breastfeeding as well: "After her birth, I rubbed that same earth across my nipples and touched it to my daughter's lips, so that, with her first suck, with her first taste of the dirt and the salt and the milk that is me,

she would know that I am, and will always be, her home" (113). In turn, Akiko considers Beccah her homeland. She gives Beccah the Korean name Bek-hap, which means "white lily" and considers her daughter "the lily, purest white. Blooming in the boundary between Korea and America, between life and death, this child, with the tendril of her body, keeps me from crossing over and roots me to this earth" (117).

The struggle against all the multiple forms and agents of gendered subjugations and the cultivation a gendered identity in *Comfort Woman* employ principally different methods from those in *The Tale of Murasaki* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold*. Unlike Murasaki's reconciliation with her self through the process of writing to reminisce on her life and Polly's reconstruction of her new identity as an American woman by taking in the culture of the new land, Akiko seeks and achieves liberation through the retrieval of the self and identity that is lost to her, through strengthening and keeping alive the bonds she shares with other victimized women and through reclaiming her true name, the true roots of her identity. As Induk chooses to reclaim her name and identity by speaking out against the Japanese soldiers' rule of silence and is viciously killed for her resistance outright, Akiko follows suit in Induk's defiance – though covertly – until she can be liberated through Induk's assistance, which helps her survive the escape from the camp, guides her to Manshin Ahjima, and ultimately saves her from Bradley's sexual demands. Interestingly, one façade of Induk's multiple relationships to Akiko is one of the 'lovers' as Induk comes to Akiko's in the night, touching and inducing pleasures in her in quite a lesbian manner (145). One night, Bradley wakes up to have a sexual intercourse with Akiko after hearing she cry out in her sleep, aroused by Induk. But then in the morning he preaches to her that "self-fornication is a sin" (146). However, Akiko takes her relationship with Induk differently – as a spiritual communion. So she questions, "How could he compare what went on between men's and women's bodies with what happened spiritually?" (146). When Akiko tells him that she is not alone, but is touched by Induk, Bradley condemns the female spirit as 'a succubus' and claims, "God gave them over to shameful lusts so that even the women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones" (146). At this, Akiko fearlessly laughs and notices "fear" in Bradley's eyes, just like the one she has seen in the eyes of the

Japanese soldiers (146). She describes it as "[h]is fear that instead of saving me, he had damned himself. That he could not pass the test his God devised for him" (146). Just then, Akiko knows that Bradley will no longer use her, the fallen woman, to satisfy his sexual desire: "I knew that he would not use me again like that. … I knew then that he could not" (148).

The reclaiming of women's names and identities in this fictional biography largely involves the solidarity among women. Not only does Akiko bind herself to Induk's spirit, she also forges a bond with the seven star sisters, some of whom share the names of her own sisters. Significant to her is also her nameless mother, even though sometimes Akiko doubts whether her mother can love her so intensely after the disappointment of having yet another daughter. She remains close to her mother and is the one to climb up the roof, in extremely cold weather, with her mother's wedding dress to invite her mother's spirit back to feast and prepare for the afterlife journey in place of the oldest son her mother never has (181). Ultimately, Akiko cherishes Beccah, whose birth returns life to her and who becomes her greatest love: "I find myself fighting both overwhelming joy and overwhelming grief … I know in that moment how much my own mother must have loved me – more than anything in this world or in heaven, including God" (117). Thus, Akiko hopes that Beccah will one day have a child of her own, asking her, "Don't you know that babies are the only way you know you're alive?" (128) and "[H]ow will you know how much I love you if you don't have your own children?" (128).

To perpetuate the connection between her female Korean ancestors and companions and her descendant, Akiko introduces her baby to the spirits of her fellow women and female relatives in the night when Bradley is asleep, in a ritual of bonding and thanksgiving: "I wrap my daughter in a towel, tie her onto my back, and prepare to introduce her to her grandmother. I pour the scorched rice tea and, bowing twice, present it to Induk's spirit in gratitude, to my oldest sister's spirit – wherever she is – in forgiveness, and finally to my mother's spirit in love" (182). And then, when Akiko believes that Beccah is suffering from a curse called Red Death, she calls upon the spirits to save her in a ritual involving binding Beccah's feet with strips of torn bed sheet with her "name, birth date, and genealogy," or "spiritual address" (78). On the

sheet are also the names of the female spirits Akiko has enlisted to save her daughter, as she explains, "[T]his character means you. This is me, this is Birth Grandmother, this is each of her sisters. I linked us all together, a chain to fight the Red Death" (78).

Apart from creating female solidarity and bonding to fight against oppression, it can be implied that to survive, women may not only have to take on diverse and self-effacing 'identities' as impersonations, but also have to take in some "male influence." The idea is suggested in the scenes associating the ginseng that Induk feeds Akiko by the stream after she escapes from the camp. As the ginseng emerges from Induk's "hands cupping her breasts" (36), it can be comparable to Induk's breast milk which saves Akiko's life, filling her with the male energy necessary to her survival. Symbolically, this can have two interpretations. One is that for Akiko's survival, she has to use men by offering her femininity, similar to how she agrees to marry Bradley to live on. And the other is that Akiko has to adapt herself to become more masculine in order to have the strength to survive. The similar idea of adaptability or flexibility of women is hinted at in the scene in which Akiko makes seaweed soup or "myokkuk" for herself when she is breastfeeding Beccah: "Induk says my body is weakest after birth, but also at its most flexible. Our bones are as soft and changeable as those of the fetus we carried for nine months. This is the time we are most female, she says. Myokkuk is for women, for life" (37). However, the influence of the male energy is not always positive. Akiko thinks that she survives but is unable to have children for so many years because of the excessive male energy from the ginseng:

> Secretly, I think that is why I could not have a baby for so long after the Japanese recreation camp. Though the camp doctors said my insides were ruined from so many men, so many times. I think that the real reason I could not conceive for almost twenty years is because I ate so much ginseng. I became unbalanced with male energy. Finally the effects wore off enough to give me a baby girl. (37)

The effects of the ginseng, perhaps, are imparted to Beccah. Despite being born as a girl, there are hints that she has dominant "masculine" traits. Akiko's birth dream featuring a dragon deceives both parents into thinking that the baby is going to be a boy. But when Akiko discovers that she has given birth to a girl, she feels "a fierce joy, more awesome because of its unexpectedness" (116). Akiko thinks, "This baby was for me, mine, not my husband's son but my daughter" (116). The Chinese zodiac month in which Beccah is born is the month of the dog, same as that of Akiko's mother. Akiko describes the characteristics of the zodiac sign as being "[f]ierce, loyal, bold, and fearless" (116) – largely considered masculine traits. On this matter, Akiko remarks, "If we were in Korea, and if I had married a Korean, I am sure my husband's father would have insisted on a name to counteract these traits, to inject meekness into the dominant natures of those animal signs" (116). However, Akiko asks Bradley "to pick an American name that is very strong, one that will protect her throughout her life" (116). She also holds a hundred-day celebration for Beccah, even though her baby is a girl: "I want my own child to know that I gave her a hundred-day celebration, that I love her and thank the spirits for her health, even though she is not a boy and not in Korea. Or perhaps I celebrate because she is a girl, and American girl" (119). However, Akiko expresses her worry when Beccah chokes on her breast milk and hits her as if she is furious, "She is noisy like her father, not afraid to yell and keep yelling. This must be a lingering effect of the ginseng. I do not know if it is a good thing" (38).

Apart from the idea of taking in some masculinity to survive, another interesting concept in *Comfort Woman* that is closely connected with women's creation of identity and liberation is contact with death. The similar concept can be found in *The Tale of Murasaki* and *Thousand Pieces of Gold* as well. The writing self of Murasaki Shikibu is born with the death of her mother, and she has to renounce the world and die before she can be liberated and pass on her memoir to her daughter Katako. Similarly, Polly Bemis has to undergo a symbolic murder of her identity as Lalu to be reborn as Polly, and she fully realizes where she belongs after the death of her husband Charlie.

Specifically, the liberation of the three generations of the Korean women in *Comfort Woman* is closely intertwined with the concept of death and rebirth. Akiko seems to yearn for death so that she can be freed – like Induk who makes up her own choice to die. Induk's choice and method of dying to be liberated is illustrated with an analogy involving a jeweled "dagger of honor" for Korean high-class women. As Akiko ponders why Induk is special to her, she recalls this jeweled dagger, which another comfort woman coming from the high class speaks of: "The knife would have been hers when she married. The knife would have shown her pride in her virtue; if she had failed in guarding it, she would have used the weapon on herself" (144). Other comfort women envy her right and choice to die, and Akiko thinks that Induk uses the men by turning them into her own dagger so that she can pursue her choice to die:

> The rest of us were envious, not of the rich things she indicated having, not of her aristocracy, but of her right to kill herself. We all had the obligation, of course, given what had happened to us, but it didn't have the status of privilege and choice.
>
> That is what, in the end, made Induk so special: she chose her own death. Using the Japanese as her dagger, she taunted them with the language and truths they perceived as insults. She sharpened their anger to the point where it equaled and fused with their black hungers. She used them to end her life, to find release. (144)

Later on, Akiko tries to make her own choice. Firstly, she tries to commit suicide during her baptism, and secondly, she seems to try to commit suicide by drowning on other occasions. Beccah recalls how Akiko "flirted with death" (46) in form of the handsome but gluttonous spirit called Saja, whose epithets consist of "the Death Messenger" (43) and "the Guardian of Hell" (43). Beccah imagines Saja as "an ugly old man with horns and ulcerous skin, burning yellow eyes and a gaping, toothless mouth that waited to feed ravenously on the souls that lined up in front of our apartment" (43) and "the devil my father had preached about" (43) based on her

Western cultural knowledge. She tells her mother that Saja "stinks … with his bubbling skin, black and green, fermenting with pus" (44). For Beccah, Saja is to be feared and hated, but for Akiko, Saja as the personification of death is a powerful and desirable figure – "neither old nor ugly, but young and handsome, a dark soldier, alluring and virile" (46). Knowing that Saja is in fact a handsome young man, Beccah associates the image of Saja with that of her father to help her understand why her mother is obsessed with him. She also recalls that her mother dances in a trance and "would cajole the soldier of death, tease him, beg him to take her with him" (46). While people give Akiko the benefit of doubt and treat her incidents of near-drowning as accidents rather than suicide, Beccah thinks otherwise: "Only I knew she went swimming to try to catch death" (47). She also remarks, "My mother was like that cat who could never catch the tail of happiness because she never stopped chasing it; despite all her begging and threats and wishes, she was snubbed by death until she stopped wanting it" (47).

The reason behind Akiko's yearning for death is suggested to be her wish for liberation and retrieval of her lost identity. When Akiko is baptized in the Taedong River before she marries Bradley, she tries to drown herself to become one with the river; "I threw myself facedown into the river. Stolen by the cold, my breath rushed out, bubbling in the river's froth. I held my body stiff, felt the waters turn me, testing my sturdiness against its rocks, and then I let go. I felt the pull of the river in my legs and my lungs, feel the need to dissolve into her body" (103). Then, after Akiko is saved from drowning in the canal, Beccah asks Akiko why she wants to leave her when she says Beccah is the only thing she loves. To this, Akiko replies, "[I]t's not a matter of leaving you, but of retrieving something that I lost" (48). Thus, Beccah offers, "I could help you look for it, if you told me what you lost" (48). At this particular point, Akiko is prompted to tell Beccah the story of Princess Pari, and Beccah promises to save her as Pari does. Moreover, later it is revealed what Akiko has been trying to look for when Manshin Ahjima teaches her how to find lost things – her own mother: "When Manshin Ahjima urged me to try to find something I had lost, all I could think of was my mother" (59).

Akiko's choice to become a spirit medium, to contact with the dead and console them, may also stem from her desire for liberation through death rather than financial necessity or uncontrollable possession. According to Chen, Keller "illustrates the complicated chain of death and rebirth set into motion by Soon Hyo's metamorphosis into the comfort woman Akiko 41; and … suggests the possibility that through the rituals of propitiation and healing that Akiko performs for others, she is somehow able to transform the injustices done to her into a self-healing ritual of resistance and redemption" (118). When the young Beccah listens to the recording of Akiko's ceremony in the cassette tape and does not understand why Akiko has to scream like that, Akiko explains to her, "I am crying for the dead. To show proper respect. To show love" (172). Beccah then promises, "I would cry for you, Mommy" (172) and Akiko replies, "I know … Every year, on my death anniversary, that will be your gift to me" (172).

With her death, Akiko is ultimately liberated as she has achieved her wish that Beccah learns of her name and heritage. As a result of Akiko's death, Beccah learns the true name of her mother, written in the letters from the American Embassy in Seoul and the Red Cross as "Mrs. Akiko (Kim Soon Hyo) Bradley" (173). She also learns that the name of some of the Seven Star Sisters are the names of her mother's own sisters, and learns about the life of Akiko/Soon Hyo: "I had to read these opening lines twice more before I understand who was who, that my mother once belonged to a name, to a life, that I had never known about … and that my mother, once bound to others besides myself, had severed those ties – my lineage, her family name – with her silence" (173). Beccah finds it hard to comprehend what she has discovered and considers it an irony to learn about the life of her mother in death: "I sat, surrounded by the papers, by the secrets she had guarded and cultivated like a garden. I sat and I waited for some way to understand, to know this person called Soon Hyo, thinking that I had always been waiting for my mother, wasting time in the hallway of her life, waiting for an invitation to step over the threshold and into her home" (173). It is also in death that Akiko is able to speak out about the Japanese's atrocities towards her and the fellow 'Chongshindae' or 'battalion slaves' (193) at length, going as far as to reprimand the Emperor of Japan:

> Our brothers and fathers conscripted. The women left to be picked over like fruit to be tasted, consumed, the pits spit out as Chongshindae, where we rotted under the body of orders from the Emperor of Japan. Under the Emperor's orders, we were beaten and starved. Under Emperor's orders, the holes of our bodies were used to bury their excrement. Under Emperor's orders, we were bled again and again until we were thrown into a pit and burned, the ash from our thrashing arms dusting the surface of the river in which we had sometimes been allowed to bathe. Under Emperor's orders, we could not prepare those in the river for the journey out of hell. (193)

In the cassette tape, Akiko continues speaking defiantly in consolation to the other comfort women – as proof of their existences and the one who performs annual memorials for them:

> The Japanese believe they have destroyed an entire generation of Koreans. That we are all dead and have taken the horrible truth with us, but I am alive. I feel you, knowing you wait by my side until the time comes for me to join you across the river. I offer you this one small gesture each year, worth more than the guilt money the Japanese now offer to silence me: a bit of rice burned in your memories, and your names called over and over again, a feast of crumbs for the starving. (194)

Ironically, Akiko's proclamation that she is alive is to be heard by another person only when she is dead. However, symbolically this can mean that even though she is physically dead, Akiko remains alive through Beccah's remembrance, as Beccah will carry on her story as well as those of the women Akiko knows.

Akiko's liberation culminates in the reclaiming of her name Soon Hyo, which replaces Akiko at the head of the last chapter in Akiko's/Soon Hyo's *embedded narrative*. The reclaimed name is passed on to her daughter Beccah/Bek-hap as well

as her decision to leave behind her story along with the stories of her fellow women to her daughter so that Beccah understands herself by virtue of her heritage. To Beccah, Akiko leaves her final message: that their liberation does not come from severing the ties with the past and haunting spirits, but from remembering them and being bound together as women: "Beccah-chan, lead the parade of the dead. … When I can no longer perform the *chesa* for the spirits, we will look to you to feed us. I have tried to release you, but in the end I cannot do it and tie you to me, so that we will carry each other always. Your blood in mine" (197). Beccah ultimately realizes her importance to her mother, even though she has always been thinking that Akiko prioritizes the spirits over her: "I remembered watching my mother lay out the offerings for the dead before she would feed me, remembered her dancing over me with strips of cloth torn from the sheets of my bed. And while I had felt invisible, unimportant, while my mother consorted with her spirits, I now understood that she knew I watched her. That in her way, she had always carried me with her" (197). Beccah's discovery of her mother's identity compels her to break up with Sanford, who hardly understands her.

Ultimately, Beccah is inspired to perform the final rites for her mother in a way that will help reclaim and reiterate her mother's name. At one significant point of the ceremony, Beccah touches a scribbled strip of linen dipped in the blessed water to Akiko's mouth and proclaims, "This is for your name, Omoni, so you can speak it true: Soon Hyo, Soon Hyo, Soon Hyo" (209). She then binds her mother's limbs with the strips of linen written with Soon Hyo's name and genealogy to bind her spirit to her body in the same way her mother has done so to cure her from the red curse. With Akiko's death, Soon Hyo is finally liberated in spirit because she has successfully passed on the stories of herself and the women she knows to Beccah, who will preserve Soon Hyo's identity through her remembrance. The use of the words "comfort woman" in the title thus comes to take on more meanings than the standard embittered euphemism for the Japanese army's forced prostitutes; Akiko/Soon Hyo continues to be a "comfort woman" in another sense that she consoles the spirits of the dead as a spirit medium who conveys messages from the dead to the living and comforts her bereaved daughter through the strength that enables her to survive her traumatic experiences and reclaim her identity.

In conclusion, *Comfort Woman* employs surrealistic narrative techniques and magical realism to present alternating narratives of the living daughter and the dead mother. It also presents the supernatural as real through the eyes of its protagonist who considers herself symbolically dead and existing in the realm in between the dead and the living. It is through the contact with these spirits that Akiko/Soon Hyo realizes that her identity as a woman is collective, diverse, fluid, and interconnected with those of the other women, and that her liberation comes from the reclaiming of her identity as well as those of the other women and passing them on to her daughter as a kind of female inheritance. Ultimately, the reclaiming of these lost voices leads to the completion of their gendered identities and their liberation.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Fictional biography, a literary genre which emerged quite recently, is interesting in that it allows the mergence of fact and fiction in a unique and more closely related way. This genre can give life, voice, and identity to its subject in a way that traditional biography may not be able to do so, and it can lend to fiction a basis of facts and history that contributes to the illusion of 'authenticity' of the story being told. In addition, fictional biography can create novelistic narratives that take readers to revisit the past and invite them to make new interpretations through the (re)created fictional life, which can be inspired by a forgotten or insignificant figure in traditional historiography. Virginia Woolf realizes such characteristics and strongly encourages this welding of the granite of factual 'truth' and the rainbow of the fictional 'personality' in biography writing. However, while Woolf's approach may not be completely applicable to the writing of traditional biography, it turns to be the core concept of fictional biography, in which the personality of its subject/protagonist is highlighted and given equal importance as the historical and factual aspects of its details.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that a writer of fictional biography is given the liberty to dispense with or distort historical facts, but rather to selectively and reasonably structure his/her narrative and include plausible details that fill in the existing gaps in factual information and/or lead to the thematic ideas he/she hopes to raise through the portrayal of his/her subject's recreated and fictional life. This is exactly what the three women writers: Liza Dalby, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, and Nora Okja Keller have done in their fictional biographies regarding the lives of the Heian female author Murasaki Shikibu, the Chinese American pioneer woman Lalu Nathoy/Polly Bemis, and the Korean comfort woman and spirit medium Akiko/Soon Hyo respectively. The three authors have reconstructed their subjects/protagonists' lives to illustrate the creation process of their gendered identities. The identities of the three protagonists evolve throughout the fictional biographies largely influenced by

their female gender and experiences, which present them with the subjugation and the struggle for liberation unique to their gender.

However, not only does gender play a pivotal role in the shaping of these protagonists' identities, but their particular cultures, historical periods, and social statuses, as well as those of their authors also contribute to their representations in the narratives. While Liza Dalby is of European American descent, she has immersed herself in the reading of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* and has done a thorough research of her protagonist's literary work and culture in order to produce a piece of veiled life-writing that can assume the illusion of being Murasaki Shikibu's autobiographical memoir, together with the lost ending manuscript of her reputed *Tale of Genji*. Similarly, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, a Chinese American writer, has immersed herself in the research of records on Polly Bemis's life and the geography, history, and culture of Lalu's homeland in Northern China as the basis of her biographical novel. Nora Okja Keller, as a Korean American, relies on her Korean culture and her experiences in Hawaii, where she grew up primarily raised by her mother, as much as the historical research on the issue of Japanese military prostitution during World War II and the comfort women's testimonies, to complete the cross-cultural, autobiographical narratives of Akiko and Beccah.

The authors' efforts in the creation of these narratives, however, do not mean that they have "reclaimed" the historical counterparts of their protagonists as they actually were. Rather, they have fabricated plausible renditions of their protagonists' life in accordance with history and culture in order to explore the lives and identities of these "fellow women" and cultivate a kind of "her-story" – as it is called by Scarparo in her in-depth study of fictional biography as gendered metafiction: "In this respect, the stories of [the female protagonists] merge with the stories of their biographers/historians/translators to become as much versions of 'her-story' as narratives about the relationship between history and fiction" (160). Scarparo proposes, "The task of the feminist intellectual is not to give voice to the 'real' [historical counterparts of their protagonists], but to engage in a process of self-invention which allows women self-representational agency. To this end, invention of the real is useful – as long as it is done self-consciously: inventing to speak, instead of

searching to find the real as it happened" (160). Ultimately, the three fictional biographies studied in this thesis achieve what Scarparo considers to be the goal of women's biographies – to include women into history:

> Biographies of women by women and women's history share a common goal: to write women into history. This is achieved primarily by questioning the records from which women are generally excluded and by presenting women as protagonists in and of history. The methodologies and the means by which such a project is realised have been, and still are, open to discussion. (41)

Some of the methodologies and means mentioned by Scarparo are explored in this structuralist and narratological analysis of the three fictional biographies concerning the reconstruction of gendered identity. The use of structuralist methods – especially Roland Barthes's Five Codes of Narratives and Gerard Genette's Narratology – highlights how the narratives tell/show readers their protagonists' lives and how they develop their particular themes. The result is that, while the three works employ codes of narrative to portray their thematic ideas in a similar way and deal with similar issues unique to the female experiences, such as subjugation of women, they use different narratological techniques to reflect on the nature of their female protagonists, and they propose different means through which their protagonists can seek liberation in relation to their historical periods, ethnicities, beliefs, and personalities.

The use of codes of narrative in the three works is similar in two major ways. Firstly, all three fictional narratives employ *semic codes* in form of additional characters, or additional details on historically existing characters to contribute to their thematic ideas. Secondly, the fictional narratives employ multiple functional codes in many instances to illustrate their thematic ideas as well, by making *proairetic codes* indicating actions and *cultural codes* indicating knowledge that is shared by members of the particular society and culture of the narrators function doubly as *symbolic codes* involving their themes.

In terms of *semic codes* or characters, the three works employ totally fictional and partly historical characters to varying extents. Dalby's *The Tale of Murasaki* features a multitude of characters consisting of historical personages in Murasaki Shikibu's life, fictional characters in *The Tale of Genji*, and purely fictional characters created by Dalby to illustrate her ideas. Katako, historically recorded as Murasaki's only daughter, serves to introduce readers to Murasaki, her secret memoir, and the secret ending of *The Tale of Genji*. At the same time, Katako also serves as the link between her mother and her daughter, the inheritor of this female literary legacy. The historical "mother of Michitsuna," author of the *Gossamer Years*, is fictionalized as Dalby's Murasaki's "Auntie" and her literary foremother. Fujiwara no Michinaga, Murasaki's patron, is portrayed in contrast to Murasaki's fictional character Genji, and he is shown as the influence for the more political and caricature Genji in the later part of *The Tale of Genji*. Some main characters in *The Tale of Genji*, such as Genji, Murasaki, and Oborozukiyo, are compared with historical people in Murasaki's life. Genji is a foil to Michinaga, and *The Genji Tale*'s Murasaki is a foil to the fictional biography's Murasaki Shikibu. The seduction of Oborozukiyo by Genji is put in contrast to the rape of Murasaki by her father's guest to contrast Murasaki's romantic notions in her youth with the reality of sexual inequality in her society. In addition, main characters in the last part of *The Tale of Genji* – Kaoru, Niou, and Ukifune – feature prominently in Dalby's fictional ending to *The Tale of Genji* to reflect the fictional Murasaki Shikibu's thematic ideas of a woman's spiritual maturation and liberation. Other totally fictional characters in Murasaki's narrative contribute to her experiences; meeting Ming-gwok, her Chinese love interest, makes Murasaki begin to review her Japanese culture differently, and learning about various aspects of female experiences of her women friends cause Murasaki to reflect on women's lives and inspire her to selectively include parts of their experiences into Ukifune's life.

Similarly, McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold* employs a combination of fictitious characters and those based on historically existing people. The existences, personalities, and characteristics of the Chinese characters – Lalu's parents and siblings, Chen, Ding, the madam of the brothel, and Jim – are created by McCunn to represent Chinese culture and values Lalu is exposed to in her youth, especially the idea of

gendered labor division, arranged marriage, feminine propriety, and fatalism. Jim is also created as a foil to Charlie Bemis, Lalu/Polly's future husband. Jim and Charlie are portrayed as equally capable, free-spirited, self-made men. However, Jim is considered much socially inferior to Charlie only because of his Chinese ethnicity. Then, historically existing people in Lalu/Polly's life such as Charlie and Hong King are given additional background information that contributes to the novel's thematic ideas. Charlie becomes the symbolic image of freedom and the liberal, self-made American man who supports Polly in her quest for freedom and loves her unconditionally, while the old Hong King represents the oppression of Lalu as a woman through his renaming and raping her. Minor characters such as the townspeople of Warrens, many of whom historically existed, serve to show Polly's good relationship with them as well as their acceptance of her as part of their community.

Keller's *Comfort Woman* functions as a fictional biography in that it recreates the life of its protagonist to reflect on the traumatic experiences of comfort women as a group of the marginalized; it employs all fabricated characters who are created to illustrate the thematic ideas of the novel in various aspects. On the one hand, female characters such as Beccah, Akiko's nameless mother, Induk, and the other comfort women contribute to the themes of female solidarity through their bonding, female subjugation through their experiences as the sexually and culturally oppressed by virtue of their sex and ethnicity, and female inheritance through their acts of remembrance for their deceased and wronged fellows. On the other hand, male characters such as the Japanese soldiers, Akiko's husband Richard Bradley, Beccah's boyfriends Max and later Sanford represent the oppression of women through physical violence, religion and verbal discourse, as well as men's inability and lack of attempt to understand women in various aspects.

Not only do the three works use *semic codes* to produce further *symbolic codes*, in the same way they also employ *proairetic codes* and *cultural codes* to function simultaneously as *symbolic codes* in many instances. Actions that are exclusive to the female experiences are given deeper meanings. For example, breastfeeding in *The Tale of Murasaki* and *Comfort Woman* is portrayed as deliverance of inheritance, female sacrifice and bonding, as well as spiritual

sustenance. Katako compares her reading Murasaki's secret memoir to her breastfeeding her young daughter as the reception of sustenance, and Akiko is set to breastfeed Beccah in the same way that her mother breastfed her and her older sisters because she feels that this act of self-sacrifice binds her daughter to her and helps revive her at the same time.

Another symbolic female experience prevalent in the three fictional biographies is rape. The three protagonists are faced with rape as the symbol of subjugation of women at various stages of their lives. Naturally, the issue of rape in literature is further complicated by the ethnicities, cultural, and social constraints of the rapists and rape victims/survivors. Regarding rape, Laura E. Tanner states, "Many of the most interesting representations of rape in twentieth-century women's writing may be found in the work of Latina, Asian-American, Native American, and African-American writers" (741-2). She elaborates,

> These groups of women, who have traditionally confronted the barriers of race and ethnicity as well as gender, claim for themselves in their representations of rape the right to speak their own violation – and thus, frequently, the right to reclaim themselves from it. The increased statistical vulnerability of minority women to the violence of rape is a practical reality that is also a manifestation of a larger problem of maintaining identity in a hostile world; *in the literature of minority women, rape is often a symbolic mark of oppression that also never ceases to exist as a concrete, physical fact*. (742, my italics)

The historical records on Murasaki Shikibu's life never mention any forced sexual intercourse perpetrated on her by any man – even Michinaga – possibly due to the discretion of such an issue in Heian society, where forced sexual intercourse in literature or diary is hardly mentioned as "rape." However, the rapes of Murasaki by the lieutenant captain and Michinaga are plausibly invented as experiences that influence Murasaki's treatment of Genji, her ideal male character, as well as her perception on male-female relationship which constitutes her identity. As for

Lalu/Polly Bemis, there is strong evidence that she may have been forced to grant her master Hong King sexual favors while she was his chattel. McCunn turns the rape of Lalu into a display of power on Hong King's part, rather than erotic desire. This corresponds with Tanner's statement: "The relationship between rape and power is also explored in the works of several Chinese-American women writers" (742). As for *Comfort Woman*, Japan's subjugation of Korea and its people during World War II is largely symbolized by the soldiers' rape of the bodies of the military prostitutes including Akiko and Induk. Furthermore, Akiko's inability to refuse the sexual demands of her husband, who is a Christian minister, symbolizes how religion is exploited to justify men's domination of women through the institution of marriage. Rape features as integral part of the subjugation of the three protagonists as women and becomes part of their gendered identities. This is similar to how Scarparo views the rape of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652), one of the few professional women painters in the Italian Baroque period, who was historically sexually violated by a friend of her father, in Anna Banti's fictional biography *Artemisia* (1947). Scarparo states, "The issue of rape also turns Artemisia into a kind of 'everywoman,' as she becomes an emblem of the literal and metaphorical forms of violence women experience in patriarchal societies" (49). As such, in women's fictional biographies, rape is recognized as a symbol of subjugation that has become quite universal.

Not only can the *proairetic code* rape be further interpreted as *symbolic code* for subjugation of women, *proairetic codes-cum-cultural codes* involving beauty standards, such as eyebrow plucking, foot binding, corset wearing, and dressing, are also simultaneously turned into *symbolic codes* for control of women and their emancipation. Ruri, Murasaki's unladylike friend, is marked by how she refuses to pluck her eyebrows and paint her face white. Such actions constitute the character of rebelliousness that corresponds to her subsequent decision to drown herself in the Uji River rather than being submitted to marriage. The Chinese tradition that controls Lalu is signified by the custom of foot binding that restricts her physical movement and realm of work, and foot unbinding is symbolic for her initiation into the realm of men's farm work. Similarly, corset wearing signifies the control of Lalu in the new American culture where she finds herself enslaved as a sex object. However, Lalu's act of

readjusting her clothes in the way she considers more appropriate symbolizes how she selectively defies some aspects of the control imposed on her. Then, Akiko's choices of clothing in many instances symbolize the impersonations she has to take on in order to survive, and Beccah's refusal to dictate how to dress her mother's dead body until she discovers Akiko's instructions for a proper funeral accentuates the symbolic meaning of Akiko's clothing as self-effacing roles that are imposed on her as a woman.

Nevertheless, while the three fictional biographies employ codes of narrative in a similar way to lead to their thematic ideas, their narrative structures vastly differ to suit their protagonists' background – especially in the aspect of literacy. Among the three works, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* employs the simplest narrative structure with only one *internal focalizer*, and the life of Lalu/Polly Bemis is delivered to readers in form of a chronological, third-person narrative. The choice of this simple structure is plausibly dictated by Polly's illiteracy in both the Chinese and English languages, and the author's desire to narrate Polly's life story through Polly's own point of view. Moreover, Polly Bemis does not have a direct descendant to pass on her own story. Nevertheless, the author divides the narrative into parts to emphasize the focus and changes of each part. In contrast, *The Tale of Murasaki* and *Comfort Woman* employ more complex narrative structures to relate to the theme of female inheritance and to reflect the natures of their protagonists. In each of these two fictional biographies, the protagonist has a daughter who inherits her legacy in the form of a concrete record of her mother's life. For Katako, Murasaki's legacy comes as a secret memoir and the final chapter of *The Tale of Genji*, which she hands down to her own daughter. The legacy assumes the form of Murasaki's self-written record to reflect her identity as a woman writer as well as to narrate her life story in her own point of view. As such, *The Tale of Murasaki* is written in a three-narrative structure with Katako's narrative as the *frame narrative* which introduces and concludes Murasaki's *embedded narrative*. Furthermore, Ukifune's narrative is included in the end as the final chapter of *The Tale of Genji* to complete the theme of female spiritual maturation, which is a continuation from Murasaki's narrative. Then, for *Comfort Woman*, the legacy is not in form of a written record, but a self-recorded voice on a cassette tape which Akiko intends for Beccah to discover and listen to after her death. The author's choice of

using a recorded voice to be listened to only when her protagonist is dead corresponds to Akiko's wish to reclaim her own "voice" and identity, as well as the lost voices of the other dead women she has known. Furthermore, it symbolizes that Akiko's voice and identity can be preserved after her death, and it reflects part of Akiko's profession as a shaman, as she has to record her performance – her speaking out for the dead – for some of her clients. At the same time, it allows Akiko's narrative to commence against the fact that she is announced to be dead at the beginning, even though the novel never exactly confirms that Akiko's narrative strictly comes from the cassette tape recording. *Comfort Woman* also employs Beccah's narrative as the *frame narrative*, and it intrusively moves back and forth between this narrative and Akiko's narrative as the *embedded narrative* to present their parallel points of view as the two narrators never communicate with each other directly.

The three fictional biographies also differ in the aspect of women's struggle and liberation along the creation process of their gendered identities, which are affected by the personalities, cultures, historical periods, and societies of their protagonists. In *The Tale of Murasaki*, Murasaki realizes that she can give up writing and devote herself to the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment through her faith only after she has reminisced on her lived life and put it down in her memoir. Her liberation through Buddhism corresponds with the limited choices Heian women have as alternatives to live independently from men's control: court service or ordination. Even though court service is first presented as an alternative, Murasaki discovers that life in the palace cannot offer her solace and that court ladies cannot avoid men's influence or sexual advances. In *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Lalu/Polly seeks liberation through her refusal to be owned by any man as well as her determination to live self-sufficiently and become part of her community. She does not shun the name "Polly," which is first labeled on her against her will; instead she adopts it, reconstructs a new identity by opening herself to the new culture of the land she has come to live in, and ultimately discovers where she belongs through the love she shares with Charlie. Her determination is possibly influenced by the liberal American values she is exposed to in the American pioneering era and her doubt of the traditional Chinese view that performing a wife's and mother's duties ensures a woman's happiness. Then, Akiko's

liberation in *Comfort Woman* comes from bonding with fellow marginalized women, such as Induk, through her shamanistic faith, which is starkly against the Christian faith of her oppressive husband. With the help of their spirits, Akiko succeeds in reclaiming her identity and true name Soon Hyo, and delivers her legacy and identity to her daughter for remembrance and continuation of memorial – along with those of the other women she has known, which will otherwise remain unspoken and forgotten. Deeply traumatized and symbolically killed by the multiple rapes and identity-erasure perpetrated on her, Akiko resorts to contact with spirits and becomes a spirit medium in order to live on to sustain both her daughter and the memories of the dead, which she eventually passes on to Beccah. Clearly, liberation of the female protagonists in fictional biographies can be achieved through different means that best suit their needs, choices, and circumstances.

In this structuralist study of the three works in the genre of fictional biography, I acknowledge that there are many limitations to consider. Firstly, the length of the three fictional biographies makes it impossible for me to adequately apply Barthes's five codes to my analysis of them; they may be adapted more fully to shorter works such as short stories. Secondly, the selected works belong to such different cultures and periods that in-depth comparisons and patterns may be hard to make among them. Thirdly, the nature of the selected works as cross-cultural writings involves complex and extensive intertextuality between them, as well as knowledge outside the Western/European culture and discipline. Such knowledge may have slipped from my research through outside sources and influenced some of my interpretations of the texts. Fourthly, as all of the selected works are contemporary, previous analyses and researches of the particular works to be reviewed can be hard to come by.

Nevertheless, I believe that further study of fictional biography in relation to the reconstruction of identity can be applied to other works to illustrate how the genre combines fiction with fact to compensate for the lack of historical records on its subject/protagonist's life, and to derive thematic ideas and meanings out of the life of its historical subject. In this post-modern and intercultural world, it is interesting to explore how fact and fiction, cross-cultural and gendered issues come into contact in literary works which look back to a person's life in the past and create new meanings

out of his/her existence. For further study, I suggest that fictional biographies inspired by the same historical protagonist, historical period, or culture be studied in a more closely comparative approach.

Specifically, it is interesting as well to focus on the polarized portrayals of male characters in feministic fictional biographies, where there are both 'oppressive' male characters as antagonists and supportive or 'ideal' male characters as advisors, helpers, or companions to the female protagonists. On the one hand, the three fictional biographies feature an array of antagonistic male figures. There are the lieutenant captain, Michinaga, Kaoru, and Niou in *The Tale of Murasaki*. In *Thousand Pieces of Gold* there are Chen, the bandits, and Hong King. And in *Comfort Woman* there are the Japanese soldiers and Akiko's husband, Richard Bradley. On the other hand, there are some – or a few – supportive or ideal male characters in two out of the three fictional biographies. Murasaki's father and husband are open-minded men. Her father allows her to study Chinese, and her husband Nobutaka is supportive to her writing work, even though both of them do not have much important roles in the fictional biography. Murasaki also temporarily has a sensitive and romantic Chinese lover, Ming-gwok, who treats her as an equal and opens Murasaki's perspective to see the different side of her culture. Lalu/Polly has a loving father. She is protected by Ding during the time she is held by the bandits. Then, Jim becomes her advisor, mental support, and love interest. Charlie takes over these roles when Jim dies, and they stay together as husband and wife until his death. Murasaki and Polly have men whom they trust and love. However, such male characters are completely absent from *Comfort Women*. There is no ideal man for Akiko or Beccah. Akiko's father has hardly any contact with her, and Beccah vaguely remembers her father as an oppressive figure, even though she tries to imagine him as a loving, normal father. Furthermore, Beccah's boyfriends, Max and Sanford, have very minor roles and are portrayed as insignificant men whom Beccah can easily leave without regret. These generally negative portrayals of male characters in *Comfort Woman* possibly serve to strengthen the theme of female solidarity by making female-female relationships much more fulfilling and long lasting than male-female ones. The portrayal of men in other pieces of women's writing may be studied in comparison to any of the three works as well.

In addition, it is also interesting to explore more on certain topics such as female inheritance, which is prevalent in both *The Tale of Murasaki* and *Comfort Woman*, in other pseudo-autobiographical writings which feature the same theme such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. There is also a possibility to study fictional biographies featuring female subjects and written by female writers in comparison to fictional biographies featuring male subjects and male writers to explore their differing processes of identity-creation. In fact, possibilities of further study can be as vast as the literary aspects the genre itself can offer.

As the narratives of the three fictional biographies begin in the early years of the lives of their female protagonists, illustrate their protagonists' maturation as they embark on the world while creating, struggling for, and preserving their lifelong, ever-evolving gendered identities, and eventually end in the protagonists' death with the impression that the entire lives of these remarkable female figures sustain meanings of their own, the imagining and reading of such texts of lives lived and gone can approximate the experiences of reminiscing on, reconstructing, and reclaiming their identities for authors and readers. The narrative of a meaningful fictional completion of each woman's life can have cathartic effects on its creator and readers, and thus inspire them to reflect on their lives and their own identities, as well as the limitations and adaptations that have become parts of them. Ultimately, I would like to conclude my thesis with one of Murasaki's translated poems in *The Tale of Murasaki* – on the joy of living despite the brevity of life: "*Why do we suffer so in the world? Just regard life as the short bloom of the mountain cherry*" (Dalby 400). The lives of Murasaki Shikibu, Polly Bemis, and Soon Hyo in the three fictional biographies may have their share of heart-wrenching pains and tragic moments. However, I do believe there is a beautiful aspect to the fictional narratives of their struggle for liberation, and I have come to share Katako's view of Murasaki's particular poem when I consider how each woman eventually wins her liberation in the long, harsh fight so that, at the time of her death, she can depart from this world without regret: "I realized it was actually joyous, and my entire understanding of her was transformed. In the end she had no more sorrow than does a cherry blossom at its falling" (Dalby 400).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
VITA SACKVILLE-WEST AND *ORLANDO*

Virginia Woolf's fictional biography *Orlando, the Biography* concerns the story of the titular protagonist who undergoes a miraculous sex change from male to female and lives across the span of over three hundred years. He is born an aristocrat in the Elizabethan period, and he becomes Queen Elizabeth's lover as a youth. Then, during the reign of King James I, Orlando becomes involved with many ladies and is heartbroken by a Russian Princess by the name of Sasha, who departs during the Great Frost of 1709. After that, he secludes himself in his manor house with 365 rooms and 52 staircases and sets to become a writer. He invites the famous poet Nicholas (or Nick) Greene to converse and finds him an entertaining companion. But then, Greene writes a parody on the eccentricity of Orlando as a nobleman, and Orlando feels so deeply hurt by this betrayal that he burns most of his own writings save for one poem. Later, Orlando is repulsed by the advances made on him by Archduchess Harriet of Romania and wants to flee England. King Charles II then sends him to Constantinople as an ambassador.

There, he is unexplainably and magically transformed into a woman. As a woman, Orlando lives independently with the gypsies for a period and then decides to return to England. She becomes more feminine after a romantic interlude with the ship's captain. When she returns home, she finds out that there are lawsuits against her owning property for many reasons. Firstly, her male counterpart is claimed to be dead. Secondly, she has no rights to own property as a woman. And thirdly, there are three sons by a Spanish dancer called Rosina Pepita who claim to have been fathered by the male Orlando and thus they inherit his property. Nevertheless, Orlando gets on with her life. She discovers that Archduchess Harriet is in fact Archduke Harry, a man in disguise, and he has been in love with her ever since she was still a man. He proposes to her. However, Orlando soon gets tired of him and drives him away. Then she resumes writing. She comes to know the famous poets of the eighteenth century such as Addison, Dryden, and Pope. However, they do not take women's writing

seriously and Orlando finds herself much more entertained by prostitutes' stories as she disguises herself as a man and goes meet them while roaming London at night. Time passes into the strict and stiffening Victorian age, and Orlando feels the need to get married. In a manner parodied to that of a gothic romance – especially Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, she ventures out into the fields and claims that she will be the bride of nature, bride of the moor. Just then, Orlando falls by the lake and twists her ankle. She is then rescued by a man on a horse, Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire. In two seconds, they know everything about each other and are engaged to be married. Soon after, the lawsuits are settled with Orlando having the rights to her titles and property. Shel and Orlando continue their relationship. They get along well as Shel has the qualities of a good woman and Orlando has those of a good man. They get married in a rushed ceremony when Shel has to leave to sea. Orlando soon gives birth to their son. She realizes that a writer has to strike a balance with the age he/she is in and resumes working on her poem, "The Oak Tree," which she started to write in the Elizabethan age. When the poem is finished, Nick Greene, now an influential critic in the Victorian age, sees Orlando's manuscript and encourages her to publish it. As time moves on into the twentieth century, Orlando encounters many changes of the modern period. She ponders about the real self of 'Orlando' and eventually realizes that her self and identity is a continuum and conglomeration of the different façades and genders she has taken throughout the ages. At the end of the novel, Shel returns to her and time reaches the present in 1928.

It is widely known that the life of Orlando is based on the life and family history of Vita Sackville-West, one of Woolf's female lovers. In fact, Nigel Nicolson (1917-2004), Vita's son, calls the novel "the longest and most charming love-letter in literature" (201). Woolf writes in her diary, "Vita should be Orlando, a young nobleman" (112), and confirms again that Orlando is definitely "Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another" (115). Vita Sackville-West, or Victoria Mary Sackville-West, was born into the prestigious Sackville-West aristocratic family. Her father, Lionel Edward Sackville-West, 3rd Baron Sackville (1867-1928), and her mother, Victoria Sackville-West (1862-1936) were first cousins. Victoria was an illegitimate daughter of Lionel Sackville-West, 2nd Baron Sackville (1827-1908), with

an internationally famous Spanish dancer named Josefa de la Oliva (also known as Pepita – the same name as the fictional Spanish dancer who claims to have three sons by Orlando) who is claimed to be of gypsy origin. Rachel Bowlby, in the introduction to the Oxford's publication of *Orlando* in 1998, states that Victoria was "brought up in relative obscurity in the south of France, and then taken for a short while to England to be introduced to her hitherto unknown noble relatives" (xx-xxi). Bowlby remarks how Vita embodies both the formal nobility from her father's side and the romanticism from that of her mother:

> [Vita] was thus born of a dubiously double Sackville pairing compounded of fantastically disparate elements: her father's side was straightforwardly Sackville, while her mother's parents were Sackville plus a whole spread of highly romantic elements: the gypsy, the artist, the woman celebrity. In one way, Victoria literally repeated her mother's story, identifying herself with the foreign Pepita – Victoria had lived abroad and was illegitimate – and allying herself to a Sackville named, like her own father, Lionel (xxi).

Like Orlando, Vita was keen on literature, poetry and nature, and she had a strong attachment to her ancestry and family history, which is evident in how she "took upon herself the conserving role of historian, and prided herself on the continuity and illustriousness of her ancestry" (Bowlby xx) in the writing of *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922), which became Woolf's basis on Orlando's family background in *Orlando*. In fact, Orlando's manor house with its 365 rooms and 52 staircases resembles the Knole House, the ancestral home of the Sackville-West family. The country house, one of the largest houses in England, came into possession of Thomas Sackville (1536-1608), cousin to Queen Elizabeth I in 1566. Vita Sackville-West was born in the Knole House near the town of Sevenoaks and grew up there. However, as the Knole House was traditionally passed down to male heirs, Vita lost her rights to the house she was so fond of to her father's brother. The threat of losing the Knole House in the 1910 trial to determine the inheritance of the particular

house mirrors that of Orlando's case after her sex transformation. Bowlby states that Vita's real case "involved every aspect of the Orlando case except the gender dispute, though supplying instead the added spice of a quasi-incestuous marriage" (xxxix).

There are also other similarities between Orlando and Vita Sackville-West. Vita had been to Constantinople for some time, and Orlando's position as an ambassador may reflect that of her maternal grandfather and Harold Nicolson (1886-968), Vita's husband, both of whom were British diplomats. Like Orlando, Vita had relationships with both sexes. However, Orlando is more likely a 'straight' heterosexual, as he has relationships with women when he is a man, and she is attracted to men as a woman. Orlando's lover, the Russian Princess Sasha, is based on Violet Trefusis née Keppel (1894-1972) who had an intensely passionate affair with Vita and had eloped with her in Europe several times. During their elopements, Vita disguised herself as a man, as does Orlando when she goes out to converse with the prostitutes. Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Orlando's husband, is also possibly based on Vita's husband Harold Nicolson, who has a strong relationship with her despite the fact that both of them are homosexuals. Their unorthodox marriage is illustrated in Nigel Nicolson's biographic work of his mother's life, *Portrait of a Marriage* (1973).

APPENDIX B
ROLAND BARTHES'S STRUCTURALIST METHODS AND GERARD GENETTE'S NARRATOLOGY

In his essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," Barthes posits that while linguistics treats sentence as the largest structural unit, it is the smallest and the basic unit one can work on in narrative analysis, in "the network of the self-multiplying systems of discourse that humans create" (Detweiler 113). Barthes considers a narrative as "a large sentence, just as any declarative sentence is, in a certain way, the outline of a little narrative" (241). He selects three levels of narrative structure for analysis: level of functions, actions, and narration approximating "discourse." Barthes' essay examines the substance and interrelation among these three levels.

Barthes states that the level of function consists of two classes: the distributional or functional class, and the integrative or metaphoric class. The functional class operates on a single level, metonymically, complementarily, and referring to functions of actions.

On the other hand, the metaphoric class consists of elements Barthes calls indices or indicators, referring to functions of being, i.e., characters' personality traits and identities, and atmosphere. The functional class is mainly employed by popular tales, whereas the metaphoric class is mainly employed by psychological narratives. A great variety called "intermediary forms" lie in between the two poles.

Each of the class can be further divided into two sub-classes. The subdivisions of the functional class are units which Barthes calls cardinal functions or nuclei, which causes decisive actions or the moments of risks in narrative, and catalyses that fill in the space between the nuclear actions, or the "areas of security" which serve to secure contact between narrator and reader. As for the metaphoric class consisting of indices, its subdivisions are indices proper, which convey the character traits and emotions, and information fragments, which merely offer data.

Barthes stresses that a unit can belong to multiple classes at the same time, and that the latter three elements (catalyses, indices, and information fragments) are development of the nuclei and together they constitute a few finite sets from which the story proliferates (Detweiler 114).

As for the level of actions, Barthes considers it in A. J. Greimas' sense of actants[1], or acting characters. However, he finds that there is a major problem in the classification of characters which has been done by other critics. This particular problem is the location and identity of the subject/ protagonist of a narrative. The solution he proposes to this problem is to study characters as grammatical units rather than genuine, psychological beings.

Barthes asks who the giver of narrative is and comes up with three assumptions. The first one identifies the narrator with the actual author, equating the text to the expression of the author's self. The second one posits that the narrator is "an all-knowing consciousness, a 'God' who both knows his characters intimately and aloof from them" (Detweiler 116). Finally, the third one sees the narrator as the one who limits his presentation to the viewpoints of the characters. All of these are "inadequate" to Barthes, as they maintain the illusion that the narrator and the characters are real people, while he prefers to see them as "grammatical entities." Barthes then discusses the systems of narration as being either personal or apersonal. He finds that while the apersonal is traditionally stressed in the narrative mode, the personal is gradually absorbed into the story until the apersonal and the personal mix regularly in the narrative.

On the level of narration, Barthes sees the writing process as the coding of the narration. Its role is not to convey a narrative message, but to call attention to the writing itself. He thinks that the analysis of the message belongs to the world of discourse beyond the narrative level, having nothing to do with structural narrative analysis. Nevertheless,

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[1] A.J. Greimas, another structuralist critic, developed 'structural semantics' which involves treating narratives as if they were sentences. Actants function in narratives as nouns function in sentences. They consist of six roles: sender – object – receiver and helper – subject – opponent, and underlie all narratives in form of characters and objects. A character or an object may perform one role or more, and more than one character or an object can function as one actant. (Selden 63)

what Western society is interested in is the 'ends' or products that is the message, and thus it tries to disguise the coding of narrative rather than accentuates it.

Another structuralist method of division later developed by Barthes is the Five Codes of Narrative in his book *S/Z*. According to Barry (51), the codes can be summarized as follows:

1. *The proairetic code* – providing indication of actions
2. *The hermeneutic code* – posing questions or enigmas which provide narrative suspense
3. *The cultural code* – containing references out beyond the text to what is regarded as common knowledge in the culture of the character, author, or reader
4. *The semic/connotative code* – linked to theme and constituting a 'character' when organized around a particular proper name
5. *The symbolic code* – linked to theme on a larger scale than the semic code, consisting of contrasts and pairings related to the most basic binary polarities seen by structuralists as fundamental to the human way of perceiving and organizing reality

Gerard Genette, another structuralist critic who chiefly contributes to Narratology, or the study of how narrative functions, discusses six particular areas in his book *Narrative Discourse*. They can be summarized as follows (Barry 231-239):

1. The basic narrative mode: *mimetic* or *diegetic*. The mimetic mode is the dramatization or "showing" of an event, while the diegetic mode is the summarization or "telling" of an event. A novel usually employs both modes to varying extents.
2. The point of view of the narrative – or "focalization" in Genette's term. The *external focalization* means the viewpoint outside the character depicted, i.e., presenting what the character outwardly says and does. On

the other hand, the *internal focalization* is the viewpoint inside the character, showing what he/she feels and thinks. In this case, the character that is the main focus the internal focalization is called a '*focalizer*.' There is also another type: *zero focalization*, which can be equated with the more traditional term 'omniscient viewpoint'.

3. The narrator of the story: an '*authorial persona*' or a *distinct character*. The authorial persona is usually employed in the zero focalization as a voice or a tone that can possibly be registered as "an intelligent recording consciousness, a mere 'telling medium' which strives for neutrality and transparency." This voice is not the author's "true" voice, but a specific voice and tone that the author only uses in a narrative. This kind of narrator can be called "covert," "effaced," "non-intrusive," or "non-dramatized." On the other hand, the other kind of narrator is a distinct character with a name, gender, personal history, social status, and personality. Such a narrator is "overt," "intrusive" or "dramatized." He or she can be further classified as "*heterodiegetic*" – an outsider who tells the story, but does not witness or participate in it, or "*homodiegetic*" – a character present in the story he/she narrates. First-person narrator can be either hetorodiegetic or homodiegetic, while omniscient narrator is necessarily heterodiegetic.

4. The handling of time in the story. The order of telling in a narrative is not always chronological. A narrative can flash back to an event in the past, which can be called "*analeptic*", or it can flash forward to narrate, refer to or anticipate what will happen later, which is called "*proleptic*". Proleptic details also include symbolic actions which foreshadow the future events.

5. The 'packaging' of the story. Some stories consist of more than one narrative, or a narrative within another narrative. The first narrative presented – whether it is the main narrative of the story or not – is called the "*frame narrative*" or "*primary narrative*" and the narrative(s) within it the "*embedded narrative*," "*secondary narrative*" or "*meta narrative*."

Furthermore, the frame narrative can be sub-classified as "*single-ended*," which means that the frame situation is not returned to when the story ends, "*double-ended*," which means that the story returns to the situation of the frame narrative in the end, or "*intrusive*", meaning that the story moves back and forth between the frame narrative and the embedded one(s).

6. The representation of speech and thought – there are three levels: *mimetic*, *transposed*, or *narratized speech*. A mimetic speech is the direct speech, which can be tagged with the speaker, i.e., he/she said, or untagged. The direct and tagged speech can also be selectively tagged as necessary. As for the transposed speech, it is the equivalent of reported speech and is necessarily tagged, introducing a formal distancing between the reader and the depicted event. Finally, narratized speech is similar to the transposed speech, but it does not report the actual words used and instead conveys the substance of the message, providing the maximum distance between the reader and the voice and tone of the spoken words. However, the distance can be slightly reduced in the use of the free indirect speech, which can smoothly and naturally glide into the musing of a focalizer in an internally focalized narrative.

VITAE

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