

## CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES ON JAPANESE IMMIGRANTS IN HIROMI GOTO'S *THE KAPPA CHILD* AND *CHORUS OF MUSHROOMS*

Oana Meda Păloșanu, PhD Candidate, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

*Abstract: Hiromi Goto writes to reject the objective and uniformizing tendencies of the Canadian literary and aesthetic canons. She has a very specific ideal reader in mind, familiar with both English and Japanese and with sufficient cross-cultural awareness to understand social and cultural variability. Goto refuses to write another specific Internment-Prairie-Japanese-Canadian novel, but broadens the horizon of expectation of her readers by presenting Japanese-Canadian protagonists who challenge stereotypical constructs.*

*Keywords: Japanese-Canadian, Diaspora, Cross-Cultural, Cultural Variability, Stereotype*

Hiromi Goto stands out in the literature of the Japanese diaspora in Canada for her very specific treatment of character development. Her outlook broadened the horizon of expectation of readers by presenting protagonists who actively fight against the racial, ageist and gender stereotypical constructs which they have been labeled with. Hiromi Goto was born in 1966 and migrated to Canada at the age of three. She lived in British Columbia for 8 years and at the age of 11 moved to Alberta with her family. Her first novel, "*Chorus of Mushrooms*", published in 1994 received the Commonwealth Writers' Prize Best First Book Canada and Caribbean Region and was the co-winner of the Canada-Japan Book Award. "*The Kappa Child*", published by Hiromi Goto in 2001 and was awarded the James Tiptree Prize the next year for its unique approach on gender roles. For the purpose of this paper I will be focusing on the protagonists of these novels, namely the *Issei*<sup>1</sup> grandmother Naoe and the unnamed *Nisei*<sup>2</sup> narrator who learns to heal the trauma of her childhood by accepting a fantastic element in her unextraordinary life.

The first generation of Japanese immigrants sought to achieve financial independence so they may one day return to more economically stable circumstances in Japan. In this respect, their focus was centered not on acquiring the language and integrating within the mainstream social framework, and more on diligently achieving economic independence. This however, has attracted a stigma of unassailability. At the same time, their successful enterprises generated frictions with the white population who could no longer take the jobs for which the Japanese were willing to work longer hours for lower wages. Their effort to become a model minority was perceived as having a detrimental effect on the welfare of the white population. The second generation of Japanese Canadians sought to act as mediators between their aging parents and the white population. By reconciling both aspects of their multicultural heritage they could close the gap of perceived difference. However, their apparent denial of traditional family roles and their racially-specific visual markers have made it so that the *Nisei* were placed in a double cone of marginality and consequently faced a double "disidentification effect" (Pecheux 1982, 112).

<sup>1</sup> *Issei* is a Japanese language term used to specify the Japanese people first to immigrate.

<sup>2</sup> *Nisei* is a Japanese language term used to define the children born to Japanese people in the new country.

The issue of stereotyping is central to both novels, indicating how multiple layers of oppression overlap to generate the isolation of cultural and racial minorities. Some of the most relevant episodes in “*Chorus of Mushrooms*”, evince such tendencies. Murasaki, the granddaughter of the family, learns at Church that:

Red and Yellow, Black and White

They are precious in His sight

Jesus loves the little children of the world!

There were pictures drawn on the song boards too. Indians with feathers and black boys with curly hair wearing only shorts and yellow people with skinny eyes. An a blonde girl with long eyelashes with a normal dress on. “Everybody is the same”, the teacher said, “Jesus doesn’t see any difference at all. He loves you all the same”. I thought that Jesus must be pretty blind if he thought everybody was the same. Because they weren’t. They weren’t at all. (Goto, *Chorus* 59, emphasis mine)

The depiction underlines the importance attached to visual markers both in defining the self and in establishing identity as central or “Other”. The song enumerates the ethnic minorities of Canada in terms of their most often associated stereotypes. The Indians’ “feathers” are markers of exoticism, black boys have “curly hair” and “wear only shorts” because they are poor. Asians are “yellow” and have “skinny eyes”. Their “Otherness” is further emphasized when placed in contrast with the Eurocentric staple of beauty associated with “blonde hair”, “long eyelashes” and having a “normal” dress on. The acknowledgement of living in a society with retractile tendencies towards difference comes to Murasaki when she is asked to take on the role of Alice in the school play. Her beautiful singing voice qualifies her for the role, however, she must allow herself to be reinscribed as local in order to participate “Alice is a story about an English girl, you know. An English girl with lovely blonde hair (...) You simply cannot have an Alice with black hair” (Goto, *Chorus* 177). The ease with which her mother accepts this idea enforces the stereotype of the *Nisei*’s propensity to act in such a way as to obtain the approval of the mainstream. Murasaki’s cultural confusion and her attempt to reconcile with the hyphen in her identity has also been associated with the descendants of diasporic minorities. The *Issei* grandmother’s inability to communicate with her daughter completes the stereotypical pan-generational conflict of the Japanese diaspora.

Gender and racial stereotyping is also conspicuous in “*The Kappa Child*”. The narrator’s family is subjected to the unquestioned rule of a patriarch and hierarchically-driven. The mother is *yasashii*, that is, docile and unimposing to a fault, in capable of protecting herself or her children against the rule of the father and thus conforming to the stereotypical image of submissive Japanese women. Jane Nakamura, their only neighbor, is defined as *hinganai*, meaning impolite and socially inappropriate for her liberty of language and determination to act as independently as a man would. The opening episode of the book shows the family preparing for Thanksgivings dinner in an effort to maintain an illusion of white middle-class propriety. However, as the event progresses the facade of normality crumbles under the relationship strain of a dysfunctional family.

The different generations of Japanese Canadians faced different types of stereotype and were forced to develop specific coping mechanisms. Naoe acts the part of an aged Japanese woman, never condescending to leave her chair and unable to speak English in spite

of decades of being exposed to the language. Although she bows to the Japanese principle of non-imposition, she does not hold back on expressing her condescendence towards other's ignorance and ease to judge. She is capable of speaking English fluently but she prefers to feign ignorance and subject to stereotypical constructs. From her strategically placed seat, she is first to encounter all those entering the house. To her chagrin and amusement, they always instinctively assume that she is unable to speak the local tongue and therefore automatically switch to a less complex system of communication: "*Ohairi kudasai! Dōzo ohairi kudasai.*"<sup>3</sup> Talk loudly and e-n-u-n-c-i-a-t-e. I might be stupid as well as deaf. How can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language? But let them think this. Let them think what they will, for they will. Solly, Obāchan no speeku Eeenglishu" (Goto, *Chorus* 5). Her internal monologues challenge the Eurocentric tendency to emphasize "Otherness" in alternative cultural constructs and then extrapolate them to suit a totalizing political agenda.

Easy for an old woman to sit in a chair and talk and talk. Easier, still not to say anything at all. I could nod and smile and watch "Sesame Street" so I can learn French as well as the English people don't think I already know. Bonjour! I'll say and everyone will be amazed. Je m'appelle Naoe Kiyokawa. Ha! If an old woman sits in a chair and never gets out and talks and talks and talks, don't ignore her. She might be saying something that will change the colour of your eyes. (37)

When rebuked by her daughter for her refusal to speak English, she again adopts an air of naïve linguistic inability: "*Gomennasai. Waruine, Obāchan wa. Solly. Solly*"<sup>4</sup> (5) and feigns behavior associated with *amae*<sup>5</sup>. However, she is harsh in criticizing those who obtusely follow the prescription of stereotypes. For example her son in law attempts to act according to specific Japanese tenets which posit the respect for the elders as a datum. He always asks her about her day, but doesn't attempt to truly communicate, making his attempts void of *makoto*<sup>6</sup>: "'Glad to hear it,' he says, no matter what I say. Once, I said I spent the day masturbating with my toes. Another time I said Keiko scrubbed the walls with shit and wiped the floor with piss. But all he says is, 'Glad to hear it'" (48). By doing so, she protests against stereotypes such as the "*shikata-ga-nai*" syndrome extensively attributed to *Issei* women. Naoe realizes that she is starting to bow to ageist constructs when she considers her sexuality abnormal:

Most unseemly, to be this age and horny, but it is funny after all. This muttering, old, lamb-haired Obāchan wearing elastic-waisted polyester pants, brown collarless shirt with pink flowers, grey cardigan and heel imprinted slippers. Just pulling out the waistband with one

<sup>3</sup> Step in! Make yourself at home!

<sup>4</sup> I am very sorry. My mistake. Grandmother is really sorry.

<sup>5</sup> In "*The Anatomy of dependence*" Takeo Doi defines this as a "peculiarly Japanese behavior" (169) which partly explains "the psychological differences between Japan and Western countries" (310). The child/ young adult tends to act immature and simulate inability to cope with various everyday occurrences, "helplessness and the desire to be loved" (22) in order to gain the sympathy and support of the mother/ older female figure in the family. He defines *amae* as behaving "self-indulgently, presuming on some special relationship that exists between the two" (29).

<sup>6</sup> Translates as "sincerity" or "truth" and represents a recurring motif of Japanese Art.

quavering hand and the other just about to slip into cotton briefs, toying with the idea of—  
 .“(Goto Chorus 39)

Her most prominent feature, her incessant stream of words is no longer enough to ward off the pressure of the hegemonic discourse. She is forced to reevaluate her circumstances if she is to maintain her cultural and identity autonomy. She abandons the limitations of her old life and starts on a journey paralleling a mythical quest. She encounters legendary creatures such as *Yuki Onna*<sup>7</sup> and a truck-driver-*Tengu*<sup>8</sup> who empower her to the point that she can conjure the elements of nature. She challenges the stigma of unassimilability by signing into the Calgary Bull-Riding competition, considered to be an epitome of the manifestation of white Canadian malehood. However, she purposefully erases her markers of difference by signing in under a gender-neuter alias and by wearing a mask. Announcers automatically interpret that the Purple Mask is a man, thus signaling the limits to Naoe's attempt at emancipation from stereotype. Naoe accepts being presented to the audience as a white male because this “delineat[es] the borders into which difference is accepted or ‘tolerable’” (Sasano 40) within Canadian society.

Ladies and gentlemen! I've just received a special bulletin. There's word that The Purple Mask has been seen near the chutes! Now for those of you who've never heard of The Purple Mask, you folks from out of town, The Purple Mask is a mysteeeeerious bullrider who shows up at the Calgary Stampede and gives bull riding a whole new meaning. No one knows who he is, where he comes from. He doesn't even have a pro card. But lordly, can he ride! He just showed up one year and he's been around ever since. Only takes one ride. Never had a wreck. Plumb mysterious. The Purple Mask is a legend in these parts come Stampede time, and you're going to get your money's worth when you see this cowboy ride! (Goto, Chorus 216-217)

Naoe challenges precontrived notions such as “identity, power and possibility in the context of externally-regulated social demands” (Calliste, Sefa, and Margarida 15) by radically shifting the direction of her development towards the unpredictable. The protagonist of the “*The Kappa Child*” faces similar problems when trying to come to terms with her heritage. Born and raised in a family in which an abusive father dominated without scruples, the protagonist is forced to curb her aspirations and accept mediocrity together with an all-encompassing emotional stasis which do not allow her to successfully integrate in society. Both now and in the past she perceived her socio-cultural milieu as constricting and disempowering. Her childhood inner monologues clearly illustrate an acute perception of social and racial limitations:

I lay there and thought about my options. There were none. I was ten years old and I didn't have any money. I knew what happened to little kids who ran away- they were either found cut up into little pieces or sold to men more dangerous than my father. Okasan would never leave Dad, she couldn't save herself, let alone her children, and that was that. Going to white outsiders wasn't an option for an Asian immigrant family like us. If you ditched the family, there was absolutely nothing left. When you are ten, something is better than nothing, even if

<sup>7</sup> Yuki Onna is a spirit or yōkai in Japanese folklore who scares mortals or leads them astray on snowy nights and abandoning them to die of exposure. It is believed to be the spirit of someone who died in a snowstorm

<sup>8</sup> The Tengu is a type of legendary creature found in Japanese folk religion depicted as having both human and avian characteristics. Its most prominent characteristic is its long, red nose.

something has a hand faster than the words forming in your head, let alone in your mouth. (Goto Kappa 199)

Multiple episodes throughout the book, such as the initial Thanksgiving family meal or when the father offers the family a meal of rancid chicken, are indicative of the nature of the hierarchical nature of the family. The synergy between the autocratic father, the powerless mother and the sisters is marked by the principles of top-down communication. This is translated in the lives of the now adult sister as various psychological issues, ranging from trichotillomania to pseudocyesis and a tendency to slip back into their childhood roles as soon as they return home. The narrating protagonist admits that:

I've always hoped that childhood could be a book, a sequence of pages that I could flip through, or close. A book that could be put away on a shelf. Even boxed and locked into storage should the need arise. But, of course not. Childhood isn't a book and it doesn't end. My childhood spills into my adult life despite all my attempts at otherwise and the saturation of the past with the present is an ongoing story." (Goto Kappa 215)

At the moment, her life gravitates around frustrations engendered by her alexithymic predisposition, a sense of futility foregrounded by her vapid occupation which consists of gathering stray shopping carts while driving: "around in a milk van, with no milk" (Goto, *Kappa* 84), and an extremely low sense of self-worth obvious in her unflattering references to herself: "Clothing does not fit me. My big-boned arms, my daikon legs, my beta-beta feet, and splaying toes. My bratwurst fingers and nonexistent neck. And my head. My poor colossal head, too huge even to dream of a ten-gallon hat" (Goto, *Kappa* 51). Her lifestyle is indicative of an individual whom, in an effort to blend with the ascribed label of model minority, has in the meantime curbed her personality development and is therefore unable to develop adequate coping mechanisms or work towards achieving self-improvement:

I don't ask for much in this world. I just mostly leave it alone, you know. Keep a safe space between me and my family, try to be a good person without manipulating other people's lives, go to work, practice sanitary masturbation, pay taxes. I don't have any pets. No major vices. Don't buy on credit. Saving money for a trip somewhere warm. What went wrong? Why can't I just have a normal life? (Goto, *Kappa* 155)

Unlike Naoe who acts as a result of intrinsic motivation, the protagonist of "*The Kappa Child*" requires external support in order to break through her abandonment to mediocrity and dispassionate attitude. The Stranger, "a retro-dressed person of questionable gender and racial origin" (Goto, *Kappa* 121), introduces her to the world of the kappa, *yukai*<sup>9</sup> of the Japanese mythology who were transplanted to Canada together with the immigrant families. She becomes pregnant with a kappa child, and, as she learns to fit into the role of a mother, she is able to deal with the lingering strain of her childhood and gradually recalibrates her attitude towards herself and others. Hers is a journey of emotional healing and identity development. Similarly to Naoe, she experiences a crisis of identity. In the case of Naoe, it

<sup>9</sup> Youkai represents a wide class of supernatural monsters in Japanese folklore who bring good fortune or act malevolently towards mortals who encounter them.

could be traced to the traditionally superimposed limitations and gender roles which she now chooses to oppose:

For a Japanese woman, losing her identity, her family name, and by extension, her heritage is a matter of simple bureaucracy: “An easy thing to change a name. All it takes is ink and a piece of paper. A whole dimension on a family tree erased when one name is dropped and another assumed. All those mothers and daughters and mothers and daughters swallowed into the names of men. It would make us tear our hair, beat our breast, if we thought about it long enough. Enough of this tree nonsense!”(Goto, Chorus 38)

In the case of the protagonist of “*The Kappa Child*”, her identity effacement is the result of successive and repeated episodes of violence and the conscientization of gender and social vulnerability. She accepts the “*shikata-ga-nai*” dictate and bows to stereotypical taxonomy. A break from her already ossified tendencies can only be prompted by external intervention.

Self-discovery translates as healing in the novels. They focus on members of an uprooted culture and of a highly visible diaspora whose status is the corollary of cultural fusion. They illustrate an antagonistic tendency in acquiring identity definition that shifts between an effort to orient towards mainstream social and cultural expectations and a desire to preserve traditional values intact. Goto’s work exhibits resonance with Edward Said’s acknowledgement that: “Once we accept the actual configuration of literary experiences overlapping with one another and interdependent, despite national boundaries and coercively legislated national autonomies, history and geography are transfigured in new maps in new and far less stable entities, in new types of connections”(Said 317).

The fundamental differences in the constructions of characters in the literature of the Japanese diaspora lies in the authors’ divergent perceptions on displacement which: “is not experienced in precisely the same way across time and space, and does not unfold in uniform fashion” (Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenberg (1996, 4). Characters such as Joy Kogawa’s Obasan and Naomi perceive their isolation and difference as inherent consequences of racial discrepancy, to the point that they interfere with social integration. Alternately, the protagonists of Hiromi Goto’s books perceive their distinctness as a source of empowerment, albeit, not always from the beginning. Naoe draws strength from her sarcasm towards the ignorant who refuse to define her outside the stereotypically constructed avatar of an *Issei* woman. Her apparent compliance alternated with tendencies bordering on the autistic, i.e., shouting incessantly, refusal to speak in any other language besides Japanese, her proclivity towards a static and isolated lifestyle, etc., place her in the position of an Outsider-Within. From her vantage point, she can make socio-cultural assessments that, in spite of their subjectivity, posit behavioral substitutes as alternatives to prevailing stereotypes. Her apparent linguistic inability allows her to commingle both with her *uchi* and the *soto*<sup>10</sup> groups and her

<sup>10</sup> The inside and the outside group. In Japanese society belonging to one group or another translates into different attitudes towards the interlocutor, the employment of situational-specific grammatical and syntactic structures. A Japanese individual will act to preserve the honor and interests of his *uchi*-group, consisting of relatives and close friends and by extension, the inhabitants of his proximal environment. He will also be more reserved and polite in relation to members of the *soto* group.

cultural amphibianism permits her to integrate within the Canadian mainstream better than she had in her old Japanese family.

Naoe understands that her agenda is independent of her family's desire to affiliate to Canadian standards. Her daughter "is a Nutra-sweet woman and doesn't take any cream. She's an Ivory girl with eyebrows plucked and penciled in darker" (68-69). When Murasaki, the granddaughter of the family, consumes too many oranges and her skin starts taking on a yellowish tint, her mother acts irrationally, trying to forcefully scrub it off. A preference for the Japanese heritage is thus presented as detrimental to acquiring social status. Naoe leaves her family as a result of her refusal to fall into the stereotype of the old woman, so aptly represented by Joy Kogawa's "Obasan". She evinces independence and self-sufficiency and disputes the structure of the traditional Japanese family.

The acknowledgement that she is reaching the end of her life prompts her to let go of rigid principles of social propriety and to experience life outside the limitations imposed upon Japanese women. Hence, she challenges the principles of *Wabi-Sabi*<sup>11</sup> associated with aging in Japanese culture, and veers more towards an Eurocentric construction of age which focuses on maintaining a youthful attitude even in old age. By immixing the elements of both, she manages to successfully elude ageist stereotypes. *Wabi*<sup>12</sup> and *Sabi*<sup>13</sup> are elements of Japanese aesthetics which present impermanence and imperfection as staples of beauty. Aging appears as beautiful as long as it is accepted gracefully. This goes against the Eurocentric tendency to equate beauty with proportionality and the visually pleasing. Naoe reveals attitudes which have generally been censored by artificially imposed social constructs. For example, does not have any qualms about exploring her sexuality. At the same time, she accepts her age as the result of a natural and fulfilling process of development: "I wanted to be a scholar once, but I decided to be an old woman when I grew up. You can channel your life in several directions, but I wanted to focus on one thing only. And do it very well. I'm the best old woman you're going to find for many years to come!" (Goto, *Chorus* 111). Her demeanor brings her closer to the Eurocentric ideal of age, in which one can continue engaging in the activities one enjoys regardless of age.

The protagonist of "*The Kappa Child*" is a *Nisei* woman who does not make an effort to escape her circumstances of her own accord. She has an occupation that provides little satisfaction and limits opportunities for social interaction. She is single and continually places the needs of others above her own. She therefore conforms entirely to the stereotype of the traditional Japanese immigrant woman excluded from better employment and occupying the lowest position in the family. Her falling short of Eurocentric standards of beauty bring her closer to *Wabi-Sabi*, but also heighten her perception of her difference:

I am not a beautiful Asian. I am not beautiful. There is a difference between petite and short; one is more attractive than the other. Don't get me wrong, I'm not bitter about my lack of physical beauty. My beauty lies beneath a tough surface, like a pomegranate, my Okasan is fond of telling me. Slither thinks all I need is a good orthodontist, a professional makeover, and a haircut done without a pair of toenail scissors. Maybe she's right, but I refuse to succumb. (Goto, *Kappa* 51)

<sup>11</sup> It represents a type of aesthetics derived from impermanence and imperfection.

<sup>12</sup> *Wabi* refers to austerity, serene beauty or a state of spiritual solitude.

<sup>13</sup> *Sabi* refers to the appreciation of age and of the natural occurrence of the cycles of life.

The gives her a sense of purpose. She becomes the mother of a kappa child through immaculate conception. Although there are no outward signs to prove her story, the narrator experiences physical sensations, a heightened sense of awareness and a wider emotional range which is are characteristic to pregnancy. This helps her deal with the emotional baggage of her childhood and to stand up to her father, shaking of the male-dominated stigma which is often associated with Japanese women.

Hiromi Goto's unique mode of challenging stereotypes is the result of her multicultural formation which affords her what Krygier Martin suggests as: "a vantage point, a perspective, and a quite peculiar place to stand. That metaphorical space is simultaneously inside and outside the cultures in which they are raised, in which they live, of which they are parts and which are parts of them" (22). However, she does not restrict the themes of her work to mere autobiographies of subjection as most of the writers of the Japanese diaspora. Her protagonists perceive the strongest form of rejection from within their inner-group, experiencing a reversal of the *uchi-soto* dichotomy. Naoe's Japanese ancestry is shunned by her daughter and perceived as an oddity by most other members of the family. The narrator of "*The Kappa Child*" does not so much face an emotional crisis due to a failed effort to assimilate, but to the oppressive dynamics in her family. This has resulted in socially-retractile tendencies, an appalling sense of worth and a proclivity for social awkwardness accentuated by her preference for wearing pajamas at all times and her lack of adequate emotional response in various interactional circumstances. She does not attempt to challenge stereotypical constructs before encountering the kappa child.

On the other hand, the grandmother's disruptive behavior translates into speaking incessantly "but to no avail, no one hears my language So I sit and say the words and will, until the wind or I shall die. Someone, something must stand against this wind and I will. I am" (Goto *Chorus* 5). By doing so, she challenges the principles of social propriety and restraint which were considered vital for a Japanese woman's integration within the rigid structure of the traditional Japanese family. She challenges the position of non-imposition associated with the Japanese. The episode of the Internment most eloquently demonstrated this tendency towards the obedience of authority. The Japanese offered their full cooperation in being moved, despite often having little more than a few days' notice before the event. However, their desire to not cause commotion was more due to a heightened sense of propriety than to obedience. When ascribing stereotypes, the hegemonic discourse did not take this aspect into consideration.

Naoe challenges both gender and racial stereotypes by never hesitating to speak her mind. But although "a prayer meeting would turn to exorcism if Obāchan started howling back at the wind" (Goto *Chorus* 98) she is aware that "My words are only noises in this place I call a home" (Goto *Chorus* 11). By transcending stereotypical and traditional constructs she is isolated from the group in which acceptance and integration are pursued as a means of repaying one's *On*<sup>14</sup> and *Giri*<sup>15</sup> towards the group. By leaving her family and living an active and adventurous lifestyle she calls into question the stereotypes of unresponsiveness,

<sup>14</sup> Translates as the "debt of gratitude" and implies a social obligation to return a favor received from a member of either the *uchi* or the *soto* groups.

<sup>15</sup> Translates as the moral "Duty" or "Obligation" one inherently has towards elders, authority, spiritual deities, family, etc.

immobility and retractility associated with Japanese old women and so aptly represented by Joy Kogawa's "*Obasan*". Naomi and Stephen, the *Nisei* of the same novel, are stunted by their inability to emotionally cope with the loss of the mother figure and the fear of rejection. The narrator of "*The Kappa Child*" faces similar problems, however, she is able to go beyond artificially constructed limitations with the help of external intervention.

Hiromi Goto rewrites legends and folk-tales and puts her protagonists in unmediated contact with the supernatural in order to generate strategies of empowerment and to heal racial and emotional stress. Her characters have to be prompted to action by a dramatic occurrence - such as awareness of the end of life or the encounter with a mythological creature - to break away from the stereotypes they were superinscribed by a totalizing and difference-unfriendly hegemony. However, once events are set into motion, the characters act to overthrow previously constructed social assumptions. The radical position Hiromi Goto adopts via character construction is the result of she herself being a racialized "Other", and therefore, stereotypically superinscribed:

You're so lucky, I've been told. You have a rich source of culture to draw from, to bring to your writing. And I was stunned. Amazed. That the person was so "white" Canadian, she didn't even have a culture any more. That she was in such a position of privilege, that her own racial/cultural identification became obsolete and my Canadian racialized position of historically reinforced weakness was a thing to be envied—it gave me lots to write about. There is something wrong with this equation. (Goto, "Translating" 113)

Goto aims to elude the status of racialized "Other" and to avoid writing another specific Internment-Prairie-Japanese-Canadian novel which would act to enforce the centrality of white canonic literature. By creating characters who challenge stereotypes she acts against political agendas aimed at equating the Japanese diaspora to a status of undesirable minority. She aims at underlining the heterogeneous nature of Canadian literature and the perceptive limitations imposed by stereotyping on minorities: "Through her revisions of the folk traditions and *Obasan*, Goto insists on the provisional nature of cultures and identities, and negotiates shifting and evasive Japanese Canadian feminist subject positions" (Beauregard 47). Her central characters challenge the white readership's horizon of expectation and "By explicitly adopting and adapting 'impure' myths and legends, Goto refuses to accept the 'fixed tablet of tradition' offered to her by hegemonic groups; she refuses their imperative to reproduce 'Japanese culture'" (Beauregard 48).

Goto also touches upon the stereotypes of inner-group exclusiveness and the group-oriented nature of the Japanese. An important aspect of both novels is the tendency to reverse the roles of *uchi* and *soto* in the sense that the protagonists abandon their *uchi*-group to seek safety and understanding on the outside. Naoe's potential is stunted while she remains a part of a family which has developed xenophobic attitudes towards her cultural difference. The narrator of "*The Kappa Child*" contemplates running away as a child, but is aware by the social limitations imposed on her by her racial heritage. For the former, *uchi* symbolizes abandonment to preconceived ideas and effacement of identity. For the latter, it represents powerlessness, fear and the realization of social limitation. Only by breaking free from the *uchi* entirely, as in the case of Naoe, or by (literally) including the *soto* within the *uchi*, as the

theme of “*The Kappa Child*” would indicate, can the protagonists achieve a sense of understanding of the self in a multicultural social context.

In conclusion, I have shown that despite Hiromi Goto’s choice to incorporate important thematic landmarks of Japanese-Diaspora-Prairie-Internment literature in her work - such as the problem of assimilation of the diaspora and the abrasive effect pan-generational conflict has on identity development - she departs from works defined as canonic for the genre. Unlike Joy Kogawa’s “*Obasan*”, Hiromi Goto has a specific manner in defining the synergy and interactional patterns of her protagonists. Unlike stereotypes which act to disempower, Goto rewrites legends and folk tales in order to generate strategies of empowerment for her protagonists. Thus, they are able to shift racial, ageist and gender-specific stereotypes which have long been associated with the Japanese diaspora.

### List of Cited Works:

Beauregard, Guy. "Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* and the Politics of Writing Diaspora." *West Coast Line: a journal of contemporary writing and criticism* 29.3 (1995-96). Print.

Aguiar Margarida. *Anti-Racist Deminism: Critical Race and Gender Studies*, Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2000. Print.

Doi, Takeo. *The Anatomy of Dependence*. New York : Kodansha International, 1981. Print.

Goto, Hiromi. *The Kappa Child*. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 2001. Print.

---. *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Great Britain: Women’s Press Ltd, 1997. Print.

---. "Translating the Self: Moving between Cultures." *West Coast Line* 30.2 (1996): 111-113. Print.

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Toronto: Penguin, 1983. Print.

Krygier, Martin. *Civil Passions: Selected Writings*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2005. Print.

Pécheux, Michel. *Languages, Semantics and Ideology*. Trans. Nagpal, Harbans, New York: St. Martin’s, 1982. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1994. Print.

Sasano, Mari. “Words Like Buckshoot: Taking Aim at Notions of Nation in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*.” *Open Letter, De:Scribing Alberta, Part 2*. (1998). Web. 31 Aug. 2013. Web.

Smadar, Lavie, and Swedenburg, Ted. *Displacement, diaspora, and geographies of identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. Print.