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Literature written by Australians of Asian heritage represents a range of explorations in the field of hybridity. This category is, as a consequence, difficult to define in strictly nationalistic terms as 'Asian Australian literature': where Australian literature is the controlling noun and 'Asian' functions as an adjective. Some Asian Australian writers are Australian-born, others trace their Asian heritage through several generations; some write in English, others do not. For reasons of space, this essay deals only with anglophone Asian Australian writers. Wenche Ommundsen quotes an estimate that, for example, 'around 200 writers of Chinese descent live in Australia, most of them writing in Chinese' (Ommundsen 94). Such writers are not treated here. The 'Asia' encompassed by Asian Australian writers is protean, changing as patterns of Asian immigration to Australia changes. 'Asia' in an Australian context is generally taken to refer to the Far East or to Southeast Asia but increasingly migration from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) has broadened that image. Ethnic Chinese accounts for the largest Asian immigrant group in Australia but 'ethnic Chinese' is not a simple category. Some migrants of Chinese heritage come to Australia direct from the mainland (this is particularly true of the post-1989 generation of migrants) but others migrate out of the Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora and come to Australia via such countries as Singapore, Malaysia, or Indonesia. For these diasporic writers, 'Chineseness' can be a term to which they relate with difficulty. Despite the dominance of Chinese migrants within the Australian understanding of Asia, this essay takes a broad view of what kinds of ethnic background constitute Asianness. The question of how Asia is to be defined is of particular urgency in Australia where, as Yuangfang Shen argues in *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes*, 'people of Asian descent tend to be lumped together regardless of national origin' (Shen 123). The ascription of 'Asianness', regardless of individual background or national inheritance, is an expression of Australia's enduring anti-Asian racism, and we should be keenly aware of this problem when approaching Australian writers of Asian heritage.

Any discussion of Asian-Australian relations, literary or otherwise, must be prefaced with some mention of the restrictions placed on Asian immigration for most of the twentieth century, under the aegis of the 1901 Immigration (Restriction) Act or so-called 'White Australia policy'. The exclusion of Asian immigrants then coincided with the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia and commentators such as Ien Ang have noted that anti-Asian sentiment has been a defining characteristic of Australian nationalism and national identity. Historically, anti-Chinese policy represents the first instance of intra-colonial cooperation. In June 1888 delegates met in Sydney for the anti-Chinese intercolonial conference, to consider a concerted response to recent widespread anti-Chinese protests and riots (Donegan & Evans, 83). Organized anti-Chinese activities foreshadowed widespread campaigns against not only Chinese, but Indians, Melanesians, Japanese and Afghans during the 1890s (ibid). The effect of the Immigration (Restriction) Act was to bring about a drastic shrinkage of the Chinese community: according to Yuanfang Shen, 'in 1901, the number of those classified as 'full Chinese' was 29 627. In 1933, it fell to 10 846, and decreased still further by 1940' (Shen 65). It was only under the Whitlam government, elected in 1972, that race as the criteria for immigration to Australia was abolished and large-scale Asian migration, particularly from China, Korea and Vietnam, began.

More than any other single factor, the White Australia policy accounts for the under-representation of writers of Asian descent within the Australian literary tradition. This is not to say that Asian Australian writers did not exist until the latter decades of the twentieth century. As Shen Yuanfang explores in her book, *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes* (2001), Chinese Australians like Taam Sze Pui in *My Life and Work* (1925) wrote of their experiences from the mid to late nineteenth century onwards. The visibility of these writings is another matter. As Shen argues,

> Feeling unwelcome and rejected, those who for various reasons chose to stay kept a low profile for several generations. They 'yearned to become invisible', as Brian Castro later stated in his 'Memoirs of a Dislocated Person', and to withdraw behind the walls they had in turn built around themselves. Further evidence of this longing for silence can be found in the closing down of Chinese newspapers one after another (Shen, 66-67).

Only the relaxation of immigration restrictions during and after World War Two saw the emergence of a generation of writers of Asian descent who were able to assume a public voice.

Perhaps not surprisingly, pioneering Asian Australian writers tend not to be of Chinese descent but count among their numbers writers of South Asian heritage such as Mena Abdullah and Yasmine Gooneratne. Abdullah was born in 1930 in Bundarra NSW, of Punjabi background. Until she left to attend Sydney Girls High School, she lived on her parents' sheep property. The stories for young adult readers gathered in *The Time of the Peacock* (1965) explore the possibilities for hybrid cultural experiences within the geographical and social context of the bush. Abdullah's child narrator expresses the doubleness of consciousness formed within the different environments provided by an Asian family and the Australian wilderness.

Among the most well established of Asian Australian writers is Yasmine Gooneratne: university professor, literary critic, editor, bibliographer, novelist, essayist, and poet. She was born in 1935 in Sri Lanka, became resident in Australia in 1972, and since 1991 has held a personal chair of English at Macquarie University. Her reputation is cemented by a number of awards: her first novel, *A Change of Skies* (1991) won the 1992 Marjorie Barnard Literary Award for Fiction and was short listed for the 1991 Commonwealth Fiction Prize; her second novel, *The Pleasures of Conquest* (1995) was short listed for the 1996 Commonwealth Writers Prize; she received the Raja Rao Award 2001; and she was made a member of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1990 for her distinguished service to literature and education. Gooneratne's publications include works of literary criticism; the anthologies *New Ceylon Writing* (1973), *Stories from Sri Lanka* (1979) and *Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, & Singapore* (1979); the two novels; several volumes of poetry; and her family history, *Relative Merits: A Personal Memoir of the Bandaranaike Family of Sri Lanka* (1986).

The history of Gooneratne's powerful clan is based on her own memories and interviews with her family members, and explores the interconnectedness of personal, family, and social histories. A sense of the inseparability of the personal and the political or national recurs throughout Gooneratne's writing. Her second novel, *The Pleasures of Conquest*, for instance, skilfully manipulates the representation of interpersonal relationships to generate a powerful and surprising ending. This novel is dedicated to the Sri Lankan journalist and international statesman (Varindra) Tarzie Vittache, who was an outspoken critic of the regime of Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960-65, 1970-77). In the narrative, Gooneratne deals with shifting colonial relationships between Europe and Asia as her fictional country of Amnesia undergoes transformation from a British colony to an independent nation. The conquests

invoked by the title, and the various pleasures they bring, are explored through a series of autonomous but related narrative voices. The celebrity writer Stella Mallinson, academic Philip Destry, the returning expatriate Angela Forbes, and the illiterate village woman Mallika share a relationship with the grand New Imperial Hotel, a modernized colonial institution that is the focus of the novel. Through the focus provided by the hotel, Gooneratne weaves a complex tapestry that incorporates the island's turbulent history as well as its troubled globalized present. In the 'Author's Note' that concludes the book, Gooneratne describes the Sovereign Republic of Amnesia as 'a nation that has forgotten its history (except when there is some profit to be made out of remembering it' (319). The powerfully satirical ending sees the arrival in Amnesia of the long-awaited prophet and savior who is revealed to be none other than the nephew of Mallika and the young man taken back to the US with Stella Mallinson as a kind of human souvenir. The Guru, founder of Guru Mahadev Inc, is deeply complicit with the corrupt government from which the people had hoped he would deliver them. So the novel concludes with a dramatic scene describing the President's mock-coronation beneath the glare of television lights, as the Guru sets on his head 'a replica of the golden crown of Amnesia's extinguished royalty' (317). In this false reconstruction of Amnesia's imperial/colonial past, the Guru repeats the betrayal of the people by his ancestor, Sir John D'Esterey, who brokered the agreement that brought the ancient kingdom of Kandy under British colonial rule.

One thematic dimension of this complex narrative is represented in Gooneratne's poem 'Business People' where she describes the superficial touristic appreciation of the beauty of the land: 'They scan the catalogue, write out a cheque and for the price fixed-thirty dollars-/ buy my poor country'. She continues:

> We have survived
> other invasions,
> other impudences.
> We have welcomed, been
> hospitable, suffered and
> survived. But this time
> our smiles lick the ground
> before them, our welcome
> has a fixed tariff, our children
> have become a nation of beggars (Gooneratne 1992).

Like the new colonialism promised by Gooneratne's fictional prophet, Guru Mahadev, this commodified Asian hospitality is based on a new kind of international relationship, that of global capitalism and specifically of Third World tourism. The tone adopted by the poet is complex: she is satirical as she invokes the complacency of a people who prefer to forget the past and neglect the future precisely because historical experience tells them that they have survived colonialist invasions before. She writes, 'Smile, live in the present. / This way there will be no time / to recall the past / or think of the future' (1992). But survival is what is in question in a nation reduced to a community of beggars.

In her first novel, *A Change of Skies*, Gooneratne deals not with the incursions made by colonial powers in Asia but with a Sri Lankan family migrating to Australia. Here she explores the paradox that while Australia can offer an experience of freedom unavailable in the homeland, Australia is sought out by the migrant for its promise of stability and security: though that promise may be betrayed by the experience of displacement and exile. The value of dominant understandings of 'Australianness' is brought into question as the narrative chronicles the transformation of Bharat and Navarajini Davasinha from cultural sophisticates

into the suburban Barry and Jean Mundy. The question raised by this transformation is whether immigrants like these can revitalize Australian culture by the infusion of external influences. However, the obstacle posed by enduring forms of racism prevents any real cultural interaction or dialogue.

The effort to bring the past into a meaningful and sustaining relationship with the present could be said to characterise all of Gooneratne's writing. Her volume of poetry, *The Lizard's Cry* (1972), for example, is written in the style of the traditional Sinhala Sandesaya long poem. A further example is the title poem of *6,000 Foot Death Dive* (1981), which offers an imaginative reconstruction of an actual news story: a young parachutist's fatal jump over the bush outside Darwin. As the poet recreates the woman's final moments, she reflects also upon the poetic consciousness that permits this coming together of a dead woman and the present moment in which she posthumously participates. Past and present, homeland and hostland, tradition and global modernity: Gooneratne's work explores the complications of diasporic and intercultural experience with skill, wit and biting irony. She is a writer located voluntarily between worlds; a cosmopolitan who sustains her links with Sri Lanka even as she occupies the position of a prominent Australian intellectual. In a similar manner, the Indonesian Australian writer and journalist Dewi Anggraeni sustains an intercultural lifestyle which informs her work in a myriad of ways.

In her novels, poetry, and stories, and also in her journalism, Anggraeni is consistently concerned with the complexities of negotiating cross-cultural differences. She was born in 1945 in Jakarta of ethnic Chinese descent and has lived in Australia since 1970. She is the Australia correspondent for TEMPO news magazine in Indonesia and a regular contributor to *The Jakarta Post*. In Australia she writes for such publications as *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review*, and *The Canberra Times*; in Hong Kong she writes for *The Far Eastern Economic Review*. She writes in English and Indonesian: her bilingual collection of short stories, *Neighbourhood Tales*, was published in 2001. She has published in English four novels – *The Root of All Evil* (1987), *Parallel Forces* (1988) and *Journeys through Shadows* (1998) and *Snake* (2003) – and a trilogy of novellas, *Stories of Indian Pacific* (1992). Her most recent book is *Who Did This to Our Bali?* (2003), a journalistic account of the 2002 terrorist bombings, offering a comprehensive summary of the event, the investigation, and the trials of the main perpetrators.

Each of Anggraeni's novels concerns a movement between Australia and Southeast Asia. *The Root of All Evil* enacts a narrative motif common in anglophone Asian diasporic novels: the return home of an expatriate child upon the death of a parent. In this novel, it is the Indonesian wife of an Australian who returns to Jakarta to be with her dying father. The return 'home' to a place become unfamiliar through long separation both makes problematical the notion of belonging and also provides an occasion for a critical view of social and cultural attitudes that have also become strange. Here, Anggraeni is particularly critical of attitudes towards and treatment of women in Indonesian society. Her second novel, *Parallel Forces* also focuses upon a woman's experience of East and West. This novel also employs a common narrative device in Asian diasporic fiction: the construction of a parallel between the present and some ancient, mythological past. In Anggraeni's novel, the protagonist is Amyrra, one of twin sisters, and the narrative uncovers parallels between her life and that of the twelfth-century queen, Ken Dedes, in the Golden Age of a Javanese kingdom. The story raises questions about fate, individual determination and the experience of inter-ethnic family conflicts. Despite her obsessive attempts to avoid her fate, Amyrra's life unfolds according to the parallel forces of the novel's title.

In *Snake* Anggraeni also pursues the idea of fate, this time through the curse embodied by the snake brooch, worn as a clasp for the traditional blouse, the *kebaya*, which has cursed a network of several divided Southeast Asian families. The protagonist, again an Indonesian

living in Melbourne, is given the brooch by her current lover, Kurt. Serena learns that the brooch has belonged to her own grandmother, as she becomes increasingly fascinated by it. This fascination is part of the mystical power of the brooch which finally destroys its victims. In Malacca, Serena meets Nancy and the bonding between these women turns out to have a family basis, though their immediate families are on different sides of a long-running conflict. The action moves from Melbourne to Malacca and Jakarta, among a diasporic network of ethnic Chinese communities. This novel represents Anggraeni's first fictional treatment of the 'overseas Chinese' community from which she is descended and this represents a significant innovation in Asian diasporic literature. In this novel, she places this representation of historical diasporic societies within a thematic context that is familiar from her earlier novels: the conflict between Asian cultural heritage and Western lifestyles, between tradition and modernity, between Western rationalism and Eastern mysticism.

Other Asian Australian writers of this generation include the Vietnamese-born autobiographer, poet and fiction writer Uyen Loewald, who was born in 1940 and came to Australia in 1970; Don'o Kim, the recipient of a 2004 Australia Council Writers' Emeritus award, a novelist, librettist and playwright, who was born in Korea in 1938 and arrived in Australia in 1961; the novelist Ang Chin Geok, who was born in Singapore in 1942 and migrated to Australia in 1967; the Malaysian poet Ee Tiang Hong, born in 1933 in Malacca, who died in 1990 in Western Australia; the fiction writer Chitra Fernando, who was born in 1935 in Sri Lanka, arrived in Australia in 1961, and died in Sydney in 1998; and also the novelist and poet Moni Lai Storz, who was born Lai Suan Tin in 1944 in Malaysia of Chinese parents, and came to Australia in 1963.

Beth Yahp represents in important respects a later generation of Asian Australian writers, born some twenty years after the writers mentioned above. She was born in Malaysia in 1964, of Chinese-Thai background, and migrated with her family to Australia in 1984. In 1998 she moved to Paris and now she divides her time among Sydney, Kuala Lumpur, and Paris. Beth Yahp's case raises the question of how an Asian Australian writer is to be defined: she is neither Australian-born nor does she live exclusively in Australia; her best known work does not mention Australia at all. But *The Crocodile Fury* won the Victorian Premier's Prize for First Fiction and the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission Award in Australia. It has been published in Singapore and Malaysia, and the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Greece. As such, this is an influential text that occupies a central place in the emerging canon of diasporic anglophone Asian literature.

The technical innovations that Yahp brings to the narrative produces a complex and difficult but rich and evocative fictive texture. She adapts an oral story-telling style to a repetitive and spiralling narrative structure where the story is told by indirection and strategic silences. This refusal of linear narrative enacts an anti-colonial gesture which is thematised within the novel by Yahp's treatment of the convent, built on the ruins of 'the rich man's' grand mansion, which sets out to civilise the native girls. The nuns tell the narrator,

> A story starts at the beginning, with a description of the people and the place of the story. … Convent girls must speak plainly and clearly until they get to the end. They must remember that the last word is not the true end. Every story has a meaning which can be applied to the lives of convent girls. Only when they see this meaning does the story end (Yahp 40).

But *The Crocodile Fury* has no obvious beginning or end. The first chapters all repeat the sentence 'That's the place to begin' and the final chapters repeat uncertainly 'That's the place to finish'.

The narrative tells the story of three generations of Malaysian women: the unnamed first-person narrator, her mother and grandmother; the crocodile fury of the title is a motivating factor in their lives, which are shaped by their position within a patriarchal (post)colonial society. Vengeance and the memorialisation of suffering is a dominant theme of the novel, together with the problem of working through this anger. Towards the end of the novel the narrator comments,

> My crocodile is not one for cursing. His is a fury that starts out slow, that boils and bubbles, and hitches its back against the weight of all the jokes and jibes, the petty slights and discriminations accumulated over the years; all the back-bitings, jealousies and injustices involved in the scramble for favour, the aches of being owned body and soul (Yahp 324).

She suggests that there are multiple 'crocodiles', that in fact every oppressed person possesses his or her own internal 'crocodile'; in some respects, the crocodile metaphor functions in the same way as the narrative's pervasive community of angry ghosts. Both are subjected to ontological scrutiny, in a text that deploys techniques of magical realism to question the status occupied by those seeking vengeance, both dead and living. A character such as the Lizard Boy, whose 'bad luck demon' reaches out to its counterpart on the shoulders of the narrator's mother, becomes fully human only after he runs away to join the jungle bandits and so is identified as the husband for whom the mother tearfully searches, and the father of the narrator. It is only by indirection that the narrator's father is identified: by the itchy scales that appear in patches on her body and through the story of the Lizard Boy that her mother tells in fragments. Lizard Boy may be the legendary bandit King Crocodile but the bandit is represented as a mythical figure, belonging to a different ontological realm: 'Faced with calamity townsfolk cry "King Crocodile!" as if invoking a charm. King Crocodile for miraculous escapes, for a nose thumbed at death!' (104). In this text, no ontologies are stable: the narrator's grandmother is shown to be biologically unrelated to her; the names and settings of the novel are non-specific and could be applied to anyone, anywhere. The characters are known as Grandmother, mother, the rich man, the lover: all are without personal names. The significant elements of the novel's setting are the hill shaped like a woman's body and the jungle that covers it. The name of this 'Mat Selleh' hill offers one of the few Malaysian details, together with Yahp's use of the figure of the *pontianak*, a female vampire in Malay folklore, but otherwise the novel betrays no particular specificity to Malaysia.

Within the post-colonial interest of the narrative is a particular attention to the position of colonized women. The *pontianak* figure, known only as 'the lover' is captured by force by 'the rich man' who brings her to his mansion on Mat Selleh hill and there attempts to subjugate her, to make her a possession among his many artefacts, served by his slave-like retinue of local servants. Western images of the Oriental woman are played off in the narrative against the lover's refusal to be possessed. Even when locked in the windowless punishment room, where the rich man hopes to use her terror as a weapon of subjugation, the lover refuses to return his gaze but keeps something of herself private and aloof. In this colonialist and patriarchal context, the lover is 'monstrous'; she violates the decorum of patriarchal and colonial subservience. She is a powerful woman in a situation where feminine power is unnatural and suspect. Yahp stresses the necessary unnaturalness of the lover through narrative hints that she is a supernatural creature and perhaps a sea monster. The grandmother discovers in the lover's rusting and salt-encrusted treasure chest a single scale, the removal of which may have brought the lover under the power of the rich man. Through this and other details, the lover is associated with the sea and with longing for a return to the

freedom of the oceans. Instead, she disappears on the top of Mat Selleh hill with her diaphanous gown wrapped around the dead body of the rich man. She is a victim not only of the rich man's urge to conquer and possess but also of the grandmother's jealousy. Until the arrival of the lover, Grandmother had been a favored pet and her displacement gives rise to a fury that vents itself not on its proper object, the rich man, but on a fellow sufferer: the lover. In this respect, Grandmother is an ambiguous character: she is tainted by her proximity to the rich man's colonialism. Later, she sends her adopted daughter and the narrator, her granddaughter, to be educated by the nuns who now occupy the rich man's place, both physically and ideologically, in the mansion atop the hill. Grandmother insists that they learn the language of the colonisers even though they also learn a worldview radically opposed to her own. For the grandmother, the natural and supernatural realms are continuous and from this she makes her living as a seer. But the nuns, seeing that her pregnant daughter was meant 'not for the spiritual life but the family life', as the narrator repeats, reject her request to become a novice and reinforce a strict distinction between natural and supernatural worlds. In this way, Yahp suggests that colonialism offers an ontological view of the world that is radically at odds with the native worldview.

Born in Hobart, of Vietnamese descent, Hoa Pham combines the themes of the supernatural with Vietnamese Australian culture in her novels for young adults. She has published: *49 Ghosts* (1998), *No one Like Me* (1998), and *Quicksilver* (1999); a play based on *49 Ghosts*; and *Vixen* (2000), her first adult novel. As in Beth Yahp's work, *Vixen* disturbs comfortable ontological distinctions and categories. The novel reworks the traditional myth of the female fox spirit who is able to change form at will between human and animal. In *Vixen*, the fox fairy flees from Vietnam to Australia where she learns of Australia's Asian past. This narrative offers a revision of the female fox spirit as a powerful and playful rather than death-bringing character. Similarly, the Singaporean Australian writer Lau Siew Mei offers a reappraisal of Mao's widow in her novel *Playing Madame Mao* (2000). She was born in Singapore in 1968 and migrated to Australia in 1994; she now lives in Brisbane. In the narrative, the appearance of a mythical underwater mirror-world of vengeful spirits stresses the same kind of ontological uncertainty that is thematized by Yahp and Pham. The novel is structured around the idea of doubling or mirroring. Lau's protagonist is an actress who plays the role of Mao's third wife, Chiang Ching, and gradually finds her own identity dissolving into that of the woman she is performing. The perception of life as performance generates a narrative in which illusion undermines understandings of history, mythology, and reality. The convergence of the actress and her theatrical subject begins with the coincidence of their shared names, develops through their common awareness of the supernatural 'mirror people', and culminates in the undermining of the line separating madness from sanity.

The thematising of psychological disturbance within the context of intercultural relations is taken up by Simone Lazaroo in her second novel, *The Australian Fiancé*. Lazaroo was born in Singapore in 1961 and migrated with her family to Perth in 1963. Her two novels, *The Australian Fiancé* (2000) and *The World Waiting to Be Made* (1994) are past winners of the WA Premier's Book Award for Fiction (1995, 2000) and explore the cultural differences that characterise relations between the Eurasian community of Singapore and Australian society. *The Australian Fiancé* is set in 1949, in the immediate post-war years, in Singapore and Broome, and at a time when the 'White Australia Policy' was in full force. The novel focuses upon a young Singaporean, Eurasian woman who is recovering from the brutality of the Japanese occupation of Singapore. She meets the Australian heir of a wealthy Broome pearling tycoon and travels with him to his home, tellingly named 'Elsewhere'. Both characters remain unnamed, like the characters of Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury*. The young man is either 'he' or 'the fiancé' and the young woman is either 'the Eurasian woman' or 'she'. In 'her' case, the lack of a personal name is indicative of her alienated condition, as

she seeks to deal with the effects of living through the horrors of occupied Singapore as a military sex slave. Lazaroo alternates between first-person and third-person narration in the attempt to capture the young woman's efforts at self-reconstruction through the creation of a coherent narrative from the fragments of her traumatic past. In Australia, however, patriarchy is complemented by racism. She is able to enter Australia only at the discretion of an immigration officer, who asks her what percentage 'European' she is, and using a bought certificate of exemption. Ultimately, the narrative exposes the incommensurability of the worldviews occupied by the two individuals in this couple, as the relationship fails and the fiancée returns to Singapore.

Lazaroo's first novel is similarly critical but more ironic and amusing in its treatment of intercultural conflict. *The World Waiting to Be Made* was shortlisted for the Vogel Prize and was winner of the Hungerford Award. This narrative tells of the migrant Dias family, as they move from Singapore to Australia. The contrast between suburban Perth and Malacca provides a context for self-discovery, for a young woman returning to her birthplace, Singapore. The child narrator brings into the novel experiences that cannot be fully explained except in a mature perspective. Contrasts between childhood and maturity are complemented by contrasts between Aboriginal or native and white values, and between white Anglo-Celtic and Asian experience in Australia.

The difficulty yet inevitability of 'Australianisation' and an accompanying cultural hybridisation, within the context of Asian migration, is the subject of Hsu Ming Teo's first novel, *Love and Vertigo* (2000). As an unpublished manuscript, it was awarded the 1999 *Australian*/Vogel Award; it has since been translated into Chinese, German, Italian, and Thai. Her second novel, *Behind the Moon*, appeared in 2005. Hsu-Ming Teo was born in Malaysia in 1970 and migrated with her parents to Sydney in 1977. *Love and Vertigo* addresses issues of migration, belonging, and identity within the context of suicide. The novel opens with the narrator's arrival in Singapore from Sydney for her mother's wake. There she discovers the experience characteristic of all such diasporic returns; she says of her mother's birthplace: 'This is not the Singapore my mother told me about. Her stories are a world apart from this: no longer reality but history. Just like my mother herself' (Teo, 2). The place to which the migrant returns is never the place from which the migrant left. Both the home culture and the migrant herself change in unanticipated ways. Pandora Lim's story, and that of her daughter, Grace, is a story of multiple migration: from Singapore to Malaysia to Sydney. In this respect, Teo captures something common to many Asian Australian histories: that there is no simple departure from the homeland to trace. The ethnic 'home' of the Lim family is a China so distant that it is never mentioned in the narrative. The 'Chineseness' of the family is something of which we are largely reminded by such narrative episodes as the anti-Chinese riots in Malaysia in 1969. The Lims are part of the Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora before they compound that migration experience by moving to Australia. Of course, until the dismantling of the White Australia policy in the 1970s, the period of Grace's childhood in Sydney, Australia was not a realistic destination for Asian migrants. The narrative captures the complexity of the Asian migration experience by tracing the family history through several generations and by using the motif of 'ghosts' that the narrator is determined to lay to rest. These ghosts include not only her dead mother but also her estranged father, the Patriarch, as she calls him. Together with her brother, Grace struggles to adjust to the demands of an Australian adolescence while coping with the range of racist behaviors displayed by teachers and fellow students.

Hsu-Ming Teo's second novel is also in some respects a family history but focussed upon life in suburban Sydney for three misfits, Justin Cheong, Tien Ho and Nigel 'Gibbo' Gibson. They meet in school, a place where social groups are divided along ethnic lines, and vow to remain lifelong friends. This commitment is tested over time as the narrative explores

the complexities and divisions that characterise contemporary Australian multicultural society. These conflicts include not only those between white and Asian Australians but also those among various immigrant groups, and those within the Asian community. Teo interprets the 'multicultures' in a broad context to take in communities of sexual difference and generational cultures as well.

Arlene Chai's novels use family and personal narratives to explore political developments in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia. Described by her publisher as a Filipina-Chinese-Australian, Chai was born in 1955 in Manila and emigrated to Australia with her family in 1982. Her most recent book, *Black Hearts*, a thriller, was published in 2000. Chai's novels offer a mix of eastern and western elements: ancient curses and mysterious prophecies propel narratives that invoke *feng shui* and mythical spirits; at the same time, Chai's characters pursue wealth and power in a modern business world. Chai does not focus the action of her writing in Australia. Australia is the place left behind in both *On the Goddess Rock* (1999), winner of the Vision Australia Library Award, and *The Last Time I Saw Mother* (1995), novels which are structured around the return of a young woman to her ancestral home in Asia where she uncovers her family secrets. Chai's second novel, *Eating Fire and Drinking Water* (1997), shares with her first an interest in mapping modern Filipino history, from the Japanese occupation during the Second World War to the rise and fall of the Marcos regime. Again, the focus is a young woman in search of identity; in this novel she is a young journalist seeking the story of her own life.

Lillian Ng's fiction also brings together personal and historical narratives. Her first novel, *Silver Sister* (1994), dramatises the multiple migrations so characteristic of Asian Australian and Ng's own experience. She was born Ng Cheng-Chye in Singapore after her parents fled China during the war against Japan. She grew up in Hong Kong, Singapore and the United Kingdom before migrating to Australia in 1972. *Silver Sister* (runner up for the inaugural Angus & Robertson Bookworld Prize for Fiction in 1993), juxtaposes and connects the life experience of two Chinese Australian women. Life is viewed largely as a response to historical events beyond the control of the individual, as Ng reveals the ways in which history shapes the migratory routes and cultural identities available to an individual at any given moment. Ng's second novel presents a similar view, focusing as it does upon a Chinese student stranded in Sydney in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square disturbances. *Swallowing Clouds* (1997), is structured by a parallel between the contemporary experience of the protagonist Syn and the ancient story of a woman drowned in a pig's basket as punishment for adultery. Syn is characterised as a modern reincarnation of the executed woman in her relationship with her boss, the married butcher Zhu. The novel, which dwells on the details of their sexual relationship, has been condemned by critics like Tseen Khoo as an Orientalising representation of Asian women as passive, acquiescent and sexually available. In response, Ng, a practising gynecologist and obstetrician, has explained that the narrative is based on the lives of many of the Chinese mainland women who visit her Sydney surgery.

Recent writers like Chai, Teo, Lazaroo and Lau Siew Mei are not new arrivals but have all grown up in Australia: Hoa Pham has been described as a 'Vietnamese writer' but she was born in Hobart and English is her mother tongue; she does not speak Vietnamese. However, there is a significant group of writers, sometimes referred to as the Tiananmen generation, who are recent direct migrants from the Chinese mainland, like Ng's fictional character Syn. Fang Xiangshu's autobiographical narrative, *East Wind, West Wind* (1992), for example, describes the manifold difficulties of settling in Australia as a dissident. Many of the interviewees in Sang Ye's *The Year the Dragon Came* (1996) are post-Tiananmen migrants who express their disappointment and anger in the face of Australia's residual anti-Asian racism. Perhaps the best known of these 'angry' Chinese Australians is the poet and fiction

writer Ouyang Yu, whose themes center on anger, exile, and the question of literary voice. Yu was born in 1955 in Huangzhou, China and arrived in Australia in 1991. He is the editor of *Otherland*, Australia's only Chinese-language literary journal.

At its most general, Yu's writing speaks of the 'between worlds' condition of failure to belong as either Chinese or Australian in terms of language, culture, history, and identity. The poem 'Alien' proclaims: 'I stand on this land / that does not belong to me / that does not belong to them either' (Yu *Moon Over Melbourne* 28). This failure to belong is explored in terms of gaze and voice: the racist gaze and its deliberate absence is the subject of the poem 'Ways of Not Seeing' where he documents various forms of (not) seeing that reinforce his status as a (barely) tolerated outsider: 'One way of not seeing is remote control / that senses your approaching and looks away well in advance // another way of not seeing is staring into your eyes / and right through until s/he sees someone behind you' (Yu *Moon Over Melbourne* 81). As Yu observes this process of not-seeing, it eventually promotes a similarly selective vision in the 'foreigner' who will learn to look back with a dehumanising gaze, as if 'they' were 'a tree, a blade of grass, a kangaroo or anything' (Yu *Moon Over Melbourne* 81). The 'between worlds' condition is described in the poem 'Seeing Double': 'wherever you go / china follows you // like a shadow / its ancientness // recast in australia' (Yu *Moon Over Melbourne* 36). Cultural translation is a necessary but painful condition of migrant life in Australia, if the 'hostland' is to become the 'homeland'. However, this continual process of interpretation and translation is endlessly confusing, threatening the loss of self, of identity, rather than the acquisition of additional cultural 'selves': 'you can't help but / translate everything back and forth so many times // that it becomes unrecognisably / fascinating as a doubled, tripled, multiple double' (Yu *Moon Over Melbourne* 36).

The acquisition of 'Australianness', in addition to rather than distinct from 'Chineseness' or 'Asianness', is a cosmopolitan strategy adopted by recent writers who are well travelled, sophisticated world-citizens, like the poet Adam Aitken. He was born in London, in 1960, of a Thai mother and Australian Anglo-Scottish father; Aitken was educated in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Perth and Sydney. He has published *Letter to Marco Polo* (1980), *In One House* (1996), *Crossing Lake Toba* (1998), and a chapbook, *Impermance.com* (2004). The collection *Romeo and Juliet in Subtitles* (2000) was inspired by his 1998 residency in Kuala Lumpur. His characteristic themes of identity, origin, belonging, and cultural hybridity are explored in poems that are lyrical yet detached and playful. The poem 'Rock Carvings, Sydney' ironically makes the connection between culture and landscape through the metaphor of the ancient carvings: 'They answer no one back / in that text they had to read / of sky, beach, cliff, and ledge / land's fractured page, counter-signed as real estate. / *No man owns it* say the men who do' (*Romeo and Juliet in Subtitles*). Or from that same collection, the poem 'Terra Nullius' begins: 'Marlboro man looks older this year, but gets about, / wears his dead heart / open-cut upon his sleeve, / greets young custodians at the airstrip'. The juxtaposition here of popular culture icons like the 'Marlboro man' with modern technology and a gesture towards the Australian bush is typical of Aitken's deployment of the range of discourses that are constitutive of the contemporary hybrid Australian subject. Even the discourse of discursive subject formation comes before the poet's ironic gaze, as in 'Learning Para-Linguistics' which begins: 'Hoping to *articulate my relation to the Other* / downmarket I move' (italics in the original) and culminates in the outrageous hybrid simile that likens 'Sheena, from Bradford ' to 'an eight-armed Swiss army knife / of a goddess on wheels' (*Romeo and Juliet in Subtitles*). Aitken's work is located in a cosmopolitan, postcolonial, globalized, pop cultural world. So 'Saigon the Movie' describes how 'James Bond flies into Phuket, which he pronounces / Fukit and this announces the demise / of the colonial era' (*Romeo and Juliet in Subtitles*). He achieves a balance of eastern and western cultural references, a balance that sustains tension rather than succumbing to an easy erasure

of cultural difference. A very literary awareness of the fictionality of national myths and historical narrative runs through Aitken's work but perhaps nowhere more so than in his 'Federation' poems. For example, 'Federation, Mark 2', published in the webzine *Chain*, where the nation's evolution is likened to a school motto, the US 'Declaration of Independence', 'or our folksy versions' of it. The poet reflects, 'and I can't think of a nation / so anxious to be happy / singing ourselves this structured refrain'. What is enforced by these fictions of nationalism, of national progress, and of belonging is conformity. So happiness becomes a duty, imposed on all citizens, 'a complex of happiness / mixed with the guilt some of us feel'.

The idea of cultural hybridity which is explored in Aitken's poetry marks the work of a number of contemporary cosmopolitan Asian Australian writers: notably, Natasha/Tom Cho and Brian Castro. Not only does Cho experiment with the possibilities for hybrid ethnic and racial identities, s/he also plays with gender in unsettling ways. In the short story 'Speaking English' (2003), published in the webzine *Cornerfold Magazine*, Cho juxtaposes pop cultural references in a comic and ironic fashion. The story begins with the narrator's confession that speaking English became much easier once she adopted the habit of substituting for unknown words or phrases either the name of a celebrity or a string like 'yada yada yada'. This gives rise to a series of comic juxtapositions between a 'home' or ethnic origin, thought of in 'traditional' terms, and the contemporary Australian 'here', which is characterised by a pantheon of popular movie and television icons. So the story concludes:

> Recently, I decided to commemorate the 20th anniversary of my arrival in Australia by adopting an anglicised name. I turned once again to television for inspiration and this is why I now answer to the name 'Ricardo Montalban'. Although Chuck, my friend's husband, told me that 'Ricardo Montalban' is not quite the right name for me. He said that this is because I am more like 'a Chinese version of Heather Locklear'. The thing is, only earlier that day I had been told that I was 'a Hispanic Martha Stewart'. I just looked at Chuck and said: 'Yada yada yada. Whatever' (Cho n.p.).

Here, gender switching (Ricardo Montalban was best known as the unctuous host of the eponymous 'Fantasy Island' in the US television series of the late 1970s) meets racial cross-dressing: a Chinese Heather Locklear or Hispanic Martha Stewart. In another story, 'Dinner with my Grandmother' (2005), Cho plays with some of the typical features of canonical anglophone Chinese diasporic fiction, of the kind inspired by the example of Amy Tan. The story begins:

> I am at my grandmother's house for dinner. I like visiting my grandmother. Her house is filled with all sorts of objects and memorabilia from China. She has traditional Chinese costumes, genuine jade jewellery from China, Chinese posters, corpses of real Chinese people that she stole from cemeteries in Beijing, and more. My grandmother serves up the dinner. She does not speak any English so she says to me: 'Mon chien a été vacciné contre la rage. On lui a ensuite fait une analyse de sang, avec un résultat satisfaisant. Mon animal ne réside pas en France. Il n'a donc pas besoin d'être tatoué.' An interesting thing about my grandmother is that she is called Joe Lobarto Junior. This is due to an incident that occurred when my grandfather first courted my grandmother. My grandparents initially met on a skiing holiday. My grandfather had approached my grandmother and asked her, 'What is your name?' and she had replied seductively, 'What

> would you like it to be?' and he had said, 'I would like your name to be Joe Lobarto Junior', and so now my grandmother has to answer to that name (Cho n.p.).

Here the stereotype of the diasporic Chinese woman is held up to ridicule: the authentic Chinese artefacts, the inability to speak Chinese (so she speaks French malapropisms instead), the name that requires explanation, and even the patriarchal oppression of being compelled to be what her husband demands she be. Cho has taken the commodified elements of fiction by writers like Amy Tan as the object of his/her scathing irony. Cho's is a narrative voice securely embedded in both Chinese and Australian cultural worlds. Natasha/Tom Cho performs a hybrid cultural production of 'Chinese-Australianness', where there is no authentic point of origin only a hybrid and multicultural present.

The best known of all contemporary Asian Australian writers is Brian Castro, whose work systematically deconstructs the notion of cultural authenticity. Castro was born in 1950 and, symbolically, at sea in transit between Macao and Hong Kong; he came to Australia in 1961. His works include *Birds of Passage* (1983), which shared the Australian/Vogel Literary Award; *Pomeroy* (1991); *Double-Wolf* (1991), winner of the Age Fiction Prize and the Victorian Premier's Award for Fiction; *After China* (1992), which also won the Victorian Premier's Award; *Stepper*, for which he received the National Book Council Banjo Award; and the fictionalised autobiography *Shanghai Dancing* (2003), which won the Vance Palmer Award for Fiction and the NSW Premier's Christina Stead Prize for Fiction and Book of the Year Award. He is also the author of an acclaimed collection of literary essays, *Looking for Estrellita* (1999). In the essay 'Writing Asia' hybridity is represented as his Australian heritage, but his Australian experience is of a society resistant to difference. He also describes personal subjection to the somatic imposition of difference or foreignness. In the essay 'Memoirs of a Displaced Person', in *Looking for Estrellita*, he considers this external ascription of 'Chineseness':

> What did it mean to look Chinese? I hadn't thought about it before until it was pointed out to me. Like Jean Genet, whose existence began when he was named a criminal, I became, from that moment of being named a 'Chink', defensive, anxious, unsure. Which leads me to a generalisation–a legacy and a habit–that most Chinese people in Australia, no matter how clannish or Westernised, become outsiders at some stage, because for once they have to take account of themselves–something that is alien and foreign to their nature and culture. Forced to think about notions of national identity, many become evasive and cautious; for such notions disrupt the essential harmony of their being, their unstated family philosophy. Besides, the idea of a national identity is a gross simplification, often confusing racial type with a crude definition of culture (Castro 43-44).

Simplified national identity is certainly eschewed in Castro's fiction. Australia is described as a position from which he is able to speak, in Castro's 1994 address to the Fourth Conference of Australian Studies at Guangzhou: 'I live permanently now in Australia,' he says, 'but j'avance masque. I go forward still, with a mask on my face' (Castro 'Heterotopias: Writing and Location' 181). In a 2002 interview, Castro rejects the kind of historical project that characterises the work of his contemporaries such as Arlene Chai, Hsu-Ming Teo, and Lillian Ng. His writing shares a commitment to the kind of unstable, multifaceted, and empowering cultural personae explored by Aitken and Cho.

Castro's most recent novel, *The Garden Book* (2005), returns to themes explored in his first novel, *Birds of Passage*, where the protagonist seeks a sense of self from a past that is mediated by writing. In *The Garden Book* a librarian, Norman Shih, reconstructs from various written clues the life, and particularly the romantic life, of Swan Hay, who was born Shuang He, the daughter of a country schoolteacher. Underlying the narrative is the question: what is the nature of the relationship between these two? *Birds of Passage* juxtaposes two stories: the historical narrative of Lo Yun Shan, a 'sojourner' of the 1850s gold rush, and the modern narrative of Seamus O'Young, an Australian-born Chinese. Seamus, an orphan with no roots, encounters Shan through a sheaf of decaying letters and comes to suspect that Shan, who possibly left a child behind upon his return to China, may be his ancestor. Seamus describes living in exile in the land of his birth. It is Seamus's experience of living with no secure sense of identity or history, of living perpetually in transition, and facing the challenge of creating his own sense of self that is the focus of the novel and, indeed, of Castro's positioning as a multicultural writer in Australia.

Other recent Asian Australian writers include: the poet Stanley Sim Shen who was born in Malaysia and now lives in Adelaide. His first collection, addressing themes of migration and displacement, *City of My Skin*, was published in 2001. Merlinda Bobis was born in the Philippines in 1959 and came to Australia in 1991. She is a performance artist, and the author of four collections of poetry, four plays, a novel, and a prize-winning collection of short stories. Selina Li Duke was born in Hong Kong and arrived in Australia in 1983; her experience as a Chinese Australian migrant from Hong Kong married to a Westerner informs *With Barbarian Ghosts* (1998); she has also published a children's story, *In the Year of the Tiger* (1994). Chandani Lokugé was born and educated in Sri Lanka and migrated to Australia in 1987. She has published *Moth and Other Short Stories* (1992) and a novel, *If the Moon Smiled* (2000), which explores through the experiences of a young Sri Lankan woman the cultural costs that accompany the material benefits of migration. Adib Khan, a prolific writer of fiction, came from Bangladesh to Australia in 1973; David Phu An Chiem, who arrived as a refugee in 1978, has collaborated with Brian Caswell on two young adult novels, *Only the Heart* (1997) and *The Full Story* (2002); the novelist Christopher Cyrill, was born in 1970 in Melbourne of Indian parents; and Suneeta Peres da Costa, fiction writer and dramatist, was born in 1976 in Sydney of migrant Indian parents. While these writers explore common migrant themes of displacement and belonging, Cyrill in his novels, *The Ganges and its Tributaries* (1993) and *Hymns for the Drowning* (1999), and Peres da Costa in her novel *Homework* (2001) explore the intersections of realism and fantasy, nostalgia and memory in innovative ways that problematize the issue of hybridity by speculating about the range of cultural identities to which one may 'consent' but which is still constrained by the enduring power of 'descent'.

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