"Trust Me": Responding to the Threat of Writing in *Chorus of Mushrooms*

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Excluded from Plato's republic and from J.L. Austin's theory of performative speech acts, fictionality has been seen as a threat for as long as there have been critical debates about literature. Trends in recent philosophy have exacerbated traditional anxieties over the falsehood or sophistry implicit in literary language by suggesting that the contingent word play of art is in fact the general case, and that notions of the necessity and truth of non-literary language are a dubious construction within a general economy of fictionality. No theorist has been more associated with the exploration of these vertiginous notions than Jean-François Lyotard. His report on knowledge in the post-industrial West, *The Postmodern Condition,* remains a seminal exploration of the plurality and contingency of postmodern thought, characteristics that are conspicuously shared by Hiromi Goto's novel *Chorus of Mushrooms.* Goto's book exemplifies in literary form both the possibilities and the anxieties of a postmodern vision of fiction in which issues of reality and facticity take second place to hermeneutic or experiential truth values. Lyotard's insistence on paralogy and attending to truth on an individual, local scale finds deft instantiation in Goto's narrative about narrative, about our vicarious experience of the

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past, and about translations between languages, between idiolect and sociolect, and between fictional versions of the truth.[1]

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There has been a strongly negative response to postmodernist and deconstructive thought on moral grounds by authors who claim that denying systematic standards and the hegemony of metanarratives prohibits definition of the good and so leads to nihilism.[2] Postmodernist writing thus figured looms as a threat to history, truth, and reality itself. For Lyotard, however, the seemingly relativist "linguistic turn" of postmodern theory results in a displacement of ethics rather than its ruin. He describes language in terms of the phrase:

> [A] phrase presents what it is about, the case, *ta pragmata,* which is its referent; what is signified about the case, the sense, *der Sinn;* that to which or addressed to which this is signified about the case, the addressee; that "through" which or in the name of which this is signified about the case, the addressor. The disposition of a phrase universe consists in the situating of these instances in relation to each other. (*Differend* §25)

Phrases link on to other phrases according to rules provided by language games or discourse genres, but no such genre is ultimately authoritative. Phrases cannot not happen, as even silence is a phrase, but what specific

1 Francesco Loriggio warns against the thoughtless use of Western thinkers to interpret the writing of ethnic minority authors who attempt to confound the categories of Western thought (575–7); Guy Beauregard expresses the relevant concern that importing French poststructuralism to comment on *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a "risk" (60). The congruence between Goto and Lyotard is not, I believe, a dangerous critical fiction nor an accidental resemblance. Goto's narrative arises in the context of ethnic minority experiences with racist social and linguistic expectations. She thus presents seemingly postmodern textual contingency as derived from experiential grounds that challenge the categorical and linguistic assumptions of the very cognitive structures that Lyotard also critiques in his philosophy. Lyotard's work has long been focussed on ethnic others, such as Jews and Algerians, whose exclusion has guaranteed the cohesiveness of Western European ideas and identities (see, for example, his *Political Writings* or *Heidegger and "the jews"*). Lyotard offers as a relevant example of the unjust differend the inability of ethnic groups who are citizens of colonial powers to present that very citizenship as a wrong that demands redress (*Differend* §36). The anxiety of being threatened by a language that is itself threatened is thus relevant to both the "Western" philosopher deconstructing "the West" and its others, and the Japanese Canadian author who experiences the constraints of its ethnic hegemony.

2 This resistance has become a commonplace in the literary-critical landscape, and ranges from dismissive responses such as those of David Harvey and Somer Brodribb to attentive critiques by thinkers such as Seyla Benhabib and Terry Eagleton.

phrase occurs is never necessary (*Differend* §40, §41). One's experience of language is therefore fundamentally contingent, and takes the form of a primal amazement at occurrence before taking up the meaning of any such occurrence:

> Before asking questions about what it is and about its significance, before the *quid,* it must "first" so to speak "happen," *quod.* That it happens "precedes," so to speak, the question pertaining to what happens. Or rather, the question precedes itself, because "that it happens" is the question relevant as event, and it "then" pertains to the event that has just happened. The event happens as a question mark "before" happening as a question. ("Sublime" 90)

As such, no phrase can be the final phrase, as it can only posit a synthesis of preceding phrases, and is unable to refer to itself as event—to do so requires another phrase (*Differend* "Protagoras Notice" §114–117). This combination of contingency and necessity has profoundly ethical consequences:

> The impossibility of eluding the moment of writing results in an aporia. Even when totalitarianism has won, when it occupies the whole terrain, it is not fully realized unless it has eliminated the uncontrollable contingency of writing. So totalitarianism must renounce writing…. But if totalitarianism remains unwritten, it cannot be total. ("Gloss" 90)

The "threat" of writing so figured is thus not the spectre of relativism, but a necessary failure of totality that precludes tyranny. Although the freedom of writing may seem to threaten with arbitrary closure, Lyotard demonstrates that its nature *as* writing always simultaneously threatens closure itself. Writing that threatens is thus always already a threatened writing.

Chorus of Mushrooms presents a similar vision of narrative risk and contingency coexisting with anxiety about the putative total and ahistorical freedom of linguistic relativism. In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* narrative is revealed as an encounter in which teller and listener are mutually at risk, and where trust is responsible for the unique existence of each and for the relations between words and worlds. The risks of narrative involve a necessary and unavoidable vulnerability at stake whenever one's uniqueness passes from idiomatic solitude to social legibility. They arise in part from the largely uncontrollable nature of readerly interpretation, which fundamentally deprives the author of full textual authority, and also from the parallel but incommensurable risk that authorship can act oppressively

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to reshape mutual history. Fiction is thus an anxious operation rather than secure and boundless creativity, and is a product of tension between the activity of shaping and the passivity of being shaped. This fragmented and responsive model of authorship and text is both exemplified and further complicated by the intercultural experience of immigrants and their multiple relationships to languages. Goto thus presents a narrative wherein issues of genre, translation, and linguistic reference express and instantiate her postmodern, ethical vision of fiction.

One begins to read *Chorus of Mushrooms* by way of paratext[3] that raises the relationship between fact and fiction before—or perhaps as—overt fictionalizing begins. The publishing catalogue page asserts that "This is a book of fiction and all the characters are fictional," but this claim is revised by the more ambiguous Acknowledgements, which state that this "re-telling of personal myth … should (almost) always be considered a work of fiction." Still further on the threshold of the story, an epigraph declares that "The legend is believed," implying that the relationship between fiction and truth is a matter of readerly trust. This reluctant complicity of truth and fiction raises serious issues in terms of tension between narrative freedom to fictionalize and an ethics of knowable historical fact. The threat of writing is an issue explicitly addressed in the narrative, which suggests that Goto's conflation of truth and fiction, far from being an exercise in nihilism or relativism, in fact involves a more complex and simultaneous equation of the aesthetic and the ethical.

The structure of this discussion is borrowed from *Chorus of Mushrooms* itself. A single-page "Part Three" separates the long second and fourth parts of the book, and it provocatively declares itself to be "Everything that is missing or lost or caught between memory and make believe" (159). It gestures powerfully towards the issues of ethics, fictionality, and reference explored throughout the book, and does so by offering itself as excluded excess. We will thus trust Goto's narrator when she says, "It's

3 Gerard Genette provides my narratological vocabulary, which I will define briefly here. *Paratext* refers to all the textual apparatus surrounding the text of a work of literature, such as the cover art, editorial apparatus, cataloguing information, and so on. The *diegesis* is the content of a narrated story and the events of that story take place on the *diegetic* level of narration. Events at the level of the narrating event (i.e., to or around the narrator) are *hypodiegetic,* and narrating events embedded within the diegesis create deeper diegetic, or *hyperdiegetic,* levels of narration. *Metalepsis* occurs when textual events paradoxically cross between such levels of narration. Genette develops these ideas in *Narrative Discourse* and *Paratexts.* Brian McHale and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan provide excellent overviews as well.

not a linear equation. You start in the middle and unfold outward from there" (132).

Passing by way of the middle of the middle, then, the second paragraph of Part Three reads:

> Part three. Everything that is missing or lost or caught between memory and make believe or forgotten or hidden or sliced from the body like an unwanted tumour.
>
> Or
>
> A longing, a desire for. (159)

This stands witness to a phenomenon one might call "textual melancholy" that results from the inevitable displacement of possibilities by an actualized text: when any textual choice is made and an utterance occurs, it does so in the stead of all other possible utterances. Lyotard's formidable book *The Differend* is largely organized around this issue. In its most innocuous form, a "differend" is the exclusionary singularity of discourse; many linkages between phrases are always possible, but "only one of them can happen (be 'actualized') at a time" (§40; see also §92, §147). Judith Butler notes that "what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood through reference to what is barred from the signifier and from the domain of corporeal legibility" (234–5). Legibility itself is a function of repudiated excess, and melancholy is the mode by which repudiated identifications and unacknowledged losses return to haunt the self. Goto's Part Three is thus a partial—because textual—metatextual acknowledgement of the excluded excess inherent in and making possible any textual event, and her fiction, like Lyotard's philosophy, attempts to "bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them" (Lyotard *Differend* §21).

The exclusionary melancholy of the differend is perhaps most evident in moments of narrative closure. Part Three opens with the line, "An Immigrant Story With a Happy Ending" (159). This echoes an earlier statement, "there are a lot of sad immigrant stories" (102), and signals Goto's awareness that the genre of the "immigrant story" comes with a history of teleological expectations. Immigrant and ethnic minority writing has long grappled with social expectations of success or failure. Robert Kroetsch's analysis of Frederick Phillip Grove, for example, identifies as Grove's first concern "ideas of success and ideas of failure" (66). Tamara J. Palmer concludes that "Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity, a divided soul at the centre of its binary sensibility, is anxiously preoccupied with the dynamics of success and failure" and tends to either a "humorous tone or a profoundly disillusioned one" (654). Literary generic considerations thus reflect social expectations that

immigrants will either acculturate and succeed or defend their ethnic specificity and fail.

Writers such as Dionne Brand and John Marlyn, to name only two, have used tragedy to indict the former, "comic" vision of immigrants pursuing the North American Dream to wealth and happiness.[4] In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* Naoe's triumph, too, resists progressivist ideas of assimilationist success; however, it also resists the simple inversion of them into tragedy. Goto cites a set of exclusionary racist texts at the end of Part Four, also under the heading of "An Immigrant Story With a Happy Ending" (211), and so acknowledges tragic alternatives explicitly excluded from the comic end of *Chorus of Mushrooms.* Tragedy thus underpins comedy; comedy, moreover, undoes itself in a hyperbolized fantasy that makes its unreality as palpable as its appeal. Thus, the ending of Goto's novel, rather than foreclosing alternate possibilities, gestures toward their exclusion and makes their absence present.

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Such foregrounded play with teleological generic conventions opens up into a questioning of categorization in general. Jerome Bruner describes genres as "ways of telling that predispose us to use our minds and sensibilities in particular ways. In a word, while they may be representations of social ontology, they are also invitations to a particular style of epistemology" (15). This relationship between genre and the determination of meaning is raised explicitly in *Chorus of Mushrooms* when the narrator's lover wants to define the story she tells as a "ghost story":

> "Because of your ghost story?" you ask, opening eyes wide in fear or skepticism.
>
> "It doesn't have to be a ghost story. Unless you think it is. It's a question of belief." (169)

The lover's two possible responses are determined by the ghost story genre. Goto thus addresses the effects of treating the story as true or false (as believable or not) within the context of a generic assignment that dictates response. Meaning is shaped by the genre under consideration, and so deals with truth not prior to or outside textuality but as a function of textual convention.

4 I refer here to Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death,* which presents the tragedy of Szandor Hunyadi, a businessman *manqué* whose success is compromised from the start by his Hungarian ethnicity. Brand, in *Sans Souci and Other Stories,* presents many dystopian episodes of immigrant experience in Canada. Her stories, "No rinsed blue sky, no red flower fences" and "Sketches in transit … going home," explicitly address the connection between the ideology of success and the practice of immigration.

As the insistent question on the part of the narrator's addressee indicates, generic delimitation is a means to resolve the ambiguity of narrative. In fact, the desire for a determined outcome is the very desire for genre. When the narrator's lover presents his remarkably evasive invitation to marry, the narrator replies, "Is this a proposal?" (184), a demand for category that will allow decision and closure. According to Goto's narrator, however, such categorization does not "have to be" (169). The assigning of a genre occurs in utterances that link on to a text as comment on it; not a necessary *a priori* of reading, genre is posited *a posteriori.* Lyotard describes such "commentary" as "persecution" because the text is held to standards imposed upon it from outside: such a request is "no more than a prescription provided with a content, a sense, to which the work is held, as a hostage is held for the observance of a promise" (*Differend* "Levinas Notice" §3). Commentary presents itself as an exegetical unveiling of inner truth, so hiding its exteriority and failure to exhaustively delimit the meaning of the text at hand.

These determinations are described by Bruner as epistemological, but are quickly seen to be simultaneously deontological. Hayden White, in his seminal essay on the value of narrativity, argues that narrative form and moral imperative are inextricably entwined. In the examples above from *Chorus of Mushrooms,* Goto deploys generic determination to decide assent or dissent, to accept or to reject, and so to reify values by means of decision. With his call for genre, the lover responds to the tale with a request for closure permitting a determinable response. The openness of textual ambivalence and the unstable rigidity of the generic imposition are structurally identical to the distinction Geoffrey Harpham makes between the "ethical" and the "moral":

> At the moment of morality, the circumstance of choice that defines and is defined by ethics is closed off by a decision that crushes all opposition in its drive to self-actualization.
>
> … [M]orality constitutes a further imperative nested within the ethical that commands us to act now and on the right principle, that is the one we want to stand *as* principle. (397)

Jacques Derrida, for example, argues that the ethical moment involves incalculable and unobligated choice and that "there can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable" ("Afterword" 116) . Responsibility is thus found in ambiguity or contingency:

> if decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that it is content to follow up or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of a cognitive apparatus, the simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem. (Derrida *Gift* 24)

For Lyotard, the ethical moment comes in phrasing at the moment one is called upon to respond to an obligation. The ineluctable modality of phrasing prohibits the absence of a response, so responsiveness obtains as an abyssal and imperative demand.

Goto's presentation of readerly desire for constraint clearly implies that texts make demands upon readers; at the very least, the reader is called upon to respond. The response of generic delimitation attempts to simultaneously respond to this call and avert further interpellation by projecting a structure (a genre) onto the text that claims to be not only complete but derived from the text and so organically authoritative with respect to it. Importantly, in the examples under consideration here, the desire for genre results in a questioning of genre rather than a mute assigning of one. Ideas of textual responsiveness and readerly answerability thus find narrative parallels in the diegetic construction of *Chorus of Mushrooms* itself, which presents a personal encounter demanding response as essential to the production of textual meaning.

Returning to Part Three, its first paragraph reads: "*Muk shi*, *muk shi*, *mukashi*.... Nothing is impossible. Within reason, of course" (159). *Muk shi*, *muk shi*, *mukashi* is the formulaic opening of a Japanese folk tale, meaning, "In ancient times, in ancient times, in very very ancient times" (Beauregard 52). The ambiguous preposition linking absolute freedom and constraint in the sentences, "Nothing is impossible. Within reason," again, draws attention to the text's concern with possibility and limitation. On one hand, reasonableness stands as a rigid limit of intelligibility and possibility. On the other, these sentences assert limit as paradox—reason circumscribes an interiority whose excessive content continually overflows its bounds. This paradox of reason is thus similar to the delimitations of genre. Reasonableness and generic propriety undoubtedly impose limits on the polysemic. These limits, however, are always already partial, and so transgressed at the instant they are invoked. Delimitation is therefore both the very possibility of reasonableness and the inevitable failure of its pretension to total circumscription.

These paradoxes of reason and genre are presented in contexts marked by explicit references to the intersubjective encounter between audience and author. The context of the hypodiegetic dialogue that frames (and

becomes) the story—the intimacy of a lovers' bed—highlights the vulnerability and trust bound up in textual experience. The love relationship is profoundly implicated in the possibility of communication; according to Lyotard, such intimacy represents the close yet threatening contact between two unique subjectivities:

> The blinding enigma of the world of existences is that in it singularities are present in the plural: they constantly come into contact with one another through these fragile antennae of sensibility....
>
> And, in this contact, love is the exception. It demands the permeability and the surrender of my field of perspective to yours. Hence the never-ending search for a different idiom of sensibility, this vertigo where my idiom and yours falter, where they look for exchange, where they resist and discover each other. ("Gloss" 92)

Such intimacy is close because it exhibits a bond (a "demand") that dialogizes separateness, and threatening because the promise of mutuality is ultimately unable to overcome the "blinding enigma" of idiomatic sensibility, or the "singularity of resonance" we call experience ("Gloss" 92).

An identical sense of intimacy and risk can be seen in *Chorus of Mushrooms* beginning with the first of the narrating episodes, when the narrator-character responds to her partner's request for a "true story" by saying "It's like people want to hear a story, and then, after they're done with it, they can stick the story back to where it came from" (1). Her demand is then, "Can you listen before you hear?" (2). To hear responsibly, with an investment in what is heard, requires the involvement of "listening." True stories, it is suggested, merely embody or make present otherwise distant and untouchable ideas, whose disinterested separation from their hearing allows their truth to be regarded as fundamentally unrelated to the present; however true the story might be for the teller, the narrator implies, this vision of truth renders the listener impervious to its true meaning. The notion of truth at stake for the narrator involves not the merely mechanical reception of pre-verbal truth in "hearing," but an active "listening" that will produce a mutual truth in narrative realization. The response of the narrator's lover is "Trust me" (2), and it is in response to this call to trust that the story begins, rather than in response to the call for story.

The risk that demands such trust is in part the interpretive freedom of the addressee—the possibility that hearing as opposed to listening will result in a hermeneutics of coercion. There is a parallel risk on the part of the addressor as well. Any dialogue may be seen as an exchange of

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silences. At risk for the silent (silenced) partner is the possibility of being simply narrated—situated as both addressee and referent. Prescriptive phrases addressed about a referent by a manufactured "we" exclusive of the addressee can enact a silencing violence by denying those subject to the law access to its legitimating authority (Lyotard *Differend* §158–60). That is to say, should an addressee be prohibited from occupying the role of addressor, he or she is subject to the terror of the differend. Lyotard defines this political differend as a deprivation of the authority to testify to a wrong one has suffered: "to the privation constituted by the damage there is added the impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others" (*Differend* §7). In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* the lover becomes anxious about the implications of the teller's willingness and ability to fictionalize their shared story. She responds by mirroring their original exchange and saying "Trust me" in return (186). In each case, the call to "trust me" is not a promise that forecloses risk: it ultimately fails as a guarantee. Although both addressor and addressee are at risk in every textual moment, such mutual risk does not equate to mutual reassurance. Narrative relationships thus exhibit the precarious contingency of ethical incalculability.

The issue of trust is also at the heart of the truth that is produced in textual interaction. The narrator's lover questions her about the contradiction between her past inability to speak Japanese and her seeming comprehension of her grandmother's words: "how can you be telling a true story if you never knew what your grandmother said?" (12). She responds, "I'm making up the truth as I go along" (12) . A refrain of *Chorus of Mushrooms* is that truth is inevitably momentary and discursive: "Murasaki: Is this a real story? Naoe: As real as these words here and now" (64). Not only, then, must addressor and addressee be implicated in the textual production of truth, but the truth that is so produced is a function of their unique and finite co-implication, and so is not generalizable. "It's funny how you can sift your memories, braid them with other stories. Come up with a single strand and call it truth" (93). Narrative, rather than re-presenting an anterior, pre-textual Truth, thus becomes true by means of trust: "the legend is believed."

This mutually constitutive notion of text and truth as kinetic and contingent is furthered by Goto's vision of the addressor as an intertextual and non-self-present author. The contingency of textuality can be seen to pervade the production of text; at its "origin" there is no self-coherent and singular author/speaker who might authoritatively delimit meaning. This is exemplified in the lover's pseudo-proposal of marriage to the narrator: "'Because, we've been living together. Because I write letters about you.

Because they think we should get married and I think they're right.' He was serious" (184). The authorship of this statement is distributed across a complicated space of cohabitation, parental opinion, and personal desire; it is the product of a matrix of forces within which the lover cannot simply be said to originate the sentiment. Similarly, Naoe and Muriel frequently overlap as the source of words: Naoe says, "Why don't I talk sometimes and you just move your lips and it will look like you're the one who's talking" (127). When Murasaki asks, "How can I go on? Putting words in peoples' mouths. In yours, mine, distorting," Naoe answers, "I could be putting words in *your* mouth for all you know" (162). And later, when Murasaki is again anxious, Naoe makes her a promise: "if you falter, I will fill in the words for you until you are ready to begin again" (174). These women are co-implicated in the telling of the text. Muriel's effort at telling her grandmother's story is thus always an exertion of shaping power that has been itself shaped, and so is subtended by an excess it cannot wholly control.

The decentred nature of authorial subjectivity is illustrated with particular intensity by the vexing question of proper names in the text. The multilingual multiplication of names profoundly challenges the coherence of the narrating voices and identities. I have so far used the name "Muriel" to refer to the character also called "Murasaki" in the text, which makes for a modicum of clarity but hides an important ambiguity. No explicit continuity bridges the asyndeton separating the occurrences of "Muriel" and "Murasaki," which makes equating them an arbitrary interpretation. Moreover, Naoe claims the name Purple ("Murasaki") upon her escape, doubling by translation the possible referents of this name. In addition, the name "Murasaki" also cites the female author of the *Tale of Genji*, Murasaki Shikabu.[5] Thus, the self (or selves) to which these names refer is (or are) ambiguous at best, and collapsing them into a single character is a profoundly anxious interpretive strategy. At the end of the text, this translated and redoubled system of names is translated again, reappearing in the single form of the Purple Mask, and with its final translation, the name becomes a sign whose referent is unknown. The Purple Mask

5 The invocation of the *Tale of Genji* gestures toward a tension between national literatures implied by contending languages, Goto's use of translation to escape racial differends at the level of the phrase carries through into the citational narrative translations and re-tellings seen throughout *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Beauregard discusses at length Goto's hybrid use of *Genji* and other Japanese literary references to "resist pre-packaged orientalised images of herself while at the same time negotiating shifting identities (decidedly to the plural) outside culturally 'pure' markers" (58).

is known, even renowned, but no one knows who the Purple Mask is. The name Purple/Murasaki is thus redeployed as paradox: it is both an unmistakeable sign of identity and a guarantor of anonymity. In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* then, proper names proliferate identities and problematize the notion of textual origins instead of simply positioning coherent selves in cultural-linguistic worlds.

What, then, is the nature of the truth to be found in such decentred fiction?

What, then, is the nature of the truth to be found in such decentred fiction? After acknowledging the constitutive power of exclusion, Part Three addresses fictionality, history, and truth: "Forgetting or remembering something that never happened. Wondering when does one thing end and another begin? And if you can separate the two" (132). The relationship between fact, memory, and fiction is a concern throughout the text. Naoe remembers singing "A song to commemorate a blimp" in her childhood (22). The song describes the blimp as yellow like a banana,[6] whereas it is manifestly brown. Her teacher explains, "It is only a song, Naoe-chan, and the words aren't that important. We are happy to see the blimp and we sing a merry song" (22). Clearly, the goal in this example of language use is not to mimetically record the event in a verifiable, objective manner. The goal of the song is to register the affect of the event, to that end sacrificing mimetic reference recording history to imagery recording subjective emotional experience. Lyotard describes narrative knowledge as, "certify[ing] itself in the pragmatics of its transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof" (*Postmodern* 27). The postmodern version of such narrative knowledge presents momentary truth by addressing the impact of an event without recording it per se. One reason language possesses this affinity for the momentary and the subjective is its inability to reliably direct us to the real (Lyotard *Differend* "The Referent, The Name" section). Goto affirms this at the end of Part Three: "I have never seen a cicada. I have never heard them cry. What I know about them may be hearsay. It's a question of belief" (157). Reference, and so reality, is a function of trust in narrative.

The uncomfortable implication of this is that everything is merely language, and that postmodern language games do not admit experienced corporeal reality; they absurdly or dangerously reduce all human experience to a linguistic plane. Such a situation risks suffering the differend as silencing terrorism. The narrator's lover expresses that very fear:

6 It should be pointed out in connection with this example that the image of the banana is not an innocent one. The banana trope figures prominently in Goto's explorations of being Japanese Canadian. A banana is, of course, yellow on the outside and white on the inside.

> Everything you think of, you have to interpret as story. I'm not just a story. You're not just a story. We feel and think and age and learn. If you hit me it will hurt. If you leave me, I will cry. You can't just erase those things. (185)

The narrator's response to her lover denies that fictionality so supplants the real: "I'm not erasing. I'm re-telling and re-creating" (185). Butler, responding to the charge of linguistic idealism in the introduction to *Bodies that Matter,* makes a statement that clarifies this difference:

> To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. (10)

The narrator of *Chorus of Mushrooms* looks out the window as she replies to her lover, and sees "the mugo pine he has been trying to shape" (185). The relationship between author and text is thus paralleled to that between a botanical sculptor and the living, growing beings he or she shapes. The narrator cannot erase the stories of others beneath her own any more than a gardener can bend a tree wholly to his or her will. Telling is not unconditioned freedom any more than is topiary sculpture. As Beauregard points out, "her telling is not intended to be an authoritative replacement of an 'original' tale: even her revisions are subject to further revision" (50). Stories come from other stories and, rather than replacing them, remain always in tension with them. Utterances link on to utterances, supplementing without replacing; the textual melancholy of Part Three gestures forcefully toward the impossibility of such total loss or erasure. Any attempt to supplant prior stories—the threat of writing—is thus subverted by the necessary linguistic differend of melancholic exclusion—the threat to writing.

The central instance of this revision without deletion in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is the disappearance of Naoe. The newspaper story headlined "Local Elderly Woman Disappears" (88) marks the departure of Naoe from Muriel's life and their mutual translation into and through story. Muriel begins to shape stories about her Obāchan in response to the insistently repeated question, "What happened to your grandma?" (88). When the narrator shapes her narratives, then, the story of the disappearance is reworked into a myth of power and transcendence, but the disappearance itself remains as intransigent textual excess. Naoe's body becomes a locus of linguistic and sexual transformation; she blossoms through mastur-

batory ecstasy into a mythical superwoman. This fictionalizing occurs, however, in the space of possibility carved out by her bodily absence in Muriel's experience.

Indeed, *Chorus of Mushrooms* presents numerous moments when the narrator's fiction meets intractable elements that it cannot wholly bend to its own uses. Perhaps the most interesting is the introduction of *sekihan,* a special rice and bean dish that Naoe prepares for Muriel on the occasion of her first menstruation. In the hyperdiegetic frame, the narrator's lover recognizes the meal and declares, "You eat it for other special occasions too" (182). The narrator is disappointed because she "wanted it for women only" (182). When the food is recognized and named, it becomes a specific dish whose name situates it in a cultural context. Lyotard draws together issues of language, referentiality, and names when he says, "To learn names is to situate them with respect to other names by means of phrases.... A system of names presents a world. The universes presented by the phrases of that group of names are signified fragments of that world" (*Differend* §68). When the narrator draws *sekihan* into her fiction, she does so in partnership with a Japanese addressee with whom the meaning of this element must be negotiated.[7] The dish already has a position in his cultural universe that cannot be ignored. The narrator

7 Goto presents the anonymous lover as a "fresh-off-the-boat Japanese man" who "liked to arrange flowers" (54). She insists that this is "not a stereotype" (54), but he repeatedly functions in this text as a representative of foreign "authentic" Japaneseness (i.e., 54, 55, 107) with whom Goto's narrator must negotiate her hybrid Japanese Canadian perspectives. The presence of this character, and other essentialized or underwritten presences in the text, gestures at exclusions that prevent the ethical textual encounter between Muriel, her lover, and Naoe from exhibiting an utterly free and unconstrained justice. Although the ethical moment is one of contingency and open choice, it presents a heterogeneity that must nevertheless be reduced because choice is ultimately necessary. Thus, the ethical choice is always both a promise and a betrayal, a choice against as well as a choice for, and the just and unjust are continually intertwined.

> As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others. (Derrida *Gift* 68)

Thus, in giving voice to a differend, new differends are instituted that must be voiced in turn. Elements in *Chorus of Mushrooms,* such as the Japanese cultural capital possessed by the lover, or the largely anonymous Vietnamese workers on the mushroom farm, gesture towards realms of silence and exclusion imposed by the narrative, yet their presence allows the continual possibility of reading against the grain to discover other possible voices hidden in the voicing of this story.

cannot simultaneously delimit the uses of this dish and be true to its place in the universe of names that is the Japanese language; this illustrates the nature of the reality with which Goto's fiction is inevitably in dialogue: it is reality as found in language, and so self-referential, symbolic, and communicable. Reality and fiction so understood are contiguous rather than parallel. Ironically, as Lyotard argues, the experience of the real takes the form of incommunicable idiolect. The transition between idiolect and a shared language is therefore that between the real and the fictional. To become communicable is to become fictional, because to become communicable is to partake of generic verifiability that is not necessarily tied to idiomatic reality.

The transition from English description to Japanese name is emblematic of the importance of translation to all the issues of fictionality at play in the text. This importance is here registered architectonically, as it is with the rice and beans that the narrating present becomes itself subject to narration. At this moment, the narrator's linguistic and somatic interests cross—she is interested more in eating *sekihan* than in telling it—and the hypodiegetic frame of narrating flows into the diegetic narrative. The translations between languages, and between discourse and experience, thus meet at a translation between narrative levels. With this crossing, the lives of the narrator and her lover become subject to narration in turn. Such a transition recalls but inverts the use of metalepsis that Lyotard describes in the dialogues of Plato. Plato uses subtle transitions between narrative levels to implicate the audience in the dialogue, so recouping agonism to dialectic (Lyotard *Differend* "Plato Notice"). Goto's metalepsis does not act as philosophical sleight of hand but explicitly unveils the common textuality of life and art, or the always already ethical face of the aesthetic. She thus reveals the shared hypodiegetic life of the narrator and her lover as subject to the same narrative refashioning as the seemingly more distant and "textual" life of the narrator and her grandmother. Narrative interaction is presented as the ethical relationship *par excellence.*

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All of these transitions, importantly, involve translation between languages as well as narrative levels. Part Three acknowledges and interprets the risks of fiction under the sign of the "Immigrant" story, which emphasizes the fact that the linguistic issues at stake are further complicated by the crossing of English and Japanese. This pushes complex questions about translation and intelligibility to the fore. Part Three, moreover, is located in the midst of a crisis of translation that also crosses linguistic and somatic lines—Muriel's healing of her mother with food. The first episode devoted to the theme of ethnicity and food highlights the racist definition

of Muriel as an "Asian" woman and therefore an authority on the exotic. The "vegetable politics" (91) of the supermarket position her as an authority on all things Asian, regardless of the multiple national and linguistic identifications within the broad category of "Asian" and the problematic question of being assigned to a cultural category by means of her appearance. She is interpellated under the racist sign of the oriental woman and is frustrated by its insistence. The exoticized rigidity of her ethnic position is portrayed as another constraint on her linguistic freedom. Goto ends her poem "The Body Politic" with the line, "It's only that I want someone to know me by my name" (221). In order to do so, however, "someone" must first successfully learn her name. Derrida identifies a double logic at work in the relationship between naming, translation, and knowing:

> I would say that this desire is at work in every proper name: translate me, don't translate me. On the one hand, don't translate me, that is, respect me as a proper name, respect my law of the proper name which stands over and above all languages. And, on the other hand, translate me, that is, understand me. (*Ear* 102)

"The Body Politic" presents a litany of false names and racist expectations imposed by individuals and structures that refuse to translate and understand, or insist on appropriative and unjust translations. Such refusal, or inability to respect specificity, is also seen in a *Chorus of Mushrooms* episode of childhood mockery:

> I can talk. I can talk anything I want. Try and stop me.
> "Me Chinese, me play joke, me go pee pee in your Coke! Hahahaha!"
> "But I'm not Chinese," I protested. (52)

Her freedom in speech is immediately constrained by an abusive and delimiting use of the language she also inhabits. There is no trust or responsiveness possible here; addressor and addressee are separated by the gulf of a racist differend that acts to constrain and silence the girl. Access to her name is thus rendered extremely problematic because of the exclusionary racist languages that cross the space of her experience and her speech. Derrida makes a striking point about links between racism and language:

> The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word.... [I]t institutes,

> declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates. ("Racism's Last Word" 292)

In her essay "Translating the Self" Goto identifies her existence as permanently liminal, permanently in translation (111). When she writes, moreover, she must avoid recolonizing herself with the racist language that discriminates (against) her: "Language, the site of colonization, becomes an instrument I use to try to dismantle it" (112). The authorial self is thus, in keeping with her intertextual vision of authorship, inevitably separated from itself. In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* multilingualism becomes a mode of challenging the hegemony of any single language's claim to totality because it is a source of new idioms that provisionally escape ordering and delimiting silences. For example, translating romantic love into love for family is only made possible by the narrator's ability to cross between languages: "I'm glad I learned Japanese because now I can juggle two languages and when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue, I'll reach for it in English" (54). The repressive and threatening potential implicit in any use of language is therefore itself threatened not only by the internal failure of linguistic totality but by external dialogic possibilities.

The most striking moments of translation and linguistic competence appear toward the end of *Chorus of Mushrooms.* Both Naoe and the anonymous narrator-character are surprised to learn they have been interacting in Japanese without realizing it (187, 197). In each case, when the male interlocutor indicates that the conversation has been continually Japanese, the text shifts into transliterated, italicized Japanese words and characters. Unless the reader of *Chorus of Mushrooms* knows Japanese—and Goto assumes they do not ("Translating the Self" 112)—then they are refused this moment of perfect understanding at the very moment it blooms into the awareness of the characters. These strangely perfect moments of translation thus remain an entirely diegetic experience, and translation is presented as an always possible communication that is never quite attained. It expands the possibility for voicing idiomatic experience, but, as with any voicing, it remains necessarily partial.

Moreover, translation is obviously a textual event and so must occur in the context of the narrative risk and faith marked by the "Trust me." Since translation is in theory always available as a bridge and a source of new idioms, its potential does not obviate the requirement for trust as the fundamental cornerstone of dialogue. According to Lyotard,

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> Contact between two communities is immediately a conflict, since the names and the narratives of one community are exclusive of the names and narratives of the other.... The conflict does not result from a problem of language, every language is translatable (this does not prevent linguistic differences from contributing on occasion to the exacerbation of a conflict). (*Differend* §227)

The conflict between Keiko and Naoe, for example, is a result not purely of linguistic difference. It results from mutual bad faith—the decision of Keiko to not understand and the refusal of Naoe to speak. Naoe does not escape censure, as she indicts Keiko for teaching Muriel "no words so she cannot speak" (15). Clearly this excludes English as speech, and Naoe therefore refuses to communicate in a language she has in common with both her daughter and her granddaughter.

The naming and consuming of food takes on aspects of possibility similar to linguistic translation. Muriel's quest to the Oriental Food Store is her first step into the linguistic and cultural world of her grandmother, and this nutritious female kingdom is also the means by which she attempts to heal her mother. She thus voyages into the unknown world of Japanese vegetables in pursuit of regenerative power, much as Naoe experienced a vegetative and orgasmic transcendence during her mushroom-house translation from home to road trip and from Japanese to English. Muriel takes her first steps towards intercultural linguistic competence by learning to translate between the Asian names of food and the experiential reality to which they refer. Her experience is multiply somatic and discursive, a mediation between the idiomatic experience of tastes and textures and the social space of names and traditional recipes. Moreover, her learning takes place in the context of immigrant experience and marks the return of Japanese culture in a family where it has been excluded under the auspices of acculturation. This personal and social culinary interface thus also negotiates between the hegemonic and subaltern social spaces traversed by Muriel as Japanese-Canadian.

Muriel's culinary translation reaches its apex when she cooks and eats her last name (151). The family name is perhaps the most intimate space of negotiation between the personal and the social, as it situates its bearer in both linguistic space and the genealogical structures of family relationship. It, moreover, simultaneously participates in the unique designation of its bearer and assigns him or her to group membership that cuts across this individuation. In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* significantly, Muriel's family name is arbitrary. Its lexical meaning denotes a pork cutlet, and it refers

to Muriel and her family only through her father's mysterious retention of that single word in the face of his forgetting of the rest of the spoken Japanese language. By cooking and eating her family name, then, Muriel brings the shared worlds of linguistic nominalism and cultural traditions into contact with the solitary, idiomatic reality of taste and experience. Her late-night preparation of the *tonkatsu* reifies her name as both culinary substantive and family-creating proper noun in the convivial context of a shared meal. This preparation of food thus translates between languages, between idiolect and sociolect, and so between discursive and experiential realities.

Translation and the experience of textual and physical intimacy meet when Tengu and Naoe are together in the bath:

> "So, who is Murasaki and who is Purple?"
>
> "The words are different, but in translation, they come together."
>
> "So you're a translation of Murasaki and Murasaki is a translation of you?" …
>
> "That's one reading of it…."
>
> "Is there more than one?" he whispers.
>
> "Always."
>
> "Do you want to fuck?"
>
> "Let me translate the answer with my body." (174)

Here we see the text's concerns with referentiality and translation coupled, so to speak. The linguistic contacts between both pairs of interlocutors (Naoe-Tengu and narrator-lover) are marked with passionate lovemaking and the sharing of food. The translation from idiolect to sociolect is thus presented as partaking of the fragility and power of tactile sexuality. The entry into language involves the same tremulous contact between singularities as does the vulnerability of sexual exposure and contact or the mutual preparation and enjoyment of a meal. Moreover, the momentary and local nature of linguistic truth finds a metaphor in the simultaneous deep intimacy and profound separation of lovers in contact with one another's skin; skin or sociolect can only be asymptotic to the experience or idiolect of the other.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms,* then, textuality is presented as a polysemic and contingent event that draws into close proximity contingent selves and truths. The relations between them are ordered by risk that demands uncertain trust, exemplified most powerfully by the possibility and vulnerability of love. The ethicality of such discourse is paradoxically assured by its very contingency and the multiple voicing that renders subjectivity

non-self-identical and so non-authoritative. The trust that engenders textuality in *Chorus of Mushrooms* shows that such postmodern narrative is far from exercising a nihilist freedom to refashion the world: it is in fact all the more contingent because it is grounded on continual risk and a failure of authority that precludes closure. The fact that language is inevitably polysemic thus does not make meaning and intelligibility either impossible or subject to arbitrary whim. Language is a space of mutually-constituting negotiability, and Hiromi Goto's postmodern vision of fiction is enabled and sustained by its open-ended vision of contingency as responsibility.

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