

Maori-Chinese Identity in Paula Morris's *Hibiscus Coast*

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Abstract

Contemporary Maori novelist Paula Morris actively carves out “a space for Maori-Chinese” within the emerging literary canon of Aotearoa/New Zealand in her critically acclaimed novel *Hibiscus Coast*. Writing in a country where discussions of cultural politics have, until quite recently, concentrated on the binary of Maori (the colonized) and Pakeha (the colonizer), and aiming at the “regeneration and restoration of [their] self-definition,” Morris describes the “politicized memory” of the Maori-Chinese, the sort of memory that—in the words of theorist Jenny Bol Jun Lee—“guards against popular notions that seek to homogenize ethnic minority groups and position us in static binary oppositions.” Through the use of extensive interview materials, personal histories, and primary-source media documents from over a hundred years of Maori-Chinese history, this paper critically examines the politicized memory of Morris’s Maori-Chinese protagonist, Emma Taupere. It also provides an in-depth textual analysis of Emma’s complex presence in the novel, a presence which challenges our attempts to categorize or universalize her character, and explores the ways in which Emma can serve as an indicator of the changing winds in the mixed-blood/indigenous writings coming out of 21st-century New Zealand.

Keywords

Paula Morris, politicized identity, Maori-Chinese identity, Chinese-New Zealand identity, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Pakeha

The most remarkable thing about the evolution of New Zealand's national identity, is not that we have come to realize that it has an Asian dimension, but rather that we have postponed that realization for so long.

—Jim Bolger (qtd. in Laffey 242)

When former New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger declared to a Tokyo audience in May 1993 that he considered himself the leader of an “Asian” nation, he subjected himself to political backlash at home—and “doubtless some bemusement among his listeners” (Laffey 241). Bolger’s comment was nonetheless reflective of a widespread reassessment of New Zealand’s relationship to the peoples and countries of the Asia-Pacific that was occurring in the early 1990s. Today, with an Asian population that has grown approximately fifty percent between the 2001 and 2006 census, increasingly frequent ministerial statements about the nation’s dependence on Asian commerce partners, and a newly penned free-trade agreement with the People’s Republic of China, there can be little doubt of the relevance of Asia New Zealand Foundation Research Director Dr. Andrew Butcher’s recent claim that “our national identity will inevitably draw on New Zealand’s place in the Asia-Pacific and the populations of that region in New Zealand” (qtd. in “Mixing It Up,” emphasis added).

The “inevitability” of this shift in identity is contentious in a nation that has a “(mostly unwritten) bicultural constitution that recognizes the [indigenous] Maori as tangata whenua [people of the land], but also has a multicultural population” (Friesen 18). Historically speaking:

Although both ethnic groups were discriminated against, it should be pointed out that Maori and Chinese were treated quite differently by the dominant white society. Maori are an indigenous minority after all. It is true that they were a relatively powerless minority, suffering from territorial dispossession and marginalization of local economies. But Maori were British subjects while Chinese were undesirable aliens. The term “alien” has serious legal connotations as well as socio-symbolic meanings. “Alien” denotes a foreign (non-British) origin and lack of legitimate status in New Zealand. . . . One writer made a shrewd observation on the colonial government’s policy towards these two marginalized groups: “The Maori were by no means treated equally, but . . . the Chinese could be excluded while the Maori could not.” (Ip 3)

In other words, Maori, as signatories of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), were/are legal partners in a bicultural political agreement with British Crown/New Zealand government. According to Manying Ip, “[t]he uncertainty felt towards Asian immigration is therefore not just a concern about the absolute numbers coming into the country. It touches on the fundamental principles of whether the Treaty of Waitangi guaranteed *tino rangatiratanga*¹ to Maori, and if so, what exactly are the rights that Maoridom should expect under the Treaty partnership” (Ip 16). In the contemporary political climate, there are some who fear that late twentieth and early twenty-first century New Zealand government policies encouraging the expansion of trade with Asia and allowing for increased Asian immigration “is a ‘covert strategy’ to undermine Maori’s position as indigenous people” (Pang and Ip 186). Many Maori have “complained that they had not been adequately consulted when the government decided to open its doors more widely to all immigrants” (Ip 6), while others make light of these fears, believing “the bicultural model can accommodate diversity without eroding Maori interests” (Pang and Ip 186).

The purpose of this essay is not to debate the validity of (established) bicultural vs. (potential) multicultural political models for twenty-first century Aotearoa/New Zealand society,² but instead to examine the way in which these debates, and the debates surrounding issues of national identity within an Asia-Pacific context, play themselves out in Montana Award winning Maori novelist Paula Morris’s novel, *Hibiscus Coast* (2005). Postcolonial theorist Ngugi wa Thiong’o has written “[t]here is a sense in which no writer of imaginative literature from the very best to the moderately significant can really avoid the big issues of the day, for literature, to the extent that it is a mirror unto man’s nature, must reflect social reality or certain aspects of social reality” (70). Certainly there are few bigger “issues of the day” in twenty-first century Aotearoa/New Zealand than the issues surrounding personal, cultural and national identity—and Morris uses her fictional canvas to reflect the social reality of these contemporary debates.

Part thriller, part romance, and part fictional expose of the seedy underbelly of the commercial art world, *Hibiscus Coast* tells the coming-of-age story of New

¹ The phrase “*tino rangatiratanga*” refers to Maori sovereignty, or the right for Maori to control all things Maori.

² In her book *Being Maori-Chinese: Mixed Identities*, Manying Ip writes “One of the greatest dilemmas of the New Zealand government is that they are using biculturalism as a guiding social policy principle in an increasingly multicultural environment” (17). See the introductory chapter of *Being Maori-Chinese* for further discussion of this topic.

Zealand-born, Maori-Chinese protagonist Emma Taupere. Born to a Chinese immigrant mother and a Maori father, Emma grows up in a state of near-constant identity crisis, well aware from an early age that “Maori-Chinese did not attract the public gaze, except in a rather negative way. Their stories—as a community, as families and as individuals—were outside the conventional frameworks and national narratives of white New Zealand” (Ip 1). Left in this narrative vacuum, Emma writes her own story, traveling to Shanghai to train as a painter and then returning to Auckland to participate in a complex forgery scam orchestrated by her unscrupulous Samoan ex-boyfriend Siaki. The narrative becomes “a story about art forgery, and also about identity and the ways in which people fail to see beneath the skin. . . . Despite her astonishing gifts as a painter, Emma has no sense of her own value or of where she fits in the world” (Larsen). The remainder of this essay works to “fit” Emma into the world of contemporary New Zealand, situating her fictional character within the non-fictionalized historic context of Maori-Chinese relations in New Zealand and examining the ways in which Morris positions her character as a symbolic challenge to notions of race-relations that “seek to homogenize ethnic minority groups and position [them] in static binary oppositions” (Lee 110).

Nga Hainamana ma Nga Maori (The Chinese and the Maori)

It is impossible to read Emma Taupere’s enigmatic character in *Hibiscus Coast*, without taking into account the politicized social memory her Maori-Chinese ancestry brings to the narrative table. A reading public even marginally aware of the racial politics surrounding these two ethnic groups will recognize that “in a colonial context, where everyone in Aotearoa/New Zealand continues to be affected by the multi-dimensional *taniwha*³ of colonialism, sharing the dual ethnicity of Maori-Chinese [often means] a double dose of the varied layers of racism that people from ethnic minorities are exposed to in Aotearoa/New Zealand” (Lee 95). This “double dose” of racism that Maori-Chinese are exposed to is markedly complicated by the long social history that underlies the cross-cultural interactions and relationships between these peoples. Historically speaking:

Under the hierarch of “race,” Maori were [considered] less physically able, less mentally intelligent, less emotionally sophisticated—less

³ Lee explains in her footnote about the Maori word “*taniwha*.” “*Taniwha* here refers to a monster-type creature.”

human—than Pakeha. With the arrival of the Chinese in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the racial hierarchy took on a new, local twist. The Chinese were racialized, officially referred to as ‘aliens’ and relegated to the lowest level of inferiority. In 1880 MP Richard Seddon (later to be Premier) announced “there is the same distinctiveness between a European and Chinaman as that between a Chinaman and monkey.” (Lee 99)

Comments like Richard Seddon’s go far in reinforcing the findings of sociologist Arvind Palat, who reaches the following conclusion:

Xenophobia and outright racism against Asian migrants has, in fact, been a persistent thread in the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand since its constitution as a British colony. Indeed, as early as 1857, even before a single Chinese person had entered the district, an Anti-Chinese Committee to fight the “Mongolian Filth” had been formed in Nelson. Equally telling, as late as 1992, there was only one mention of Asia in the index to the second edition of the *Oxford History of New Zealand*, and that mention directed readers to “See Immigration; Xenophobia.” (35)

In comparison to these racist and xenophobic statements made about Asian migrants in the late nineteenth century, in 1920 Prime Minister Massey stated, “[t]he Maori is a European for our purposes. The Maori is a very good citizen, and has the same rights and privileges as a European, and he is worthy of them” (qtd. in Lee 99). Massey’s statement indicates that by the 1920s, Maori had begun “to be looked (down) upon as the ‘noble savage,’ and praised for their adaptability to assimilation with Pakeha” (Lee 99). While these attitudes by no means indicated an end to racist treatment of the Maori population, they did allow for a fostering of race theory in New Zealand that placed both Pakeha and Maori considerably higher on the ladder of social hierarchy than Asians. The manifestation of “Yellow Peril” hysteria was therefore a result of paranoia and racism levied against Asian immigrants by both the Maori and Pakeha populations of early twentieth-century New Zealand.

In their compelling study *Recalling Aotearoa: Indigenous Politics of Ethnic Relations in New Zealand*, Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley recount their finding that “Maori have long harboured deep-seated concerns about Asian immigrants. Sir Apirana Ngata and the Ngata Committee in 1929 drew attention to the perceived

moral threat posed by Asian men toward the Maori community at large, and Maori women in particular” (184). At the heart of the Ngata Committee’s concerns was a deeply ingrained cultural aversion to inter-ethnic relationships between Maori and Chinese. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century politicians and high ranking community figures of both Maori and Pakeha decent argued that Maori-Chinese children were an affront to the purity of Maori bloodlines. These fears began manifesting as early as 1907 when the *New Zealand Free Lance* reported, “[t]here is a universal feeling in New Zealand that the Chinaman must go . . . if the Chinaman remains in our country we shall have the infusion of blood between our people and the yellow man, and the further knowledge that wherever that occurs it spells degradation” (“Dissatisfied” 7). These early fears gave way to full-fledged paranoia by 1938 when G. T. Parvin, the secretary of the White New Zealand League, emphatically wrote in the *NZ Truth*, “the Asiatic terror is very real . . . gradually the Maori race is being mongrelized by their association with Chinese” (12).

This fear of “mongrelization” was equally terrifying to many Chinese. According to Manying Ip, “The opposition to cross-cultural union was much stronger from the Chinese side [than the Maori]. Fathers would cajole and threaten; mothers would cry and plead, while relatives and friends gossiped and sniggered” (8). She says, “[t]o many Chinese, being mixed blood is just not as good. As Mui Yin puts it, ‘We Chinese are really racist. We call ourselves *ren* [people/humans]. But all others are *gui* [鬼 foreign/ghosts]. Mixed-blood people we call them *zazhong* [雜種 half-caste bastards]” (Ip 15-16). In her research on the history of Maori/Chinese relations, however, Jenny Lee says she found ample evidence of Maori echoing the fear of both white New Zealanders and Chinese, citing a record of a “prominent” Maori elder stating, “[t]he Chinese are all right to have around the district as long as they don’t get married to the Maori. It’s not right to have Maori children around the place who are half Chinese. . . . All this mixing is not right because it is spoiling the Maori blood” (Lee 105). This growing panic was widely supported by the popular media in headlines such as the one found in the May 4, 1938 issue of *NZ Truth* which read, “Revelations about Social Menace Maori-Chinese Children—Over 30 Born in Auckland Last Year” (12).

According to Fleras and Spoonley, of equal concern to the fear of “spoiling the Maori blood” was “the fear that Asian immigrants would adversely affect Maori labour market participation” (184). This fear is ultimately what led to decades of paranoid anti-Asian political policies that called for “the imposition of the poll tax of £ 10 in 1881 (later raised to £ 100 in 1899) on new arrivals from China, the

introduction of English proficiency tests for admission in 1899, and the denial of the right to become naturalized citizens in 1908" (Palat 39). These laws were put in place to ensure "that the Chinese in New Zealand would remain a transient population" (Palat 39) and resulted in a "systemic and long-term institutionalized racism" (Murphy 1) aimed at the Chinese people.

Unfortunately, the "Yellow Peril" fears of the nineteenth and early half of the twentieth centuries "resurfaced in the mid-1990s by way of media-hyped moral panics over a pending Asian 'invasion,' together with a host of demeaning stereotypes about triads, wealth, driving habits, educational success, and dietary preferences" (Fleras and Spoonley 157). Although Fleras and Spoonley claim that in the years leading up to the turn of the twenty-first century "blatant forms of racism have given way to more polite styles that tend to be oblique or coded in disguised terms" (157), in 2002 Winston Peters, the leader of the nationalist New Zealand First Party and current New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs, gave a speech warning the citizens of New Zealand about the peril of "Asianisation by stealth" (Peters). In the course of his 2002 campaign, Peters went on to blame the "flood of immigrants" for "fundamentally changing the character of our country in a totally ad hoc way" (Barber) and asked his constituents, "Who asked you whether you wanted to Asianise New Zealand?" (Peters). It is into this new wave of "polite" racism that Emma Taupere is born and raised. It is also the socio-political environment that the novel itself was born into when it was published and distributed in 2005.

Emma Taupere on Mongrels, Chinese Characters, and Dusky Maidens

Born to an immigrant Asian mother and a Maori Father, Emma Taupere is subject to all of the racism one would expect given the history of Maori-Chinese race relations outlined above. She learns at a young age "that her mother's name and her mother's voice were foreign, and that her mother's presence made the family odd in some way" (284). She is also made keenly aware that "her mother's family in China didn't consider her a real beauty: her skin was too brown and her lips too full" (16). These realizations culminate in an adult Emma ultimately believing "that both sides of the family thought her a mongrel" (16), a derogatory classification that harkens back to those early twentieth century headlines about the Maori-Chinese children born in Auckland.

Interestingly, in spite of the concern from her Chinese relations that she is too “brown,” the brunt of Emma’s marginalization comes from people associating her with the Asian side of her genetic heritage. Racial binaries are therefore defined early in the novel, binaries that set Emma’s “Asian-ness” on one side of the continuum, and nearly everyone else in New Zealand on the other. This plays out in the actions of a Pakeha/European character who definitively declares to a room full of people that “the Chinese aren’t like us” (147), in Emma’s Maori Aunt choosing to refer to her as “that little Chinese girl” (150) instead of as her niece, and in her Samoan ex-boyfriend refusing to introduce her to his parents because they were “old-fashioned and judgmental” (252)—a euphemism for “old-fashioned and too racist” to accept a Maori-Chinese girlfriend into their family fold.

The exceptions to these unwritten racist rules come when Emma’s boyfriends and admirers are attracted to her “foreign” look. Siaki, Emma’s Samoan ex-boyfriend, points out early in the novel, “[p]eople stared at her—he’d stared at her, he couldn’t help it” (145). He recalls being immediately taken in by her “small heart of a face, her fan-shaped eyes, her high cheekbones” and by the “bold design” of her unusual facial features (145). These sentiments are echoed by another man during Emma’s first term at university, who “told her she was exotic, and was disappointed to find she’d been born and brought up in Auckland; she soon discovered that she lacked the sufficiently alien costumes or religious beliefs required to feed his fantasy” (213). Even Luke, Emma’s quasi-romantic love interest in the novel, engages in fantasies about Emma’s exoticism before bedding her for the first time. Early descriptions of Luke characterize him as imagining Emma naked, on his bed, “her flawless, coffee-coloured skin a dark tattoo on the clean white sheets . . . [her] aureoles a velvety black.” In these fantasies, “she’d stir in her sleep and roll to one side . . . each pose as simple and artful and enigmatic as a Chinese character” (176).

Towards the end of the novel Morris pointedly juxtaposes these unrealised boyish fantasies of the eroticized Maori-Chinese Emma with the very real and concrete “dusky maiden”⁴ images prevalent on the walls of Luke’s uncle’s bach⁵ in Waiwera. This gallery of velvet images is Emma’s only company while she is staying in the bach, and she is fascinated with the depiction of the “topless girls, their pointed breasts shaped like stunted bananas, each in a brilliant bikini bottom or

⁴ According to Lisa Taouma “dusky maiden” “was a term that was coined in the very kitsch era of the 1950s when it was popular to do prints and velvet paintings of naked breasted Polynesian women” (36).

⁵ In New Zealand a “bach” is a small holiday home and is pronounced “batch.”

skimpy sarong. The girl in the picture closest to the door waded in a pool, a pink hibiscus tucked into her blonde beehive hairdo" (287).

According to Lisa Taouma, the author of the essay "Gauguin is Dead. . . . There is No Paradise," the image of the dusky maiden, "more than any other image of the Pacific, has lasted the test of time in the popular media. A painting from the earliest travels to Polynesia can be held up next to a nineteenth-century photograph and a contemporary tourist postcard and the image of the 'dusky maiden' remains the same, unchanged over time, dress, and pose, with brown eyes that beckon" (36). The images in the aging gallery of the old bach uphold this long standing fascination with the "dusky maiden" stereotype, but, Emma thinks, "the black velvet girls were a little weird, each posing in a different but equally provocative way, like a chorus line at a cabaret or some kind of slutty island beauty contest" (297). She later muses, after spending hours with the images, "[i]t mustn't be a bad life, splashing around in a pool at the base of a stylized waterfall, wearing the skimpiest of bikini bottoms and some fresh floral decoration. The girls were smiling but distant, preoccupied with their pose. It was so much easier to be looked at than to be the one doing the looking. Perhaps, Emma thought, she should have become a K-girl after all" (301).

This off-hand comment by Emma becomes a deeply dark and disturbing reflection when taken in context of the politicized history of race-relations discussed here, and with Emma's experiences in the novel with being seen as a "K-girl" while in Shanghai. According to Morris, a K-girl is a young, brassy, hustling, hard-edged Shanghai girl "lobbying to become a *jinsiniao*, a kept woman" (217) by an older white foreign man. While living in Shanghai, Emma meets a rich, powerful, older New Zealander who leaves his wife and children behind while he lives and works in China for large portions of the year. When Emma becomes his Shanghai mistress, she "thought of her relationship with Greg as one of equals: they were two New Zealanders drawn together in a foreign place" (216). As she sits in a fancy restaurant one night, however, she realizes that "at *Lan Na Thai* or any of the restaurants she and Greg went to together, most of them too expensive for all but a few Shanghainese, she was just another Chinese girl with an older, richer, ex-pat lover" (217). This sudden out-of-body, self-sighting experience in the restaurant upsets Emma, making her wonder if Greg views her as "the kind of trophy so many of his colleagues acquired in Shanghai: a cute local girlfriend who was sexy, willing and easily bought" (217). This awakening of Emma's self-awareness as someone who looks—from the outside—like just another K-girl, becomes all the more

poignant when read in light of her later sad reflection that “it was so much easier to be looked at than to be the one doing the looking” (301).

Emma’s confession that she finds it alluring to be a static object watched and examined instead of an active watcher seeking and interpreting, is both complimentary and contradictory to the development of her constantly vacillating character. It is perhaps the clearest indicator that Emma is a character not at home in herself, and therefore not at home in any of the locations we find her in during the course of the narrative. She consciously rejects the ready-made racial identities of the “dusky maiden” and the “K-girl,” and then spends the rest of the novel attempting to negotiate an identity for herself that goes beyond copying—both personally (in terms of self-identity) and professionally (in terms of her job as a painter).

Early in the novel Emma openly scorns people who go on quests for self-awareness and for long-lost personal ancestral histories. She makes it emphatically clear when she travels to Shanghai to train as a painter that she is not going there “looking for love or romance, and she wasn’t there in search of her mother’s history. She certainly didn’t go there to ruminate over what it meant to be an Asian and a New Zealander at the same time. She’d always scoffed at these kinds of quests, rolling her eyes at the New Zealanders she met in London off to track down ancestral homes” (127). In spite of these boisterous claims, Emma cannot seem to help herself from whiling away a great deal of her time in Shanghai ruminating over just what it does mean to be “an Asian and a New Zealander at the same time.” In her early days in the city she finds herself constantly listening for New Zealand accents in the cafes and bars and looking for people she can connect to from “the home team” (158). She eventually gives up this quest, disillusioned because “there was a kind of conspiracy among ex-pats, a brotherhood of exhilaration and impatience with the city, but [she] always felt outside it” (136). It upset Emma that other New Zealand expats in Shanghai never recognized “she belonged on their side—the side that would always be resolutely outside—unless she opened her mouth. Nobody expected her to be a New Zealander because New Zealanders looked European, or they looked Maori, or they looked Polynesian; New Zealanders didn’t look Chinese” (136).

Unable to connect with other New Zealanders except as Greg’s “mingfen . . . a woman going out with a married man, and therefore a third person with no official status” (239), Emma is surprised to find herself making attempts to reconnect with memories of her long-dead mother, Ling. The most meaningful part of this connection comes from making contact with her Chinese relatives. As a child,

“she’d never thought of her mother having uncles or cousins or family of any kind: all the family she knew belonged to her father” (122), so becoming acquainted with these “new” relations opened a window on her mother’s world that Emma grew up feeling shut out of. After Ling’s death from cancer when Emma was only ten, the girl’s “Maori aunts swept through the house, sorting and sniffing . . . and then the small pieces of their life that were Chinese—the rice cooker in the bottom of the pantry; the red-bean porridge waiting when Emma arrived home from school on winter afternoons; bleached chopsticks in the cutlery drawer; thin-skinned books of impenetrable architectural letters piled on the lower shelf of her mother’s bedside table—disappeared” (119). Having lost her mother over twenty years earlier, both literally and figuratively, Emma is surprised to find herself “during her last six months in Shanghai . . . remembering more of her mother” (121). She says, “[i]n Shanghai they circled each other, the mother she remembered and the mother who grew up here, the girl her mother raised, the young woman Emma had become” (122).

It is in trying to come to terms with the “young woman she had become” that Emma’s story becomes a fascinating exploration of the ways in which her Maori-Chinese heritage, long-standing ex-pat lifestyle, and role as a painter capable of elaborate copies⁶ intersect. Morris has said at varying times “there is a lot of confinement in the story. Emma is confined even in the midst of large cities like Auckland and Shanghai”⁷ and “*Hibiscus Coast* is a lot about entrapment and escape.”⁸ These motifs of confinement, entrapment, and escape are imbued throughout the novel; Emma is perpetually depicted in the tight confines of her cramped studio in Shanghai, in the circumscribed existence she lives while living in an Auckland Princess Wharf apartment, in her visit to Luke’s dark and claustrophobic house in Kumeu, and in her hideout in the tiny, ramshackle bach in Waiwera. These movements from one confined physical space to the next seem to echo Emma’s tightly controlled emotional and psychological world, and for much of the novel she seems happy in this “cell-like serenity” (135). She is defined repeatedly in the narrative as being “alone,” “isolated,” and “in retreat.” She admits

⁶ In her *Listener* review of *Hibiscus Coast* Lydia Wevers writes: “Copying has a long and venerable artistic history. In Italy there is a Museum of Fakes, and its founder, Salvatore Castillo, said recently that very good counterfeiters eventually get their own show” (40).

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all of the direct quotes from Paula Morris included in this article are taken from an interview I recorded with her at the Centre for Flexible & Distance Learning at the University of Auckland on 21 Nov. 2005.

⁸ This quote was taken from a talk Morris gave to the Creative Writing MA students at the University of Auckland on 3 Aug. 2006.

that she has never had very many close friends, and her cousin Ani describes her as “cold and imperious” (150). Even when she tries to communicate with Luke, “their conversations remained brutal and stammering, as though they were adolescents with nothing sensible to say” (149). Emma’s isolated and aloof characterization is emphasized by descriptions likening her to a cat; she “curls into the bend in the sofa” (58), “paws at her eyes” (38), and shuns physical contact, “ducking away” to avoid Siaki’s touch (181).

As if in defiance of these attempts to portray her as cold and withdrawn, Morris makes it clear towards the end of the narrative, “the thing Emma longed for the most was a real Auckland life, one in which she made friends, went places, did things” (317). This contradiction opens up in the novel the possibility of debate between the concepts of foreshadowing and what theorist Gary Saul Morson calls “sideshadowing”—a debate that allows for multifarious interpretations of the “lives” Emma could live beyond the closing of the novel.

Looking in the Sideshadows

At first the foreshadowing in the novel seems to reiterate the atmospheric sense of confinement and entrapment that Morris says she purposefully evokes in the novel. According to Gary Morson, foreshadowing is, in and of itself, a confining concept—the very term “indicates a backward causality,” it draws to our attention the fact that in a novel “the future is already there” (48-49). In a literary thriller such as *Hibiscus Coast*, foreshadowing “directs our attention not to the experience of the character but to the design of the author, whose structure is entirely responsible for foreshadowing” (Morson 50). This seems an important aspect of a text written by an author who emphatically states, “I am a firm believer that everything in a book is a conscious choice made by me. . . . I don’t belong to the romantic school of thought that ‘voices come into my head and flow through me onto the page.’ No—everything is my choice.” The reader therefore finds Morris consciously embedding pointed foreshadowing in the descriptions of Emma’s dreams:

She’d been dreaming again, for the second night in a row, of the Gauguin painting. In yesterday’s dream, the door of the back room swung open over and over. Sometimes it revealed the painting hanging on the wall, but other times the wall was bare, and Siaki was on his knees in the wardrobe rifling through cardboard boxes of rubbish—old

Christmas decorations and chewed toys—shouting at her to help look for the missing painting. (63)

This scene is, of course, replayed later in the novel when the Gauguin is stolen and Siaki rifles through the paper and boxes in the studio fruitlessly searching for the missing paintings.

This author-infused determinism is underwritten, however, by Morris's more prominent use of sideshadowing. According to Morson, "[i]n sideshadowing, two or more alternative presents, the actual and the possible, are made simultaneously visible. This is a simultaneity not in time but of times: we do not see contradictory actualities, but one possibility that was actualized and, at the same moment, another that could have been but was not. In this way, time itself acquires a double and often many doubles. A haze of possibilities surrounds each actuality" (118). The possibility of sideshadowing is emphasized in the novel by Emma's dream about a dissolving life/painting—a dream that seems to trump the foreshadowing dream about the stolen paintings both in terms of imagery and depth of description. In this dream:

Emma saw herself at a great distance, galloping on a horse across the sandy folds of a beach. She was hurrying to arrive somewhere before the rain began. But the clouds above her head formed into a garish cartoon of the painting, the girl's face and hair fragmenting and reforming into vast swathes of Technicolor sky; the rain threatened to form drips of paint, about to splash Emma and turn her—and the horse, the beach, the sea—into blotches and splatters and rivulets, a lacy tangle of excess colour like the dirty floor beneath an easel. (63)

In a novel about aesthetics that is heavily laden with questions about the nature and importance of art and identity, Emma's dream takes on enormous significance. If Emma can be dissolved, she can be repainted. Her future is not immutable. This concept of sideshadowing, of looking at alternate possibilities, allows for a juxtaposition between Emma's past actions and current life, and her multivariate futures. It also emphasizes the rippling, spiraling effect that these actions of Emma's will have on the greater world around her. This is most clearly illuminated in the philosophic doctrine iterated in the Chinese proverb Morris chooses to preface the book with: "*Taoli man tianxia*—The fruits of one's teaching

cover the earth.”⁹ Morris sums up the vast possibility enveloped in this proverb, and in Emma’s character, through an examination of Emma’s relationship with her teacher, Yi, who taught her how to paint perfect copies while she was in Shanghai:

Yi’s tremendous ability as a painter has brought out Emma’s gift and created this person who is a monster, in a way. She has tremendous talent, and now a tremendous technique, and as we all know when you have tremendous talent and tremendous technique you can become a great artist or someone who uses it for terrible purposes. Or, of course, you can be someone who just throws it all away and does nothing at all. The proverb refers to this idea—how one person can somehow have this enormous effect. He’s sort of like the invisible mastermind behind the book. It is in thinking over how he would react to what she is doing that finally persuades Emma to change her course. (Morris, Personal interview)

The fact that Emma can choose not to be a monster, that Morris gifts her with a range of life-choices—she can continue to copy, she can be a great artist, or she can be someone who does nothing at all—emphasizes the fact that every choice a character makes, every choice an author makes, “is strategic, in the sense that every utterance has an epistemological agenda, a way of seeing the world that is favored via that choice and not others” (Johnstone 45). Morris’s choice to preface her novel with these teachings, and to ground the novel in a character imbued with a rich multicultural racial background, demonstrates an epistemological agenda that envisions a world beyond the postcolonial binaries which have dominated discussions of racial politics in the established literary canon of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Although Morris makes it clear when discussing her work that she does not want “her characters to lead with their race,” and that she hopes “their race is not the most important thing about them,” she does, nonetheless, say it is a “conscious choice” to incorporate characters of mixed-blood ancestral histories into her texts as

⁹ “*Taoli man tianxia* (桃李滿天下)—The fruits of one’s teaching cover the earth (Chinese proverb)” is the *Hibiscus Coast* epigraph quote and translation provided by Morris. While I work with Morris’s translation in this essay, I recognize that the more conventional translation refers to the idea that teachers “should be rewarded by their students’ achievement who are the ‘fruits of their labour’—*tao li man tian xia*—students are teachers’ peaches and plums growing all over the world” (Hui 27).

a way of challenging postcolonial binary distinctions. Writing as an expatriate New Zealand writer of both English and Ngati Wai descent, Morris says she is acutely aware that she does not want “her characters to be seen as representatives,” and that she is therefore highly interested in the “clash coming together” in her mixed-blood characters. More specifically she says of her Maori-Chinese protagonist in *Hibiscus Coast*, “I suppose giving Emma that heritage made it more complicated for her to be representative” and that part of the joy in creating this character was “watching” Emma’s reactions to art, people and experiences in the novel “depending on which part of her heritage she chooses to prioritize at the time.”

“A politicized memory,” Jenny Bol Jun Lee writes in *Eating Pork Bones and Puha with Chopsticks*, “guards against popular notions that seek to homogenize ethnic minority groups and position us in static binary oppositions” (110). The possibility of a plurality in Emma’s responses, and the possibility of multiple endings to the novel, mirror the possibility of multiple futures (and multivariate identity associations) for the Maori-Chinese people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. As stated earlier in this essay, historically, Maori-Chinese have not attracted “the public gaze, except in a rather negative way. Their stories—as a community, as families and as individuals—were outside the conventional frameworks and national narrative of white New Zealand” (Ip 1). Because of this, “[m]onoculturalism has largely dictated the way that collective memories were recorded” (Ip 1). By filling in the gaps in the literary social history of Aotearoa/New Zealand with characters not representative of one race, but who prove to be a rich blend of the country’s politicized social/racial history, Morris invites us to look into the sideshadows for the plurality of stories still left to be lived and shared. *Hibiscus Coast* offers to its readers, and to the continually emerging New Zealand literary canon, a new piece of politicized memory—a piece that recognizes Maori-Chinese cultural identities as important components of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s social history—and its future.

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