THE SPACE BETWEEN:

An analysis of code-switching within Asian American poetry as strategic poetic device

by

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For my family—

No matter how we say it,

English, *Zhōng wén*, Chinglish…

I am so proud to be yours.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on code-switching as strategic poetic technique within Asian American poetry. Through analyzing poems by Asian American poets, I argue that code-switching — a linguistic term for the shift between two (or more) different languages — serves as a poetic tool for negotiating metaphorical distances, and creating acts of linguistic activism, thus complicating traditional readings of Asian American poetics and identity poetry.

I explore the poetic work of three contemporary Asian American poets: Cathy Linh Che, Patrick Rosal, and Cathy Park Hong, specifically examining how code-switching influences depictions of cultural, historical, and emotional relationships within poems. Ultimately, this project is not an attempt to argue for "one way" that writers use code-switching within poetry, or one effect of it; rather, it is a study of how poetic code-switching describes and reveals aspects of the hyphenated minority identity.

Exploring code-switching as a multifaceted poetic tool usefully complicates existing readings of Asian American poetry. Current readings often position the poetic content on two ends of a spectrum: Either the poem is read through the lens of ethnicity and race, ignoring aesthetic and formal qualities; or the ethnic, cultural and historical contexts of the poem are ignored, while formal poetic qualities are emphasized. Such readings have problematic consequences for the genre of Asian American poetry, as they marginalize writers into either end of a spectrum, without considering the interconnectedness of the ethnic with the aesthetic.

By code-switching within their poems, Che, Rosal, and Hong create nuanced narratives of minority identities — identities which include the navigation of race, but further include navigation of distances in language, family, culture, and emotion. Thus, the strategic shift between multiple languages within a poem gives these poets the agency to construct their own identities as those that are not limited by cultural stereotypes. Code-switching becomes a technique that poets use to reflect and reveal the complexities of their relationships with language and culture.

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I orient the reader to cultural, literary and linguistic contexts that will help them understand code-switching as a linguistic concept as well as the genre of Asian American literature. In the second chapter, I analyze the work of Cathy Linh Che and Patrick Rosal through the lens of familial relationships. Through focused close readings and analysis, I argue that by code-switching, both Che and Rosal shape the portrayal of intimacy and emotional distance with family members and the reader, thus revealing the ways in which language negotiates relationships. The third and final chapter centers on the poetic work of Cathy Park Hong, who uses code-switching as strategic rhetorical protest to subvert forms of exoticization and cultural appropriation of Korean language. As such, code-switching becomes a poetic tool for re-claiming hyphenated identities through negotiations of emotional, cultural, and historical distances as well as protesting acts of marginalization both within and beyond the text.

I conclude by arguing for code-switching as a reflective tool for reading and understanding the lived experiences of bilingual Asian American poets — experiences which are shaped poetically by the use of multiple languages. The poets' conscious command and play with languages create unique navigations of audience access, but further produce intimacies and distances within their own relationships. The poets thus use code-switching both to reflect their own experiences, and also to actively subvert and protest against reader expectations and cultural stereotypes. Ultimately, viewing code-switching as a poetic device challenges readers to view language as performative and interactive with cultural identity.

CONTENTS

Short Titles

My American Kundiman: Rosal, Patrick. *My American Kundiman: Poems*. New York: Persea, 2006. Print.

Split: Che, Cathy Linh. *Split*. Alice James Books, 2014. Print.

Translating Mo'um: Hong, Cathy Park. *Translating Mo'um.* (2002b). Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose, 2002. Print.

Chapter I

Legitimizing the Tongue:
Introducing code-switching as strategic poetic device

"Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language," writes Chicana feminist-theorist Gloria Anzaldúa in her 1987 poetic text *Borderlands/La Frontera* (81). For Anzaldúa, languages convey more than mere communicative power: they encompass a part of cultural identity and community as well. By suggesting that language and ethnic culture are embedded within each other, Anzaldúa makes a powerful point about identity formation. She writes: "Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate … and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate" (81). Anzaldúa thus protests the ways in which her language use is limited by her audiences. She suggests that she should be free to "switch codes without always having to translate," be they cultural codes of behavior or linguistic codes of speech. As such, she makes an argument for *code-switching* — defined by linguists as the shift between two different languages in a single conversation or space,[1] a practice that Anzaldúa uses in much of her own poetry.

While Anzaldúa is a poet who has received a large amount of attention for her experimentation with multilingual poetry, this thesis does not focus on her poetic work; rather, it builds upon what she has already begun to articulate in *Borderlands*: relationships between language and identity, and issues of accommodating or adjusting language to fit readers' expectations. In my thesis, I center on code-switching[2] within poetry not only as a tool for linguistic activism, but also as

[1] Or, as psycholinguist François Grosjean more specifically defines: "Code-switching is the alternate use of two languages, that is, the speaker makes a complete shift to another language for a word, phrase, or sentence and then reverts back to the base language" (Grosjean 52).

[2] In the context of this thesis, I define linguistic code-switching as the shift between two or more languages within the body of a poem (i.e., English and Vietnamese).

a strategic poetic device, used to manipulate distances between audiences, create thematic distances within the poems, and function as a lens for reading the poetry.

In this thesis, I study the multilingual poetry of contemporary Asian American poets Cathy Linh Che, Patrick Rosal, and Cathy Park Hong, examining how their use of code-switching in poetry constructs their hyphenated identities as Asian-Americans. Through exploring the works of Che, Rosal, and Hong, I reveal how code-switching functions strategically within these poems in order to negotiate metaphorical distances in culture, language, memory, and relationships, thus enabling the poets to construct and 'rewrite' their own experiences away from previous narratives of marginalization and exoticization. As a result, readers are challenged to consider these poems beyond those of traditional reader-writer relationships. Code-switching becomes a strategic tool that reshapes expected reader-writer power dynamics, and acts as a form of linguistic activism against dominant readings of "minority poetry."

Code-switching as a poetic device itself remains largely understudied, especially within the realm of Asian American literature. In fact, critics have argued that Asian American poetry generally remains 'doubly' marginalized within the already-marginalized field of Asian American literature. As Asian American Studies scholar Dorothy Wang notes: "If discussed at all, Asian American writing is treated as ancillary in the current academy and viewed as being of interest mainly to Asian American students […] The poetry is almost never taught—except perhaps in specialized Asian American literature courses, but even then not so much" (Wang 24). Rather, scholars focus primarily on Asian American prosaic work, as literary scholar Juliana Chang observes, "[T]he vast majority of this critical writing within the field of Asian American literary studies analyzes works of prose fiction and nonfiction, and, to a lesser extent, drama" (84). Asian American poetry is located as a marginalized field of study, and even less attention is paid to code-switching as a poetic tool within the field. In this thesis, I argue that code-switching is not only necessary to understanding the thematic elements

of these poems, but that code-switching also plays a role in revealing the poems' social critique and activist work.

I have organized this first chapter into sub-sections in order to provide contextual information before the close readings of poetry in the next two chapters. First, I explain linguistic code-switching, identifying what code-switching is (according to linguists) and how it works in speech environments. Second, I explore 'poetic code-switching' as a strategic device within readings of Asian American literature, noting the ways in which poetic code-switching expands and differs from linguistic code-switching. I then overview the field of Asian American poetry, including the controversies surrounding 'identity poetry,' and examine how code-switching acts as an intervention within 'identity poetry.' In the last part of this chapter, I examine how code-switching complicates Asian American poetry by acting as one poetic device, of many, used to negotiate metaphorical distances and subvert the marginalization of hyphenated identities. I claim that poetic code-switching challenges existing scholarly binaries which suggest a separation of 'race' from the formal, aesthetic decisions of a poem. Poetic code-switching offers a new way of reading Asian American poetry, as poetry which intersects the ethnic with the aesthetic.

THE LINGUIST'S LENS: WHAT IS CODE-SWITCHING?[3]

The linguistic concept of code-switching is not new. In the field of linguistics, code-switching has been a focus since the 1980s, with increased attention paid to its relationship with identity construction, validation of one's assigned "role" in a community, social cues, and

[3] I find it helpful to first contextualize code-switching in the linguistic environment, before moving on to a literary discussion, since the term "code-switch" originates from the field of linguistics, and will be operating as a linguistic tool in addition to a poetic device within the poems.

community (Heller; Lo; Grosjean; Auer). Those who are bilingual or multilingual speakers often engage in code-switching. According to *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Code-switching,* bilingual speakers are those who have sustained the use of both languages continuously throughout a lifetime, starting from birth, or early childhood (Bullock and Toribio 7). It should be noted that all speakers — including monolingual speakers — selectively shift between their own language styles and/or dialects, depending on their linguistic environments (Bullock and Toribio 2). However, this study will focus on code-switching by bilingual speakers within poetry. Such poets have command over the multiple varieties and dialects of two (or more) languages, as opposed to just one.

It is important to note that code-switching does not devalue the two (or more) languages being spoken, nor does it mean that the bilingual speaker "'speaks no language whatsoever' and confuse[s] the two [languages] to such an extent that it is impossible to tell which language they speak" (qtd. in Grosjean 53). After all, code-switching is not an "ungrammatical" way to speak — it is guided by a system of rules, as well as fluency with two (or more) languages. As linguist François Grosjean states in his book, *Bilingual*, "…code-switching follows very strict constraints and is implemented by bilinguals who are competent in their languages" (57). Yet, even when code-switching is present, it may not be available to everyone. Linguist Monica Heller observes: "Only those who are so socially situated with respect to the social boundaries that they have access to multiple roles will be likely to use code-switching to communicative effect." Heller describes these 'co-members' of multiple communities as those who have agency in both languages, and thus, she emphasizes that code-switching is exclusive, and not available to every member of a speech community (8). This element of code-switching — that revolves around access and distance — will be important in the later discussion of code-switching's role in poetry.

Linguists have identified numerous reasons for code-switching in speech, emphasizing the act as a social tactic. According to Grosjean, "Code-switching is also used as a communicative or

social strategy, to show speaker involvement, exclude someone, raise one's status, show expertise, and so on" (55). In this way, code-switching provides a channel for bilingual speakers to convey an underlying social meaning through their speech. Speakers can code-switch to build solidarity within a speech group, inflate or deflate ethnic identities (thus associating more with one community over another), validate one's presence within a community, and build narrative (Heller; Lo; Muysken; Myers-Scotton). This complicated navigation of speech communities creates a way for speakers to emphasize differences or similarities, a key part of discursively constructing identity.

For example, in a 2013 study[4] conducted within a Chinese-American family in Michigan, speakers were observed to code-switch between Mandarin Chinese and English as a way to perform their familial identities and negotiate relationships (Duan 2013). During a conversation at dinner, the mother (Min) and daughter (Karen) both employed code-switching in order to disalign with each other, thus validating their own performances of familial identities.[5]

MIN: muo gu hen hao chi. Wo zuo tian zuo de cai zen men mei you ren xi huan chi?
'Mushrooms are so good. Why did nobody like to eat the dishes I made yesterday?'
KAREN: I did! I ate them!
MIN: no! **PARTY** DE SHI HOU
'no! DURING PARTY TIME'
KAREN: **wo** party de shi hou?
'(Our) party time?'
MIN: mmm-mm… Everybody!

[4] The study analyzed a recorded conversation among three family members of a Chinese-American household: a mother, Min (age 53), a father, Cunming (age 54), and a daughter, Karen (age 17). The father and mother are both bidialectal Mandarin Chinese speakers; The daughter, Karen, was born in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She has attended school and lived in the United States throughout her entire life. Karen's first language, acquired as a child, was Mandarin Chinese. However, upon entering kindergarten at an English-speaking school, Karen began to speak in English both at home and in school.

[5] This example uses a linguistic transcription convention (adopted from Coates 1998, xviii-xix): whereupon capital letters indicate louder speech, and double parentheses mark transcriber's comments. Each instance of code-switching is placed in bold text.

KAREN: ((laughing))
MIN: ke neng bu xi huan wo zuo de cai ba
'Maybe they didn't like my (vegetable) dishes.'
KAREN: you're just being sensitive
MIN: **I'm not.**

I use this example to illustrate both the pragmatics of code-switching, and the social function of code-switching in identity performance. As seen in this moment, code-switching can occur as one word in the middle of a sentence ("**PARTY** DE SHI HOU"), or as an entire sentence ("**I'm not**").[6] Both these instances are considered legitimate examples of "code-switching." In this example, code-switching allows the two speakers to negotiate their mother-daughter relationship. Karen attempts to convince Min that their party guests liked her mother's cooked dishes at the family's dinner party, hosted the previous night, and uses code-switching to diminish her mother's own sense of insecurity over her cooking. Karen says "=You're just being sensitive," and Min immediately replies: "**I'm not.**" This code-switch *out* of Min's matrix language (Mandarin Chinese) and into English demonstrates her disconnect with Karen's identification of her mother as sensitive. "I'm not" in English holds more linguistic resonance for Min. She can efficiently reject her "sensitive" role in a more powerful way in English. By using the same language as her daughter, Min can defend herself with English and thus, perform her own identity as a mother who is not sensitive.

According to linguist Adrienne Lo, code-switching plays a part in "making apparent speakers' imaginations about the speech communities they and their interlocutors belong to" (Lo 475). Code-switching helps speakers validate their position within a speech community, while also allowing speakers to *construct* and act upon their imagined roles within a speech community. Speakers will thus switch into or out of their matrix language in order to align or disalign themselves with a certain identity. For example, in the same 2013 Chinese-American familial study, Karen code-

[6] In the poems I study in Chapters II and III, poets employ a more artful construction of code-switching; however, it is important to acknowledge that code-switching can occur as an utterance or a full sentence (out of a speaker's matrix language) within a given conversation.

switches into Mandarin Chinese, in order to accentuate her disagreement with her father's identification of her as a child: "I'm not a **xiao hai er**!," *I'm not a child,* Karen says*,* referencing her disalignment with his identification of her as a "child." Karen switches to the Chinese word for child, "xiao hai er," when referencing her disagreement to her father's statement. She emphasizes her refusal of a child's identity by appealing to her parents in Chinese.

In linguistics, code-switching studies have traditionally been focused on spoken environments. I am interested in moving away from the spoken context of code-switching, and focusing instead on code-switching in *poetry*. As such, it is important to note that, while these questions of identity construction, solidarity building, and alignment will all intersect with code-switching in literature, looking at code-switching in poetry also opens up previously unexplored space. Poets are not interacting directly with others in a speech community; rather, their use of code-switching is a conscious and strategic poetic choice, which both produces and diminishes distances in thematic content, as well as distances between reader and writer. As a result, other factors come into play in poetic code-switching that do not exist in spoken contexts: for example, the aesthetic ways that code-switching exists on a page. Poets may also discuss code-switching in their poems without actually engaging in a linguistic "code-switch." Unlike spoken code-switching, which is often unconscious, poetic code-switching involves conscious decisions and awareness of the role of language within social interactions, in addition to the role of language as a literary device.

This consciousness of language as social and literary tool is relevant within the broader field of Asian American literature, which produces literature that is reflective of the cultural, political, linguistic experiences of hyphenated American identities. Asian American studies scholar Shirley Geok-Lin Lim writes in "Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature," that, in response to mounting theoretical interest in ethnic studies, feminism, and politics by scholars, Asian American literature functions as "a cultural product that encapsulates

language-values and creates sites for sociohistorical, anthropological, and political expressions and formations" (149). According to Lim, Asian American literature is a reflection and creation of cultural and political material that is, in part, also filtered through the lived experiences of Asian Americans. Thus, code-switching in poetry allows poets to construct and align themselves with various social and literary identities. Additionally, it enables poets to build and portray the specific experiences of bilingual Asian Americans living in the United States.

POETIC CODE-SWITCHING AS INTERVENTION

The term 'code-switching' now extends *beyond* the realm of linguistics, as media outlets and cultural theorists such as Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn have begun to use the term as a metaphor to describe shifts in cultural identity performance. In 2013, National Public Radio created the Code Switch blog, a media blog where journalists examine intersections between ethnicity, race, and culture in American society. As NPR Code Switch blogger Gene Demby noted in the blog's first post, code-switching can be explored through a much broader lens than that of language. The act of code-switching also illuminates how "we're hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities — sometimes within a single interaction," Demby writes (1). Thus, code-switching has become a way to navigate not only spoken languages, but social identities as well.

In my thesis, I explore poetic code-switching as acts of linguistic code-switching (switches between two or more languages) in relation to social and cultural identity construction. I argue that poetic code-switching allows poets to more accurately portray the experiences of their identities, by creating new distances between poets, readers, and thematic elements of the poems. Thus, poets can

effectively use code-switching to produce or diminish emotional distances in relationships, and manipulate audience accessibility.

Of course, the idea of "distance" within poetry is not exclusive to Asian American poetry, nor is distance (or lack of distance) *only* produced by code-switching. Many other poetic devices work to introduce ideas of distance, and, furthermore, code-switching as a poetic distancing tool cannot be studied without acknowledging its interaction *with* these other poetic devices. However, this thesis will focus on code-switching in particular as *one* of many deliberate poetic devices used to negotiate metaphorical distances, in relationship with other poetic elements, descriptions, and narrative tools of poems. By code-switching, the poets not only become narrators of experience, but also manipulators of emotional, physical, cultural and linguistic space.

This thesis will focus on code-switching within Asian American poetry as a way to show how — by negotiating with distances in emotion, familial history, and cultural access — code-switching complicates identity, turning the 'identity poem' into a nuanced, multidimensional piece — purposeful both in its consideration of craft, and in its consideration of racial/ethnic culture. In turn, reading code-switching as an intentional poetic device helps connect the 'aesthetic' qualities with the 'social' themes of the poem.

ASIAN AMERICAN POETRY: A BRIEF CONTEXT

Returning to Gloria Anzaldúa's words on ethnic and linguistic identities as "twin skins," part of this thesis will also examine the intersection of ethnic and cultural identity with language. As Anzaldúa notes, linguistic and ethnic identities are wrapped up within one another; one cannot study the code-switching within the poetry without studying the ethnic and cultural codes bound within

the language. Thus, in order to grasp code-switching as poetic device, it is first necessary to contextualize the field of Asian American literature.

As American scholar-poet Timothy Yu observes, the term 'Asian American' is a relatively new term, invented in the late 1960s as a way to unite and mobilize several distinct ethnic groups "under a single political and cultural umbrella" (Yu 5). As Yu points out, the term itself cannot be used or seen as a "traditional racial category"; rather, 'Asian American' is an umbrella term that brings together different ethnic groups from varying socioeconomic backgrounds, in order to politically and socially express, organize, and unite (5). Thus, 'Asian American' is not tied to a single ethnic culture and should not be read as one homogeneous ethnic group, as it fails to represent the multiplicity of diverse cultures and languages *within* 'Asia America.'

This thesis concentrates on poetry that both explicitly and implicitly discusses being of or from Asian history/descent, and negotiates these very distinct histories and identities in the United States. The poets I have selected all identify as Asian American, inhabit the U.S., and can trace familial history back to East Asia or Southeast Asia.[7] Accordingly, this thesis will also focus on Asian American poetry that seeks to express the different ethnic, cultural and linguistic experiences of Asian Americans in the U.S., in part through code-switching. While my definition of 'Asian American' is by no means comprehensive, I study these selected poets in order to reveal code-switching as a useful poetic tool in complicating 'identity poetry' within the realm of minority literature, by intersecting the ethnic with the aesthetic.

[7] I'm borrowing from scholar Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn's definition of Asian American (10).

ON A SPECTRUM SCALE

As poets and scholars have pointed out, current readings of Asian American poetry are problematic, positioning writers on either end of a spectrum — writers are tagged as either writing completely about race, or not about race at all. In her text *Thinking its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry,* Dorothy Wang further explores the problematic readings of Asian American poetry on a spectrum scale. Wang argues that there remains "a double standard in discussing the work of poets of color and those who are supposedly racially 'unmarked'" (xx). Wang suggests that poets of color are read exclusively through the lens of race and ethnicity, while non-minority poets are more likely to be read for form and aesthetic value. She describes this phenomenon in more detail:

> When (critics) read a literary work, fiction or poetry, by an Asian American writer, they almost inevitably assume that the work functions as a transparent window into the ethnographic 'truth' of a hyphenated identity and an exotic 'home' culture—in other words, as if there were no such thing as the mediatedness of language. (Wang 23)

On the other end of the spectrum, Wang criticizes avant-garde scholars for, in their analysis of Asian American poetry, "completely ignor(ing) the ethnicity of the poet, even when the poet makes clear that racialized/ethnic identity is not a trivial concern in the work" (Wang 23).

For Wang and other scholars, this 'double standard'[8] is problematic, because it lumps poets into opposite ends of a spectrum — either marginalizing their work completely through the lens of ethnicity and race; or ignoring the ethnic, cultural, social and historical contexts from the poems

[8] In her book *Modeling Minority Women,* Hebbar also calls this reading of ethnic literature as undergoing a 'double standard': "These analytical trends suggest that reading ethnic literature requires paying attention to depictions of 'real' lived experience and imply that examinations of poetics should be reserved for Anglo, 'master,' or canonical fiction" (Hebbar xvi).

completely, focusing instead on formal poetic qualities, or themes that do not involve race and ethnicity. For this particular study, I find it useful to look at the current readings of ethnic literature on a *spectrum,* rather than using the term "double standard," which suggests a strict binary positioning of values. The spectrum offers more opportunity for re-positioning such readings in-between 'race' and 'structural and formal' elements of a poem.

THE POET'S PRESSURE

Not only does the spectrum marginalize poets' works into 'race' or 'raceless' categories, but the spectrum has also forced poets into producing work explicitly *for* such categories. In her essay "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde," poet Cathy Park Hong challenges the treatment of minority poets in mainstream and avant-garde poetic landscapes, noting that poets of color, in particular, face pressure to squeeze their poetry through a 'race' or 'raceless' lens for non-minority audiences:

> …some of us (and here I use the first person plural loosely) dread the possibility of being tarred as an "identity politics" poet, and perhaps to such a degree that it's turned into our own detriment: we may overly exercise a form of self-restraint, scraping our writing of explicitly toxic racial matter, so we won't be exiled to *that* ghetto. (Hong 1)

For Hong and other writers, the ways that Asian American poetry is viewed in the canonical literary tradition is problematic, as it creates pressure to either overracialize or "erase" race within their own poetic texts, in order to avoid being cast in a label of "identity politics" poet.

A similar anxiety can be found in other Asian American literary spheres, resulting in opposing pressures in the ways writers feel they have to portray themselves. As Asian American

studies scholar Xiao-huang Yin argues in *Redefining Chinese American Sensibility,* Chinese immigrant authors frequently feel pressured to sensationalize their ethnic narratives in order to satisfy a non-Chinese audience. Yin notes, "…creative writing in English has often demanded the suppression and distortion of Chinese sensibility, which does not fit into the stereotypical portrayal of 'Orientals' in popular American culture" (Yin 190). As Yin points out, Chinese immigrant narratives that are written in English tend to display a contrived version of Chineseness that is geared towards winning over a "non-native" audience. Meanwhile, when Chinese writers write solely in Chinese, Yin argues that the Chinese language is able to "reinforce the ethnic consciousness and solidarity of Chinese immigrants and function as an identity tool that unites [the Chinese] in a strange land," yet, simultaneously, limit readership only to fluent Chinese readers, rather than non-native speakers (Yin 179). Interestingly, Yin's article, which speaks about the pressure of Chinese writers to distort their own Chinese heritage in English, does not mention the intersection of Chinese *and* English within one given literary piece. This thesis focuses on poems by contemporary Asian American poets that explicitly use *both* English and a foreign language within the work.

Repositioning Asian American poetry on the spectrum

American literary scholar Juliana Chang further challenges the positioning of Asian American poets on such a 'race-to-raceless' scale, arguing that language within poetry cannot be categorized so neatly. Rather, poetic language, according to Chang, is nuanced — not static. She notes, "Poetic language is not a smooth mirror reflecting social relations or an archive of fixed cultural essence, but a rough and uneven terrain through which we may glimpse how cultures and histories are refracted, suppressed, and re-imagined" (Chang 93). According to Wang and Chang, ethnic and racial identity remains connected *to* the thematic and structural elements of a poem,

prompting the question: Why does the writer have to remain stuck at either end of the spectrum, fearing writing poetry that is *only* read through the lens of race, or poetry that is *only* read and studied through structure/form? American literary scholar Sue-Im Lee stresses, "The study of the aesthetic is *not* a non-Asian American activity" (Lee 14). Thus, this thesis attempts to bridge the aesthetic *with* the ethnic, with a focus on code-switching as the container of both racial/cultural dialogue and intentional, structural form. "All writing is situated in both aesthetic and social realms," Wang writes, implying that all reading of the work should be a reflection of both the aesthetic and the social. Indeed, Wang brings our attention to the entanglement of cultural context with structural, formalist qualities of the poem: "Poems are never divorced from contexts and from history… Likewise, what constitutes the social, the cultural and the political must be analyzed for their linguistic and structural forms" (Wang 19).

By creating and diminishing metaphorical distances, code-switching repositions Asian American poetry on the spectrum by allowing the reading to come to a middle ground. The formal, structural decisions of the poem are inherent within the cultural, ethnic decisions of the poem, and code-switching allows a reader to view these identities not as separate, but as entwined within one another. Ultimately, this thesis will challenge positioning such works on either end of the spectrum, using code-switching to unsettle this 'spectrum scale,' producing poetry that conjoins thematic elements of race with aesthetic poetic decisions as well.

BEYOND LINGUISTIC ACTIVISM

Yet, code-switching does more than bridge the aesthetic with the social in poetry. It also helps poets advance their activist work, by subverting reader expectations. While readers coming to a book of poetry with an English title may expect a poem written entirely in English, code-switching

produces a mixed field of access and alienation. The distance in comprehension fluctuates; readers may understand *part* of a poem, but be denied access from other sections, if written in a foreign language. By employing code-switching, poets such as Hong create intentional distance between their subjects and the speaker, attempting to replicate the type of exoticization that they face. Scholar Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn names code-switching as a form of "linguistic hybridity" — a mixing of cultures and languages — in conjunction with the lived 'hybridity' that most Asian Americans face throughout their daily lives (95). Thus, translations (of their Asian languages) typically do not accurately reflect Asian Americans' experiences. Rather, code-switching without translations retains a type of distance that is resonant with poets' lived experiences: "[Translations] replicate binary divisions and affirm and maintain difference — it is the 'acknowledgment of the gap' or 'loss' that haunts translation" (Wallinger-Schorn 93). A distance is developed between reader and writer, in that the reader can become alienated, unable to continue dialoguing within the poem. Code-switching *without* translation creates a distance in comprehension between writer and reader, but it is a distance that Wallinger-Schorn argues is more true to Asian American experiences, and forces the *reader* to reposition her own reading of the text; she is forced to look up the foreign language in order to understand the poem; or accept her limits in understanding.

Through exploring the responsibility of the *reader* to put in the work to understand — or *attempting* to understand — 'foreign' phrases within the poem, code-switching becomes a way to subvert "the eurocentric convention that ethnic speakers have to make sure their utterances are understood" (Wallinger-Schorn 100). Therefore, in poems that employ code-switching, emotional and intellectual distance for the reader is both closed and created, and the poet becomes the shaper of distance, retaining an agency in this ability to shape distance, as well.

For poets, the use of code-switching to shape distance and agency seems paramount to the idea of 'linguistic activism,' a term which Wallinger-Schorn describes as poetry which "refuse[s] to

quietly acquiesce to a racist American power pyramid with a dominating Anglo-American group and its language at the top … thereby renegotiating and retrieving a distinctive, but fully American, Asian American subjectivity" (100). I will look at Che's, Rosal's, and Hong's work with code-switching as, in part, acts of linguistic activism — used to dismantle reader expectations, and challenge systems of exoticization and cultural appropriation of Asian American bodies. However, I argue that in addition to subverting exoticization, these poets also code-switch as a way to reflect their own personal experiences, create intimacy and alienation in relationships, and shape their own levels of agency. Ultimately, the negotiation of metaphorical distances through code-switching suggests an ongoing set of adjustments — the self as a shifting set of relations.

Chapter II

Coming Closer:
Code-switching as a way to retain emotional and cultural intimacy

In this chapter, I focus on code-switching as a way to retain cultural and emotional intimacy between poets and their familial members. I analyze two autobiographical poems by Cathy Linh Che and Patrick Rosal, examining how poetic code-switching expresses emotional and cultural intimacies in familial relationships, in addition to expressing the poets' own lived experiences as hyphenated identities. I explore on the poets' navigations of language as history, cultural value, and agency, in order to effectively close emotional distances between family members and themselves. For Che and Rosal, code-switching does not communicate ideas neutrally; it negotiates relationships within communities, and, as a result, it becomes stitched into these poets' autobiographies, inseparable from their lived truths.

TUSSLING WITH THE GAP: CATHY LINH CHE AND EMOTIONAL DISTANCE

"I'm still tussling with the gap — all that is implied in the hyphen or the space between Vietnamese and American," said poet Cathy Linh Che, in a 2012 interview with *Ploughshares* literary magazine.[9] Che draws attention to the ways in which a hyphenated identity may "tussle" with different cultural and linguistic spaces. By addressing the complexity of living in "the space between" two cultures, Che focuses particularly on an idea of cultural and linguistic distance in relation to identity. She characterizes the "tussle" not only as a grappling with Vietnamese language, but also as a navigation of her identity as Vietnamese-American granddaughter, fluent in English, who grew up

[9] "Interview With Poet Cathy Linh Che." Interview by Jennifer De Leon. n.d.: n. pag. *Ploughshares Literary Magazine*. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. <http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/interview-with-poet-cathy-linh-che/>.

in the United States, away from her Vietnamese grandmother. Che's decision to describe the Vietnamese-American hyphen as "the gap" further implies an open space, or break in continuity; the hyphenated identity is not static, but rather, dynamic — suggesting a movement between spaces. As such, Che reveals the nuances of hyphenated identities to readers; the Vietnamese-American identity is constantly shifting into "the gap," a space of linguistic and ethnic-cultural between-ness.

Writing, then, offers a way to reflect upon and examine this state of marginality. As Che noted in the same interview, "My parents' stories and my stories aren't a part of the dominant American narrative, and why I write, I suppose — (is) to write us in" (Che 2012). Che explained that her own writing is a way to *reduce* the distance that she feels from the "dominant American narrative," a narrative that — as Asian American poet Marilyn Chin claims — includes a "monolithic, monolingual, monocultural, and henceforth monotonous fate" (qtd. Wallinger-Schorn 11). For Che and Chin, the challenge is for minority poets to shift their marginalized positions within the canon through *writing* about their hyphenated experiences as Asian Americans. By doing so, these writers can close the distance that separates them from the "dominant" and "mono-" cultural work within the canon. Building upon this claim, I argue that these poets not only fill the "gap" within the canon for marginalized or underrepresented voices, but that, through strategic code-switching, they "tussle" between linguistic spaces in order to place themselves closer in emotional and cultural understanding to their familial communities in the poems.

Che and Rosal are both *writing* their own stories as hyphenated identities, stories which involve code-switching, and are not included in the dominant American narrative. As such, their experiences are not historically or culturally neutral. Language becomes a negotiation of identities, and also a negotiation of relationships. As Che explained in her *Ploughshares* interview: "Maybe [writing my parents' stories] was a way to bring my family closer to me, or maybe it was a way to explain myself to the people who just didn't understand me" (Che 2012). Che's attempts to "bring

(her) family closer," and additionally, "explain (herself) to the people who just didn't understand…" are both markers of closing distance *between* and *within* two disparate audiences, positioning herself closer to each one. Thus, code-switching within Che's writing becomes a way for her to claim agency and power — and ultimately, shape the emotional distance between her speaker and familial members.

In her autobiographical[10] poem "Burial,"[11] published in 2014, Che uses code-switching to figuratively bury and come to terms with her grandmother's death. In the process, she reaches a level of intimacy and closure with her grandmother. She describes returning to Vietnam to bury the physical body of her deceased grandmother, who she has not seen for twenty-two years. At the beginning of the poem, Che reflects on the burial of her grandmother as a simultaneous burial of her own absence from her grandmother's life:

> There is the rain, the odor of fresh earth, and you, Grandmother,
> in a box, I bury the distance, twenty-two years
> of not meeting you and your knotted hands. (61 Che ll. 1-3)

At the start of the poem, Che orients the reader with physical description, time, and action.[12] Her grandmother remains "in a box," — a coffin — sealed off from the rest of the world, while Che wishes to "bury the distance, twenty-two years/ of not meeting you and your knotted hands." By "*bury(ing)* the distance," Che expresses her desire to *lay to rest* her physical and temporal separation

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[10] Cathy Linh Che, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2015

[11] See Appendix A for full-length poem, attached at the end of this Chapter (37).

[12] The scale of physical distance in the first three lines of the poem is worth paying attention to, since Che's speaker buries Grandmother "in a box" — a contained space, while also attempting to bury the vaster "twenty-two years of not meeting you," and the immeasurable "distance" of not meeting her grandmother. By burying both the specific and the grand, Che's speaker suggests a stretching-out of space. Traditional measures of distance become magnified and subverted in the poem, and it soon becomes clear that the speaker is not only referencing a physical distance, but both the cultural and emotional distance that lies inherent within the absence/loss of her grandmother.

from her grandmother. The word "bury" itself suggests a finality in the act of covering up, with no future interaction.

However, as the poem progresses, Che uses code-switching as a tool to *dig up* memories and stories about her grandmother, preserving rather than "burying" her. This preservation is first illustrated through the speaker's list of all she wishes to bury — a layering of emotional, cultural and physical distances, in addition to her grandmother's deceased body. In the next few stanzas, Che creates a catalogue of all she "buries," including items that reveal much about her grandmother's history and life. She begins by burying her grandmother's physical body:

> I bury your hair, parted to the side and pinned back,
> your áo dài of crushed velvet,
> the implements you used to farm (ll. 4-6)

Che buries a physical object — her grandmother's hair, "parted to the side and pinned back" — and then puts her grandmother's body — clad in an "áo dài," a type of traditional Vietnamese dress[13] — to rest. The code-switch here, from English to Vietnamese, creates a type of intimacy through language. Without translating, Che uses the Vietnamese word "áo dài" in order to keep a sense of cultural privacy for her and her grandmother. This detail acts not as a burial, but as a preservation of her grandmother's language, culture and history, and, furthermore, a preservation of Che's negotiation "between the space" of her Vietnamese and American heritages (Che 1).

This cultural preservation is heightened through Che's consciousness of Vietnamese as a private, shared identity between her and her grandmother. As Asian American Studies scholar Shirley Lim argues in her article "Reconstructing Asian-American Poetry: A Case for Ethnopoetics," there is a certain cultural intimacy within expressions that may get lost when moved out of their original language. According to Lim, "Linguistic survival of first language expressions […] points to the poets' awareness that there exists in the original language itself certain values, concepts, and

[13] "áo dài." *VDict Vietnamese Dictionary*. VDict Vietnamese Dictionary, n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2014.

cultural traits which are not discoverable in English" (Lim 54). Building upon Lim's argument that use of a first language allows poets to preserve a set of cultural values unique to that language, I argue that Che's use of Vietnamese not only retains such cultural values, but also brings her culturally and emotionally closer to her grandmother. By keeping the meaning of "áo dài" in Vietnamese without translating for a non-Vietnamese reader, Che cultivates a system of intimate knowledge that she and her grandmother share: the Vietnamese *language*. Che and her grandmother, despite the twenty-two years apart, and the physical distance, can become connected through their shared knowledge of Vietnamese. Essentially, Che is shaping her own identity as granddaughter — an identity with which she uses to mourn the loss and celebrate the life of her grandmother.

As the poem progresses, Che attempts to travel closer to her grandmother by documenting various moments of her life. These details become more and more specific as the reader moves throughout each stanza, so that the reader — and Che — are granted increasing access to her grandmother's world. Che writes:

> the stroke which claimed your right side,
> the feeding tube, the toilet seat, the pigs
> that slept so soundly next to the well,
>
> the land you gave up when you remarried.
> your grief over my grandfather's passing.
> the war that evaporated your father's leg.
>
> the war that crushed your bowls,
> your childhood home razed by the rutted wheels
> of an American tank—
>
> I bury it all. (Che 61 ll. 7-16)

Che expresses a desire to "bury" such details about her grandmother's life, yet, in supposedly "burying" these stories, she actually uncovers and gives dimension to her grandmother beyond her being a simple physical body. By introducing the stroke, the war, "your grief," "the land you gave up," "your childhood home razed by the rutted wheels/ of an American tank," Che portrays her

grandmother's many stories of loss and hardship, producing a narrative 'unearthing' and a physical burying at the same time. The specific language that Che chooses to describe these memories — "gave up," "grief," "evaporated," "crushed," "razed" — depicts her grandmother's suffering, and, also, depicts her long life. While Che physically puts her grandmother in the ground, she also lifts her grandmother's stories up, where they have been buried for twenty-two years, thus narrowing the distance — and alienation — between them.

As Lim points out, code-switching can enhance this type of familial intimacy and closeness by keeping moments private, between two speakers. Che emphasizes this sense of closeness by aesthetically marking the code-switch as separate from other elements in the poem. When Che reflects on an earlier memory with her grandmother, she code-switches into Vietnamese:

> …What did I know, child
> who heard you speak only once,
>
> and when we met for the first time,
> tears watered the side of your face.
> I held your hand and said,
>
> *Bà ngoại, bà ngoại.* (61 Che ll. 21-26).

Che separates the code-switched line: "*Bà ngoại, bà ngoại*" — Grandmother, grandmother[14] — in its own stanza, in addition to italicizing the Vietnamese, making it visually separate from the rest of the text. The effect of placing "*Bà ngoại, bà ngoại*" away from other moments in the poem draws the reader's attention immediately to this line, which, arguably, is the poetic climax. At this moment, the speaker is physically the *nearest* to her grandmother that she's ever been (in the poem), touching her grandmother's hand and addressing her in Vietnamese. As with the lack of translation with "áo dài" (l. 5), there is a narrowing of distance between Che and her grandmother each time she uses Vietnamese. Language serves as a shared system of knowledge and identity between the two, and

[14] "Bà Ngoại." *Google Translate*. Google, n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2015.

thus, this intimate memory is made even more intimate by the lack of translation, and the aesthetic decision to set it apart from other lines in the poem. The phrase "*Bà ngoại, bà ngoại*" is private and kept only between the speaker and her Vietnamese grandmother, rather than shared broadly with all (non-Vietnamese) readers. Thus, Che reveals that code-switching not only negotiates questions of audience access, keeping readers *out,* but also narrows distance in personal relationships, drawing family members *in.*

Che achieves a new closeness with her grandmother at the end of the poem, when she returns to her grandmother's homeland and expresses a desire to save this intimacy:

> Ten years later, I returned.
> It rained on your gravesite.
> In the picture above your tomb,
>
> you looked just like my mother.
> We lit the joss sticks and planted them.
> We kept the encroaching grass at bay.
> (Che 62 ll. 27-32)

In this moment, Che is able to close the distance between her physically distant grandmother by finding her within the face of her own mother. The poem thus becomes not only a *burial* of the grandmother, but also a traveling in emotional distance. At the start of the poem, Che finds her grandmother "in a box" — presumably a coffin, describing the location of her grandmother with scarcity and vagueness (l. 2). Yet, by the end of the poem, Che now finds her grandmother in the most intimate of spaces: the living face of her mother. By finding her grandmother in her mother's face, Che claims a sense of intimacy and knowledge with her grandmother's world. The need to protect her grandmother signals this sense of new closeness. "We kept the encroaching grass at bay," she notes at the end of the poem, signaling her duty to *protect* her grandmother's, and, consequently, her mother's land from whatever may be "encroaching" (Che 62 l. 32). "Encroaching grass" connotes a type of intrusive growth; Che implies that she does not want her grandmother's

memory to be grown over by impending change. Rather, the speaker wants to save the memory of her grandmother, and, consequently, save the closeness that she has attained with her grandmother up until this point in the poem.

By code-switching — among using other literary devices — throughout "Burial," Che explores the linguistic and physical distance of immigrants navigating the space between homeland and 'new' home. Che suggests that code-switching embeds itself within the experiences of hyphenated identities, many of whom are first- or second-generation immigrants, with familial members who are located physically in other countries (homelands), and linguistically in other languages (mother tongues). As such, Che unravels the complicated process of emotional intimacy, distance, and closure that occurs in families of immigrants. She reveals that code-switching is often an integral part of immigrant experiences. While Che's experiences with linguistic movements between history, emotion, and physical space may not be included within the 'dominant American narrative,' Che's poetry suggests code-switching is a natural part of her own "American" experience. As a result, Che is writing her own story *into* the "American" narrative, exposing the ways in which code-switching functions not only in relation to her literary audiences, but also within her own relationships as a tool for familial intimacy and knowledge.

"[Loving] more fluently": Patrick Rosal reclaims language and identity

While Che uses code-switching within her poetry as a way to produce intimacy and meditate upon the loss of her grandmother, Filipino-American poet Patrick Rosal code-switches in order to reflect the tensions in his relationship with his father, a relationship fraught with passion, confrontation, and love. In an interview with the Park University's Ethnic Voices Poetry Series, Rosal describes his affinity for poetry as a combination of musical passion and language: "I don't

think I would have picked up on poetry so quickly if it weren't for two things: The variety and depth of which I dealt with music, but also, languages. In my house, we heard English, Spanish, Tagalog, Ilocano, and my dad—because he's an ex-Catholic priest, pre-Vatican, too—Latin" (Rosal 2014b). In the work of Rosal, a first-generation Filipino-American who grew up in New Jersey,[15] the intersection of multiple languages is common. In this chapter, I will focus on Rosal's autobiographical poem "As Glass,"[16] where he code-switches only once between Spanish and English in a conversation with his father, but talks at length about code-switching and the effect of languages on his own identity as Filipino-American son.

Rosal writes often of the historical influences within his work as a writer. In his essay "A Brute in America: Poetry and an Interrogation of Violence," written for ARTSblog in 2014, Rosal notes an emotional history contained within the events of the past:

> As a Filipino-American, I'm a descendent of brutality on both sides of the gun. If you know the history of American imperialism, you understand what I'm saying. We have a million-some stories that have yet to be fully confronted and written. So, a whole history of feeling goes untold (Rosal 2014a).

For Rosal, there exists a "history of feeling," in relation to American imperialism that remains distant from present-day narratives. Within "As Glass," Rosal entwines the "history of feeling" into a broader generational history of his Filipino-American family, stitching the emotional *into* the historical, and thus, telling the "untold," writing his way into a story, similar to how Che "writes [her family] in" to the dominant narrative.

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[15] Rosal, Patrick. "About Patrick Rosal." *Patrick Rosal*. Patrick Rosal, n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2015. <http://www.patrickrosal.com/about>.

[16] See Appendix B for full-length poem, attached at the end of this chapter (38).

At a reading at Bates College in February 2008, Rosal prefaced his reading of "As Glass," saying: "My father and I have had a tumultuous kind of relationship." Rosal further explained, "About my second day [living in Buenos Aires] I called home back in Jersey. Both my father and I speak Spanish but we've never spoken it to each other. But when I called him from Buenos Aires that day, we spoke to each other in Spanish for about fifteen minutes. And we liked each other in Spanish."[17] Rosal begins the poem in Buenos Aires, kicking a ball back to young boys playing soccer. The speaker then returns to his home to call his father on the phone, speaking to him in Spanish, and begins to reflect upon his relationship with his father, a relationship filled with strain, love, and both national and personal history.

When Rosal code-switches, he reaches a state of intimacy with his father that, according to the poem, would not be achieved in English. Rosal, who code-switches without translation, creates a similar environment of familial privacy that Che produces in "Burial." Rosal writes:

> [I] return to my hardfloor Palermo flat
>
> to phone my dad back in Jersey: *Papa* I say
> *Tu hijo habla* Of course at first he doesn't
>
> recognize my own voice or even his own name
> for I am speaking to him with an affection
>
> whose prepositions point in all the wrong directions
> but for six full minutes we are unfamiliar
>
> with one another's rage For once
> we are laughing at the same time… (45 ll. 10-18)

In these lines, the physical distance that separates Rosal from his father — from New Jersey to Buenos Aires — creates an immediate disconnect between father and son. In addition to physical distance, there seems to be, initially, a distance in understanding. Rosal's father does not

[17] Rosal, Patrick. "As Glass (live, Bates)." *From the Fishouse*. Fishouse, 27 Feb. 2008. Web. 14 Feb. 2015. <http://www.fishousepoems.org/?p=4468>.

comprehend Rosal's speech, and moreover, the prepositions take on "wrong directions," implying error in communicating with his father in Spanish, breaching what has historically been seen as 'correct' or familiar modes of communication in their relationship. The "prepositions point[ing] in all the wrong directions" not only suggest that Rosal's father is unfamiliar with his use of Spanish to communicate, but that Rosal's decision to use Spanish is "wrong," a step outside of the familiar. While there is a sense of "wrongness" and risk accompanying his dialogue in Spanish, it is this switch into Spanish which leads Rosal and his father into simultaneous laughter. As the poem progresses, Rosal uses Spanish to travel an emotional distance, allowing him and his father to forget "one another's rage," and, consequently, "[laugh] at the same time," reaching a new emotional closeness in their relationship. Like Che, Rosal does not provide a translation for his Spanish line — "*Papa* I say / *Tu hijo habla,"* (Father, I say / your son speaks.[18]) In this way, his direct speech with his father becomes a shared moment of familiarity between Rosal and his father, creating a distance between non-Spanish readers and the speaker, and thus allowing the speaker to retain a privacy exclusive to father and son.

Rosal pays a deep attention to form throughout the piece as another way to enhance the expression of emotional turbulence — and process of understanding — with his father. Rosal's steep line breaks and lack of punctuation in "As Glass"[19] construct an effect of emotional blurriness. Lines like "*Tu hijo habla* Of course at first he doesn't/ recognize my voice…" (ll. 12-13), and:

> …we are unfamiliar
>
> with one another's rage For once
>
> we are laughing at the same time (ll. 16-18)

[18] "Tu Hijo Habla." *Google Translate*. Google, n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2015. <https://translate.google.com/?ie=UTF-8&hl=en&client=tw-ob#auto/en/tu%20hijo%20habla>.

[19] Rosal does not use periods in any of his poems in *My American Kundiman.*

echo a thematic tone of restlessness and tension. The lack of punctuation causes a blurring together of ideas in the poem: the bodily, the rage, Rosal's attempts at communicating with his father. Rosal attempts to expose a sense of restlessness, produced from the constant 'tussle' and tension of negotiating differing 'identities' within different languages. Without periods or commas to connect the lines together, Rosal forces the reader to develop a new system to read the stops of the lines. Readers must pay close attention to line breaks, capital letters, and the content of the sentences themselves, in order to decipher where sentences end and begin. As a result, a reader is primed to pay attention to the ongoing breathlessness of each line, and, in addition, put more work into understanding the relationships of lines, as independent and connected with each other.

Building upon this play in form, Rosal suggests the capacity of language to withhold information. Rosal describes the disconnect from his father both culturally and emotionally, yet, uses language to stitch this distance back together. In Spanish, Rosal finds closer connection to his father. He writes:

> the bold charity of a foreign tongue sweetening
> the image in my mind of this quickly aging man who
>
> whacked me and my brothers silly with his leather belt (Rosal 46 ll. 40-42)

For Rosal, his father's role as the one who hit his brothers is muted by the "bold charity of a foreign tongue"; Rosal recognizes the foreign language's ability to shield him from his father's severity. By expressing language as "sweetening / the image in my mind," Rosal suggests his knowledge of language to be multifaceted — able to sweeten and, simultaneously, sharpen for rage (l. 41).

Rosal uses code-switching to expand beyond a shared intimacy in language. He also discusses switching into Spanish as a way to actively construct the narrative of his hyphenated identity, alluding to the idea that different forms of self and feeling are made possible within different languages. In the latter half of the poem, Rosal reflects on the language of Spanish:

> Not in this Castillian For today this speech

> of imperial thieves this dialect of conquerors this
>
> larcenists' parlance I am taking back
> as my own and every word of every tenderness
>
> I have failed to speak is already rising through my knees
> as glass It is ancient and it is pure It is not free
>
> of bitterness or grief It is heating
> my very fingers as I write this… (Rosal 47 ll. 49-56)

Throughout this moment in the poem, Rosal attempts to reclaim Spanish "as my own" language in order to reshape his own identity as that of a Filipino-American son who grew up physically and emotionally estranged from his familial history. Rosal calls Spanish the "dialect of conquerors," referencing the history of the Philippines as a colony of Spain for three centuries, and, in turn, subversively "taking back as my own" the conqueror's speech (Bjork 25). Rosal draws back to "ancient" tongue and history; the "tenderness" and affection that Spanish can communicate begins to take over Rosal's body, "already rising through my knees," yet Rosal recognizes that acquiring the Spanish language itself "is not free." There is a cost for speaking the language; each time Spanish is spoken by a Filipino-American, Rosal acknowledges an "ancient" generational history of violence, grief, and loss. He alludes to the complexity of being from the conquered, yet speaking a tongue of the "conquerors,' in addition to the "tenderness" that comes with the ownership of not only a language, but also a history and an ethnic culture.

Returning to line 52 of the poem, there is a loss of personal agency when Rosal speaks Spanish, as Rosal notes the silence ("every word of every tenderness / I have failed to speak") as an inability to communicate tenderness or *love* for his father. Beyond the historical reference, Rosal also calls Spanish "this speech / of imperial thieves," "this dialect of conquerors this / larcenists' parlance," choosing to tag the language with a vocabulary of theft and rage. His use of "larcenists' parlance" is especially notable, as he describes the language as stolen personal property. For Rosal, Spanish embeds political loss as well as personal loss; the language seems to carry a power dynamic

between 'the conquered' and 'the conqueror,' and also brings into question who has *access* to such languages, and who does not. Rosal thus seems to be indirectly referencing a history of code-switching among populations who must bend to the tongues of "imperial thieves" while struggling to maintain their own fluency in rage. Consequently, Rosal implies that being of the "conquered" identity entails an inherited history of rage and colonization:

> some cots and soup and all 400 years of horse shit
> poured hot through his veins And I
>
> am there too… (46 Rosal ll. 37-39)

Here, Rosal references his father's childhood, creating a catalogue of memories and objects in the same way that Che archives her grandmother's life. However, the moments that Rosal has chosen to represent for his father seem geared toward anger and sparseness; in lines 37-38, Rosal draws attention to all the injustices — "horse shit" — that are "poured hot" through his father's veins, a history of colonization his family has been forced to endure. Rosal suggests that he wishes to construct and empower his own identity, a "larcenists' parlance I am taking back / as my own," which includes such a history, but also includes agency in *telling* this history through the language, rather than having this history be told by others for him. Thus, Rosal stresses a type of agency in taking and using the language for himself.

In addition to seizing control of language, Rosal also takes ownership of the emotional knowledge and values that different languages convey. He writes:

> It's simple: we don't loathe one another in Spanish
> like we do in English—a language I've long known
>
> for its fluid burn The way it rises from my father's
> ankles into his belly from his torso into his limbs. (45 Rosal ll. 21-22)

Rosal's speaker continues by referencing the use of English which, in contrast to Spanish, is a way to provoke rage between him and his father. English becomes a channel through which Rosal's speaker can experience his father's rage, and, consequently, his "loathing," while Spanish presents a milder

emotional state — "we don't loathe one another," Rosal observes. In this case, language not only exists to communicate, but is also capable of enhancing different emotional states. Rosal's consciousness about code-switching *between* two languages, and, consequently, switching between emotional registers, complicates Lim's claim that code-switching retains certain cultural values and expressions within a given language (Lim 54). While Lim discusses the preservation of original meaning in language, Rosal notes a history of the Spanish language as a language forced into Filipino culture through Spanish colonization. For Rosal, it is not only "cultural traits" that are kept within a given language, but also the specific history and emotional knowledge that encompass such a language. Thus, Rosal uses the Spanish language not only to communicate cultural values to his father ("Tu hijo habla,") but additionally to acknowledge a history of Spanish within the Philippines.

In addition to emotional knowledge, Rosal further expresses language as *bodily* knowledge. In fact, language becomes a crucial part of identity, to the point where it is the only thing that remains after "flesh sinew and gut […] fall away" (ll. 29-30). Thus, Rosal suggests that code-switching is a fundamental part of his own autobiography, and also plays a key role in negotiating family relationships, both physically and bodily. Rosal describes English as entering the body: "its fluid burn The way it rises from my father's / ankles into his belly…" (Rosal 45 ll. 21-22). English becomes embodied within the father's "ankles," "belly, "limbs" in Rosal's poem, in ways similar to Hong's expression of language through bodily landscape in "Rite of Passage" ("marbles slivered out of my mouth," Hong 17 l. 5).[20] The body reacts physically to the production of language. Rosal writes:

> …This is why he and I can glare at one another
> can glare at one another for decades
>
> without moving—all the lexicons
> of sadness and delight turning cold and hard

[20] This poem will be discussed in Chapter III (40).

about every muscle and bone twisting
around the capillaries flooding the metacarpal nooks

stopping in the esophagus So if flesh sinew and gut
(this human crucible) were to fall away—as it must—

what's left is the clear anatomy of a man
cast in language unsummoned for 77 years… (Rosal 46 ll. 19-32)

Rosal engages a language of reason: "This is why," and "So if…what's left…" In this moment, he attempts to logically narrate his way through his bilingualism, and this knowledge further becomes inhabited within the body as a type of physical emotion or feeling: "every muscle and bone twisting / around the capillaries flooding the metacarpal nooks" (45 ll. 27-28). As such, language becomes an intimate, close form of knowledge, narrowing a new type of distance: distance in physicality. Rosal alludes to the production of language — "stopping in the esophagus," through the body — and suggests that knowledge of language itself is one of the most intimate forms of knowledge, produced within and emitted *out* of a human throat (45 l. 29).

Rosal again emphasizes the power of language when he observes that "if flesh sinew and gut […] were to fall away—as it must—" signifying the death or decay of the body, then "what's left is the clear anatomy of a man / cast in language unsummoned for 77 years" (ll. 31-32). Even in death, the body is preserved in language, referencing language as resonant and permanent. Moreover, language is so powerful that it seems to have the material presence of a body. Language "unsummoned for 77 years" is perhaps a reference to Rosal's father's childhood in the Philippines speaking Spanish, a language that, as the poet tells his audience at Bates College, he and his father have never spoken to each other in. However, Spanish seems to be embedded within his father, in addition to a longer history of Spanish colonization: "the whittled wooden fans…and all 400 years of horse shit," Rosal writes (ll. 33-38).

Nearing the end of the poem, Rosal recognizes a merging of father and son's identities. He writes: "I want to learn / to love more fluently even if it means in English / I should shatter into the body of my father" (47 ll. 56-58). He acknowledges the difference between two languages — Spanish and English — and, consequently, the two differing narratives that they tell about his father: one that is "sweetening" and one that is filled with loathing. The language remains entwined with the cultural perception and cultural identity of figures in the poem, and Rosal acknowledges "shatter[ing] into the body of my father" as one way he becomes emotionally and physically closer to his father — so close, in fact, he shatters *into* his father through shared language.

Though he code-switches just once in "As Glass," Rosal meditates on code-switching in his relationship with his father throughout the entire poem. By doing so, Rosal suggests that code-switching is not a neutral act, but rather, there are strategic and nuanced emotional distances woven within the act of switching between languages. By recognizing that he can both come closer to different modes of agency, emotional intimacy, and personal/generational history through code-switching, Rosal also suggests that code-switching is a natural part of his his lived experiences — and his stories — as a Filipino-American son.

CODE-SWITCHING AS A POETIC TOOL FOR INTIMACY: THE IMPLICATIONS

As Che and Rosal both reveal in their poems, poetic code-switching creates emotional intimacy within relationships by enabling poets to manipulate emotional distances, and meditate upon their familial histories through language. By focusing on language as expressive of shared cultural values and shared history, Che and Rosal effectively narrow emotional distances separating themselves from their family members. As a result, they create their own experiences (in writing) as hyphenated identities with immigrant family members.

In addition to this identity-making, poetic code-switching also challenges majority literary culture. Scholars have claimed that poetic code-switching offers counter-action to existing 'dominant' poetic narratives. In fact, Wallinger-Schorn argues that code-switching in literature offers a new language form, consequently complicating a monolingual 'majority [literary] culture':

> Linguistic hybridity exists where English and, for example, Korean interact and create a new form of language… Neither wholly English nor wholly Korean; it is a new creation, a fusion of, or, peaceful cohabitation between, those two languages, destabilizing the 'purity' and ostensible fixity of Standard English prescribed by the American majority culture. (79)

As Wallinger-Schorn notes, the existence of *both* English and an Asian language subverts conventional Standard English literature. Returning to Marilyn Chin's earlier point about a "monolingual and monocultural" literary canon, Che and Rosal's uses of different languages shape cultural distances, thus creating a "fusion of … these two languages" within the poems, and ultimately, diversifying the mono-lingual literary space. Rather, Spanish and English *together* form a hybrid poetic space, where both languages inform the poet's linguistic and cultural experiences of familial relationships, allowing poets to "write in" their own stories as hyphenated-American identities. Che and Rosal's decisions to leave out the English translation, then, are active forces against the "majority culture," serving as rhetorical protest against the dominant narrative.

Yet, in addition to offering a form of linguistic activism, code-switching is also integral to these poets' formations of poetic and familial identities. As Benzi Zhang states in *Asian America Diaspora Poetry in North America,* the entrance of an Asian (or other) language within an otherwise all-English poem "should not be seen as a passive receptor of social meanings but rather as an active power that allows Asian diaspora poets to achieve self-definition and self-validation" (132). Indeed, Rosal and Che's code-switches seek to create a certain sense of "self-definition" and identity. Che's

speaker is both American granddaughter and Vietnamese granddaughter. By addressing her grandmother in both English (l. 1) and Vietnamese (l. 26), the speaker builds her own identity as a granddaughter of *both* languages and cultures, and thus, actively attempts to create a dual cultural identity within the poem. Che thus closes a new distance: distance between "American" and "Vietnamese" identities. Rather than place both on a binary by using one language over the other, Che incorporates *both* within the poem, and thus, creates a joint-identity by including both languages. Similarly, Rosal's use of Spanish and English develops his identity and agency as a son. Rosal "[takes] back [Spanish] as my own" history, in addition to his father's, and a history of the Philippines' colonization by Spain. By remaining conscious about the nuances of code-switching between Spanish and English ("It's simple: we don't loathe one another in Spanish / like we do in English" 45 Rosal ll. 19-20), and the "dialect of conquerors," Rosal shapes his own identity as Filipino-American son, who remains bound by a broader national history of the Philippines, as well as the personal history of his father.

Thus, poetic code-switching is one tool that allows poets to actively convey and construct their own hyphenated identities — identities which are not only cultural and national, but also include their own personal relationships as daughters, sons, sisters, and generational immigrants. Rosal and Che thus reveal the 'tussle' between languages as strategic and active identity-construction. Furthermore, they demonstrate the powerful intersection of language with identity; language is not neutral. As philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin observed, a speaker cannot express language without expressing a part of her social identity: "There are no neutral words and forms—words and forms that can belong to 'no one.' […] Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (qtd. in Koven 412). Thus, languages are expressive not only of ideas, but of the urgent and complex tensions and distances within relationships. In the next chapter, I will build upon code-switching as a device to negotiate relationships, studying code-switching within the

poetry of Cathy Park Hong. Hong's use of code-switching can be read as direct acts of linguistic activism within sexual encounters, exploring shifts in power that build — and differ from — Che and Rosal's work with the familial.

A. ***Burial***

There is the rain, the odor of fresh earth, and you, Grandmother,
    in a box. I bury the distance, twenty-two years
        of not meeting you and your knotted hands.

I bury your hair, parted to the side and pinned back,
    your áo dài of crushed velvet,
        the implements you used to farm,

the stroke which claimed your right side,
    the feeding tube, the toilet seat, the pigs
        that slept so soundly next to the well,

the land you gave up when you remarried.
    your grief over my grandfather's passing.
        the war that evaporated your father's leg.

the war that crushed your bowls,
    your childhood home razed by the rutted wheels
        of an American tank—

I bury it all.

You learned that nothing stays in this life,
    not your daughter, not your uncle,
        not even the dignity of leaving this world

with your pants on. The bed sores on your hips
    were clean and sunken in. What did I know, child
        who heard you speak only once,

and when we met for the first time,
    tears watered the side of your face.
        I held your hand and said,

Bà ngoại, bà ngoại.

Ten years later, I returned.
    It rained on your gravesite.
        In the picture above your tomb,

you looked just like my mother.
    We lit the joss sticks and planted them.
        We kept the encroaching grass at bay.

—CATHY LINH CHE, *Split* (61).

B. *As Glass*

When these sons of Buenos Aires holler
in chorus from the muck-blessed soccer field

across the street they are calling to me
in the formal idioms their fathers use

to ignore the ubiquitous feral dogs
and the beggars of Recoleta

I understand just enough to fling
back halfway to the park's paved border

their summer-toughened leather ball
and return to my hardfloor Palermo flat

to phone my dad back in Jersey: *Papa* I say
Tu hijo habla Of course at first he doesn't

recognize my voice or even his own name
for I am speaking to him with an affection

whose prepositions point in all the wrong directions
but for six full minutes we are unfamiliar

with one another's rage For once
we are laughing at the same time

It's simple: we don't loathe one another in Spanish
like we do in English—a language I've long known

for its fluid burn The way it rises from my father's
ankles into his belly from his torso into his limbs

like molten glass This is why he and I
can glare at one another for decades

without moving—all the lexicons
of sadness and delight turning cold and hard

about every muscle and bone twisting
around the capillaries flooding the metacarpal nooks

stopping in the esophagus So if flesh sinew and gut
(this human crucible) were to fall away—as it must—

what's left is the clear anatomy of a man

cast in language unsummoned for 77 years:

the whittled wooden fans of his childhood
his mother's kalesa rocking over Vigan cobblestone

a whore's warm breasts flushed against him
like a good bottle of rum cracked cathedral windows

some cots and soup and all 400 years of horse shit
poured hot through his veins And I

am there too—sitting in a chilly apartment in Palermo
listening to the fading howls from the football field

the bold charity of a foreign tongue sweetening
the image in my mind of this quickly aging man who

whacked me and my brothers silly with his leather belt
And down the street I can still hear those boys

teasing one another in lunfardo Maybe they're not too young
to despise their fathers Maybe they can already taste

in the prayers they pretend to say before they sleep
that petty venom distilling in their mouths But not today

Not in this Castillian For today this speech
of imperial thieves this dialect of conquerors this

larcenists' parlance I am taking back
as my own and every word of every tenderness

I have failed to speak is already rising through my knees
as glass It is ancient and it is pure It is not free

of bitterness or grief It is heating
my very fingers as I write this: I want to learn

to love more fluently even if it means in English
I should shatter into the body of my father

—PATRICK ROSAL, *My American Kundiman* (45).

Chapter III

The shrug of my tongue, the shrug of command: Code-switching as a strategic form of rhetorical protest

In the previous chapter, Che and Rosal reveal how code-switching serves as poetic tool to capture the complicated experiences of the hyphenated identity, experiences which are informed by the 'tussle' among different cultural and linguistic spaces. This chapter will focus in particular on code-switching as not only a way to reflect the experiences of hyphenated identities, but also to rhetorically protest acts of exoticization and objectification, thus claiming power for the Asian American speaker. In Chapter III, I focus exclusively on the poetry of contemporary Korean-American poet Cathy Park Hong. I examine code-switching in three of her poems: "All the Aphrodisiacs," "Rite of Passage," and "Translating Pagaji," all from her 2002 collection, *Translating Mo'um.*

These poems address different types of cultural and emotional distance than those of Chapter II. All three poems function in highly sexual environments, where the speaker considers her interactions with other (non-Korean) partners or people, socially critiquing their exoticization of her Korean-American female body by using Korean words to dismantle reader expectations and reader experiences. I will focus on how each poem code-switches as a means to gain agency and power for the female speaker, subverting and challenging notions of exoticization of Korean-American female bodies, and toying with questions of audience access and poetic form.[21] Ultimately, I will concentrate on code-switching as a form of linguistic activism used to navigate and critique various relationships within the poems.

[21] Of course, these questions of reader access happen throughout all poems, with or without code-switching. However, in this chapter, I focus specifically on how code-switching toys with reader expectations in relation to the withholding and disclosure of different languages.

Scholar Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn defines *linguistic activism* as a form of linguistic innovation or hybridity, where code-switching is an intentional decision to subvert reader expectations of dominant English texts. According to Wallinger-Schorn, such poems resist traditional Eurocentric power dynamics in relation to ethnicity and language, by integrating — and therefore, validating — minority languages within the literature. She writes:

> [A]ll linguistically hybrid poems refuse to quietly acquiese to a racist American power pyramid with a dominating Anglo-American group and its language at the top, instead engaging in ethnic empowerment as linguistic activism and thereby renegotiating and retrieving a distinctive, but fully American, Asian American subjectivity. (101)

Hong's work can be read, in part, as a way to "renegotiate" and reclaim Asian American identity by refusing to submit to one dominant language (English), and, furthermore, refusing to disclose translations to non-Korean speakers.

In an interview with *Women's Review of Books* literary magazine, Hong further discussed the strategic role of translation as a form of linguistic activism within her poetic work. When asked why she does not include translations from Korean to English within her own poetry, Hong said: "I wanted to open up these schisms, to emphasize that memory, the filtering of human experience into poetry, is often fractured and not transparent, especially experiences which have always been bisected and undercut by two languages." She added, "I think I want to debunk the idea of easy translation—whether it be the idea of literal translation or, as I said before, the translating of one's experience into poetry" (Hong 2002a, 15). Hong's intentional decision to leave out English translations in her poetry creates a power dynamic between speaker and reader of the poem. Not only are "easy" translations dismantled and withheld from the reader, but, according to Hong, code-switching — without translation — also more accurately reflects her personal experiences of cultural

and linguistic movement. Hong points out that human experiences and the world of memory, especially for bilingual speakers, are "not transparent" — not captured neatly by one language, but rather, "bisected" by the complexities of belonging to two (or more) languages, implying a movement between multiple spaces.

Scholars describe poetic code-switching in this way as a navigation of power. Literary scholar Benzi Zhang argues that code-switching makes apparent different levels of cultural knowledge for speaker and reader: "[T]he insertion of […] foreign words effectively renders Asian sensibilities into English and signifies different positions of cultural agency" (Zhang 131). Building upon this idea of cultural agency, I argue that Hong uses Korean to consciously expose themes of exoticism and racial stereotyping that readers themselves may be (consciously or unconsciously) participating in. As a result, Hong creates agency for her speaker through critiquing culturally appropriative behavior, in addition to an agency in knowledge; Hong's speaker can access cultural understanding that her readers do not have. Yet, Hong does more than negotiate questions of audience access; she uses code-switching to reflect her speaker's lived experiences of Korean-American identity, grappling with multiple languages and cultural codes. In "An Introduction to Chinese-American and Japanese American Literatures," Jeffrey Chan et al. writes, "The minority experience does not yield itself to accurate or complete expression on the white man's language" (qtd. Zhang 137). As Chang et al. suggest, code-switching embeds itself as a natural part of the "minority experience," and is documented as such in Hong's poems. Thus, the poems not only act as social critique of exoticization, but further inhabit the embodied experiences of Korean-American female identities living in the U.S. — which, as Hong reveals, are *complicated* experiences of rage, agency, celebration, and shifting power dynamics.

Critics who have reviewed Hong's work, such as Jan Clausen, have raised questions about the effect of Hong's play with translation. Clausen, in a review titled "The poetics of estrangement,"

published through the *Women's Review of Books,* writes of Hong's collection *Translating Mo'um*: "Hong deftly dismantles the romance of language as homeland, with results especially unnerving for the non-Korean-speaking reader" (Clausen 15). According to Clausen, Hong's work with code-switching subverts traditional notions of the 'native tongue' as representative of "homeland," dismantling what a reader may expect of a Korean American author: that she use *Korean* language to specifically discuss her ethnic culture as a hyphenated American. In other words, Hong's code-switches function as intentional poetic protest against the reader's expectations of the relationship between multilingual text and ethnic identity. As Clausen points out, such readings may anticipate that mother tongue is only introduced to speak about cultural difference or history, rather than used additionally as formal poetic device. In this chapter, I reveal Hong's awareness of Korean language and code-switching as tools in identity-construction. Rather than allow others to shape her identity for her, she remains dominant in shaping her identity — and her agency — for herself.

A SECRET LANGUAGE: CODE-SWITCHING TO CLAIM POWER IN "ALL THE APHRODISIACS"

In her poem "All the Aphrodisiacs,"[22] Hong depicts a sexual encounter with a non-Korean lover, and uses code-switching to highlight shifts in sexual power between the speaker and her lover. In this piece, the claiming of sexual and physical agency is directly linked to *language*. Korean becomes a very intentional poetic force throughout the poem, used specifically to create cultural distance between the speaker and her lover, and, additionally used to navigate power dynamics between speaker and reader.

[22] See Appendix C for full-length poem, attached at the end of this Chapter (65).

Hong establishes an illicit desirability around the Korean language through her use of bodily language. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker observes her lover's desire for Korean language:

> white cloth, drunkenness, a different language leaks out—
> the idea of throat, an orifice, a cord—
>
> you say it turns you on when I speak Korean
> The gold paste of afterbirth, no red— (37 ll. 4-7)

Hong's depiction of the "white cloth" initially connotes a pure, clean surface. Yet, her next choice of words — "drunkenness," "language *leaks* out," — suggests a quality of dirtiness and impurity upon the appearance of "a different language." As Hong observes: language "leaks" out, implying 'new' language — Korean — as excess, unintentional, and dirtying. In lines 4, 5, and 7, Hong presents a series of *fragments* in thought, ending each line with a dash, attempting to poetically replicate the ways in which memory jolts to a stop — unfinished, rapidly followed by new thought. This 'stream-of-consciousness' aesthetic produces a fragmented effect, resonant with Hong's description of memories as a type of "fractured" experience, encompassing "slippages" between two languages and cultures.[23] Moreover, the dashes draw attention to the line "you say it turns you on when I speak Korean," the only line that is not cut short by a dash in this section (l. 6). This line is especially notable, because it is where the speaker first signifies her own power within the poem — she speaks Korean; she has the capacity to "turn you on," and, as a result, she gains a type of bodily and linguistic power, able to elicit bodily reactions from others using Korean speech.

Hong sets up the Korean language as 'exotic' from her lover's perspective; then, she critiques and dismantles such notions of exoticism throughout the rest of the poem. The speaker's

[23] In her interview with *Women's Review of Books*, Hong expressed her desire to reveal the nuances of being bilingual within her poetic work: "I wanted to emphasize the slippages in translation—not just translations from Korean words to English, but also how to translate memories of family or history that I associate with a Korean language into a poem written in English" (Hong 2002a).

power as the producer of Korean language is amplified when she begins to list body parts in isolation, choosing to focus on single *parts* of the body — "the idea of throat, an orifice, a cord" — and again, creating a fragmenting effect (l. 5). Hong connects Korean strongly to bodily images and concepts, referring to areas of the body that sound comes out of.[24] Korean *leaking* out of these bodily parts presents the idea of Korean as autonomic, unable to be contained. Furthermore, it suggests that the language should have been contained to begin with; something can only leak *out* if it was, initially, locked *in*. There is an implied shame and wrongness about the Korean language escaping — "tur[ning] you on" — when it was, presumably, meant to be kept in. As such, Hong's presentation of Korean as accidental, sexualized, and *foreign* lends to a tone of exoticization surrounding the language. She further writes: "The gold paste of afterbirth, no red—" implying an unnatural birth or production process, "no red," no blood (l. 7). Rather, what remains is a type of abnormality paralleled with Korean language. From the lover's perspective, Korean is thus exotic, a turn-on;[25] for the speaker, Korean is slippage, "drunkenness," production. Hong thus subverts any idea of Korean as 'unnatural' by revealing the power that Korean has in interacting with the lover.

[24] When looking at *cord* (l. 5), we later see a remnant of restriction, binding, tying in the poem — verbs typically associated with the idea of *cords* as wrapping. In l. 27, for example, Hong notes: "Strips of white cotton I use to bind your wrist to post…" Hong is willfully playing with the dual meanings of *cord,* creating an atmosphere of restriction (*cords* used to tie) versus speech (*cords* used to speak). The relationship between the two resonates with the speaker's tension in her sexual situation. Rather than remain bound to a notion of 'exotic secrecy,' as her knowledge of Korean seems to suggest to her lover, the speaker creates agency for herself in "tell(ing) you it's a secret," locking the lover out of fully understanding her usage of Korean (l. 12). Despite being trapped in a physical location, the speaker ultimately claims power using her "throat, an orifice, a cord" — suggesting her ability to physically restrict her lover by using speech (vocal cords).

[25] Setting up the language in this way creates a distance in terms of how Korean is portrayed from start to end of the poem. At the beginning of the poem, Korean is described by Hong as "accidental," but moving on to the end of the poem, readers see that Korean has an unharnessed, "secret" power, and is now able to control and dictate the rules of the relationship.

Hong gains power in choosing what she can disclose and withhold from both lover and audience. As a result, she gains control over the intimacy of the situation. In lines 8-10, Hong speaks to her lover, after being told that her Korean "turns [him] on" (l. 6):

> Household phrases —*pae-go-p'a (I am hungry)*
>
> —*ch'i-wa (Clean up)*
> —*kae sekki (Son of a dog)*
>
> I breathe those words into your ear, which make you climax;
> afterwards you ask me for their translations. I tell you it's a secret. (37 ll. 8-12)

In this instance of physical *intimacy* between two lovers, where Hong's speaker whispers Korean into her lover's ear, the English-Korean code-switch actually works to increase the cultural and lingual distance between the lovers. There is a vengeful knowledge in the speaker's ability to know Korean, and to use it against someone who does not understand, yet is "turned on" by the language. While the speaker gains control by using Korean in the sexual relationship, she also uses Korean to exact a form of revenge on the exoticization of her language/culture, cursing her lover with "Son of a dog" and afterwards, keeping the translations a secret, thus widening the cultural distance between her and her lover (37 l. 12). By providing translations for the *reader,* however, Hong intentionally brings readers closer to her "secret," creating the effect of proximity, while also subversively separating herself from a lover who does not understand. Additionally, readers are allowed to see the critique, and thus, comprehend this moment as one of linguistic activism. As a result, code-switching works to produce intimacy and alienation at the same time, toying with measures of "distance."

While Hong tags these Korean terms as "Household phrases," they are used sexually, almost violently, as sources of power. The "Household phrases" are commands ("*Clean up*"), statements ("*I am hungry*") and even curses *("Son of a dog").* Ultimately, these phrases are performative — causing the lover to climax (l. 11). The first Korean term, *pae-go-p'a:* "I am hungry" conveys an urgency in response, and encompasses a strange, contained power. When the speaker asserts "I am hungry," in

Korean, yet purposely keeps the translation "a secret" from her lover, she suggests a need for satiation, perhaps even recognizing an appetite for power.

Meanwhile, the term *ch'i-wa,* "Clean up," implies the creation of a mess. "Clean up" is an imperative, and as such, it is powerful in its ability to demand an action *of* the lover. The call to "Clean up" also draws the reader's attention back to the poem's numerous "white" objects that can be "sullied" — white cloth, white cotton to bind wrists, white bodies (l. 4, 27, 30). Throughout the poem, the idea of "white" being "sullied" suggests a racial undertone (l. 22-23). Given Hong's activist work within this poem, the whiteness she describes not only alludes to a purity in hue, but also implies a problematic idea of 'ethnic purity.' Her lover does not understand Korean; as such, Hong writes of a racial encounter between her speaker and somebody who is not Korean-American, but who wrongly 'desires' Korean culture. Yet again, Hong does not divorce the ethnic from the aesthetic within her work; "whiteness" is given aesthetic attention through its reappearance throughout the poem, as well as its suggestion toward ethnicity. "Sullying" not only insinuates a tarnishing of physical objects, but also points to the lover's tarnished authenticity. Hong criticizes the lover's exoticization of Korean culture. As a result, the speaker keeps this demand to "Clean up" hidden from her lover, creating an effect of secret condemnation and amplifying the lover's lack of agency.

As previously discussed, Hong informs the reader of her act of subversion against her lover by providing the reader with various Korean translations — "*pae-go-p'a (I am hungry*)." However, she withholds other translations from the reader. When Hong writes: "*gijek niin tigit rril*—the recitation of the alphabet; guttural diphthong, gorgeous," (37 l. 13) she never translates these four Korean words into English. As a result, the speaker's power over her lover also extends to her power over the non-Korean *reader*, claimed through inclusion and alienation of audiences. Hong thus positions her non-Korean reader to also be kept out of the "secret" of language, creating alignments between

lover and reader. Such an alignment is revealed in line 13, when, by paying attention to physical linguistic sounds, Hong amplifies the reader's awareness of the layers of language — language as sonic, phonetic, and eventually communicative (but also isolative in its ability to communicate). These four Korean "words" — *gijek, niin, tigit, rril* — are actually the names of the four Korean consonants "*na, da, la, ma*" found in another one of Hong's poems, "Zoo"[26] (Grotjohn 3). By emphasizing the consonants of words, Hong pushes the reader to think about the implications of language when kept out of its "secret" meaning. When language is reduced simply to noise, as it frequently is for non-native speakers, Hong both critiques and questions a non-native speaker's desire of such language. She suggests the problematic and ironic tendency to exoticize a foreign language as sexually appealing, when the language itself communicates mundane 'household' terms: I am hungry; clean up; son of a dog; the alphabet. Thus, she challenges the lover's sexual desire for Korean language by turning language into a force for vengeance and physical power. By doing so, Hong complicates her hyphenated identity as one that will not tolerate acts of exoticization. Hong chooses to reframe the Korean alphabet's "guttural[s]" — a sound defined as "harsh-sounding" in the dictionary[27] — as *gorgeous*. Through such a descriptor, Hong reclaims the Korean language not as exotic, but as powerful; not as guttural, but as beautiful. Ultimately, she develops a speaker who owns the language as a force of physical, sexual and cultural power.

Hong further mobilizes her sense of linguistic power when she describes the relationship between her own desire and language. She writes:

> What are the objects that turn me on: words—
>
> *han-gul:* the language first used by female entertainers, poets, prostitutes.
>
> The sight of shoes around telephone wires, pulleyed by their laces, the blunt word cock

[26] "Zoo" will be discussed in the Conclusion (71).
[27] "Guttural." Def. 1. *Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English*. 1969. Print.

(Hong 37 ll. 15-17)

Hong alludes to a sense of restriction in the body — "shoes around telephone wires, pulleyed by their laces," she writes, creating a noose-like image of shoes — which are objects of the body — as tensed, taut. Following this image, Hong notes that it is the "blunt *word* cock" (rather than the physical bodily part itself) that she desires. Thus, Hong's attention to *language* as a form of desire becomes important to her attainment of power in the poem. Hong is successful in achieving control over her lover because she recognizes that power is not simply fueled by physical gestures and movements, but also by systems of language.

This connection between language and sexual desire is important, as it emphasizes cultural distances between the lover/audience and the speaker. For Hong's speaker, language and sexuality remain tightly wound within each other, further defining her identity as that of poet, Korean speaker, and Korean-American lover within the poem. Language is a "turn-on"; the speaker specifically desires "*han-gul*: the language first used by female entertainers, poets, prostitutes" (l. 15). Hong thus reclaims this sexualized language of female entertainers and poets, a language which initially suggests, from its population, an illicit desire, corruption, or wildness. Yet, by calling *han-gul* a "turn-on," Hong reclaims the language as powerful and private; belonging only to one demographic, a demographic which [most] readers are kept out of, and the speaker herself belongs *to*. Thus, Hong chooses to create intentional distances between author and reader in order to establish her own identity. She is the master of language, and she has the *agency* to keep others out of such language systems.

The speaker extends her agency as a 'master' of language even further, when she begins to consider physical language production. She attempts to control the bodily experience of the lover by limiting his capacity to communicate. Hong writes:

my hand pressed against your diaphragm, corralling your pitch.

> a pinch of rain caught between mouths,
>
> analgesic, tea. poachers drawing blood—
>
> strips of white cotton I use to bind your wrist to post, tight
> enough to swell vein, allow sweat— (38 ll. 24-28)

Hong attempts to control the lover's physical production of speech. The speaker uses Korean repeatedly to "press against your diaphragm," and furthermore "corral" — or fence in — "your pitch." This usage of *corral* is notable, as Hong not only makes a reference to an animalistic type of control (corrals used to fence in *livestock*), but she also notes that it is the lover's *pitch* being corralled; she controls a portion of the lover's voice and ability to communicate. Thus, while the speaker sexually controls her lover, she also gains a sense of linguistic control. The speaker *binds* the lover's wrist, "tight enough to swell vein, allow sweat—"again demonstrating the speaker's violent, tightening dimensions of physical power over her lover, yet also showing a constriction of the lover's power in speech and in physical movement. The lover remains stuck, his wrists bound, in a similar way that his comprehension of Korean is also stuck and immobile. The lover not only loses the ability to physically *move,* but he also loses the ability to linguistically and culturally understand — and is thus incapable of moving forward (or backwards) in thought.

Ultimately, the poem culminates in a silencing of the lover, not only stripping his power to speak, but also stripping his power to exoticize the speaker. Hong writes:

> sweat to sully the white of your sibiliant body,
>
> the shrug of my tongue, the shrug of command, *ssshhht.* (38 ll. 29-30)

The body is described as "sibilant" — a linguistic term, in which a speech sound "is sounded with a hissing effect."[28] In these two lines, Hong uses a variety of sibilant terms: "sweat," "sully," "sibilant,"

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[28] "Sibilant." Def. 1. *Google*. Google, n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2015. <https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=define%3A%20sibilant>.

"shrug," and "ssshhht." in order to stress the body as being its own kind of linguistic noise, in addition to stressing the speaker's role as the linguistic and bodily controller. Hong's speaker has agency over the lover's "sibilant" body, as she emphasizes with "the shrug of my tongue, the shrug of command," yet she *also* has agency over the language used to depict the lover. Hong's power rises to an even greater height, as she notes that, in "allowing sweat," she can "sully the white of your sibilant body," thus dirtying the lover's body through her ability to 'bind,' 'sully,' and control (l. 28, 29). Hong's decision to use the word "allow" in line 28 suggests her strength and agency; she is a figure who can both control the body's functions, i.e. sweat. Here, Hong stresses both the ways that language shapes identity (of her lover), in addition to how she *uses* language to gain command over her lover's and her own identities — and, "ssshhht," silence him.

Throughout "All the Aphrodisiacs," Hong manipulates the idea of language as a "secret," toying with reader expectations and power dynamics between speaker and lover within the poem. By doing so, she constructs the bodily experience of a hyphenated identity as multifaceted and complex, containing power in calling out others' desirability of one's language (and ethnic culture), in addition to an illicit lingual foreignness, containment, and shame. As a result, code-switching is enacted as a form of linguistic activism, integrating ethnic with the aesthetic, and criticizing both lover and audience in their treatment of 'foreign,' Korean culture. In the next poem, "Rite of Passage," Hong further critiques such exoticization by critiquing acts of cultural appropriation, through a focus on personal and national history.

'FRAGMENTS OF FREAKS': A HISTORY OF EXOTICIZATION IN "RITE OF PASSAGE"

In Cathy Park Hong's poem "Rite of Passage,"[29] the speaker critiques acts of cultural appropriation by denouncing non-native speakers who borrow from and misuse the Korean language. Hong's speaker begins the poem in childhood, observing white women try on clothing. The poem then meditates on the speaker's romantic encounters in relation to shame and disgrace. By the end of the poem, Hong presents a disintegration of time and space, through the portrayal of historical figures in side shows — whose bodies were exoticized and capitalized upon by others. By criticizing this type of objectification, Hong points out that language, when misused, contains a wicked power — one that creates distance between communities, and thus, produces tension and gaps in cultural understanding.

Throughout the poem, Hong observes — and critiques — others' classification of the Korean female body as 'different.' The speaker starts the poem in a fitting room with her Korean mother, who stirs attention from the "white women pulling chenille over their breasts" when she returns for new clothing (l. 1-2). This gaze at Korean culture causes a sense of embarrassment and shame for the speaker, who notes that she "felt oddly collaged" in the dressing room, suggesting a fragmented state-of-being. Hong describes a bodily self-consciousness:

> I felt oddly collaged: elbow to nose, shin to eye,
> neck to breast, brow to toe. (Hong 17 ll. 3-4)

Hong's description of her "collaged" body replicates her navigation of her environment, which is fragmented and composed of numerous locations, images, and movements. Her disorientation suggests a discomfort in the way others construct or gaze at her body in parts — elbow, nose, shin, eye — rather than as a whole. Hong's attention to the bodily language in this poem implies a critique of the poetic form and tradition of blasons — a verse form, originating in the sixteen century, in

[29] See Appendix D for full-length poem, attached at the end of this Chapter (67).

which (male) poets praised female bodies or body parts within the poetry (Donaldson-Evans 463). In lines 3-4, particularly when Hong writes of "fe[eling] oddly collaged: elbow to nose, shin to eye,/ neck to breast, brow to toe," she critiques and resists the gaze of others 'making' her into an artistic 'collage' — only considering her body for aesthetic appeal. Hong suggests a discomfort in others using or viewing her body as 'desirable' precisely *because* of its different appearance.

The speaker furthers her critique of such objectification, by meditating on her own body as embedded (through language) within the land. For example, she notes:

> The arterial clouds shouldered a glassy reservoir.
> Divers made thin sleeves in the water,
>
> Fog rolled over the dry shrub mountains
> like air conditioning. (Hong 17 ll. 11-14)

Hong brings in a new landscape to the poem, which starts in "an open dressing room." The fog, clouds, and water suggest a faraway and aerial view of land, almost as if the speaker is attempting to uproot herself from the dressing room filled with white women and into the imaginative geography of her future.

Yet Hong draws on history, as well, to point out ongoing problematic objectification of Korean female bodies on a broader scale. For Hong, objectification of her body is made apparent through both language and others' gazes. The speaker describes a history of Americans mispronouncing and appropriating Korean language and culture:

> *Hey saekshi,* the American GIs cried to the Korean
> barmaids, pronouncing *saekshi 'sexy'*
>
> though *saekshi* meant *respectable woman,*
> *a woman eligible for marriage.* (Hong 17 ll. 7-10)

The linguistic switching that happens here is not necessarily code-switching, but a borrowing of a Korean term, which leads to a blurring of two cultural codes. The Korean definition of *saekshi,* "respectable woman," causes tension when compared to the American GI use of the term as a

substitute for "sexy." The speaker attempts to navigate complex "codes" of sexuality between Korean and American cultures, grappling between preserving "respectability" of the *saekshi*, versus claiming "*saekshi,"* or *sexy* qualities when encountering men. In this instance, American GIs borrow a Korean term — saekshi — yet, without the proper cultural context, they misuse the term, and what is purposed as a flirtatious compliment becomes degrading and exoticizing. Thus, the appropriation becomes two kinds of misuse of the Korean language: a literal mispronunciation, and the crude misunderstanding of the term that objectifies and exoticizes Korean women.

This misuse of Korean language highlights a sexual and cultural tension, which Hong amplifies through her speaker's struggle to speak. Hong writes: "When I flirted, marbles slivered out of my mouth/ like amphibious eggs" (Hong 17 ll. 5-6). For Hong, her speech is incomprehensible, hatching something feral or animalistic. Hong expresses her own attempts at English as animalistic, effortful. Interestingly, too, the *marbles* — as opposed to speech — are "like amphibious eggs" that slide out of her mouth. Marbles, which are lifeless, describe Hong's attempts at flirting, yet, *amphibious eggs,* which are waiting to hatch or be alive, also represent such attempts to flirt. Amphibious eggs evolve *into* something cold-blooded and traditionally thought to be ugly; Hong sees her 'flirtatiousness' as slimy, a failed attempt at beauty or vivaciousness.

Hong develops this struggle to communicate by visually illustrating her speaker's difficulty in talking, as well as critiquing non-Korean speakers' judgments of the language. She writes:

> A stutter inflated and reddened the face:
> eyes bulged and lips gaped to form,
>
> a fortune cookie cracked and a tongue rolled out.
> Wagged the Morse code but no one knew it. (Hong 17 ll. 23-26)

Hong suggests that it is problematic to think of fortune cookies and other objects as 'representative' of an entire culture. In fact, she critiques the acknowledgment of language *without* culture. By presenting the fortune cookie with a tongue, Hong suggests that it is untrue that you could "know"

all of Korean by learning one word of the language, and nothing of the actual culture. Furthermore, Hong suggests an inability in communication, by presenting a struggle to comprehend: "Wagged the Morse code but no one knew it" (l. 26). This inability to detect a 'secret' language or system of communication — in this case, Morse code — suggests another failure of understanding in the poem.

As a result, Hong actively subverts notions of objectification and exoticization within "Rite of Passage," drawing both into personal experience, as well as broader history. At the end of her poem, the speaker references 'freak' sideshow acts:

> Fragments of freaks: the Hottentot's ass,
> the Siamese twins' toupee, the indecisive chink
> who said, I do. Later, no forget it, I do not. (ll. 29-31)

Asian American diaspora poetry has been described by scholar Benzi Zhang as "[incorporating] both the imagery of exoticism and a critical perspective that subverts the very practice of exoticization" (101). Zhang adds, "Asian diaspora poetry, in other words, challenges us to rethink the practice of cultural exoticization in relation to Western ideological appropriations" (101). Hong references bodily features of the Siamese twins and the Hottentot to draw attention to the ways in which bodies are made 'other' and fragmented; as such, the Hottentot Venus and the Siamese twins were not seen as *humans*; rather, they were recognized for their "toupee" and "ass." Meanwhile, the "indecisive chink" creates a form of resistance by the end of the poem. Hong ends the piece with, "I do not," signifying a refusal to engage in acts of exoticization, or to let her speaker be exoticized by others. By calling out cultural appropriation in her poetic work, while further subverting 'traditional' "image[s] of exoticism" (i.e. fortune cookie, yet Hong adds a tongue) Hong rewrites the narrative of the exoticized, both giving this narrative a literal "tongue" (l. 25) while also problematizing a history of objectification.

DISMANTLING THE 'EASY' TRANSLATION: "TRANSLATING PAGAJI"

In her poem "Translating Pagaji,"[30] Cathy Park Hong delves into a similar critique of exoticization as in the previous two poems, manipulating questions of readership access with regards to form. Hong begins the piece with introductory directions: "*please fill all appropriate blanks with 'pagaji'* " she writes. Yet, she withholds from the reader the English definition of *pagaji,* and instead, provides 21 blank lines within the poem, which readers are instructed to fill in with the phonetics of the Korean word. The choice, at first, is a puzzling one. Why create a poem where readers are asked — literally — to perform a sort of translation exercise without the poet's help?

In her 2002 interview with *Women's Review of Books,* Hong addressed her conscious decision to withhold English translations from her poetry. She said: "…it seems that we are expected to get or at least look up certain canonical Western references, while if we are faced with anything non-Western, we expect notes, a neat little synopsis […] I think this privileges a certain kind of reader, which I don't want to do" (Hong 2002a, 15). According to Hong, her use of code-switching within her poetry raises the stakes for readers who are used to experiencing "Western poems," and strips away a sort of "reader privilege" that elevates the Western canon. Hong's use of code-switching, then, is innovative in its attempt to change reader response and reader experience. By code-switching into the poems, Hong presents a form of linguistic activism that directly challenges a canonical, Eurocentric view of poetry as monolingual.

Indeed, in "Translating Pagaji," Hong creates multiple code-switches to disarm readers through both form and content, thereby enabling the poem's speaker to claim agency as a producer of physical and emotional distance. However, this emotional distance is different from that of Che's and Rosal's poems, as discussed in Chapter II. Hong seeks to create a distance in romantic and

[30] See Appendix E for full-length poem, attached at the end of this Chapter (69).

sexual intimacy; the distancing in Hong's poems is an explicit and subversive seizure of power. As such, Hong produces distances in power between her and the reader, in addition to a distance in lingual acquisition.[31] Readers must rely on Hong's contextual clues within each line to decipher the proper meaning of "pagaji," which is never revealed throughout the poem.

Hong aims to draw out expectations that the reader may have about Korean language and culture through her presentation of the code-switches in the poem. As each "pagaji" is given its own blank, the reader is forced to fill in — and consequently guess — what the meaning of "pagaji" is, based on the surrounding context that Hong provides. As Hong shuffles the reader through the poem with 'fill-in-the-blanks,' the reader is challenged to directly address her own presumptions about what the Korean word may mean. At times, Hong intentionally provides sentence contexts that are provocative and reminiscent of stereotypes, forcing the reader to play *into* such stereotypes: "they said _____ was perfectly average for/ Asian women" (Hong 21 ll. 9-10). Hong asks her readers to guess, repeatedly, what "pagaji" means, disorienting the reader through a constantly shifting sentence context for the word. Hong begins the poem:

> Angrily, she turned _____ but said nothing.
>
> In the new country, she wore a Napoleonic jacket
> and drank box wine. She was _____ to
> box wine and
>
> glycerin _____ but was too embarrassed
> to tell anyone. (21 ll. 1-6)

Hong's conscious placement of the blank lines, in-between various moments in sentences, creates anticipated reader response. As linguists Ludmila Isurin et. al note in *Multidisciplinary Approaches to*

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[31] Of course, it is important to acknowledge that Hong does not *only* produce distance through code-switching; many other poetic devices are in operation in this poem, which negotiate with metaphorical distances of power and emotion as well. However, I argue that code-switching amplifies Hong's social critique of both reader and lover in the poem, through presenting a unique *linguistic* distance, and thus changing power dynamics in relation to audience access throughout the poem.

Code-Switching, when monolingual readers stumble upon a code-switched word in a sentence, they are prone to 'fill in' predicted meanings: "Readers consider the plausibility of certain expected words or phrases within a sentence, and the tendency is to place the more plausible expectations first in the process of interpreting a sentence" (7). Hong consciously toys with the automated reader response to "place the more plausible expectations first" in sentence comprehension. For example, in this specific moment in Hong's poem, "pagaji" in line 1 suggests a state-of-being: "She turned _____." Yet, in line 3, the most plausible meaning of "pagaji" is a bodily or physical response to box wine — perhaps [allergic] or [addicted]. However, if the reader then fills in the rest of the line: "She was [allergic] to/ box wine and/ glycerin…" (l. 3) and moves onto line 5, the meaning of "pagaji" becomes even more muddled. Hong writes: "glycerin _____ but was too embarrassed/ to tell anyone" (l. 5). Here, the word would more likely be considered a noun, related to glycerin. Throughout the poem, Hong repeatedly debunks the suggested "automated reader response" of Isurin et al. by shifting the sentence environment, so that "pagaji" becomes simultaneously noun, verb and adjective. As a result, Hong also dismantles a reading experience where ethnic and aesthetic are separate from one another. Rather, "pagaji" combines intentional aesthetic decisions, using the blank spaces, while also toying with reader expectations of race, culture and ethnicity through Hong's integration of Korean language and stereotypes of Asian women.

Thus, Hong not only disrupts our expectation of how *language* itself operates, but she also disrupts common perceptions of 'ethnic' or Asian American poetry as containing stereotypical notions of culture. Hong draws upon stereotypical images of Korean culture, yet she inverts these images through her re-definitions of "pagaji":

> […] She grabbed
> coupons for eyelid surgery at _____.
>
> _____ is a plastic container that can be bought
> in rainbow hues at your local Korean grocer.

_____ is making love with suit intact, zipper down. (ll. 27-31)

"Pagaji" becomes a physical place where the speaker can go to escape her physical [Asian] appearance by attaining "eyelid surgery," an attempt to make her eyes appeal to a Western standard of beauty. Yet, in the next line, "pagaji" is defined as an object (container), then, an agent of an activity ("making love with suit intact, zipper down"). When the "plastic container" is juxtaposed against "making love with suit intact, zipper down," Hong creates an effect of disorientation, in addition to a play with gender. The act of intercourse "with suit intact, zipper down" suggests a lack of intimacy that would normally be associated with a masculine body in "a suit," engaging in sexual intercourse, while "a plastic container that can be bought" implies a physical object that is easily attainable at a specific place: "your local Korean grocer." Hong demands the reader to capitalize on her imagination, seeking connections between disjointed images and [pagajis] when, in fact, there are none of them. Neither image seems directly related to each other, nor do these images connect to the coupons for eyelid surgery at [pagaji]. The movement of "pagaji" from place to object to activity not only defies the reader's expected 'rules' of language as belonging to *one* definition, but it also suggests a defiance of different cultural stereotypes, objects, and places. "Pagaji" begins to permeate all spheres of experience — merging into objects, dialogue, environments, and actions. Hong insinuates that the *meaning* of the word itself is not the key toward understanding the poem; rather, it is the process of watching "pagaji" evolve "in the new country," [32] as the speaker wrangles with cultural misunderstandings, tensions, and experiences.

In fact, Hong creates an intentional distancing even *within* the Korean itself. According to scholar Robert Grotjohn, the word "pagaji" in Korean means "gourd." In a review for the *Virginia Review of Asian Studies,* Grotjohn compares Hong's work to contemporary Korean American poet Suji Kwock Kim*,* noting that Hong's poetry contains less "identifiable Korean or Korean American

[32] All of the translations until line 32 take place in "the new country" (Hong 22).

stories" than Kim's work. In fact, it is Hong's abstract, 'unidentifiable' use of Korean language that Grotjohn pays particular attention to. He writes:

> [Hong] is a much less dependable translator [than Kim,] interject[ing] 21 blanks into the poem without ever translating *pagaji* (gourd) which fits well in only the last blank: 'In the old country, the old woman wearing a towel over / her head washed scallions in the _____.' (Grotjohn 1)

Grotjohn reveals the intentional distance of the speaker in purposefully creating mistranslations of "pagaji (gourd)." Interestingly, it is not until the speaker lands in the "old country" that the word "pagaji" is used correctly as its proper meaning, unbeknownst to the readers. At the end of the poem, Hong writes:

> In the old country, the old woman wearing a towel over
> her head washed scallions in the _____. She
> scratched her head scarf. It was a good day.
>
> (22 ll. 33-35)

Back in the speaker's homeland, Hong not only uses "pagaji" correctly, but she also states: "It was a good day," a statement that contradicts the confusion, tension and anxiety that occurs in "the new country" (ll. 2-32). This last use of "pagaji' is significant, as it signals that Hong has manipulated notions of knowledge and power with the reader, yet, rather than expose the reader to her misunderstanding (like she does in "All the Aphrodisiacs"), the translations remain a secret throughout the entire poem, proving the elasticity of language "in the new country." For immigrants in a foreign space, Hong suggests that communication becomes bound by cultural stereotypes, exoticization, and misappropriations. The immigrant experience, for Hong, is not only one of code-switching, but it is also one of constant maneuvering with language, moving *into* and out of such stereotypes and objectified notions of her own body. Hong's attempt to confuse the reader is an attempt to simulate her speaker's own experiences as a new body to a foreign land.

Thus, Hong creates a landscape where *readers* are made to feel foreign, and moreover, forced to consider their discomfort or foreignness in relation to the immigrant female subject. In line 2, "In the new country, she wore a Napoleonic jacket," Hong suggests movement from an "old" country to a "new," weaving in a movement of immigrants from the homeland to a foreign space. Hong depicts the cultural insecurity of arriving into a new land, and the sense of shame and unfamiliarity that follows: "too embarrassed/ to tell anyone" (l. 5). Through creating an effect of alienation for readers, the reading experience of "pagaji" for non-Korean readers begins to simulate the alienation of immigrants, and the accompanying humiliation of being made 'foreign.' Hong further illustrates this sense of alienation by writing:

> When she did not reach a certain height, she
> looked into hormonal _____ though
>
> they said _____ was perfectly average for
> Asian women.
>
> She felt a bloated sense of cultural _____
> so she took some antacids.

(Hong 21 ll. 7-12)

Hong details the speaker's state of physical abnormality, and implies a mounting sense of anxiety in relation to 'irregular' physical appearance throughout the poem. By noting, "When she did not reach into a certain height, she/ looked into hormonal _____," Hong implies bodily irregularity as measured against *other*, "normal" non-Asian bodies: "they said _____ was perfectly average for/ Asian women." The speaker pays a great deal of attention to the bodily and what is normal or abnormal, even seeking out *treatment* (antacids; "looked into hormonal _____") when she cannot achieve certain bodily norms. However, what readers are forced to fill in as "pagaji" are their own perceptions or estimations of cultural stereotypes; "pagaji" defines whatever is believed to be average for Asian women (l. 9-10). It is interesting to note that medicine and diagnosis both are defined as "pagaji" in lines 8 and 11. The treatment for not attaining a specific height is "hormonal

[pagaji,]" while the speaker "felt a bloated sense of cultural [pagaji]." Again, language becomes inverted to represent two entirely different objects; yet, by introducing "pagaji," Hong forces readers to pay attention to their own cultural expectations of Asian femininity.

As a result, the intentional code-switches force readers to entirely change their reading experiences of a poem. As Isurin, et. al observe in their linguistic analysis of code-switching texts, when readers *read* texts that code-switch, "there are often situations in which the initial 'set up' that provides for an expected word or phrase is found to be incorrect, causing a delay in the processing of the entire sentence and sometimes, the need to return to earlier portions of the sentence in order to clarify its meaning (7). Hong manipulates this notion of "return" in "Translating 'Pagaji.'" As readers struggle to make sense of "pagaji" in one line, they may "return to earlier portions of the sentence" — or of the entire poem — in order to decipher the meaning of the word. Rather than create a poetic piece that is easily translated, Hong asserts "Translating Pagaji" as a poem demanding the reader's full attention and time. She suggests that the immigrant experience is not one of 'easy' translation; rather, it is one of ongoing and complex grappling of linguistic and cultural codes. As such, she participates in a mode of linguistic activism, consciously resisting and criticizing such exoticisms that take place in the poem through manipulating code-switches into and out of Korean.

THE READER IS RESPONSIBLE: IMPLICATIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING AS RHETORICAL PROTEST

There is a sharp attention given to *sound* throughout all of Hong's work that enables Hong to cultivate power on the part of poet and speaker. As such, it is interesting to note that Hong chooses to focus on the phonetic sounds of Korean in all of her work — using the roman alphabet — rather than including Korean characters. As Wallinger-Schorn points out, inclusion of non-English characters within a poem would create complete inaccessibility upon the reader: "...the reader is

responsible for deciphering the non-English words or signs, if these are not annotated," she writes. "This subverts the eurocentric convention that ethnic speakers have to make sure their utterances are understood." For Wallinger-Schorn, in the context of Asian American poetry, inclusion of non-English characters within a poem is a conscious statement upon the part of the poet, who attempts to push past conventional, normative readings of Asian American poets as 'exotic,' 'foreign,' — inverting the pressure of an ethnic poet to enunciate or perform for a dominantly English-speaking audience. Indeed, Hong presents a rather 'untraditional' translation project throughout her poems, one in which memory and experience are fragmented within the poem (as in "All the Aphrodisiacs" and "Rite of Passage"), and readers are made to seek out translations on their own ("Translating Pagaji").

According to Wallinger-Schorn, if non-English characters are introduced, the poet does not perform, necessarily, for the reader — but contrastingly, she offers the reader a glimpse of what the multilingual Asian American experience of language *is*. Rather than translate for the reader, the poet forces the reader to push outside of traditional reading 'comfort zones,' and do the work. However, Wallinger-Schorn fails to mention what happens when the poet does not completely use foreign characters, but *sounds*. Hong thereby complicates this claim by using the roman alphabet, permitting her readers to at least phonetically *sound out* Korean words, i.e. 'saekshi,' 'han-gul,' yet, in some instances, failing to translate for the reader. Hong seems to "tell (us) it's a secret" (Hong 37 l. 12), hiding the real meaning of words from the reader, yet leaking out just enough for the readers to understand that the language is present as a secretive, almost powerful force only accessible to some. For readers, this has a different effect than the subversion from "eurocentric convention" that Wallinger-Schorn implies. In "All the Aphrodisiacs," for example, Hong reveals some translations explicitly — i.e. *"pae-go-p'a (I am hungry),"* yet hides others behind abstract images or performances — "*gijek niin tigit rril*—the recitation of the alphabet" (ll. 8, 14).

By showing us *some* translations and hiding others, Hong toys with the notion of language as a secret, able to be contained and unleashed. Hong attempts to subvert the notion that multilingual states of speech mean *less* or are not powerful. Through her use of poetic code-switching, Hong complicates multilingualism as experimentation with distance and power. In "Rite of Passage," for example, the existence of two cultural and linguistic shifts between '*saekshi'* and 'sexy' results in a powerful wrestling between two different sexual states of the speaker — one demure, the other overly sexual. Meanwhile, in "All the Aphrodisiacs," the speaker claims power as a multilingual presence, and in doing so, claims agency as the director of distance in the poem. Thus, code-switching enables the multilingual speaker to claim power and shape the relational distance between readers, characters, and speakers of the poem.

C. ***All the Aphrodisiacs***

blowfish arranged on a saucer. Russian roulette. angelic slivers.

ginseng. cut antlers allotted in bags dogs on a spit, a Dutch girl

winking holds a bowl of shellfish.

white cloth, drunkenness, a different language leaks out—
the idea of throat, an orifice, a cord—

you say it turns you on when I speak Korean.
The gold paste of afterbirth, no red—

Household phrases —*pae-go-p'a* *(I am hungry)*
—*ch'i-wa* *(Clean up)*
—*kae sekki* *(Son of a dog)*

I breathe those words into your ear, which make you climax;

afterwards you ask me for their translations. I tell you it's a secret.

gijek niin tigit rril—the recitation of the alphabet; guttural dipthong, gorgeous.

What are the objects that turn me on: words—

han-gul: the language first used by female entertainers, poets, prostitutes.

The sight of shoes around telephone wires, pulleyed by their laces, the
blunt word cock.

Little pink tutus in FAO Schwarz,
when I was four they used to dress me as a boy,

white noise, whitewashed. the whir of ventilation in the library.

Even quarantined amongst books, I tried to kiss you once.

Strips of white cotton, the color of the commoner, the color of virtue,
the color that can be sullied—

my hand pressed against your diaphragm, corralling your pitch.

a pinch of rain caught between mouths,

analgesic, tea. poachers drawing blood—

strips of white cotton I use to bind your wrist to post, tight
enough to swell vein, allow sweat—

sweat to sully the white of your sibilant body,

the shrug of my tongue, the shrug of command, *ssshhht.*

—CATHY PARK HONG, *Translating Mo'um* (37).

D. *Rite of Passage*

Childhood was spent in an open dressing room where
white women pulled chenille over their breasts and

I felt oddly collaged: elbow to nose, shin to eye,
neck to breast, brow to toe

When I flirted, marbles slivered out of my mouth
like amphibious eggs.

Hey saekshi, the American GIs cried to the Korean
barmaids, pronouncing *saekshi 'sexy'*

though *saekshi* meant *respectable woman,*
a woman eligible for marriage.

The arterial clouds shouldered a glassy reservoir.
Divers made thin sleeves in the water,

Fog rolled over the dry shrug mountains
like air conditioning.

She's back, the saleslady whispered to her assistant,
when Mother came to try on a blouse.

A rain of Rapunzels fell from their towers,
bodies first, hair trailing like streamers.

My first kiss was with a twenty-year-old man
who whispered *your hands are shaking.*

When thoughts of disgrace invaded the mind,
I hummed or sang to drown out the noise.

A stutter inflated and reddened the face:
eyes bulged and lips gaped to form,

a fortune cookie cracked and a tongue rolled out.
Wagged the Morse code but no one knew it.

Antidepressants lined up like clever pilgrims.
I felt quiet that night.

Fragments of freaks: the Hottentot's ass,
the Siamese twins' toupee, the indecisive chink

31 who said, I do. Later, no forget it, I do not.

—CATHY PARK HONG, *Translating Mo'um* (17).

E. Translating "Pagaji"

please fill all appropriate blanks with 'pagaji.'

Angrily, she turned _____ but said nothing.

In the new country, she wore a Napoleonic jacket
and drank box wine. She was _____ to
box wine and

glycerin _____ but was too embarrassed
to tell anyone.

When she did not reach a certain height, she
looked into hormonal _____ though

they said _____ was perfectly average for
Asian women.

She felt a bloated sense of cultural _____
so she took some antacids.

She did not _____, she strode.

In college, her shyness was mistranslated as _____,
so to look the part, she acquired pierces.

Was it her Napoleonic jacket? European men with their
Vittel water bottles and blinding Adidas' hounded
her for directions. She told them to _____.

She holler _____! and turned the school into guerilla—

_____ with a straight face. Later they found out that

it was stolen from _____, a dystopic novel.

In the new country, she eventually grew _____
to make up for height.

It became the irrepressible joke. She could affect
any facial _____. But _____ was more
versatile, because of its daredevil

_____. She grabbed

coupons for eyelid surgery at _____.

_____ is a plastic container that can be bought
in rainbow hues at your local Korean grocer.

_____ is making love with suit intact, zipper down.

She conquered the cul-de-sac through slash and _____.

In the old country, the old woman wearing a towel over
her head washed scallions in the _____. She
scratched her head scarf. It was a good day.

—CATHY PARK HONG, *Translating Mo'um* (21).

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that code-switching enables a more nuanced understanding of Asian American literature by amplifying thematic distances, reflecting the experiences of hyphenated identities, and offering poets a subversive tool to challenge notions of exoticization. As a result, readers are asked to experience the lingual and thematic content in ways that may complicate notions of language as static, or separate from constructing identity. Che, Rosal, and Hong all relay their experiences, in part, through code-switches with English and a second language, in order to more accurately portray — and reproduce — their own bilingual Asian American narratives, narratives which have been left out of the 'dominant' canon. Thus, these poets not only redefine Asian American poetry, but they also challenge existing readings of minority poetry as consumed entirely by race, or consumed entirely by form. Code-switching demands readings of the poems that cross multiple ethnic, cultural, historical and artistic borders, resulting in poetry that intersects the ethnic with the aesthetic.

It is important to acknowledge that poetic code-switching has a diverse array of effects in addition to those analyzed in my thesis. In order to extend this idea, I propose a secondary reading of poetic code-switching and its relationship to formal qualities of a poem. I focus on code-switching and its interaction with visual space in Cathy Park Hong's poem "Zoo," offering a taste of how code-switching, in addition to its negotiations with thematic distance, operates in tandem with other formal poetic devices, such as aesthetic space.

As discussed in my project, to view the poetry simply through the lens of ethnic culture and language would be oversimplifying the rich, nuanced and — at times — inventive nature of Hong's work, which speaks not only to the borders between language and ethnic culture, but also informs us about the relationship between language and spatial borders. As a body moving through foreign

land, Hong's speaker in "Zoo"[33] seems fascinated by the physical boundaries separating zoo animals — in this case, a metaphor for immigrants — from onlookers (extended to the readers).

In "Zoo," Hong's play with form presents a figurative type of code-switch, where the poet, in addition to speaking of code-switching as a tool for distancing cultural identities, also consciously uses *space* within the poem to stretch out similar emotional distances as well. Thus, the distance is not only found through a switch in language, but also through a focus on different spatial and aesthetic areas within the poem. At the onset of the poem, Hong uses Korean syllables — *Ga, na, da* — to break up English terms with sound. Moreover, she adds a series of spaces after each Korean syllable, in order to stress the separation between English and Korean, zoo animal and human viewer, immigrant and natural citizen. Hong writes:

> *Ga* The fishy consonant
> *Na* The monkey vowel
>
> *Da* The immigrant's tongue
> as shrill or guttural. (13 ll. 1-4)

In this moment, Hong creates an intentional set of visual "bars" through her use of spacing and italics, both physically distinguishing Korean *Ga, Na, Da* noises from their English lines, and additionally placing the Korean syllables as distinct visual *markers* for her readers. It's assumed that Hong's readers will not understand Korean, as she provides translations for each Korean syllable or word. Thus, *Ga, Na, Da* serve as visual signs for her reader, rather than linguistic signs, forcing her readers to negotiate distance in understanding between Korean and English. For the non-native speaker, Korean is arguably similar to the animal that one might observe at a zoo and objectify. Hong seems aware of the visual significance of looking, with regards to a code-switch in language and in aesthetic space. She ultimately exploits this inclination to watch, by comparing the zoo-goer's

[33] See Appendix F for full-length poem, attached at the end of the Conclusion (74).

tendency to gape or watch a creature to a native speaker's tendency to gape at a foreigner's use of language.

Hong translates the Korean syllables *here* as negatively animalistic: "fishy consonant," "monkey vowel," "immigrant's tongue/ as shrill or guttural." Korean becomes linked to the strangeness and savageness of animals. In the process, Hong turns the Korean language into an animal "with an atavistic tail," noting the ancient, flawed notion of linguistic history with regards to exploiting human beings and language. She references "The Hottentot click called undeveloped," briefly referencing a history of language — in this case, the Hottentot language — as thought of as inhumane, a language spoken by apes[34]. Furthermore, the Hottentot click is "undeveloped," and history's thorax is "cracked," two broken or dysfunctional qualities of an animal.

Despite the ways in which I have tried to elucidate code-switching as a strategic poetic device in this thesis, it is impossible to define "one way" of poetic code-switching, nor is the ultimate goal of this thesis to categorize poetic code-switching into a singular formula. Rather, it is necessary to acknowledge that code-switching as a poetic tool operates in tandem with formal and other devices within a poem, in order to diversify, expand, and reflect the contemporary Asian American poetic experience.

[34] Cambridge Tribune. "Cambridge Tribune 9 July 1887 — Cambridge Public Library." *Cambridge Public Library*. Cambridge Public Library, n.d. Web. 23 Jan. 2015.

F. *Zoo*

Ga The fishy consonant,
Na The monkey vowel.

Da The immigrant's tongue
as shrill or guttural.

Overture of my voice like the flash of bats.
The hyena babble and apish libretto.

Piscine skin, unblinking eyes.
Sideshow invites foreigner with the animal hide.

Alveolar *tt,* sibiliant *ss,* and glottal *hh.*

shi: poem
kkatchi: magpie
ayi: child

Words with an atavistic tail. History's thorax considerably
cracked. The Hottentot click called undeveloped.

Mother and Father obsessed with hygiene:
as if to rid themselves of their old third world smell.

Labial *bs* and palatal *ts:*

La the word
Ma speaks
Ba without you

I dreamed a Korean verse, a past conversation
with Mother when they said I was blathering unintelligibly
in my sleep.

The mute girl with the baboon's face unlearned
her vowels and cycled across a rugged phonetic map.

Sa glossary
Ah din
Ja impossible word

Macaws turned into camouflaged moths.
The sky was overcast, the ocean a slate gray

along the wolf-hued sand. I dived into the ocean
swam across channels to islands without flags;

replaced the jingoist's linotype with my yellowing
canines and shrilled against the anemic angel who

cradled the bells that dictated time and lucid breath.

—CATHY PARK HONG, *Translating Mo'um* (13).

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