

Book Reviews

Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu. *Transgressive Transcripts: Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Chinese Canadian Women's Writing*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. Pp. x, 178. US\$54.

Bennett Fu's *Transgressive Transcripts* studies the ways four Chinese Canadian women writers—Sky Lee, Larissa Lai, Lydia Kwa, and Evelyn Lau—produce “hidden transcripts,” defined as a “critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant” (James C. Scott qtd. in Fu 1). Fu situates the re-evaluation of female bodies and sexuality within the larger context of Canadian history and culture, arguing that these women “translate their personal experiences into texts that articulate the heroines’ sexual desires, fantasies, and practices in an explicit manner. In other words, they participate in the discursive formations of history, ethnicity, and sexuality. More precisely, in an attempt to highlight the ‘bad subject,’ they engage with the notion of transgressive sexualities” (8–9).

Largely influenced by the sexual/textual politics of the 1980s and early 1990s, Fu employs the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, using such recognizable notions as “two lips” (Fu 75), “abjection” (96), “*chora*,” (107), and “M/other” (114) to read subversion in his texts. The book is divided neatly into four chapters with a chapter for each author. The chapter on Lee is entitled “Spatial Transcript” and “deals with how migrant female bodies perform in various locations and how defined and confined spaces intervene in alternative sexualities” (29). Fu writes, “Lee creates a genealogy of female characters who transgress normality; in particular, the female bodies in Lee's novel traverse the hyphenated space by subverting established patriarchal laws to claim their subjectivity” (29–30). This first chapter looks at the way the multi-generational family saga of *Disappearing Moon Café*, which follows families of Chinese Canadians from 1892 to 1986, moves from confinement to mobility, using both “historical facts and literary magic realism” (30). Fu contends that “space is the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced. Space . . . is a crucial factor in the social production of sexed corporeality: the built environment provides the context and the coordinates for contemporary forms of the body” (34). Thus, by the fourth generation, Kae and Beatrice reverse the trajectory of the female immigrant experience as they are “illuminated in Hong Kong” rather than

in Canada. This “enlightenment when returning to the motherland reverses the promise of a move from dystopia (old-world China) to utopia (new-world Canada); unlike them, their immobile mothers are imprisoned in the nightmarish ‘woman-hating world’ of Vancouver’s Chinatown” (45). For Fu, “in the era of globalization, transgressing essentialist norms and breaking the ‘secret codes’ seem to carve out a new Asian North American sensibility” (50).

The theme of transgression in Lai’s *When Fox Is a Thousand* becomes “morphological” in Chapter Two. Morphological transcripts include bodily transformations, reinventions of identity, self-fashioning of gender, and travelling through ancient and contemporary cultures as well as Western and Asian tales (57). Fu provides a helpful explanation of the trickster figure of the fox found in traditional Chinese tales, and his knowledge of Chinese folk and literary source materials adds a fascinating and original layer to his readings (58). The chapter provides a nice literary reading of Lai’s ambitious first novel, exploring topics such as cross-dressing, passing, Gothic doubles, parody, and intertextuality.

Chapter Three, called “Genealogical Transcript,” examines Kwa’s *This Place Called Absence* through Kristeva’s theory of abjection. Fu argues that Kwa “re-territorializes the position of the abject (turn-of-the century prostitutes and the contemporary lesbian) on two levels: breaking the paternal law to seek their freedom and breaking temporal and spatial barriers to establish women’s solidarity, a close bond in which mothers, lovers, and daughters support each other and create a sense of community” (101). Particularly intriguing is Fu’s link between a *yin* space or absence and Lacanian lack (109), which is turned by Kwa into a “metaphor for possibility” (110).

Lau’s *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* and *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far* are studied in the last chapter, entitled “Hypersexual Transcript.” Here, not surprisingly, the focus is on deviance and how, like abjection, deviance “disturbs the very identity, system, and order it seeks to found by establishing a ridge between the inside and outside, rendering the ‘I’ to a multiple, contradictory, and discontinuous subjectivity” (119). Fu notes, “deviance/defiance has reversed the terms of mainstream culture’s normative discourse by wholly embracing the outlaw culture: prostitution, running away, and drug addiction. It also illuminates the freakishness (i.e., *das Unheimliche*) and brutality of the ‘real’ world” (131). Fu argues that Lee, Lai, Kwa, and Lau are all engaged in

developing a new feminist praxis that articulates the ways in which (in)visibility, otherness, bonding, and stigma are reproduced on Chinese Canadian women’s bodies. . . . Disclosing their hidden

transcript in transgressive ways, Chinese Canadian women writers have successfully transformed it into a *public* transcript, portending a turning of the tables. (148)

Given that these books were published between 1989 and 2000, the newness of the “feminist praxis” is questionable by 2013. However, *Transgressive Transcripts* provides intelligent and lucid, though somewhat predictable, readings.

Eleanor Ty

Ode Ogede. *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Inward*. Lanham: Lexington-Rowman, 2011. Pp. xvii, 227. US\$65.00.

Ode Ogede’s *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Inward* has recuperated the term *intertextuality* from its two decades of disuse in a detailed discussion of the intra-continental dialogues among major African writers. He argues that “in order for a more compendious understanding of the field [of African literature] to emerge, intertextuality must take a more central stage rather than the passing nod which it currently enjoys” (209).

The book is a significant study of disjunctions and continuities among African artists. Although its opening paragraphs might wrongly suggest that its subject is influence, its actual focus is on how African writers re-write one another creatively. Divided into five chapters and a short conclusion, it juxtaposes Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* (1961) and his fellow Nigerian Flora Nwapa’s *One is Not Enough* (1981) in terms of the writers’ representation of prostitution; the Nigerian Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) and the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) as satirical representations of the post-independence situation; Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1965) and the South African/Botswanan Bessie Head’s *Maru* (1971) for their representation of minorities within an ethnic group; and works by Okinba Launko and Chimalum Nwankwo for thematic echoes of their fellow Nigerian Christopher Okigbo. Ogede succeeds in showcasing the diversity of African literature and relocating it from what he considers regionalism.

Ogede reads individual works with great sensitivity and attention to detail. Handling a topic which could easily draw a critic to Franco Moretti’s con-