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# Betwixt and Between Past and Present: Cultural and Generic Hybridity in the Fiction of Mary Yukari Waters

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*A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. . . . The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise: it has caught his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*

Walter Benjamin 1968, 260

Humanity is increasingly turning back to its history, and in the process it contemplates, compares and adjusts whatever is offered by bygone generations and civilizations. As a result of the huge technology in science in general and in communication technology in particular, humanity is opening up to new cultures and is forever coming up with hybrid offspring, both physical and aesthetic, on an unprecedented scale. That is why cultural hybridity features strongly in contemporary American fiction, especially after the United States has emerged as the hegemonic capitalist power that attracts people from every corner of the world yielding a growing diversity and a rich cultural vigor.

The concept of "American Literature" is currently being revised in the light of multiculturalism. The "borderlands," which has replaced the "frontier," has dominated a considerable area in American studies. Amy Kaplan describes the "frontier" as "a major conceptual site in American studies, which has undergone revision from the vacant space of the wilderness to a bloody battlefield of conflict and conquest, and more recently to a site of contacts, encounters and collisions that produce new hybrid cultures" (1993,16). That is why Kaplan calls for a critique that links the "internal categories of gender, race and ethnicity to the global dynamics of empire building" (1993, 16). But do these internal categories help in the coherence or do they add to the fragmentation of diverse identities? It is the dynamics of this critique of multiple identification and hybrid cultures that is being traced here in this study and how all this is reflected in narrative responses to such conditions of the examination of the self and, on a broader scale, community. This study builds on Victor Turner's theory of "liminality" as referring to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the change in established structures and hierarchical order. Such liminal conditions of change and conversion are situations to be studied on their own right where real-life experience modifies human beings cognitively, emotionally, and morally, leading eventually to the transmission of

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ideas and to the formation of structures. From a perspective of liminality, the cultural dimension of human experience is not an impediment to a more rational and organized world<sup>1</sup> but is a tool in transforming the social world by means of rituals, myths, and symbols. The amalgamation of such elements is not a threat to the so-called purity of culture – if there's any – but a matrix that yields richer elements that encompass more cultures in a process that goes on indefinitely. The term 'cultural hybridity' is used in this study rather than 'mixed race' or 'multi-ethnicity' because by using the former, more stress will be given to the efforts of preserving the minor culture in the face of the dominant; while using the latter terms might connote the efforts of assimilation of minor culture within the dominant. Moreover, the study focuses not on biological or racial mixing and what such mixing entails, rather it focuses on how two cultures can be 'assimilated' within a person with perfect harmony, without the tragic obligation of having to choose one.

The fiction of Mary Yukari Waters moves beyond Gloria Anzaldúa's attempt at modifying the monoracial worldview that has deemed non-Western cultural differences dismal or invisible to what Jane Park calls a "highly commodified form of mestiza consciousness . . . [where] racial difference, properly contained and sanitized through class and/or cultural capital, is neither ignored nor reviled but, rather, actively celebrated and portrayed as desirable" (Beltrán 2008, 185). It depicts the shifting identities of the self, portraying not just heterogeneity, but finally the metaphysical human aspiration that allows them to integrate their need to hold on to the past with the necessity to accept the present, and eventually to look forward to the unexpected joys of the future. This paper will deal with two short stories of Waters: "Rationing" and "Aftermath" which are included in her debut collection of short stories *The Laws of Evening* (2002).

Mary Yukari Waters is of Irish American and Japanese origin. She was born in Japan in 1965 and though she moved to the U.S. at age nine, all her writings reflect the Japanese culture and tradition which she was introduced to at an early age by her grandmother and elderly neighbors. As a child with Western looks (for she did not take after her Japanese mother), she struggled in Japan because she stood out among other Japanese children. Her whiteness was a burden in a Japanese milieu as she was racially identifiable. But moving to the U.S. she mixed normally with the other children and was relieved to be out of the "spotlight:"<sup>2</sup> "It's hard to reconcile with the fact that I look so Western and yet a lot of me is actually very very Asian" (Tseng 2004).

Waters was charmed by the life of her mother and grandmother and the hardships they had been through as well as the way they took those hardships. Waters would recount how her grandmother's generation had always fascinated her and, accordingly, she had to deal with the subject of the changing "industrialization/westernization of Japan" (Tseng 2004). She depicts the qualities needed for the rebuilding of Japan after the war symbolized in Saburo's father in "Rationing," namely, stoicism, rationality and balance as contrasted to Saburo's uncle's careless abundance which did not help him survive the war.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the theory of "hybrid degeneracy," people of mixed race and culture were "emotionally unstable, irrational, and biologically inferior to the 'pure' races of their parents" (Beltrán 10).

<sup>2</sup> America is an outstanding example of the in-betweens who belong in neither camp and in both: "Since 1970, the number of mixed-race children in the United States has quadrupled. And there are six times as many intermarriages today as there were in 1960" (Etzioni 1997).

Born to parents of different cultures, Mary Yukari Waters can be labeled a “liminal” figure according to Victor Turner. The term “liminal” was introduced to anthropology by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les Rites de Passage* (1909). The rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage consist, according to Van Gennep, of a three-part structure: separation, liminal period and reassimilation. The person undergoing the rite is first stripped of his or her social status, passes through the liminal period of transition in which his or her structural attributes are neutralized or made ambiguous and is finally given his or her new status and reassimilated into society. Victor Turner considers the middle stage of the rite of passage when all the action during social transition takes place a culturally “dangerous,” but, at the same time, a culturally “creative” stage. Liminal figures are straddling “betwixt and between” cultural positions and in the course of such a process straddle between identities (Weber 1995, 527). Though Turner perceives liminality as a “midpoint of transition . . . between two positions” and a temporary state rather than a permanent one, he concedes that in modern societies “[i]nstead of the liminal being a passage, it seemed to be coming to be regarded as a state” (Turner 1974, 261). The liminal state invokes a symbolic realm of values and meanings, which in its turn invokes a symbiotic counterpart of social structure. Turner calls this counter realm “communitas.” Because the liminal condition symbolically yields human bonds that transcend the common daily social relations, liminality, therefore, expresses universal moral values that help in individual psychological development, and, it eventually, expresses the possibility of both moral growth for a society and evolutionary development for humanity. As will be shown in the study, the liminal state of the protagonists opens their eyes to moral values that have been dormant waiting for the slightest sign (a memory, a smell) to awaken their consciousness of their psychological development.

Roles played by people on the racial and ethnic margins of cultural situation are being emphasized in present-day critical practice: “This attention to the margins of culture and to cultures once marginalized by mainstream cultural historians is proving to be a hallmark of the new American studies” (Patell 1999, 169). Marginalized communities who were previously literarily either effaced or represented stereotypically have been decentering “white” communities since, as Victor Turner noted in 1982, “what was once considered ‘contaminated,’ ‘promiscuous,’ ‘impure’ [was] becoming the focus of postmodern analytical attention” (Kapchan 1999, 239). The field for comparing and coming up with terms concerned with multicultural communities is widening: whereas Marwan Kraidy favors “hybridity” over “creolization,” “mestizaje,” or “syncretism”<sup>3</sup> because it is “related to the three interconnected realms of race, language and ethnicity” (2005, 1); David S. Goldstein compares hybridity and “polyculturalism” saying that whereas hybridity is received, polyculturalism is achieved (2007, 114). Those previously

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<sup>3</sup> Creolization, *mestizaje* and syncretism are more limited than hybridity since creolization and *mestizaje* are related to specific cultures (African American and Latina/Latino respectively), while syncretism is associated with theology and religion.

marginalized are allowing a new sense of not only cultural hybridity and adaptation, but a serious narrative reflection of identities previously marked in terms of class, gender, religion or ethnicity. Fiona Bowie cites Victor Turner to illustrate that those marginalized have a potentiality to create their own myths and symbols:

Liminality, marginality and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodic reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature and culture. But they are more than classification, since they incite men to action as well as to thought. Each of these productions has a multivocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psycho-biological levels simultaneously. (Bowie 2000, 170)

Waters chooses, for her two short stories to be published in the U.S., two characters that would have been otherwise marginalized and marked according to their ethnicity and gender respectively: a Japanese retired university professor, and a Japanese widowed mother. Both, in their devoted upbringing of their children, create their own myths and symbols that help in molding, not just the cultural background of their children, but that of the coming generations as well.

Will Kymlicka's comment on "American multiculturalism" adds certain conditions for intergroup relations like fluid group boundaries and multiple identification in order for such a multicultural society to function efficiently:

The appropriate form of multiculturalism must be fluid in conception of groups and group boundaries (new groups may emerge, older groups may coalesce or disappear); voluntary in its conception of group affiliation (individuals should be free to decide whether and how to affiliate with their community of descent); and nonexclusive in its conception of group identity (being a member of one group does not preclude identification with another, or with the larger American nation). (1998, 73)

Kymlicka does not want ethnic/Americans to separate their conflicting identities in order to fit in. They should not bring their lifestyles to conform to various codes; instead, they should have the freedom of multiple identification in whichever place and with whichever group, be it a minority or mainstream.

Waters fulfills Kymlicka's exemplary mode of multiculturalism. Waters admits that her biracial origin has shaped her identity in a way that makes her feel "it's like two completely different selves, but I like it. I don't necessarily try to combine them so much. I kind of go from one to the other. . . . It's like two alternate worlds that I can go back and forth with" (Tseng 2004). Waters takes pride in the stoicism of the post-war Japanese generation. The opening sentence in "Rationing" begins: "Saburo's father belonged to that generation which, having survived the war, rebuilt Japan from ashes, distilling defeat and loss into a single-minded focus

with which they erected cities and industries and personal lives" (58). The stoicism of his father was a matter that aroused Saburo's awe and bewilderment. Saburo's father took any kind of calamity calmly and in a matter-of-fact attitude. When Saburo's uncle was dying, his father advises Saburo that, "when you love a sick person you have to make the choice of either using up that energy on tears or else saving it for constructive actions such as changing bedpans and spoonfeeding and giving sponge baths" (58). After the death of Saburo's mother, all that the father did was to draw a big X over the box of December 28<sup>th</sup>, the day of the mother's death, and say, "this was a bad, bad day" (63). When Saburo's father's sight was fading, he told Saburo, "If I go blind now, at my age . . . I plan to end my life" (65). Saburo imagined his father would die "as courteous and restrained" as he had been in his life. Self-sufficiency and avoidance of becoming a burden are central to the culture of the elder Japanese. The idea of becoming overly dependent is either unacceptable or a source of stress for many of them. On the other hand, Waters does include some incidents that portray the progressive American cultural invasion of Japan: In "Aftermath," seven-year-old Toshi and his friends are playing American dodgeball and eating cubes of peanut butter. Toshi's young uncle, Noboru is the mouthpiece for the necessity to "reinvent [themselves]" and to "change to fit the modern world" (100).

Nonetheless, we can only do justice to our time by comparing it to the time of our ancestors and their stories. Walter Benjamin noted in his *Illuminations* that "[t]o articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (1968, 257). Dealing with past happenings and bygone days would be best conjured up through ancestors. Toni Morrison observes such a phenomenon in African American art when she compares characters in a lot of mainstream white literature seeking solace in the "contemplation of serene nature" to Black characters seeking solace from ancestors: "There is always an elder there. And these ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom. . . the presence or absence of that figure determined the success or the happiness of the character" (Evans 1984, 343).

Toni Morrison's stress on the importance of ancestors for the happiness of the character in this sense applies to Turner's view of liminality as well. Turner mentions an essential characteristic of liminal rites; namely, everything should be done under the authority of "a master of ceremonies:" "The authority of the elders is absolute, because it represents the absolute, the axiomatic values of society in which are expressed the 'common good' and the common interest" (1967, 100). Ancestors in the Japanese culture are believed to be watching over and protecting the ones they left behind. In Waters' "Rationing," Saburo was thriving: "At thirty, Saburo was doing well for himself. . . . Life was pleasant and under control" (64). He has lived his life with his father, towards whom he felt deep awe and respect, and his mother, "with her cheerful chatter, so often served as their buffer" (61). Waters chose Japan of the post war for the setting of her stories because she is insisting that it is this generation (Saburo's father and Toshi's mother) with their strong cultural rootedness who have passed on such heritage to the next generation. It is then Saburo's and Toshi's turn to maintain the cycle till it reaches Waters who feels "very very Asian," and, through her fiction, she is carrying on the cultural obligation of her mixed race.

Cultural hybridity is not the only form of hybridity present in Waters' fiction. She weaves genres in a way that reflects how much influence her hybrid origin exercises upon her. To understand a genre needs a close examination of the social context that produced such a genre. When this social context is "hybridized" itself, it will produce "hybridized" genres. Laura Behling argues that "[g]eneric hybrids can be understood as responses to multicultural voices 'hybridized' themselves, in American society, an idea that Kenneth Burke posits in his suggestion that 'literary works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose' " (2003, 414). The questions posed after Japan's surrender were how to rebuild the country and the people and how to change in order to fit the modern world but without disrupting the balance between industrialization/westernization of Japan and its indigenous culture and traditions.

As mentioned previously, liminality is a condition that helps generate myths, symbols and rituals and each of these productions has a multivocal character. In Waters' fiction, there is an emblematic interpenetration of the historic, the mythic and the symbolic. When such patterns of interpenetration are repeated, with the past interfused with the present, they attempt to reconcile disparate qualities within the imaginary, thus marking out one major feature of her writing that transforms history, parable and myth into something contemporaneous. At every moment the meaning of the past is assessed by reference to the present and, of the present by reference to the past; the resulting assessment modifies the orientation to or even the plans for the future, and these in turn react upon the evaluation of the past. This going back and forth in time features distinctively in her writing. On going to and returning from the festival, Toshi is rushing and racing, while his mother is pleading for him to "slow down" and "wait." They greet an old man named Watanabe, but Watanabe thinks Makiko's younger brother, Noboru, Yoshitsune, her dead husband: "Yes, poor Mr. Watanabe, Makiko thinks. Bit by bit he is being pulled back in, like a slowing planet, toward some core, some necessary center of his past" (Aftermath 100). If Toshi symbolizes the future that cannot wait to come and Mr. Watanabe the past that would not let go, Makiko represents the present that is trying to achieve balance between both: "Makiko thinks of her future. She is still full of life and momentum. There is no doubt that she will pass through this period and into whatever lies beyond it, but at a gradually slowing pace; a part of her, she knows, will lag behind in the honeyed light of pre-war years" (100- 101). Makiko can stand for Klee's *Angelus Novus* who is torn between tending to the tragedies of the past and surrendering to the inevitable arrival of the future.

Similar symbolism is assigned to the characters of "Rationing." For Saburo, his dead uncle Kotai, who died when Saburo was only six, represented the affluence and prosperity of the past. Looking at a photo of Kotai with his friends, Saburo feels: "[t]he aura of careless abundance often wafted up around him, faint and nebulous as spirit incense." (59) The free spirit, the "outrageous pranks" of the "martial arts champion and dandy" held for Saburo the magic of the past that is to be contrasted to the "rationing" of his father who assigned for everything certain portions whether food, energy or even emotions. However, Saburo's fascination with his uncle is checked by his mother when he once overhears her telling a neighbor that Kotai was born in the year of the rooster and Saburo knew that roosters "finished their crowing early in the day" (59). Here Waters is mixing symbolism with myth in a beautifully delineated picture to prove that culture does not have racial boundaries; culture is forever developing for all humanity.

Memory is one way to relate the past to the present: "If the past casts a shadow on the present through memory, the present also pre-imposes on the past by means of memory. . . . what Nietzsche calls 'memory of the will,' an active memory that is sustained by the will to survive" (Xu 1994). Waters is interested in memory and "why we remember certain memories and not other memories, and how that affects your idea of who you are. Sometimes you almost manipulate memories to get what you feel like you need to get" (Tseng 2004). Waters is reflecting this in almost all her writing. In "Aftermath," the father, Yoshitsune teaches his three-year-old son, Toshi, how to salute in a manly military way because when he is

out fighting in the Pacific, this is how [he is] going to remember him. . . . Later when her husband was gone, it comforted [Makiko] to think that the same images swam in both their minds at night. Even today, Toshi's three-year-old figure is vivid in her mind. On the other hand, she has not fully absorbed the war years, still shrinks from those memories and all that has followed. (95)

However, when Makiko asks her son what he remembers of his dead father, all that the boy can remember "of his father is being carried on one arm before a sunny window" (97). Very often people push some special memories to the foreground while force other memories to the background until these memories are forgotten and the past is constantly (re)shaped according to the way each one of us wants to look at it. It is usually the tiniest detail that might cause dormant memories to be conjured. After attending a joyous festival, Makiko hopes that "[p]erhaps Toshi will remember this night. Perhaps it will rise up again once he is grown. Some smell, some glint of light will bring texture and emotion to a future summer evening. As will his memory of praying before his father's picture or being carried by his father before an open window" (101). Thus, in spite of the strong influence that the American culture casts on its Japanese counterpart, there is still hope that some aspect of the Japanese culture will live on and be remembered.

Because Waters absorbed the Japanese culture through listening to her mother and grandmother talking, her writing reproduces the traditional techniques of the oral narrative tradition. The circling back from the present to the past, the reiterating and the digressing are all outstanding features of oral narration. A. Paniker, commenting on the narrative technique of the traditional clown-narrator (the "Vidushka") in "The Oral Narrative Tradition in Mayalam," can be cited in this context because the features he is describing are very similar to Waters' narrative techniques:

The Vidushka can take all kinds of liberties; in fact he is expected to and encouraged to do so. He can indulge in any kind of extravagance, provided he can come back to the main thread of the narrative without getting lost in his own elaborations. He could turn his narrative into a string of short stories or take one of these stories and lengthen it for hours or days. Thus the oral narrative can easily achieve the length of a novel – if length is a criterion at all. (Walder 1990, 301)

The narration picks some incidents and elaborates on them in detail as in the running sessions when Saburo's father would clock Saburo's running; such an incident is recounted in almost three pages in a thirteen-page story. Waters chooses to narrate events in a non-linear fashion in order to have the liberty of mixing present and past events smoothly within the narrative. For instance, in "Aftermath," Makiko's son, Toshi, is seven when the story begins, but his mother remembers and recounts incidents when he was three, then the narration catches up again with seven-year-old Toshi. The memories Makiko remembers about her life with her husband (whether good or bad) are like a string of mini stories within the short story; but Waters does not get lost in her elaborations and she manages always to come back to the main thread of her narrative.

The importance of myth to Eastern people arises from their religious beliefs and/or spirituality. Religious beliefs in general conceive that the uncontrollable processes of nature and unexpected accidents are due to the agency of invisible, transhuman powers or beings. The idea of such powers is gradually elaborated by mythological fantasy and theological speculation. It is a convincing solution to the mysteries and paradoxes that surround birth and death, or natural perils like drought, flood, famine and disease or the endless battles of satisfying man's unlimited appetites – in summary, a solution to the whole mystery of humanity. Therefore, societies, where spirituality has a powerful stance, generate over time a system of symbolic ideas and practices that eventually give rise to traditional ritual and mythology. Franco Moretti observes that "myth ensures that culture is no longer a mere superstructure in relation to the symbolic 'neutrality' . . . of historical existence: rather it presents itself as that value-system which pervades and ascribes 'significance', and hence humanizes all manifestations of the existence" (1983, 220). In a sense, moral and spiritual redemption can be realized for a whole culture through the renewal of old myths.

The ongoing life of the dead and quest for rebirth is a basis of mythological existence. In "Aftermath," Makiko is always trying to conjure the image of her dead husband and forever urging her son to remember him by placing different pictures of the father every night on an altar around which she and her son would sit, light candles and say their prayers. Makiko insists that her son should respectfully perform the traditional prayer ritual to honor his father's memory because, as is believed in the Japanese culture, life is cyclical and those ancestors help in guiding younger generations in their life. The reason behind such a ritual is explained by Traphagan: "Ancestor-veneration rituals serve to keep the dead attached to people in the world of the living through a combination of affectively and materially maintained bonds. The ritual obligations associated with care are the basis for an interdependent and complementary relationship between living and dead" (2003, 127). Makiko is trying to let her son Toshi pass through his liminal period with the guidance of his father. She is keen afterwards to attend a festival with her son because as Turner mentions: "Ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmatory" (1967, 95).

Waters conflates disruptive changes in social structure with ritualistic/mythic patterns of transformation. Saburo in "Rationing" dreams of his dead mother playing and laughing: "'Mama! There you are!' Saburo cried out. Such relief surged



through him that it lifted him out of sleep. Lying awake in the dark, it took him several moments to comprehend that his mother had been gone for years" (68). Saburo's relief on seeing his mother in the dream was due to the fact that his father was terminally ill with cancer, as well as almost blind. Women in Japanese culture at this time were usually the family care-givers: "The gendered nature of ancestral visitation in the dreams of older women is closely related to Japanese tendencies to center responsibilities for family health-care matters on women" (Traphagan 2003, 128).

In the liminal state, the passenger is temporarily stripped of group privileges and attributes; his or her structural attributes are neutralized and, eventually, the passenger re-emerges into social structure with enhanced status or functions. When Saburo's father in "Rationing" was diagnosed with cancer and was sent to a hospital for the terminally-ill, Saburo read for him *History of the Cosmos* whenever they were out of topics to discuss. The reading made Saburo feel a recovery of the past which was suggestive of an order of communication with his father that was both phenomenological and of high potential: "There was something soothing about reading aloud; all meaning dropped away, and he was borne along a cadence reminiscent of boyhood, when his father's voice had washed over him at the dinner table" (69). The liminal condition constitutes an essential stage in individual psychological and ethical development, thus leading to moral growth of a society. Moreover, the participants in the liminal stage are spatially dislocated. They feel estranged and detached from their social environment, only to become more assimilated and attached in the following stage; the stage of initiation. The "rate of progress," as Saburo remembers someone, somewhere, saying, takes its toll. Watching from the window of the hospital room where his father is lying to regain consciousness after the operation, Saburo observes the landscape: "The landscape had changed since he had been here last. In his youth, dusk would have melted those distant hills to smooth lines like folded wings. Tonight, against a fading sky of pink and gray, the sharp black silhouette of the hills bristled with crooked telephone poles. The hills themselves were spattered with mismatched lights" (67). For Saburo places change beyond recognition and, accordingly, deepen his sense of nostalgia to the past and prepare him to occupy a new social role or status. Similarly, in "Aftermath," Toshi is impatient during the ritual of praying before his father's pictures, an act that represents his rite of passage and that prepares him to the festival where, unlike other children who are helped by their "shadowy adults" to hold sparklers over the glassy water, "Toshi was old enough, he had insisted, to do it himself" (101). Now, Toshi is prepared to embark on his life guarded with his mother's guidance and cultural support.

Change is an ontological necessity. B. S. Johnson reflects in *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*: "Change is a condition of life. Rather than deplore this, or hunt the chimæra of stability or reversal, one should perhaps embrace change as all there is. Or might be. For change is never for the better or for the worse; change simply is" (1973, 917). When learning that his son joined the track-and-field team, Saburo's father announced that on the days Saburo does not have practice, the father will be taking him to an open field to clock his runs. Saburo felt as if it is his coming-of-age ritual: "Dinner that night felt very much like a rite of passage" (60). The process of clocking Saburo's runs was ritualistic. First, before starting to run Saburo felt a firm connection to his father: "Only here, with silence stretching over the open fields like an extension of his father, did Saburo feel complete harmony

between them" (61). Next, Saburo raced towards his father with his "slight, gaunt figure" (61); and while running Saburo felt a harmony, not only with his father, but with the natural landscape around him: "A sea of rice plants, dyed red from the sunset, undulated on either side . . . the sharp green smell of growing things stung Saburo's nostrils as he sucked it in and pierced his lungs like frosty air" (61). Saburo's running sessions are his liminal rites of passage. The lack of communication and distance between father and son are replaced, through this ritual, by harmonious oneness and mutual wholeness. Finally, when the running sessions were over Saburo "had the sad premonition that they would never again have a similar experience" (62). It was true: Saburo went to college, his mother died and his father's health was deteriorating. From then on, they switched roles, the father became more dependent on the son, because of his fading sight and his cancer, and Saburo felt more responsible for his father, particularly after the mother's death. Thus, the rite of passage is complete and Saburo's once missing cultural centre is now replaced by a permanent and solid Japanese cultural core.

Drawing upon the past and the present, the mythic and the real, the symbolic and the quotidian, Waters reflects the driving force of the Asian American generations to claim the past, endorse the present and believe in the future. The rites of passage that Waters depicts in her fiction symbolize a passage into total acceptance of double identity and hybrid culture. However, if cultural and generic hybridity as exemplified in the present study proves that the writing emanating from such a hybrid state reflects the lives, places, memories and transfusions of past into present, writing remains necessarily an individual experience that draws upon the author's ability to shape the culture that contributed to his or her individual make-up.

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