

*Paper Families and Blonde Demonesses:  
The Haunting of History in SKY Lee's  
"Disappearing Moon Cafe"*

ALISON CALDER

MUSING OVER WHERE to begin her family's story, SKY Lee's character Kae Ying Woo settles on a very specific starting point, remarking that "the story began, I guess, with my great-grandmother, Lee Mui Lan, sometime in June 1924, as she stood behind the cash register at the front of the even-now famous Disappearing Moon Cafe, 50 East Pender Street, Vancouver, British Columbia" (23). The geographical specificity with which Kae Ying locates her story is equalled in importance by the temporal specificity. In this article I examine the historical placement of the Wong family narrative, focusing on the significance of Kae Ying's beginning in 1924, the year after the Chinese Exclusion Act and the year of the Janet Smith murder. Historically, Chinatown was produced in part by spatial practices that sanctioned the performance of "Chinese-ness" only in a particular geographic area. "Chinatown" is therefore both a real place and an imaginative construct. I locate Lee's writing at this intersection of the real and imaginary, since she uses such historical intertexts as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Janet Smith Bill to show how the narratives underlying ideologies of racial purity in both the Chinese and the white communities are flawed. She similarly interrogates the implications of the insistence in Chinatown on a "real wife from China" (233). Lee explores the haunting effects of history, as these submerged racial narratives work themselves out to damage succeeding generations. By paralleling the demands for racial purity within the Chinese community to those encapsulated in the Janet Smith Bill, Lee shows the insidious effects of historical narratives that refuse to acknowledge the ambiguities of racial identity.

1924 was not a good year for Chinatown. White Vancouver was brimming with anti-Chinese hysteria. The newspapers were full of inflammatory stories suggesting that British Columbia was about to be overwhelmed by a flood of inassimilable Chinese immigrants (Ward). After a series of increasingly discriminatory and punitive restrictions aimed at preventing the immigration of Chinese settlers, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1923, effectively shutting down the possibility of movement between China and Canada.<sup>1</sup> Vancouver's Chinese population was already under pressure. Men outnumbered women by a huge margin: over 150 men to every woman in 1921 (Bolaria and Singh 114). Many of the men sent a portion of their wages back to wives and families in China they had not been able to see for years. The severe shortage of women in Chinatown augmented popular conceptions of it as a den of vice, populated by unscrupulous Orientals ready to kidnap vulnerable white women, addict them to opium, and force them into prostitution — a narrative that both scandalized and thrilled white audiences.

Kay Anderson argues that Chinatown, as both an idea and a real place, is in many ways a Euro-American construct. Anderson describes how pre-existing narratives of “Chinese-ness” — the belief that Chinese people behaved in certain ways and had certain essential characteristics, such as inscrutability — allowed the dominant white culture in Vancouver to sanction certain behaviours towards the Chinese.<sup>2</sup> These behaviours were both codified in law and carried out more informally in racist social practices. Anderson's historical study clearly provides examples of how these narratives in fact helped to create the conditions that they explicitly deplored. Popular imagination held that the Chinese immigrants were irreconcilably different, unable to be assimilated into or to participate in the life of Vancouver in any meaningful way. At the same time, when Chinese immigrants did try to participate in the commercial life of the city — by opening businesses outside of Chinatown, for example — they were greeted with anti-Chinese legislation, hysteria, violence, and even riots. By means of legal and cultural texts, coupled with material violence, whites in Vancouver made the

Chinese "different," and then despised them for being so. White Vancouver thus created a spatialized racial practice, allowing Chinese to "be Chinese" in Chinatown, but forbidding their attempts to perform that racial identity elsewhere in the city. As Commissioner Gray reported critically in 1885, "By provincial legislation in British Columbia and the general hostility towards them, the Chinese are practically prohibited from becoming attached to the country. They are made, so far as provincial legislation can go, perpetual aliens" (Anderson 54).

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Wong Gwai Chang describes how this legislated alienation had affected Chinese communities in British Columbia:

Under the strain of bigotry, they were outlaws. Chinamen didn't make the law of the land, so they would always live outside of it. In fact, it was a crime for them just to be here. The result was submerged, but always there: violence, with the same, sour odor of trapped bodies under duress. That could be why the whites complained that chinamen were unclean. Sinister, they said. But imagine their fresh-faced, thoughtless innocence beside the seething rage and bitterness in Chinese faces! They grew uncomfortable in the presence of chinese, without even knowing why. (221)

Popular stories of living conditions in Chinatown exemplify how these white narratives of "outlaw" Chinese behaviour are complicit in creating that which they explicitly deplore.<sup>3</sup> Fearing "invasion" by what they saw as a sly, immoral, drug-addicted, heathen horde, many predominantly white neighborhoods formed anti-Chinese associations aimed at preventing Chinese people from moving into these areas.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Chinatown was condemned in the mainstream press and in the white imagination as an overcrowded, filthy slum, where people lived like animals crammed into overcrowded warrens — in direct contrast to the pleasant, spacious suburbs the anti-Chinese associations sought to protect. As the anti-Chinese associations prevented the Chinese from moving into their neighborhoods, the population density in Chinatown did in fact rise to unpleasant proportions. However, dominant narratives held that the Chinese preferred these uncomfortable conditions, thus masking

the narratives' own complicity in creating Chinatown's overcrowding, and simultaneously shoring up the position of the anti-Chinese associations.

Similar dynamics can be seen in the treatment of Chinese millworkers and cannery employees. Employers refused to pay Chinese workers the same amount as they paid white employees. Chinese employees commonly received half of the pay that whites did, for the same work (Ward 17). Since the Chinese needed to work but had neither legal standing nor popular support, it was impossible for them to demand equal treatment. They thus became preferred employees. Accompanying this material situation was a narrative which held that Chinese were a different species from whites and could somehow survive conditions that whites would find intolerable — bad housing, little food, incredible poverty.<sup>5</sup> The conjunction of this narrative with material conditions led to violent riots against Chinese labourers in Vancouver in 1887 and 1907, as the anger of unemployed white labourers found the most vulnerable target, the “inhuman” Chinese who would work for less money.<sup>6</sup>

These historical contexts haunt *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, resurfacing throughout the text to point to the private impact of public codes. Kae Ying opens her reconstruction of the past with Mui Lan's dilemma: her daughter-in-law has failed to produce a son. Mui Lan's husband, Wong Gwai Chang, instructs her to forget her traditional idea of buying their son a second wife:

“Those old fashioned ideas don't work here. Take a look around you! All these Gold Mountain men who don't even have one woman. . . . Bringing in another wife for him is impossible anyway. There's a new Chinese Exclusion Act. What does she think all that fuss is about! The government is saying no more chinese immigrants! In fact, they're looking to shovel us all out.” (30)

Gwai Chang's description of the Act points to the violent desires for racial uniformity embedded in its legal language. Less obvious but equally insidious effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act are seen in the Wong family's next generation, in the couplings of Beatrice and Keeman and, more tragically, Morgan and Suzie. When, in 1946, Keeman's mother tells him to go

find someone else to marry, it is empty advice: there is almost no one else. As the narrator says, "[s]ince 1923 the Chinese Exclusion Act had taken its heavy toll. The rapidly-diminishing chinese-canadian community had withdrawn into itself, ripe for incest" (147). The "submerged violence" (218) of the immigration law, internalized by the Chinese-Canadian community on which it is enacted, finds its ultimate expression in self-destruction: Suzie's suicide attempt, Morgan's drinking. This submerged violence also manifests itself in the sexual politics of the Chinese community, as the Chinese men, oppressed by white laws and codes, reenact that oppression on their wives. Lee makes such a connection through Gwai Chang's sequence of thoughts when he responds to Mui Lan's idea. He tells her that the whites are "looking to shovel us all out." Then, "suddenly he was calm again. That he had total authority would never be an issue for the patriarch, but he still added meanly, 'Open your eyes, old woman'" (30). The connection is more explicit in Gwai Chang's later memories: "in the end, it wasn't the white hysteria that frightened him as much as what chinamen had allowed themselves to become in the face of it — pitiful men, with no end for their self-pity in sight. All the more pitiful because they once had divine authority, if only over their downtrodden women" (226). Similar dynamics are evident in Mui Lan's ironic manipulation of the Exclusion Act to dominate Fong Mei, as the violence of racial oppression is passed on to one still more vulnerable: "How can we bring another woman into the country without exposing ourselves to another, even more treacherous government investigation? Then, by their laws, concubines are illegal. So A Fuk would need to divorce you first" (61). Fong Mei would then become a single woman, one of the most vulnerable members of the community.<sup>7</sup> Lee depicts the violence of the Act spiraling inward, restricting Chinatown from the outside, and poisoning it from within.<sup>8</sup>

But as Mui Lan's manipulation of the Act for her own purposes shows, the Chinese characters are not without agency. They are constrained by laws, both legal and social, to act within certain parameters, but they also contest those boundaries, subverting and exceeding them. One of the ways that Lee's text

exceeds boundaries is in its fundamental use of ghosts: Kae Ying creates the Wong family narrative by assembling the spirit-voices of her ancestors. One of the key points in Lee's novel is her use of a "real" ghost — the ghost of Janet Smith, the "willowy, tuneful scottish nightingale" said to haunt the house Morgan lives in (69). By setting the starting point of Kae Ying's narrative in 1924, Lee allows the Janet Smith Bill to function as a historical intertext that interrogates ideas of racial and genealogical purity in both white and Chinese communities, and suggests the ways that such laws, whether legal or social, will always bring about their own transgression.

On July 26, 1924, the body of 22-year-old Janet Smith was discovered in the ironing room of the wealthy Shaughnessy area home where she worked as a nursemaid. She had been shot in the head, and a gun was found nearby. The coroner's initial verdict was suicide, but that verdict was soon called into question by the United Council of Scottish Societies, which argued that Smith had in fact been murdered by the Chinese houseboy, Wong Foon Sing. Newspapers at the time loved the sensational story, which had all sorts of racial, sexual, and social angles to exploit. In a recent article, Scott Kerwin argues that the "Janet Smith Murder Mystery" was, in fact, created by the media as a paper-selling device. Kerwin points out that Victor Odlum, editor of the *Vancouver Star*, which led the attacks against Wong Foon Sing, was one of the Vancouver political scene's best-known "exclusionists" (88). In the 1921 federal election, he ran on an anti-Asian platform. Under Odlum's direction, writes Kerwin, the *Star* concocted a sensational story about the murder:

Janet Smith was a naïve young woman, separated from her loving parents in London, living in constant terror of her employer's other servant, Wong Foon Sing. Any pleas for protection from the Chinese houseboy were tragically ignored by her well-to-do employers, the Bakers. Finally, the "Chinaman" murdered Miss Smith on the Saturday morning of 26 July, but the Point Grey Police — through either incompetence or corruption — had not made an arrest. (88)

As Morgan tells Kae Ying in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, "the story had something for every kind of righteousness" (68). The

implications of this racist narrative are evident to Lee's characters, old men haunted by "the white mobs of 1907 . . . the rioting with clubs, the rocks hurled through the air, the sound of splintering glass" (70).<sup>9</sup> By 1924, however, Vancouver is more "civilized"; no rioting ensues as a result of this inflammatory rhetoric. Instead, as with the Chinese Exclusion Act, racial violence is submerged in legal language. As the narrator states, "[t]he Whites were coming at Chinatown not with clubs and stones this time but with the way they'd gotten them every time. It was dubbed the Janet Smith bill at the legislature" (224).

The proposed Janet Smith Bill was an extension of the "Women's and Girls' Protection Act" of 1919, which was originally intended to prevent Chinese-owned businesses from employing white and Native women. Partly in response to protests from the Chinese community, the explicit reference to "oriental" businesses was deleted from the Act, which was changed to make it illegal for white or native women to work in businesses that the police felt could endanger their morals (Kerwin 93). The Janet Smith Bill would extend this protection by making it illegal to employ white women and Chinese men to work in close proximity, as nursemaids and houseboys together, for example. The material effect of this bill, its supporters hoped, would be to prevent the employment of Chinese as houseboys. Janet Smith's death was thus transformed into an element in a popular narrative that, while it ostensibly sought to prevent Chinese men from engaging in criminal activities, effectively criminalized them all.

The politicizing of Janet Smith's death is not a unique instance of this narrative. Ten years earlier, in 1914, the wife of Charles Millard, a railway administrator, had been murdered by her houseboy, Jack Kong. This event catalyzed public demand to have Chinese students removed from predominantly white schools, on the grounds that white children could be affected mentally and morally by contact with Chinese children (Anderson 90-91). At the same time, Mrs. Millard's murder also prompted the Vancouver City Council to give preference to lumber mills employing white labour, and to reiterate that only white labour would be used for city works (Anderson 116). In 1931, Mary

Shaw, a white waitress in Chinatown, would allegedly be killed in a murder-suicide by Lee Dick, who was thought to be an admirer of hers. Mary Shaw's death, like those of Mrs. Millard and Janet Smith, motivated the imposition of restrictive labour laws: in an effort to protect white women from moral corruption, in 1937 Vancouver city officials began denying licences to Chinatown restaurants that employed white women.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most interesting things about the Janet Smith Bill is that it is almost entirely without material grounding. The bill could not possibly be passed by the British Columbia Legislature, as it contravened existing laws and took upon itself powers that were the jurisdiction of the federal government. The proposal, reading, and debate of the bill was thus an activity of pure performance, the intent of which was to reinforce the narrative of racial difference upon which ideas of white privilege rest. Thus, although the bill was dropped from legislative consideration in December of 1924, Mary Ellen Smith, the bill's sponsor, was able to declare that her objectives had been met:

[the bill] has already focused attention on the problem of Oriental servants in the home more than ever before and awakened the employers of servants to the danger of keeping Orientals who do not live up to proper standards. In addition, it has put the white servant girls on their guard. On the whole, whether it is endorsed or not, the bill will do a great deal of good. (Kerwin 103)

Rather than performing a legal function, then, the proposed bill performed a narrative function, allowing for the official repetition of a story that worked to consolidate racial categories. Such a production points to the continual need to stage such repetitions, and also suggests that racial boundaries, rather than being the rigid definitions proposed by Mary Ellen Smith, are permeable and in constant danger of being exceeded.

The Janet Smith Bill provides an historical context for *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, not merely by showing the racial and sexual constraints placed on the Chinatown community from the outside, but also by providing an important parallel to the racial and sexual constraints imposed on the Chinatown community from within. At the heart of the Janet Smith Bill is the fear of miscegenation, of racial impurity. Kerwin's analysis of the bill



details its two main objectives: to prevent the birth of Eurasian children by mandating a distance between young Asian men and young white women, and to ensure the ability of white women to produce white babies (105). To this end, the bill objectified "white women" as thoroughly as it did Asian men, reducing each to racial and sexual components. The working-class white woman, elsewhere ignored, becomes valuable as a potential mother of the white race. This objectification of women and the concern with regulating their sexuality parallels the obsession of Lee's Chinese characters with racial and genealogical purity. Mui Lan's relentless persecution of Fong Mei for her failure to produce a grandchild most clearly shows the reduction of women to a reproductive function: proper children are of utmost importance, while "the daughters-in-law who bore them were unidentified receptacles" (31). Mui Lan's instructions to Fong Mei to "roll your useless female eggs a long way from here" (59) demonstrate the equation of woman and fertility: since Fong Mei appears to be infertile, she is without value and should be discarded. Kae Ying's depiction of the rationale underlying Mui Lan's desire for a grandchild to continue the male Wong line — "what could be more natural, more ecologically pure?" (31) — echoes the eugenics-based discourse at the heart of the Janet Smith Bill.

Lee clearly links the attempted legislation of racial purity within the Chinese community to the Janet Smith case. When Ting An tells Gwai Chang that he intends to marry a French-Canadian woman, "Gwai Chang could not let him go away. Another blonde demoness — this one not dead enough" (232). By explicitly paralleling the French-Canadian wife with the character "Janet Smith" in the Janet Smith narrative, Lee points to both women's bodies as the loci for particular desires and fears. But where the Janet Smith murder mystery had threatened Chinatown from without, the threat in this case is seen to come from within the Chinese community itself. Again, the fear at the heart of Gwai Chang's response is the fear of miscegenation: that Ting An's marriage will produce Eurasian children. Such an outcome must be prevented at all costs. Gwai Chang tells Ting An to "[k]eep the Wong name. It's yours. Eventually,

I'll find you a real wife from China. Marrying this female is absolutely out of the question for you" (233). Gwai Chang's invocation of the "real wife from China" provokes the recognition scene between him and Ting An, where Ting An realizes the transgression that Gwai Chang's own participation in the "real wife from China" narrative has masked. This narrative, which compelled Gwai Chang to abandon Kelora and return to China to marry a "real wife," delegitimizes Ting An: it is perceived as impossible for him to be Gwai Chang's son, since Ting An's mother is "a dirty half-breed, buried somewhere in the bush" (233). Gwai Chang thus has a vested interest in perpetuating the "real wife from China" narrative: performing it reiterates the impermeability of racial boundaries and erases such counter-narratives of racial mixing as his own relationship with Kelora. Enforcing these narratives of racial and familial purity has the same performative function as proposing the Janet Smith Bill: to repeat and reiterate the rules.

However, like many of the white narratives of "Chinese-ness" that in fact produce the outcomes they explicitly deplore, the Chinese narrative of racial purity also creates the conditions that lead to its transgression. Because Ting An is a mixed-race child, he cannot be acknowledged as Gwai Chang's "real" son. Because he is not a "real" son, Gwai Chang does not arrange a wife for Ting An as he does for Choy Fuk, his legitimate son. Because Ting An is a lonely bachelor and there are very few women in Chinatown, conditions are ripe for him to conduct an affair with Fong Mei, the "real" son's wife, an affair which produces three children. Conditions are also ripe for him to seek a non-Chinese wife. Thus, Gwai Chang's adherence to the "real wife from China" narrative, meant to mandate racial purity by repressing the fact of his own transgression, has in fact produced mixed-race grandchildren who remain ignorant of their past. At the same time, because the family pretends that the infertile Choy Fuk, rather than Ting An, is the father of Fong Mei's children, the half-siblings Suzie and Morgan enter into an incestuous relationship. The outcome is tragic, as the submerged violence of the "real wife from China" narrative works its way out. Later, Morgan's Eurasian status makes him an

object of fascination for Kae Ying. When her father tries to explain Morgan's status as being "a kind of distant relative . . . in a village sense" (84), Kae Ying rejects the possibility: "my father seemed to have forgotten that Morgan was eurasian, which totally occupied my mind. After all, I had understood that kind of thing just wasn't done in nice families" (84). When Morgan tells her that "your grandmother had a lover — my father," the power of this construction of the boundaries of "nice families" is shown in Kae Ying's response:

"What a filthy, bloody lie!" I bounded off his knee, hissing like an enraged goose. . . . I couldn't think any more. At the time I was not conscious of why I needed to flip off the handle in such an excessive manner. Suddenly, I felt so ashamed for lusting after this incredible creep, this blasphemer who was assaulting the integrity, the sacred legitimacy, of my family origins. The honour of ancestors and descendants was at stake! And the more money, the more righteous! (85)

Kae Ying's response is necessarily "excessive," as it seeks to contain the information that exceeds narrative boundaries. Her response also points to the status of these racial and familial transgressions as simultaneously known and unknown; that she is "not conscious" of why she "needed to" respond in this way suggests that doubleness.

It is thus appropriate that Morgan lives in the house that the ghost of Janet Smith is said to haunt. In fact, Morgan himself can be seen as a kind of ghost, haunting the Wong family as a return of all that they have sought to repress — adultery, incest, miscegenation, abandonment. Morgan reveals his counter-narrative without saying a word: the racial mixing visible in his Eurasian features signifies that "that kind of thing" has been done in nice families after all. His very existence points to the transgression — potential and realized — of boundaries.<sup>11</sup> When Kae Ying's parents unexpectedly encounter Morgan at the hospital, they cannot contain their reactions. Their extreme response validates the counter-narrative of family origins that Morgan has been telling Kae Ying. As she reports, "I realized, then, that this was an encounter between longtime, mortal enemies. Everything that Morgan had tried to tell me so far was

true then, and whatever he had to tell me yet was going to be excruciating" (89). Morgan's threat to the Wong family lies in the narrative he reveals; it is what he "tells" that makes him a mortal enemy.

If Morgan is a ghost, he is also haunted. When Kae Ying remarks that "to me, Morgan was quite simply a haunted man" (64), she means that he is haunted by the ghost of Suzie, his lost love, whom he may be trying to reach through his relationship with Kae Ying. Morgan is equally haunted by the insistence on racial purity crystallized both in the Janet Smith Bill and in the "real wife from China" narrative. While he tells Kae Ying that he is "chinese" (69), Suzie claims that Morgan never entered Chinatown because "he was more afraid he might get mistaken for a chinaman himself" (172). At the same time, Morgan desires connection to the Chinese community, preferring to date Suzie rather than the white girls who hang around him (172). Morgan thus occupies a shifting and marginal space, both isolated and self-isolating. Lee provides a way to understand his painful and destructive relationships with Suzie and Kae Ying through a parallel description of the connection between Janet Smith and Foon Sing. When Gwai Chang remembers the Janet Smith murder, he imagines the houseboy's desire:

To him, she must have been dazzling. And why not? Her life full of human promises, she would have everything that he was denied. . . . Did he fall in love with her? There was no way for him not to be obsessed with her and all she represented. If that were so, did he come to hate her? Yes . . . well, that was more the essential question, wasn't it? A white woman would remind him of his alienation, her nearness exposing the raw intensity of his desperation. (222)

It is possible to read Morgan's relations with Suzie and Kae Ying in terms of this triple dynamic of love, hate, and self-hate. Kae Ying wonders why her dates with Morgan always involve trips to the library to look up records of events like the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Janet Smith Bill. These documents point to Morgan's fundamental preoccupations: his exclusion and inability to fit in. His presence confounds these documents, at the same time as they attempt to erase him. While Morgan's ability

to confuse the clear racial boundaries iterated in these documents can be read as a victory of sorts, this confusion also extracts a heavy toll from him: he functions in Lee's narrative as a representation of the loathing and violence that is submerged in these documents and passed on to the Chinese community. His mixed-race status equally renders him an outlaw in Chinatown. Kae Ying notes the impact of these intersecting historical narratives on him when she visits him in San Francisco: "I realized how much he hated me — as much as he hated himself. I thought maliciously, I know you Morgan. You're a runaway slave, with one bare foot on floating ice, the other on another chunk swirling in the opposite direction. But you like it there" (166). Morgan appears in the rupture between two racial boundaries, with only a precarious foothold in both. He is enslaved to history, unable to let go of the hatred for self and other engendered by the demand for racial purity encoded in both white and Chinese narratives. As Kae Ying points out, however, he is in some senses a willing slave. In seeing himself perpetually as a victim, Morgan's self-destruction has become, ironically, his self, and his existence is a perpetual reenactment of the historical violence between and within Chinese and white communities.

Describing the outcome of the Janet Smith murder, Sky Lee's narrator remarks that the old men in Chinatown "were surprised to find out how much alike chinamen and white people were" (223). As the parallel narratives of racial purity show, this similarity is not necessarily a good thing: many of Lee's characters suffer terribly because of it. Lee's text is continually haunted by history, as the spectres of racial hatred reappear despite everyone's attempts to suppress them. Nevertheless, Lee's emphasis on race as a function of narration rather than of nature points to the possibility of alternative narratives of identity that embrace and encompass hybridity. Describing her youthful unease around her friend Hermia Chow, Kae Ying writes that "legitimate, traditional and conventional were the adjectives to wear in those days, especially when I suspected that my own identity might be as defective" (41). By the end of her narrative, Kae Ying discards her passive "legitimate, traditional

and conventional" identity and, having come to terms with her convoluted family history, resolves to "live a great novel" (216). While Morgan is trapped between two unstable ice floes, unable to move, the mobility with which Kae Ying approaches her future is signified by her airplane flight to Hong Kong. Lee reports that the older generation in Chinatown had mocked the Canadian-born Chinese with the line "not quite three, not quite four, nowhere" (164). Kae Ying's understanding of her racial and cultural hybridity empowers her to transform that "nowhereness" into a dynamic position. By using the "Janet Smith murder mystery" of 1924 to parallel the narrative of the "real wife from China," Lee is able to demonstrate the negative consequences of such narratives and to illustrate the need to develop more fluid understandings of racial identity. Kae Ying's transformation shows that such change may be one way of laying the ghosts of history to rest.

## NOTES

- 1 According to Bolaria and Singh, only 7 Chinese immigrants were permitted to enter Canada between 1923 and 1946 (113). Chong gives the number as 12 (154); Anderson calls it "a handful" (140).
- 2 For historical examples of these narratives of Chinese-ness, see Bolaria and Singh, Ward, and Anderson. For discussion of how these narratives appear in literature, see Chao and Kim.
- 3 Another example of how the laws placed on Chinese actually contributed to the situation the laws tried to counter is the proliferation of "paper families" in Chinatown. While the Chinese Immigration Act was intended to strictly regulate the Chinese population in Canada and to ensure that the identities of all Chinese were known, these immigration restrictions catalyzed a massive trade in buying and selling birth certificates and other immigration documents. As a result, many Chinese were known to officials by false names and/or family connections. See Chong and Choy for descriptions of these paper families.
- 4 For a more detailed account, see Anderson, Chapter 4. See also Chong for an account of a Chinese man being refused residency in Kitsilano (154).
- 5 This construction of Chinese as requiring less sustenance than Whites would have tragic implications during the Depression, when civic authorities refused to grant unemployed Chinese workers the same amount of food that Vancouver's other unemployed received. Anderson reports the provincial relief administrator's report to the civic relief officer: "a lower scale should be applied to Oriental cases. . . . We can never expect Orientals who have a much lower standard . . . to become self-supporting as long as they are getting more on relief than they ever earned in good times." Between 1931 and 1935, at least 175 customers of the Pender Street soup kitchen starved to death (Anderson 143).

- 6 The Chinese were constructed "simply as labour-machines which possessed a use-value. This mentality was consistent with the interests of employers who benefitted from the cheap labour of Oriental workers" (Bolaria and Singh, 124).
- 7 See Chong for a description of women's precarious position in Chinatown: "A divorced woman disappeared into social oblivion, both in her earthly life and her afterlife. . . . All that she as a wife owned was her personal clothing and the jewelry she brought to the marriage" (30-31).
- 8 See Chao, "As Agents and as Perspective," for further discussion of power in the relationships between women in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Lee's female characters are doubly marginalized, subject to oppression based on sex as well as on race. I suggest that Lee shows a similar double marginalization in her depiction of Kelora, who is vulnerable to Gwai Chang because of her status as a native woman. However, Lee also makes it clear that class plays a role in a woman's status; for example, Mui Lan is far more powerful than the waitress and uses her position to exploit the other woman.
- 9 Lee's characters are also aware that the Chinese counter-narrative — that of Foon Sing's innocence — cannot allow any ambiguity, as shown in Lee Chong's angry denunciation of Foon Sing: "You dead snake! You don't even know right from wrong! . . . Buying women's intimate underwear for a white girl for a present! And then she gets a bullet hole in her stupid head! What do you think people will think of that? A no-good chinaboy sniffing after white women's asses" (76). The need to iron out any ambiguities in Foon Sing's story motivates the involvement of the Chinese Benevolent Association and their torture of Foon Sing.
- 10 See Anderson, Chapter 5, for a discussion of the controversy surrounding this attempt to control the employment of white women.
- 11 Morgan's status as inherently transgressive can be compared to the status of the Chinese generally under British Columbia's repressive racial legislation; as Gwai Chang points out, that legislation makes criminals of the Chinese who, because they did not make the law, "would always live outside of it" (221).

## WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Kay J. *Vancouver's Chinatown*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1991.
- Bolaria, B. Singh and Peter S. Li. *Racial Oppression in Canada*. 2nd ed. Toronto: Garamond, 1988.
- Chao, Lien. "As Agents and as Perspective: Female Characters in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*." *Intersexions: Issues of Race and Gender in Canadian Women's Writing*. Ed. Coomi S. Vevaina and Barbara Godard. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1996. 219-30.
- . *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: TSAR, 1997.
- Chong, Denise. *The Concubine's Children*. Toronto: Viking, 1994.
- Choy, Wayson. *Paper Shadows*. Toronto: Viking, 1999.
- Kim, Elaine H. *Asian American Literature*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982.
- Kerwin, Scott. "The Janet Smith Bill of 1924 and the Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia." *BC Studies* 121 (1999): 83-114.
- Lee, SKY. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990.
- Ward, W. Peter. *White Canada Forever*. 2nd ed. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1990.