Negotiating Boundaries: Confinement, Community and Collecting Memory in Hisaye Yamamoto's Writing

by

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For my grandmothers,

Joan Allison Burnham and Clare Kalman Lindner.

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Abstract

In this thesis I seek a better understanding of how space and boundary function in Hisaye Yamamoto's writing. While criticism and analysis of Yamamoto's work have focused on the functions of gender, Japanese-American culture, and hybrid identity, I hope to shift the focus to other themes. Among these themes are inner conflicts that cause incomplete connections with other characters, society's confining standards as the source of social ills, racial segregation, the stigmatization of women with mental-illnesses, and how aspects of Yamamoto's fictional confined communities correlate with the internment camp community.

I explore these themes in conjunction with analyses of how Yamamoto's characters break boundaries or embrace confinement in "The High-Heeled Shoes, a Memoir," "Eucalyptus," "The Eskimo Connection," and "A Fire in Fontana." I also consider how her work in journalism and fiction function as genres that negotiate social and physical limitations.

My most important goal is to show that there is more to Yamamoto's writing than other scholars have seen. Her label as a Japanese-American author has hindered an exploration of various questions about themes and patterns in her writing. I would like to expand our understanding of her writing to illuminate how she uses space and boundary to relate her life and work to those of others.

CONTENTS

Short Titles	i
Introduction: The First Syllable	1
Chapter One: A Collection of Circles	8
Chapter Two: Embracing the Boundary	15
Chapter Three: Crossing Lines	30
Chapter Four: The Burden of Truth	40
Conclusion: The Last Syllable	53
Works Consulted	55

Short Titles

Seventeen: Yamamoto, Hisaye. Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1998.

Introduction: The First Syllable

Hisaye Yamamoto is an outstanding Asian-American author who draws inspiration from her own life and sheds new light on the Japanese-American internment during World War II. Hisaye Yamamoto is already known and praised as a Japanese-American author whose stories depict the tragic consequences of Executive Order 9066, delivered on February 19, 1942, that called for 110,000 immigrants and citizens of Japanese descent to be interned during World War II. The literary canon has based her reputation almost entirely on a few short stories composed right after the war, including "Seventeen Syllables," "Yoneko's Earthquake," and "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara." Although these stories are important, they are by no means representative of her long writing career. Later she wrote about romance in the Catholic Worker community, racial segregation in the Los Angeles basin, and stories reflecting her desire to call attention to such social issues as illiteracy, alcoholism and homelessness.

In my quest to learn about the varied nature of Yamamoto's writing, I came across a body of criticism dominated by analyses of a few stories, criticism that came to the same conclusions. Left with an abundance of incomplete information, I returned to the primary texts themselves and began to recognize that her stories have many common thematic elements beyond those concerning the double identity of the Japanese-American experience, women subjected to patriarchal societies, and those struggling with familial issues. I found her characters all confined in one way or another by physical or social boundaries that alter how they perceive their place in American society. Despite, or because of these boundaries, the protagonists enter into a dialogue with someone very unlike themselves but with whom they share something fundamental. Why does

Yamamoto create these dialogues? Why do the characters have to be confined in order to connect? This is what I am seeking to understand and reveal.

In my research, I found again that many of the available scholarly articles focus on the same stories: "Yoneko's Earthquake," "Seventeen Syllables," and "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara." Those that looked closely at other stories focused on the same themes in Yamamoto's writing: omission of critical details and silence in the narrative, the immigrant family and conflicts between generations, and the Japanese culture's influence on Yamamoto's writing style. For example, Maire Mullin's study of "Wilshire Bus" takes a close look at how characters communicate non-verbally through "looks," written signs, and by remaining silent at key moments. Mullins contrasts different kinds of silence: the silence that signifies rebellion against dominant discussions that demoralize Japanese Americans, and the silence of compliance and timidity. These silences are examples of the understatement and subtlety that are key characteristics of Yamamoto's writing, as nearly every reader who comes into contact with these stories notes, and as I found while interviewing her.

King-Kok Cheung is perhaps the scholar who has studied Yamamoto's writing the most. Cheung wrote not only a comprehensive and telling introduction to Yamamoto's collection of short stories, Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories, but she has also written multiple critical and analytical essays on her work. If there is a "Yamamoto expert" out there, Cheung is it. She has chosen to focus on the ways in which Yamamoto's identity as a Japanese-American woman has influenced her writing, dealing closely with the "multiple levels of silence" embedded in Yamamoto's stories, and how indirection and communication styles in her writing respond to Japanese culture

and patriarchal society (Cheung, "Double-Telling" 1). She does not focus on Yamamoto's content as much as how her identity constructs that content. This focus is especially apparent in her essay, "Double-Telling: Intertextual Silence in Hisaye Yamamoto's Fiction." In this essay, she attributes how Yamamoto "constructs hidden plots and deflects attention from unsettling messages" to familial structures in Japanese culture. She talks about Japanese cultural values, citing the Japanese terms *enryo*, or reserve, and *gaman*, or internalization, as behavioral codes that influence Yamamoto's understated style. In her introduction to her collection of short stories, King-Kok Cheung comments on her early subtlety: "Not given to effusive rhetoric and militant statements, Yamamoto appeals to us in another way... Yamamoto's stories exemplify precision and restraint" (xxi). Among the stories that Cheung has written about are "Seventeen Syllables," "Yoneko's Earthquake," and "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara," which, as already noted, are three of Yamamoto's better-known stories. These stories illustrate Cheung's point perfectly, but by no means provide a complete sense of Yamamoto's fiction.

Other important work on Yamamoto has been done by Ming L. Cheng, who is among the writers who have explored Yamamoto's presentation of the conflicts between the *Issei* (first generation[1]) and *Nisei* (second generation), particularly those between Rosie and her parents in "Seventeen Syllables." The struggles within Japanese American families and the cultural differences that lie between the *Issei* and the *Nisei* have profound effects on Yamamoto's fiction, as she is the daughter of Japanese immigrants and considers herself more American than Japanese (DeSoto, Personal Interview).

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[1] While the term *Issei* literally translates from Japanese as "first generation," it refers to the immigrant generation, while *Nisei* refers to the first generation born in the United States.

Regarding Yamamoto's place in the classification of Japanese American literature, Ritsuko McDonald and Katharine Newman have studied Hisaye Yamamoto's writing in comparison to Wakako Yamauchi, a fellow author and one of Yamamoto's best friends whom she met during their incarceration in Poston, Arizona. "Both show the deterioration of the family, the changing role of women, the bleakness of farm life, [and] the transformation of Japanese traditions into Japanese-American culture" (McDonald and Newman 22). They assert that while Yamauchi writes mainly about Japanese-Americans amongst themselves, Yamamoto draws on the Japanese-American experience interacting with other groups (23). To illustrate their point, McDonald and Newman cite examples from "Yoneko's Earthquake," "Epithalamium," "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara," and "Las Vegas Charley" while briefly mentioning others.

These topics continue to be of great importance in understanding Japanese-American culture and literature, and have been studied extensively by these scholars. While this work is a critical foundation from which I depart and build upon, its precedence has overshadowed Yamamoto's later stories, which have been influenced by other aspects of her life from being a wife and mother, to her work with the Tribune in Los Angeles, to living in Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker community.

It is time to take a closer look at Yamamoto not only as a Japanese-American, or an ex-internee, but also as a woman and author who took time to process those camp memories and deal with those horrors. This thesis demonstrates how Yamamoto consistently returned to internment experience through a dialogue with the experiences she had much later in her life.

One avenue that Yamamoto chose to take on her quest for meaning in the internment was an exploration of different kinds of boundaries and confined communities. In her writing, she provides her characters with distinct limitations, which they sometimes surmount and sometimes embrace. Throughout her writing, she is concerned with the question: what constitutes a boundary? There are many kinds of boundaries: societal boundaries that set codes or norms by which we function and discern right from wrong, as well as the physical boundaries that construct our buildings and gates. Boundaries can be self-imposed and easy to transcend, or forced and impossible to cross. What all boundaries have in common is that they create an inner space where some people are included and others are excluded, and specific cultures can form within these spaces. This is what happened in the Japanese-American internment camps during World War II. American citizens and their relatives were forced into confinement, and in those desert spaces they created a new provisional world for themselves. Hisaye Yamamoto experienced the birth and death of this internment community, and she uses that process as a reference point from which she departs to discuss other communities. One way in which she accomplishes this is by making many of her protagonists ex-internees.

In this thesis, I view Yamamoto's short stories as collectively documenting her lifelong search to understand the internment; each story is a new revelation about the camp experience. Whether it comments on the inhumanity of prison life, racial segregation, sexual deviancy, criminality, or mental illness, each episode examines how her experiences correlate with those of other people who are on the margins of American

society. I will show how Yamamoto comes to grips with her painful past through her ability to find solidarity with these *others*.

In the range of texts I consider, I show that Yamamoto's writing reveals her search for connections, for some affirmation that what happened to her was not a random aberration of history, but an event deeply rooted in common trends and attitudes that people share. Although these connections are incomplete and sometimes problematic, they are critical. They speak to the attempt to cross boundaries.

In the following chapters, I examine stories from across the span of Yamamoto's career. The first chapter examines "The High Heeled Shoes, A Memoir" (1948), the first story in her collection. This story discusses the problematic connection that Yamamoto's characters sometimes manifest with the "others" they encounter. The question becomes, why are these encounters important? In this story, Yamamoto also proposes an interesting metaphor for these interactions as "circles" in a "collection."

Chapter Two continues this discourse in relation to "Eucalyptus" (1970), which was not included in the first edition of her collection of short stories. Toki, the narrator of "Eucalyptus," takes us into the realm of a psychiatric hospital: a space that has similar effects on its inhabitants as did the Japanese American interment camps. I explore how this comparison reveals aspects about the end of the internment and also how Yamamoto views the importance of community in confined spaces.

Chapter Three is an exploration of another later story, "The Eskimo Connection" (1983). This story involves an episode in which characters willingly engage in crossing societal boundaries, having been drawn into contact with someone on the "other side."

Relating back to the character's encounters in "The High-Heeled Shoes," I ask, what do these unusual engagements mean?

The last section considers how Yamamoto's exposure to the world of journalism while working for the Poston Chronicle and the Los Angeles Tribune changed her role as a fiction writer, as portrayed in her autobiographical story, "A Fire in Fontana" (1985). . I also show how her brief career as a journalist catalyzed a move towards relating her suffering to that of others, as demonstrated in the confrontations between characters in "The Eskimo Connection" and "The High-Heeled Shoes." Finding solidarity with others, allowed for by her work in journals serving special social niches, gave Yamamoto a new reason to consider her internment.

When analyzing her lesser known stories, we see that the process of remembering her internment, and what she wishes to *do* with those memories, is what unifies her fiction. This is also true of her work in journalism, which has never really been explored. I argue that Yamamoto's goal as a writer has been to fulfill her responsibility as a survivor to document the events as she experienced them, but also to work out how to apply her memories in the broader sense of a U.S. culture that she can belong to.

Chapter 1: A Collection of Circles

The first story in Yamamoto's collection, Seventeen Syllables and other Stories, is 1948's "The High-Heeled Shoes, A Memoir." This story stands out from the others that I discuss because it is an early story written by Yamamoto, and the interactions between the narrator and the "others" are not instigated or encouraged by the narrator, but instead are outright attempts to disturb her.

The first of these interactions occurs when the narrator answers the phone to find that the man on the other line is a stranger who refers to himself as "Tony," someone who randomly chose her from a phonebook because he is desperate to speak with *any* woman:

> The greeting is very warm. It implies, 'There is a certain thing which you and I alone know.' .... The man tells me, as man to woman. In the stark phrasing of his urgent need, I see that the certain thing alluded to by the warmth of his voice is a secret not of the past, but, with my acquiescence, of the near future. (2)

The narrator implies that this man is calling to have a sexual conversation with her or at the very least, to violate her sense of security and modesty by suggesting it. She realizes that with her "acquiescence," she and this man could have a "secret" encounter, one that crosses the lines of proper relations between strangers. This suggestion disturbs her, not only because she would never engage in something so indecent, but because the caller is able to contact her with these motives within the realm of her private home. The horrifying fact is that this man is easily able to transcend the walls of her home, a sacred space that is supposed to be immune from unsolicited interactions. By making lewd suggestions to her over the phone, he crosses an important personal boundary and shatters her sense of security.

The narrator links this intrusion to an incident in which her friend Mary was nearly raped on the street, a space which unlike the home lacks supposed protective walls and makes women more vulnerable to sexual predators. She also remembers her own experiences having felt threatened by men in public places. In one instance, she was walking down the street when she came across

> "A pair of bare, not especially remarkable legs was crossed in the open doorway... I presumed they were a woman's legs... because they were wearing black high-heeled shoes.... It wasn't a woman, but a man, unclothed (*except for the high-heeled shoes, the high-heeled shoes*), and I saw that I was, with frantic gestures, being enjoined to linger awhile." (Yamamoto, Seventeen 3)

Although there was no physical contact, the perverse and unexpected nature of the situation succeeds in violating the narrator's control over what she sees. Therefore, this man in the high-heeled shoes was not only crossing the boundary of gender identity by wearing women's shoes, but with his nudity and desire to get the narrator's attention he crossed lines of what is considered appropriate and acceptable behavior between men and women who are unfamiliar. More importantly, that this incident occurred in public suggests the complete absence of boundaries in society; if the narrator can be accosted and threatened on the street, then where are the lines behind which one can count on being safe? One would think that the home is that safe haven, but the phone call from "Tony" proves otherwise.

While the narrator clearly feels as disgusted and angered by this man in high-heeled shoes as she was by "Tony," she does not know how to prepare for and prevent future invasions. The sad truth is that there is no way to prevent them, at least in terms of

designating safe spaces. Complicating this frustration is the fact that she also judges herself for the lack of action she took against the caller:

> ...should I have turned toward the official avenues? Was it my responsibility to have responded with pretended warmth, invited him over, and had the police waiting with me when he arrived? Say I sorrowfully pressed the matter, say Tony were consequently found guilty... – the omnipotent they (representing us) would have merely restricted his liberty for a while, in the name of punishment. What would he have done when he was let go, his debt to society as completely repaid as society, who had created his condition, could make him repay? (6)

Yamamoto's character is clearly not comfortable in the "accuser's" role, and evidently even feels some pity for "Tony." She states that his "condition" as a sick man is one "created" by society, thereby relinquishing him of responsibility for his actions. The fact that society is to blame for this man's pathology is a theme that returns in "The Eskimo Connection," "Eucalyptus," and "A Fire in Fontana," and brings up the interesting question of what then "cures" people from societal pressures that make them ill? Is society's mode of "punishing" really curing the illnesses that the society caused? In this passage, the narrator frames incarceration as a punishment that "pays" debts to society, but does little to change the criminal. The parallel between this man's potential fate in prison and the fate of internment camp survivors is evident in the way that the narrator doubts the man's "guilt" to begin with, and then frames the process of incarceration as senseless, just as any positive results of the internment and the "guilt" of the Japanese-American community were never affirmed.

In this passage, the narrator also refers to herself, and presumably to other upright citizens, as "the omnipotent they," therefore inferring that the "other" in society lacks power. This notion is precarious because Yamamoto suggests that the narrator is Japanese-American, which labels her as one of the "others" in light of their recent internment and the actions taken against Asian-Americans in general during that tumultuous period. Therefore, the narrator is both the powerless "other" and the "omnipotent they," which creates an inner conflict laden with guilt.

At the end of the story after the narrator has pondered over the various responses she could have given "Tony," he never calls back and the situation is neither resolved nor made worse by any further discourse. She agonizes over whether she should have hung up in the first instance, or called the police, or have been "condescending" by suggesting that he look for a hobby or a "Lonely Hearts Club" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 5). Her sequence of ruminating thoughts aimed at having the most favorable outcome in an un-favorable situation reveals that the narrator desires not only to vindicate herself for having been harassed, but also expresses a desire to help this man somehow. Here, as in "The Eskimo Connection," Yamamoto is drawing the "enemy" nearer to the narrator, humanizing him instead of relegating him to a category of otherness. What complicates this story is the fact that Yamamoto's character has been the *victim* of this man's sickness. Despite this fact, she is compelled to think about his feelings and what led to his unfortunate condition. The narrator cannot quite reconcile the encounter she has had with "Tony" as an incident in which she was harmed, or one in which someone was trying to reach out to her for help. However, in the end, no amount of thinking and hypothesizing makes her feel better, and the only thing she can do is to let the matter go:

> Whatever, whatever- I knew I had discovered yet another circle to put away with my collection of circles. I was back to what I had started with, the helpless, absolutely useless knowledge that the days and nights must surely be bleak for a man who knew the compulsion to thumb through the telephone directory for a woman's name, any woman's name; that this bleakness, multiplied infinite times (see almost any daily paper), was a great dark sickness on the earth... (6)

This "collection of circles" is an image that beautifully illustrates the way the narrator and Yamamoto view disturbing, dismal and ambiguous memories of encounters with those made "sick" by society. That she has created a "collection" of these moments signifies that every element in that grouping shares commonalities; by being collected, they are thus related and separated from other collections. The narrator's desire to "collect" these episodes also reveals that they are maintained and prized or valuable; perhaps in the way that they make her think about her own life and identity as both an "other" and as part of mainstream society. They are important to the narrator, even if they confound and disturb her.

The narrator designates these incidents and memories as "circles," suggesting their similarity as they assume the same shape, but also asserting their autonomy. Each experience, or "circle," is unique and independent, maintaining its own meaning and space in her memory. They may all be circles, but they are not part of the same circle; they do not unite or alter each other in predictable ways. Also, the shape of the "circle" implies that there is something ongoing and never-ending about these episodes. They are never fully understood or concluded, but rather they move around and around in the narrator's mind until they are "put away" again.

The narrator's desire to "put away" the incident recalls the way in which ex-internees coped with painful internment memories. The long silence of the Japanese American community that characterized the post-war years is a symptom of this attempt to move on, and not to dwell on a dark period of time that would never be fully understood or rightfully acknowledged. In a similar sense, moments like the narrator's exposure to the "high-heeled shoes" man and "Tony's" phone call cannot be solved or explained in simple terms but become meaningful when put side by side with other similarly perplexing and disturbing incidents.

McDonald and Newman also suggest that "human interaction is 'a collection of circles'" (26). This definition is quite accurate in the sense that this and other encounters, such as Emiko's correspondence with the incarcerated Alden in "The Eskimo Connection," are uncommon, but constitute the various accumulating connections we make throughout our lives. Comparable incidents are "infinite," as the narrator notes can be surmised from reading the newspaper. Instead of ignoring them and treating them as devoid of any human or common element, Yamamoto suggests that we take a closer look at these connections and encounters to find what is really there. Is it someone asking for help? Is it a reminder of your forgotten past?

The "High-Heeled Shoes, A Memoir" also resonates with Yamamoto's other stories in that it includes moments in which the narrator feels guilty about judging the "other" in the encounter. The guilt stems from the narrator or protagonist's station as someone who has managed to integrate into the mainstream, yet can still identify with people who have not. This tension arising from a double identity resurfaces in discussions of how Yamamoto writes about boundaries and confined space as regulating

"otherness." The simultaneous identification and separation from "others" brings to light the essential elements of segregation in "The Eskimo Connection" and "A Fire in Fontana," as demonstrated in the following chapters. In this first chapter, then we have seen how narrator and character process and attempt to come to terms with a hurtful past and the continuous hurt of the memory of that past.

Chapter 2: Embracing the Boundary

The years that Hisaye Yamamoto spent in confinement in Poston, Arizona clearly impacted everything she wrote later, as literary critics and readers have recognized. Where I wish to flesh out this ongoing discourse is in demonstrating how Yamamoto took her suffering in the internment camp and sought to place it in context with other kinds of confinement. Yamamoto achieves this in many of her stories by replicating the problems, cultures, and feelings born in both literally and emotionally confining spaces.

One of Yamamoto's later stories in which she revisits the notion of separation and restriction is "Eucalyptus" (1970), in which the narrator recalls time spent in a mental hospital and its particular social and emotional dimensions. In this space, Yamamoto reframes confinement to show how physical and social boundaries can be liberating and also facilitate community life. As Yamamoto shows us, boundaries are not always detrimental and damning. In some cases, walls provide safety and security. They keep hostile or unknown elements out, while allowing for certain dynamics to shift and grow within. Yamamoto appears to be fascinated with the idea of enclosed communities, and how they function as supportive and microcosmic. What does this mean for us who read her work? As Yamamoto does in her writing, we have to shift our focus away from the actual internment camp space in order to understand better how its dynamics impacted Yamamoto, and thus, her writing. "Eucalyptus" tells the story of Toki, a woman recalling time she spent hospitalized for an unspecified mental illness. Through episodic memories, we learn that Toki both feared and became attached to the community of this institution.

Rather than initiating the story in the psychiatric hospital's setting, Yamamoto begins with Toki remembering former fellow patients, linking her to the people rather than the structure of the community. Her descriptive tone with respect to these women is friendly and intimate, as she remembers them well: "I can summon up so many faces, wondering to this day about their gnawing concerns" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 142). These concerns brought the women to the psychiatric hospital, and therefore, they define the aspect of their lives that sets them apart from the rest of society.

Throughout "Eucalyptus," Toki describes the women in the hospital in detailed physical terms: Mary "who always gets Metamucil with her pills" and "whose sweet, weatherbeaten face" she "would recognize anywhere," Amparo Martinez who has "the only other Hispanic name in the place;" the Chinese occupational therapist and her assistant, "a young black girl from Minnesota;" the only black patient with "no physical scars, but the psychic ones [that] incapacitate her;" Anna, "the tall blonde European" and "charming and witty conversationalist" who undergoes electro-shock treatment; the "gorgeous young woman... [with] her head wrapped in a turban" who "cannot be trusted with scissors;" Hilda, "a plumpish woman" who develops an eating disorder that she validates using religious rhetoric; and numerous other "grizzled veterans of the emotional wars" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 142-6). The narrator describes these women as individuals who have different mental illnesses or roles in the hospital, making up the social fabric of that provisional community.

An important aspect of this social system is its racial makeup. Toki remembers the community of women in "Eucalyptus" as being relatively diverse. "Most of the staff and patients are white. But there is a sprinkling of us others..." she says, as she

systematically lists the non-white staff and patients (Yamamoto, Seventeen 143). In particular, there is Phyllis, who "is black and the only one on the staff we'd all do anything for" (143-4). Yamamoto's statement here suggests a cause-consequence relationship between Phyllis' minority status and the fact that she is so well liked. Yamamoto describes Phyllis' remarkable kindness, but the emphasis is on the fact that the patients identify with her status as a marginalized person in the larger framework of the dominant culture. Phyllis is marginalized because of her race and gender, while the patients are sequestered to the psychiatric hospital because they are mentally ill and cannot cope with the demands of daily life in society. In contrast to the white male psychiatrist who imposes diagnoses and interpretations of the women's illnesses, Phyllis does not try to pass judgments with prescriptions or declarations about their states of mind. In contrast, the male psychiatrist exists on the periphery of the institution, as someone viewing the turmoil from the outside, "smoking a long cigar" and occasionally making suggestions, giving Toki "a sentence to live by" and saying she needs to "scale down [her] romanticism" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 147). Unlike this doctor who is establishing more walls between himself and his patients, via a discourse riddled with ideas about what sets the patient apart from the world, Phyllis facilitates connections between herself and the patients; she does not remind them of why they are there and what is waiting for them on the "outside."

Aside from the fact that the community in "Eucalyptus" is cloistered because others consider them mentally ill, they also share common experiences as women, except for Toki's psychiatrist. In this way, Yamamoto is also setting up a divide between the culture of women's emotions and men's. Toki makes this distinction clear with her

statements about the various reasons why the other women are being hospitalized. In the case of "the only black patient," Toki describes how this woman's husband reacts to her hospitalization with frustration because he must take on her domestic responsibilities while she is recovering. Of this situation, Toki says "men tend to respond to this kind of emergency with impatience and anger" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 144). Toki also points to a male relative when explaining why one fellow patient cut off all of her hair: "...the story is that her father had his heart set on a son instead of a daughter" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 145). At the end of "Eucalyptus," Toki wonders if the entrapment caused by gender roles is to blame for all of these women's troubles:

> Unwanted sons, intransigent married lovers, husbands and sons who treat us like dirt, father who wanted a son instead- this aggregate of female woe, are we all here because of what men do or don't? No, it is not that simple.... Where do the roots of our malaise lie buried? (Yamamoto, Seventeen 149)

This idea parallels Yamamoto's belief that society's alienating forces are the source of pathology, as determined in "The High-Heeled Shoes." However, Toki admits that mental illness is not as cut and dried as men versus women. This unanswered question begs us not only to think about the reasons why people are mentally ill, but why they are separated from society and judged. What have they done wrong?

Yamamoto creates a picture of the provisional psychiatric hospital community where the women share a common experience of being hospitalized, and yet, they are all distinct from one another. In her work on group dynamics, Karen Cronick states that one of the "important notions for Community Psychology" is that "community intersubjectivity implies awareness of others and concern for their wellbeing. It is

important that community members see each other's needs as extensions of their own without being identical to them" (Cronick). When applying this theory to the community in "Eucalyptus," we see that Toki's continued affection towards these women, and the idea that their "concerns" have become *her* concerns, demonstrates the connection that they shared while they were institutionalized together. However, while they share that struggle, the women are not identical in terms of their diagnoses, race, and personality.

Among these women is Laurel, with whom she has managed to keep in touch. Even after they are discharged from the ward, she and Laurel still "keep tabs on one another by phone," suggesting that their relationship was strong enough within the confines of the hospital to sustain the transition outside the institutionalized space. This is partially due to their mutual identification as stigmatized women. When Laurel tells Toki over the phone that her emotional situation is less than stellar, Toki understands without the need for further explanation because Laurel's condition is "exactly [Toki's] condition" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 143). Toki identifies with Laurel as a fellow sufferer, and the inter-subjectivity of that suffering is so strong that it transcends verbal communication.

However, Toki and Laurel have a strong verbal connection when it comes to discussing their past. Their relationship is partially based on Toki's role as Laurel's touchstone for what life was like in the institution, as Laurel has forgotten quite a bit about the experience and who the other women were. Toki believes that electro-shock therapy is to blame for Laurel's memory loss, and sustains this idea when she recounts how she overheard another patient who had received electro-shock crying out "How would you like it if you lost your whole memory?" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 143). Thus

Toki, whose name means "time" in Japanese, functions as a testament to the past for Laurel, and in this way, Toki and Laurel have created a common memory based on their shared time in confinement. This is based on Yamamoto's own experience being hospitalized and making friends with a fellow patient, with whom she kept in contact until the woman's death (DeSoto, Personal Interview).

Regarding electro-shock therapy and its repeated mention in "Eucalyptus, " this idea of "healing" accompanied by memory loss is particularly meaningful because Yamamoto is making a subtle parallel to role of the Japanese-American community in uncovering forgotten or obscured memories about the internment. The testimonial discourse that Yamamoto sets up between Toki and Laurel, and Toki and the reader, corresponds to the ways in which ex-internees recover patchy or repressed memories of their internment spaces and the communities they shared them with. Many years after the end of World War II, efforts to compile records of the internment began, such as those by the Japanese American Project through the Oral History Program at California State University, Fullerton; the Japanese American National History Museum in Los Angeles and numerous documentaries, such as Emiko Omori's Rabbit in the Moon. In a similar way, Toki's conversations with Laurel and Yamamoto's writing are also testimonies and records of time that past in a certain place with certain people. These efforts to preserve testimony provide a way to reaffirm personal memory and conviction where history books and communal silence did not value that documentation. There were few, if any historians or unbiased reporters in the internment camps, just as there were no people documenting the community on the inside of the psychiatric hospital. The burden of

proof in these situations lies solely on the survivors and confined communities themselves.

Another connection between the internment camp separation and the hospital ward is that both spheres serve to insulate people from the outside world and facilitate the birth of a new community within its walls. As internees struggled to transplant their lifestyles and values to their places of incarceration, Toki has made the mental institution a safe and livable environment for herself. Throughout "Eucalyptus" she describes how she gets along with the other women, and how they have forged connections and made routines.

> So, those hot July days on the broad patio, Laurel and I usually share the shade of the same bright-striped canvas swing. We light endless cigarettes, weave brightly colored yarn onto plastic baskets, call it occupational therapy. (Yamamoto, Seventeen 142)

The sense of community that Yamamoto presents in "Eucalyptus" is reminiscent of the improvised community established by the internees at Poston. She recalls days spent essentially killing time with others, waiting to take the next step that will make them free: this idea of time spent outside of society and searching for something "occupational" to make oneself productive are the same problems that internees faced at Poston. Having been transported to the middle of the Arizona desert, they had to create something there to organize and maintain their lives. They built their own communal homes, mess halls, hospitals and schools. They created means to employ each other and educate their children in efforts to spend time in fruitful ways:

> In order to keep the desire to learn alive in the students in addition to simply keeping them occupied, the incarcerees themselves organized and taught makeshift classes.... To combat boredom and attempt to establish as much of a sense of normality as possible under the circumstances, other activities, such as baseball leagues, were organized. (Fugita and Fernandez, 54-5)

In these processes, they also shared experiences of isolation and confinement that challenged the every day patterns they were used to. The women in "Eucalyptus" also derived ways in which to make their time in the psychiatric hospital bearable by participating in a so-called "occupational therapy:" a term that ironically points out the lack of meaning and healing in those activities. In the same way, the occupations of Japanese Americans in internment could not erase the fact that they did not choose to be there and were losing precious years of their lives in the desert.

Another aspect of "Eucalyptus" that links the hospital space with the internment camp is Toki's reluctance to leave the institution, even though that is her goal as she seeks treatment. She states, "Still, when I leave, I don't feel ready" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 147). This echoes the sentiment expressed by many ex-internees who, at the end of the war felt that although the internment camps were wretched, they had been there so long that they had made them a home, and they did not know what else to expect anymore from the outside. The uncertainty they would face by departing the camps was frightening enough to make some feel more secure in their incarcerated state:

> A feeling of uncertainty hung over the camp; we were worried about the future. Plans were made and remade, as we tried to decide what to do. Some were ready

> to risk anything to get away. Others feared to leave the protection of the camp. (Okubo 139)

Other surviving ex-internees expressed similar sentiments in Emiko Omori's documentary film, Rabbit in the Moon. In an interview with James Omura, a writer and former newspaper editor, he explains how at the end of the internment "we came out of the camps like new immigrants," meaning many of the ex-internees had lost their homes, jobs, businesses, and friends, forcing them to rebuild their lives from scratch. Omori herself continues by adding, "...with a twenty-five dollar government stipend to replace all we had lost, and we entered a country now foreign to us." Yamamoto remembers her departure from the camps as a bittersweet event, "Oh everybody was ecstatic about it, except there were some people that stayed on till the end and they didn't have any place to go, so I felt sorry for them" (DeSoto, Personal Interview). For some of the ex-internees, the camp community was all that they had left and they dreaded leaving it.

Toki expresses her hesitation towards leaving the psychiatric hospital at several points in the story, one of which concerns her responsibility to her family: "Laurel, impatient to get back to the land of the living...I, willy-nilly, venture back uneasily to my place with my husband and children" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 142). The fact that Toki goes so far as to remove herself from her family shows how serious her condition is, but also how deep the fear is of returning to a world that constrains her with its domestic and social demands. If Toki feels safer in a community of mentally ill women than in her domestic role in society, what does that say about the role of communal confinement in Yamamoto's stories?

Although it is never explicitly stated, one of the underlying fears that exists outside of the hospital space is self-distrust. In this way, the hospital protects the women from themselves, and the fear is that without those walls, the protection is gone. This anxiety manifests itself in a particular incident Toki recalls: "I remember one who is discharged and goes home. The news we get the next day is that she is dead. We are pretty subdued for the next few days" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 148). This fear of suicide and violence lurking on the outside parallels the fear of a backlash at the end of the internment.

The sense that, after leaving the psychiatric hospital, the ease of speaking about the experience ceases also contributes to Toki's apprehension. There becomes a kind of shame that overshadows the experience and makes it difficult to talk about with others. Once they have been hospitalized, society stigmatizes women, as the ex-internees were stigmatized for having been considered a threat to national security and treated as such by being placed in internment camps.

One way to think about how Yamamoto's fictional communities function in opposition to the "outside" world is to compare them to the panopticon, as spaces where people take on self-policing behaviors in order to avoid being chastised by an invisible authority that may be monitoring them. Whereas the panopticon isolates confined individuals from one another, the psychiatric ward in "Eucalyptus" unites women with mental illnesses via their segregation from a mainstream society where they would feel alienated. One might think that a space such as a mental institution would rob people of their individuality and ability to forge alliances between group members. Although this is the effect that Foucault's panopticon's confinement had, in Yamamoto's confined

spaces these individuals flourish while it is on the outside of these boundaries that they feel oppressed and vulnerable. In the psychiatric hospital and among women with similar problems, they do not have the same expectations placed upon them, and they are thus protected from the societal conditions that Yamamoto asserts are the cause of their pathology. Inside of the ward, the women know each other's pain; it is a place of communal suffering. They may be marginalized in the larger context of American society, as they fail to fulfill domestic duties or adjust to the hardships of life, but inside the hospital's boundaries, they are united in that common displacement and rejection. Outside of the hospital walls are the pressures of home and society, and the supportive community crumbles, except in the case of Toki and Laurel's friendship. Many of these women would have had to return to homes with demanding children and husbands whom they would not only have to care for, but to whom they would probably also have to explain and validate their breakdown. This explains Toki's reluctance to leave the hospital, and parallels the very same reluctance felt by some ex-internees to return to their homes after the internment.

Most Japanese-Americans leaving internment camps did not even have homes and relatives to return to, and were well aware of the hostility that awaited them, not only in general terms as Asian Americans in a racist society, but also in response to their affiliation with Pearl Harbor. Therefore, the confined space of the internment camp also served as a kind of insulation from the outside world. This relates differently to the notion of the panopticon, in which the outside space is favorable to the punishment on the inside. This is not to say that the internment camps favorable spaces, but neither was the outside world.

Internees were well aware of the history of violent, racially motivated attacks against Japanese-Americans. Ironically, protection from these kinds of attacks was cited as one of the excuses the government gave for "evacuating" Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor (Fugita and Fernandez 3). With society accusing Japanese-Americans of being disloyal and incapable of assimilating, many felt criminalized, and in turn, developed a process of self-policing, self-censorship and silence.

In his book, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Michel Foucault discusses how prisoners in a panoptical prison internalize the judicial eye of the invisible prison guard because they never know when they are being watched. In other words, they begin to police themselves so that at any given moment that the judicious authority looks at them, they will be behaving. The self-policing effect that the panopticon has on prisoners can certainly be applied to many groups of detained persons who feel like they are being watched and judged. This can certainly be said of ex-internees who felt punished by the entire nation for their Japanese-American heritage. It would make sense that they would have some fears about leaving camp to re-enter the larger prison of American culture.

For the majority who wanted to leave, they left with the burden of an experience they weren't sure they should talk about. Omori also discusses the various reasons why many internment survivors did not discuss the camps after World War II. At one point she says

> There are a lot of reasons we didn't talk much about the camps... We knew we had been in concentration camps... but by the war's end, 'concentration camp' had taken on a meaning of unimaginable horror. So one of the reasons we didn't

> talk much about them is not that they were so bad, but because they weren't bad *enough*. (Omori)

Omori points out that, compared with the tragedies experienced in Europe during the war, the Japanese-American internment seemed minuscule. This is in part due to the government and media's successful attempts to downplay the severity of the camp's conditions, but it also points out how other people's experience served to influence the way many Japanese-Americans judged their own experience. In Omori's case, her experience as juxtaposed against that of Jews and others persecuted by the Nazis was not "bad enough" to merit the attention or analysis it really deserved.

This sentiment is echoed by Takeya Mizuno, an ex-internee, who cites the camp newspapers as expressing such ideas in response to pressure from camp officials: "Feeling it futile to resist censorship, the evacuee staff often exercised self-censorship. As Kikuchi [an editor of the Tanforan Totalizer] admitted, 'we paint a bright picture of things inadvertently." In this way, the editors appropriated a certain style in order to present any kind of message they could. Editorials that were published by the Poston Chronicle support this faux-optimistic trope. One editor writes:

> Yes, so you were temporarily deprived of your rights! How can you so blindly disregard the facts of military necessity?.... At least, you're enduring life more or less snugly in a relocation camp... those kids are dying, having their legs and arms shot off or mutilated beyond repair.... so that they may enjoy their God-given liberties, not now, but after the peace, even as you and I shall enjoy them. ("Faith in God and Human Sanctity")

This passage, if it is employing sarcasm with its near accusation of readers for their suffering, it is nevertheless a typical example of the tone of editorials in the Poston Chronicle. The rhetoric disseminated in the community promoted a culture of silence and repression as defense mechanisms and means of demonstrating American loyalty, leading to the "forgetting" of the internment camp history.

This denial was, not surprisingly, supported by the government. In a practical sense, talking about the hardships that survivors experienced called attention to the fact that the United States government acted hypocritically by interning its citizens, just as our enemies had during World War II. As Caroline Chung Simpson points out, remembering the internment "created an undeniably uncanny effect by seeming to dissolve the difference between America as a symbol of democratic freedom and the tyranny of a police state represented by the Axis powers" (21). To say that the camps were horrendous would be to accuse the government and make oneself vulnerable to accusations of being "disloyal."

The rhetoric of the Chronicle suggests that internees think about the future, and advises them on how to act when they are released from Poston. This idea of crossing the physical boundaries that segregate them from their former lives is crucial to understanding how life in a community versus life on the outside might have been viewed by Yamamoto. This excerpt from an editorial in the Chronicle sheds some light:

> Undoubtedly, the greatest work in combating racial prejudice rests with the individual evacuee who is able to resettle on the outside. He will be in a position to win over the needed friendship and trust of a whole community. Every

> rehabilitated evacuee can take it as a personal duty to make real effort to regain the goodwill of his neighbors. (Fukuba)

This dialectic, set up between inside and outside the internment camp, put a great deal of pressure on internees to re-integrate themselves into an antagonistic society when they left. This pressure is comparable to the demands placed on Toki and her fellow patients when they faced leaving the psychiatric hospital to reclaim their domestic and social lives.

Through Toki's memories, Yamamoto weaves recollections of a community created from scratch by mismatched members trying to find comfort in each other and their shared experience. This mosaic and collage of personalities and disorders reminds Yamamoto of the kind of enmeshed, and sometimes intricate, atmosphere that these confined communities spawn: making friends, enemies, self-governing; literally building your own walls; comforting one another; reminding one another of what it means to be human.

The space of a mental institution shares elements with the internment camp. Both are places where people are put because they are considered a "threat" to society or society is a "threat" to them. In "Eucalyptus" and her other stories, Yamamoto subtly asserts that the stigmatizing, sexist, and racist society is the origin of her character's "sickness." In such stories as "Eucalyptus" and "the Eskimo Connection," Yamamoto points out that ironically, society "cures" boundary breakers by placing them within stricter boundaries for control and observation. However, she concludes that this exclusion is what initially leads to that pathology and the memory of that exclusion perpetuates it.

Chapter 3: Crossing Lines

Rather than writing about what is explicitly left out of Yamamoto's narratives, as I have demonstrated has been the practice of earlier critics, I have chosen to examine a prominent theme that is rarely explored: how and why do Yamamoto's characters cross boundaries, or respond to others who compromise their own spaces? In this chapter, I discuss how Yamamoto's characters in "The Eskimo Connection" cross boundaries or find their own space violated. In this story Yamamoto creates a scenario where one character on the "inside" of a barrier has an encounter with someone on the "outside." By connecting these characters Yamamoto makes the point that barriers are what limit our lives, and our actions in pushing against them also define us.

The circumstances in which boundaries are violated are important to look at not only because they are present in most of Yamamoto's stories, but because they are one way that she brings her sentiments about the internment to light. The boundaries in "The Eskimo Connection," as well as the other stories mentioned in this thesis, are comparable to the walls of the internment camp, in that they are both physically and emotionally constraining.

The endings of these stories are also quite like the end of the internment, as expressed by many ex-internees, in that they end without a crescendo or sense of falling action. They merely fade away without a resolution or explanation. As the ex-internees re-entered society after World War II, there was neither apology from the other side nor common rebellion from within. There was only the profound sense of loss and fear about what they would encounter on the "outside." "The Eskimo Connection" also lacks an emotional crescendo, in that Alden and Emiko never actually meet in person, and their

correspondence does not end because of any particular conflict but merely lapses as time passes. "The High-Heeled Shoes" ends similarly because the narrator never confronts the men who harassed her; she is left in thought without having acted. That these stories lack a typical ending in the linear narrative sense demonstrates that it is as difficult for Yamamoto to find meaning in these situations as it is for us to find a conclusion about them in her stories.

Exploring notions of guilt and incarceration in Yamamoto's stories requires considering the role of *loyalty* in the minds of internment camp survivors, and how the emphasis on proving one's loyalty to the United States was seen as the only way to escape persecution as a Japanese-American, although proving that loyalty proved to be an impossible task. Ronald Takaki, the author of Strangers from a Different Shore, describes why silence and repression played an important role in proving the loyalty of ex-internees:

> "Stigmatized," the ex-internees have been carrying the "burden of shame" for over forty painful years. "They felt like a rape victim," explained Congressman Norman Mineta, a former internee of the Heart Mountain internment camp. "They were accused of being disloyal. They were victims but they were on trial and they did not want to talk about it." (Takaki, 484-5)

In other words, the "trial" never ended for ex-internees. Even after the end of World War II, many still lived in fear that they would have to return to their desert prisons. In many Japanese-American hearts and minds, the returnees would remain fugitives trying to hide their true feelings about the internment from the government. Yamamoto is no exception to this trend. She was outspoken compared to others, but when we ask "how much more

could she have said about the camps?" we realize just how much she restrained herself in her early writings.

The mental and behavioral distinctions between inside and outside Poston set the stage for Yamamoto's writings about other communities, especially in her story "The Eskimo Connection" (1983), which questions the meaning of incarceration by exploring the correspondence between Emiko, a middle-aged widow and ex-internee, and Alden, a twenty-three year-old prisoner. Alden initially contacts Emiko by mail, saying that he enjoyed some of her poetry that he read in an Asian American literary publication and he would like to know what she thinks of his writing. Although these two start out as strangers, they develop a friendly correspondence through letters that evolves into a relationship where Emiko feels comfortable sharing pictures of her family, confiding her dissatisfaction with her domestic lifestyle, and even planning a visit to the prison to meet Alden, although these efforts fail and the meeting never occurs.

Yamamoto builds "The Eskimo Connection" around the idea that Alden is in prison and Emiko is on the outside. In fact, it is the boundary of the prison itself that makes their connection possible. If Alden were not in a prison, would he have contacted Emiko, and furthermore, would she have felt comfortable responding? Their age difference and his mental and emotional instability would probably have stood in the way of their friendship in the light of day. In this way, the prison walls facilitate their correspondence. However, as they cannot meet in person, the prison also limits their relationship.

How boundaries function is a critical question in this story, as Alden is incarcerated and Emiko is his connection to the "outside." He overcomes the boundaries

of his cell by corresponding with her, and she in turn defies boundaries derived from societal norms by corresponding with a man in prison whom she has never even met. One of the major questions in "The Eskimo Connection" is why Yamamoto creates this line for Emiko and Alden to cross. And what compels Emiko to continue contacting Alden even after she becomes disturbed by his writing?

Yamamoto creates this relationship founded on Emiko and Alden's ability to look beyond their physical limits in search of common ground. On the surface, they appear connected because they are both writers and people of color. However, the vital connection between Emiko and Alden is that they have both been prisoners. Emiko can understand Alden's imprisonment because he exists on the fringe of society as a potential threat, as she and other Japanese-Americans once were treated. Despite all of the efforts to look toward the future and make the best of the internment period, internees could never fully escape the truth: that life in Poston was incarceration in the middle of a desert.

The outright comparison of the internment camp to a prison appeared in post-World War II literature, such as Bailey's City in the Sun, in which we see that the camps were indeed prisons:

> First thing for certain, on entering Poston, was the gate. Here too were the sentries, the searchlights, and the guard towers. As they were beckoned through by the soldiers with rifles, cries and angry snarls filled the busses. Poston was no city of hope. Credence and assurance to the contrary, Poston was another concentration camp. To every weary person who entered, it was a prison formidable enough to frighten a leather-hided criminal. (Bailey 65)

The intensity of being imprisoned in such a way, while not actually being guilty of any tangible crime, is a critical issue in "The Eskimo Connection," as Emiko does not know what Alden has been found guilty of. In creating the discourse between Emiko and Alden, Yamamoto questions common understandings of prisons, crime, and guilt in other contexts.

This ambiguous foundation is the undercurrent of "The Eskimo Connection," and it proves to be emotionally problematic for Emiko, who recognizes the unorthodox nature of her relationship with Alden. After all, he is a "prisoner-patient at a federal penitentiary in the Midwest" who is "young enough to be one of her children," while she identifies herself as an "aging Nisei widow in Los Angeles." In the beginning, Emiko recognizes that responding to his first letter is "against her own better judgment" and yet, she begins a correspondence (Yamamoto, Seventeen 96-7). At this point, both Emiko and Alden have crossed the boundaries of societal norms by initiating a taboo relationship. She is substantially older than he, a widow, and a mother; he is young, potentially dangerous, and a convicted felon.

Emiko is aware of Alden's criminality, and yet she suppresses any negative intuition about their correspondence. Yamamoto reveals Emiko's paradoxical instincts regarding Alden in subtle ways throughout the story. Emiko immediately senses that Alden is a sensitive and potentially edgy person, and is aware that "most egos were covered with the thinnest of eggshells" and therefore, her responses to his writing are "careful" and written "as tactfully as possible." (Yamamoto, Seventeen 97) Already, it is as though Emiko is avoiding a potential conflict. The unique nature of their relationship, that it is entirely mediated through text because his confinement prevents

them from meeting, allows for Emiko to carefully construct and guide their discourse in this way.

Although Alden never actually threatens or harms Emiko in the story, there is an underlying eeriness that shades her narrative. The discourse between Alden and Emiko is polite and amicable, and yet the atmosphere suggests that there is something very disturbing about their correspondence. This comes through in the casual way that Yamamoto lists the various problems that Alden has:

> As the sporadic exchange of letters continued, she pieced together enough to learn... that he was being treated for depression (he mentioned massive doses of thorazine); that he attended meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous there at the prison; that he had come to Christ with such fervor that he considered the study of His Word the main preoccupation of his life. (97)

Yamamoto mentions these facts about Alden, and then continues the story without making a comment about them or how they affect his relationship with Emiko. The way in which Yamamoto treats these revelations, as completely unremarkable, is eerie because it is as though these were facts of the same nature as the size of his family, his appreciation for broccoli or feelings about the color blue. His mental health, addictions, and almost disturbing obsession with redemption are normalized in this story, and that is an uncomfortable fact. She is drawing Alden nearer to the reader in the same way Emiko draws him in; he is not "untouchable" anymore. His emotional and intellectual proximity to Emiko through their shared experience as writers and people of color calls into question our attempts to label him as a monster that should be cut off from society,

compromising our judgment and creating a provocative and eerie undercurrent in the narrative.

To some extent, the eeriness is the ambiguity of Alden's guilt and violence. The fact that he seems so amicable and kind in their correspondence, and that he and Emiko, who is a very likable character, can relate to each other is disturbing in its incongruity with his status as a felon. Their relationship blurs the lines between right and wrong, breaking the barrier of social norms that wish to separate the "bad guys" and the "good guys." Identifying and sympathizing with the public enemy makes the judgment against him much more problematic.

Yamamoto revels in this ambiguity; it seems to be where she feels most comfortable. Perhaps this is because the internment camp was such a place, where a community of suspects without identifiable crimes lived together. Just like Alden, whose crime is never explained, the alleged "crimes" of the Japanese-American community were never affirmed. And yet, both are labeled as a threat; they form a community of untouchables.

This eeriness also stems from the sense that Emiko is communicating with the "other," and that she is perhaps identifying too closely with this man whose crime she doesn't even know. It is almost as though she is in denial that he is guilty of any crime at all:

> Alden Ryan Walunga never mentioned the reason for his incarceration and Emiko never asked. If he did not wish to reveal the nature of his crime, she did not wish to know it.... Besides, Emiko was not sure that prisons were the answer to crime. It was a known fact, was it not, that prisons, as most of them were now

> constituted, rarely rehabilitated? Not only was she against capital punishment, she was also against prisons.... She agreed with the wise man who had called for a society "in which it is easier to be good." (Yamamoto, Seventeen 99)

Emiko's attitudes about incarceration and rehabilitation reflect Yamamoto's own experience having been imprisoned. Why should she trust the government's judgment of anyone, after she witnessed how it failed to recognize its own culpability? These sentiments return to the story's foreground when Emiko is trying to send reading materials to Alden and she encounters restrictions set up by the prison: "She felt something like a cold hand touch her when she received these official notes- that was what being in prison was, was it, the relinquishment of every liberty that those on the outside took for granted?" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 98). This "cold hand" is a reminder of life on the "inside," that is, life as a prisoner.

In terms of spaces and boundaries, the prison fails to insulate Alden from the outside world, insofar as he is able to initiate and continue this friendship with Emiko. It also does not prevent him from crossing the lines of their friendship, in disturbing her with the last story he sends her. The story tells of a young man who has killed his uncle and raped and killed a young, female relative (102). Emiko's reaction to the story belies the tense nature of their correspondence:

> Emiko found the story disturbing. It was afflicted with the same dichotomous anguish as that first essay of his that she had read.... Emiko was stunned by the story. Was this, then, Alden's story? (Yamamoto, Seventeen 102-3)

In this passage it becomes clear that the "connection" between Emiko and Alden is flawed and incomplete. While she wants to identify with him and not allow her questions

about his crime lead judgment, she cannot completely let go of his "otherness." This is also manifested through the guilt that Emiko feels when she distances herself from Alden. She feels ashamed when she uses familial duties as an excuse not to visit him at the prison: "'That which I should have done, I did not do,' chanted a small voice in the back of her mind" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 100). Emiko's pattern of blaming herself continues in the next instance where she tries to meet with Alden and is unable to. She internalizes this impossibility as manifesting her secret desire not to meet him because she fears him.

Through his letters to Emiko, Alden has managed to transcend the walls of the prison, in order to connect to someone on the outside. Emiko, who disapproves of the prison system, is a sympathetic outsider, who, through literature and their shared minority status, can temporarily overlook or deny the fact that society has deemed Alden a criminal.

The question of innocence and what defines "guilt" is the cornerstone of this story. Who is the criminal? They have both been put away, extracted from society's mainstream. How can Yamamoto's character judge this man? This is especially problematic because there is never a conflict between the two. Any transgression is subtle, and there is no culmination of events that would make a concrete change in Emiko's mind. There are no real consequences or rewards in their connection, which is incomplete and problematic to begin with. However, what makes their relationship worth exploring is the way in which it develops despite the barriers that the prison walls create, and in many ways, because of the distance between them.

Segregation and marginalization continue to be important in the next chapter, which explores Yamamoto's "A Fire in Fontana" and the ways in which her exposure to

journalism shaped that story and others. As in the case of Emiko and Alden's incomplete connection, "A Fire in Fontana" involves characters who simultaneously identify with and disassociate themselves from the "other."

Chapter 4: The Burden of Truth

Although she is better known for her collection of short stories, Yamamoto was also a journalist for three different publications. At the beginning of her internment in Poston, Arizona, she worked for the daily mimeographed camp newspaper, the Poston Chronicle, which appeared from December 22, 1942 until October 23, 1945. She gathered information by going around the camp and talking to people, reporting back to the writers about the events and news. Right after her release, from 1945-1948, she worked as one of the few Japanese-American reporters for the Tribune, a weekly newspaper for the black community in Los Angeles. Professor Scott Kurashige, whose work has brought him into contact with the files of the Tribune, notes that after some time spent compiling short news excerpts from wire services, Yamamoto was promoted and began writing her own column, called "Small Talk," in which she wrote about her own experiences with racism and inter-racial relations in L.A. The title of her column reflects her conversational style and self-effacing nature, qualities that persisted throughout her career. After reading copies of the Catholic Worker newsletter she found in the Tribune's office, she became interested in Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker community, and after joining the community she contributed to The Catholic Worker newsletter from 1953-1955, writing mostly about life within the community and the development of the movement (Cheung, "Introduction" ix).

In between her stints as a journalist, Yamamoto published some of her best-known short fiction. However, during her employment as a journalist Yamamoto published little fiction, if any. A question that remains is what did it mean for her to write news articles, rather than fiction? And what happened to the role of fiction when

journalism failed to tell the whole truth, as in the case of the censored Poston Chronicle and the wider-circulating newspapers that downplayed the internment during World War II? In An Absent Presence, Caroline Chung Simpson states that "West-coast Americans were aware of the internment, as it was mentioned in local papers at the beginning, but the rest of the country remained relatively uninformed" (Simpson, 22). She goes on to point out that

> In its March 20, 1944, edition, on the very eve of the postwar period, *Life* magazine, the most popular magazine in America at the time, presented its readers with the first feature article on Japanese American internment to appear in a major publication. (Simpson, 22)

The mainstream press's omission of details and postponed coverage of the internment remains as an example of U.S. journalism's shameful failure to inform readers about events of the utmost importance. Some historians even suggest that the Hearst newspapers in California disseminated racist articles that helped to build the case against Japanese Americans before the internment. Journalist Togo W. Tanaka recalls his encounters with the Hearst dominated west coast newspapers that he read in the pre-war period

> Throughout the years that I was privileged to edit the Rafu Shimpo English section, the discomforting shadow of William Randolph Hearst and his newspapers lay heavily over Japanese Americans... as I grew older and read them, they never failed to leave me with a terrible feeling that some foreordained doom lay ahead for me, as the terrible Yellow Peril would descend one day upon our beaches. (Hanson and Mitson, 89)

How does coverage like this that not only withholds critical reports on citizens, but helps instigate prejudice and violence against them, alter the role of the subsequent fiction inspired by the same events? This is when the "question of truth" in Yamamoto's fiction becomes more important and especially critical in terms of her stories referring to life in the internment camps, where the Poston Chronicle and mainstream newspapers would not have accurately portrayed the internee's real living conditions.

Any censorship imposed upon mainstream newspapers regarding coverage of the internment was multiplied in the newsrooms of the internment camp newspapers. According to Takeya Mizuno's article "Journalism under Military Guards and Searchlights" on assembly camp newspapers,

> [T]he government's blatant censorship and control of the camp newspapers was one of the most severe abridgements of First Amendment press rights in U.S. history and is necessary in understanding the government's mass incarceration policy during the war and its impact on the civil liberties and rights of Japanese Americans. (Mizuno)

Although Mizuno writes about the newspapers in the assembly center environment, the transitional precursor to the internment camp, the censorship continued in the policies guiding internment camp newspapers, at least in the early years of the internment when Yamamoto was working for the Poston Chronicle. Mizuno cites, as a notorious example of official censorship, the unwarranted killing of a young man at Manzanar, shot by guards as he approached the camp boundary. The Manzanar Free Press was not permitted to report the incident, and there were other incidents in which guards killed internees. Yamamoto witnessed a similar disregard for the First Amendment and a

censored writing environment at Poston, fully demonstrating for her the limitations of journalism.

On the other hand, although they were subject to censorship, the camp newspapers succeeded in providing a place for the community to define itself within the existing parameters. In her article "Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict," Catherine Luther asserts that

> The War Relocation Authority, which was charged with overseeing all internment camp operations, required that a newspaper be established in each camp as a means to disseminate information and to create a community atmosphere.

In a way, papers like the Poston Chronicle helped to construct the identity of the internees with its editorials and attempt to create a sense of life in that transplanted "town" in the middle of the desert. In his book, City in the Sun, Paul Bailey describes how, despite being subject to censorship, the Chronicle remained an important resource for internees:

> The camp publication had started as the *Press Bulletin*, to eventually emerge as the *Poston Chronicle*. Its patterns of emergence varied, from weekly, semi-weekly, to daily, and eventually back again... It possessed none of the freedom and swing of the long-repressed language sheets, and everyone knew it was management-dominated.... But with all of its faults, the *Chronicle* was a good thing for Poston. (Bailey, 105)

Internment camp newspapers were usually simple bulletins that served only to provide basic information on events and procedures. However, since the Poston Chronicle served the largest of the internment populations, it developed into a comprehensive news source that included local events, weather, obituaries, birth announcements, engagement

announcements, classified ads, a monthly communicable diseases report, comic strips, and even a "pet story of the week." It also covered such local social events as the "White X-mas theme dance," the Buddhist New Year celebrations, sport tournaments, local art exhibits, information on night classes, and often included such celebratory headlines as "More screen windows arrive" and "Radio appliance repair shop opens" (Poston Chronicle, Dec. 27 1942, Dec. 31 1943). Despite the desperate living conditions, a real effort was made on the part of the internees to create a new community, replicating as many aspects of home life as possible. As articles in the Chronicle reveal, "Even as the camp grew seemingly endless in size, it settled down into a crazy-quilt pattern of religious and social life" (Bailey 100). The Chronicle served to weave together this "quilt" of fractured groups, building a sense of community through its reports on social events and editorials about camp life.

Through her contact with the Poston Chronicle, both as a reader and an employee, Yamamoto developed a sense of how newspapers may function both to define and defy the communities they serve. These notions carried over to her work as a journalist for the Tribune in Los Angeles. Yamamoto's 1985 autobiographical story, "A Fire in Fontana," provided the opportunity to question journalism's beneficial role in society, and on a more fundamental level, to highlight the possibility that fiction more effectively promotes social consciousness in societies where non-fiction does not. During this period in Yamamoto's life, she was actively crossing the deeply-drawn racial lines of post-war Los Angeles. Her exploration of interracial relationships and encounters is a constant theme in her fiction, and it illustrates her fascination with communities and those who move between them. She begins "A Fire in Fontana" by saying that the period of time during

which she was writing for the Los Angeles Tribune was an eye-opening chapter in her life in which she viewed herself as becoming part of the community she was writing for:

> It was around this time that I felt something happening to me, but I couldn't put my finger on it. It was something like an itch I couldn't locate, or like food not being cooked enough, or something undone which should have been done, or something forgotten which should have been remembered. (Yamamoto, Seventeen 154)

Writing for the Tribune profoundly influenced her interest in memory and her desire to connect her experience to those of others. She describes this internal change in terms of incomplete acts: not being able to relieve an itch, uncooked food, unfinished work, and memory loss. This list of things "undone" suggest that she carries with her the sense that she must *do* something in order to satisfy some old lack of closure. In this sense, the something that "should have been remembered" may be a broad statement about all of the events, memories, and feelings that accompany such a traumatic experience as being interned. In this quotation, she admits that she has forgotten or repressed a portion of those experiences, but acknowledges the residue that the traumas have left and that she can never completely forget. These remnants of the past are what Yamamoto constantly collects and tries to patch together, especially in this piece. Yamamoto's desire to "collect" memories and experiences recalls the narrator's "collection of circles" in "The High-Heeled Shoes." Her work in journalism reminds her of her "circles:" those far off recollections of conversations, places, people, and communities long gone but still haunting her. "A Fire in Fontana" is a "circle" that Yamamoto returns to thirty-eight

years after the event that inspired it, and yet, the memory is as fresh and emotionally charged as it was in 1945.

Mike Davis studied Fontana in his book, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles. In a chapter entitled "Junkyard of Dreams," he retraces Fontana's history, from its origins as a farming community to its role in World War II as the home of a major steel mill, to the development of segregated neighborhoods that led to the tragedy that Yamamoto writes about in "A Fire in Fontana." He emphasizes the fact that Fontana's development has been driven by people who came to the area to seek work and affordable housing and a slice of the American Dream:

> Over the course of the seventy-five years since its founding, Fontana has been both junkyard and utopia for successive tropes of a changing California dream.... To this extent the Fontana story provides a parable: it is about the fate of those suburbanized California working classes who cling to their tarnished dreams at the far edge of the L.A. galaxy. (Davis 376)

Although Fontana's population drew immigrants, and even some racial diversity, each group lived in separate areas of Fontana. As a suburb of Los Angeles, and essentially a product of the city, Davis says of community life there:

> "... a few simple facts of life about Los Angeles's single-family suburbs:... *fact two:* 'Community' in Los Angeles means homogeneity of race, class and especially home values. Community designations... have no legal status...." (Davis 153)

The homogeneity that Davis describes resulted from a "white wall," designed and enforced by homeowner's associations that sought to keep people of color from

purchasing homes in their neighborhoods. The result of these housing blocs was that "95 per cent of the city's housing stock in the 1920s was effectively put off limits to Blacks and Asians" (Davis 161). Segregated neighborhoods continued to be built and designated through the 1940s, during the Japanese-American internment.

In "A Fire in Fontana," Yamamoto recalls the threats to a black man living in the predominantly white L.A. suburb of Fontana received from his neighbors, who demanded that he and his family move someplace else. In the end, we learn that he has been killed with his family in a fire that engulfs his home.

The death in "A Fire in Fontana," is based a true incident that Davis also recounts in City of Quartz:

> O'Day Short, already well known in Los Angeles as a civil rights activist, was the first to challenge Fontana's residential segregation by buying land in town in fall 1945.... In early December, Short was visited by 'vigilantes,' probably Klansmen, who ordered him to move or risk harm to his family. Short stood his ground, reporting the threats to the FBI and the county sheriff, as well as alerting the Black press in Los Angeles. Instead of providing protection, sheriff's deputies warned Short to leave before any 'disagreeableness' happened to his family. (Davis 400)

Although it was probably arson, the police classify the deaths as accidental. Before his tragic death, the man in "A Fire in Fontana" (presumably O'Day Short) had come in to ask for someone working at the newspaper to write about his situation: "He wanted his situation publicized so that some sentiment could be mustered in support of his right to live in Fontana" (Yamamoto, Seventeen 153). Here, Yamamoto is acutely aware of the

Tribune's responsibility to this man. She recognizes the *power* of the press and the media, and yet she describes simultaneously feeling "helpless" and unable to do enough to help him (Yamamoto, Seventeen 155). This feeling of powerlessness comes from her realization that tragedies occur, and one cannot always prevent them, because even responsible news writing has a limited influence. However, she regains some of that power through putting that event into a short memoir, which honors the man's memory and renders his fate more universally. Through relating this incident to her internment, Yamamoto suggests that tragedies can be visited upon us all.

Yamamoto's helplessness seems also to reflect her residual feelings about her own inability to save herself and others from the internment, and furthermore, the failure of the press to advocate for Japanese-Americans at that time. In a similar way, mainstream journalism failed to investigate or question the incident Yamamoto writes in about in "Fire in Fontana." According to Mike Davis, "The local press gave the tragedy unusually low-key coverage, quoting the D.A.'s opinion that the fire was an accident" (Davis 400).

This story, and similar experiences limiting her opportunities as a journalist, led Yamamoto to see authorship as bearing a responsibility to portray and comment upon human struggle. She describes this process as being something she entered reluctantly, as if it would awaken something unbearable in her:

> ... when I realized that something was happening to me, I scrambled to backtrack for awhile... Yet I know that this event transpired inside me; sometimes I see it as my inward self being burnt black in a certain fire. Or perhaps the process, unbeknownst to me, had begun even earlier. (Yamamoto, Seventeen 150)

This process is the connection between the struggles she felt, and those of the man who died in the fire. In a way, her ability to "forget" racism and tragedy died in that fire, too. Through her relationship to this man's pain, she has become aware of her own feelings about her past, picking up one of the "circles" from her collection to examine it more closely.

At another point in the story, Yamamoto remembers a painful incident on a bus where she is seated next to a white girl who erupts with pride after correctly predicting that a black man who has just gotten off of the bus will have to drink water from a faucet on the street, rather than be able to receive a glass of water from the restaurant he has just entered. The girl's "chortling" and apparent "glee" when she states "I knew they wouldn't give him a glass of water!" upsets Yamamoto, as she recognizes that all racism is related, at least to the extent that it empowers the racist:

> "Here I was on a bus going back to the camp in Arizona where my father still lived, and I knew there was a connection between my seatmate's joy and our having been put in that hot and windblown place of barracks." (Yamamoto, 151)

In this passage Yamamoto reaches for the root of her identification with the black man: they share a common adversary. They are both victims of a society that values white-supremacy and takes measures to secure that structure.

In hindsight both Yamamoto, interned and unable to escape a space she did not choose, and the Fontana resident, unable to remain in the space of his choice, are victims. However, the Fontana incident was a landmark for Yamamoto, who now wrote explicitly about discrimination rather than insinuating it into her work

Aside from the obvious connection that this man and Yamamoto were both people of color who were discriminated against, they share the experience of being told to leave their homes because they are not white. This idea of space as defined by societal boundaries is present in "The High-Heeled Shoes," "Eucalyptus" and "The Eskimo Connection." In "A Fire in Fontana," as in these other stories, Yamamoto revisits the internment and connects it to wider issues of space and confinement. By writing about racial segregation between blacks and whites, and the violence that results from this separation, Yamamoto can find a parallel episode associated with similar causes and similar suffering. As Grace Kyungwon Hong points out:

> The relationship between these groups is defined by differences, as Yamamoto's linking of internment and segregation demonstrates. Internment and segregation are disparate but related manifestations of the privileging of private property rights that structures the liberal democratic state.

Yamamoto and the man from Fontana were both shunned from their communities, and in both cases, physical threats and intimidation were weapons used against them. In the case of the man from Fontana, there was no legal basis for the arsonist neighbor's actions. However, Yamamoto's forced internment was an executive order handed down from President Roosevelt, which made it technically legal even if clearly unconstitutional in hindsight. The common ground between Short and Yamamoto is the injustice they faced in regards to something so personal and inalienable as the right to live where and how you please. Having that right taken away proved to change the course of Yamamoto's life, and it is not surprising that the tragedy in Fontana renewed that anger.

The police's denial of the arson and its modest coverage in the news were other examples to Yamamoto of how the "truth" was not always accessible by official venues. And so, Yamamoto wrote "A Fire in Fontana," which is a testament of the truth that she witnessed when Short entered the office of the Tribune while she was writing for them. The relation between Yamamoto's journalism and "A Fire in Fontana" is also complementary. Her work for the Los Angeles Tribune provides the fuel for the story, and the story is a manifestation of all of the things never expressed or explained by the news.

Later on in the same story, Yamamoto talks about how watching coverage of the 1963 Watts riot on television gave her a sense that one minority group's backlash against racism was, in some way, vindication for her own suffering: "To me, the tumult in the city was the long-awaited, gratifying next chapter of an old movie that had flickered about in the back of my mind for years" (157). Again, Yamamoto refers back to her internment experience as being housed in the "back of [her] mind," thus in a place that is difficult to access and contemplate. This statement from "A Fire in Fontana" is a prime example of how Yamamoto's later writing took a sharp turn towards a franker, more personal tone, in contrast to that of her earlier, better known work.

Aside from the testimonial element of "A Fire in Fontana," there is also a sense that Yamamoto is confessing her feelings of guilt. She describes herself watching the Watts riot "appalled, inwardly cowering," as she sat in front of the television in her suburban home, atop a hill and far away from the violence and conflict on the screen. She remembers that she was "sitting safely in a house which was located on a street where panic would be the order of the day if a Black family should happen to move in..."

(Yamamoto, Seventeen 157). At this moment, Yamamoto expresses the tension between past and present, and the simultaneous connection and detachment she feels with the images on the television. There is something incongruent about being Japanese-American and a one-time victim of racial segregation, and yet, also enjoying the privilege of suburban living in a racially segregated neighborhood.

This conflict parallels Emiko's guilt stemming from her inability to completely connect with Alden, and the pity that the narrator in the "High-Heeled Shoes" feels for the men who have harassed her. In all of these instances, women are in privileged positions, whether they be free citizens or owners of suburban homes. However, they have also experienced what it means to be the "other," the excluded and incarcerated, the unstable and mentally ill. What disturbs them is that they occupy two places at once, straddling the boundary lines between marginalization and acceptance. They try to use their common experiences to relate to other people who have been alienated, but in those connections they become aware of how different *they* have become from the "other," and in their minds, this amounts to a betrayal of their past.

Journalism is the genre in which Yamamoto sought the power to reconcile this guilt. She wanted to write responsibly and to protect people like O'Day Short. However, as she learned, she would have to return to fiction if she wanted to reclaim power over the truth that her words were to present.

Conclusion: The Last Syllable

The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is "perhaps the most widely reported and studied episode in Asian American history..." (Simpson 1). However, for years after the war, that discussion was held mostly by intellectuals, and not by the survivors themselves. The exception to this was the wave of literature published shortly after the war by such Japanese-Americans as Hisaye Yamamoto (who told me that she does not consider herself to be or to have been an intellectual).

One purpose of this thesis is to call attention to stories that Yamamoto has written and which have been relatively ignored or glanced over by previous scholars. "Eucalyptus," "The High-Heeled Shoes," "The Eskimo Connection," and "A Fire in Fontana" are the stories I highlight for their interesting and complex commentary on separate spaces in society, as well as the role of different genres in defining and understanding the boundaries that surround them. In each instance, these confines can be traced back to Yamamoto's history in the internment camp during World War II. For Yamamoto, confined space is the home of definitions of guilt, innocence, alienation, community and intersubjectivity. These characteristics appear contradictory in the assertion that a confined space can facilitate social life *and* destroy it; prove someone's guilt or provide a unique space in which guilt is irrelevant or ignored.

Each story highlights an issue that results from societal shortcomings. Whereas "The Eskimo Connection" reveals criminality and guilt, "The High-Heeled Shoes" illustrates sexuality and harassment in subtler, less serious ways. "A Fire in Fontana" discusses racial segregation, violence, their memory and repression, while "Eucalyptus" exposes the process in which society segregates the mentally ill.

Hisaye Yamamoto's short stories remain as intricate and complicated as ever, shaded by irony and ambiguity that make each glimpse of her imagination that much more tantalizing. Many of her best stories, including "Morning Rain," "Underground Lady," and "Reading and Writing," remain relatively untouched and unexplored by scholars. There is work still to be done. Continued research and close reading would yield a more complete and rich idea of how other social issues play into Yamamoto's notions of space and boundary. A study of Yamamoto's "Small Talk" column in the L.A. Tribune, if a complete file were available, would also be enlightening regarding her theories about Japanese Americans and the black community.

I hope that I have at least succeeded in demonstrating how incredibly complex and rewarding Yamamoto's lesser known texts are to explore. Investigating the deeply woven patterns and elements that she employs should enrich the discourse on Yamamoto's work, especially as it encompasses her journalistic contributions.

Yamamoto told me that one of her friends always laughs at her because she writes the first and last paragraphs of her stories and then proceeds to go back and fill in the rest. Whether or not she is conscious of it, she utilizes structure and boundary down to the formation of the stories themselves. Within the skeleton she forms she is then able to create the middle matter; the community, and conflict, and the story. Without this framework, these self-imposed boundaries, she might not have composed such magnificent stories as she has.

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