

# Rehistoricizing Differently, Differently: American Literary Globalism and Disruptions of Neo-Colonial Discourse in *Tropic of Orange* and *Dogeaters*

By Patrick S. Lawrence

*[T]he question of aesthetic representation is always also a debate about political representation.*

Lisa Lowe (4)

*Flyers were passed out, information verbally reproduced and distributed almost simultaneously with the frenzy of a kind of information saturation. ... The entirety of the message was disseminated in a thousand languages, including Spanglish, ebonics, and pidgin, to everyone.*

Karen Tei Yamashita (213)

In her article “The Ends of America, the Ends of Postmodernism,” Rachel Adams compares Karen Tei Yamashita’s spectacular narrative of apocalypse and regeneration, *Tropic of Orange* (1997), to Thomas Pynchon’s paranoid tale of aborted Manifest Destiny, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). Through a reading of the globally-oriented, specifically hemispheric vision found in Yamashita’s novel and Pynchon’s more U.S.-focused work, Adams proposes a new model of literature that might succeed postmodernism and signal a transition out of the solipsistic experiments of that aesthetic into a more political and more global one that she calls “American literary globalism” (250). As we strive to define the current literary moment, in which we perceive the falling away of a postmodernism aesthetic but are unsure of what will succeed it, Adams’s proposal for a global literature that grapples with the material fallout of a postmodern economic system is encouraging. In this article, I will attempt to describe what I see as some potential stylistic variants within the new literary globalism and how they inflect an ethics rooted in both economic and racial justice. In this way I hope to contribute to ongoing efforts to uncover promising trends in literary production and continue a conversation about the important political projects such literature can engage.

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There is much about *Tropic of Orange* to contrast with *The Crying of Lot 49*, though both are set in California and both are experimental novels. Yamashita's novel spectacularizes the cultural exchange at the U.S.-Mexico border. Over the course of a week, an ever-worsening economic, human, and environmental crisis culminates in an apocalyptic battle between a South-American luchador and the capitalist-industrial complex of North America, personified in the figure of SUPERNAFTA. Approaching the climax of this battle between the powers that be and those whose disenfranchisement makes possible such power, the novel's seven characters find themselves caught in an organ and drug-smuggling ring and stranded in an impromptu shanty-town of abandoned luxury cars on an isolated strip of freeway. The cultural and Cartesian geography of Los Angeles and its role as a nexus of international migration and cultural exchange are crucial frames for the novel's project, because the intersecting lines of traffic and commerce create a space where cultures can clash and inter-inform, challenging the fixedness of traditional borders.

When the two novels are juxtaposed as Adams does, Pynchon's—though innovative in other ways—stands out as a linear (if directionless) narrative primarily concerned with the morbid fantasies of the dominant perspective and largely limited to the U.S. national frame in terms of both cartography and imagination. Yamashita's, on the other hand, offers a jubilant (if often dark) and boisterous new order that breaks down national boundaries, linear narratives, and Anglo-European hegemonies. Yamashita's novel then emerges as a good representative of the kind of literature Adams describes filling an important role supplanting the more esoteric forms of postmodernism that were particularly salient in the 1960s and 1970s and that *The Crying of Lot 49* exemplifies. As Adams notes, when *Tropic of Orange* was published around the turn of the twenty-first century, the waning of the Cold War made visible processes that were ongoing but obscured in these previous decades, such as the consolidation of global markets and capital and the creation of new forms of cross-cultural coalitions. Authors like Yamashita, and novels like *Tropic of Orange*, participate in more global, less Manichean modes of cultural production that are consonant with these new realizations, and their works allow us to consider the effects of those processes of globalization more fully than earlier works.

In proposing the ends of postmodernism, Adams points to other authors who participate in this incipient tradition of American Literary Globalism, such as Junot Díaz, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gish Jen, and Edwidge Danticat. These authors work from an American context, but highlight cross-border relationships and histories, particularly in Asia and the Caribbean. Another author Adams mentions is the Filipina-American

Jessica Hagedorn, whose novel *Dogeaters* (1990) came out seven years before *Tropic of Orange* and provides a useful counterpoint to Yamashita's novel. Also concerned with the global reach of American culture and capital, *Dogeaters* dramatizes the nexus of international exchange that results from American neo-colonialism in Asia and gives voice to those who are traditionally excluded from this exchange. Hollywood movies, radio plays, newspaper articles, and ethnographic writings form a pastiche framing the lives of several characters associated with the murder of an influential populist senator based on the real-life Benigno Aquino, who was assassinated in 1983 under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos.

Though staged decades earlier than Yamashita's novel and half-way around the world from Los Angeles, Hagedorn's novel is an important point of comparison with *Tropic of Orange*. The novels share a common engagement with Hollywood Cinema tropes, and both explore themes of economic and cultural interpellation in a society dominated by a racialized political discourse heavily influenced by U.S. cultural and political exports. And, though set on opposite sides of the Pacific Rim, these novels speak in similar ways to the transnational movement of people, culture, and power. Most important for my analysis here, despite their different contexts, they share formal techniques in the similarity of their multi-vocal narration and their efforts to render visible the excluded and abject.

Both of these novels challenge unitary historical discourses that consolidate and maintain power in the hands of the few (often male, often European or U.S.) while marginalizing non-dominant voices. They do so by dispersing the narrative point of view among multiple subjects, many of whom inhabit abject positions. Adams notes of *Tropic* that "Yamashita's technique [of polyvocality], which is clearly inspired by her ambivalent experiences as an ethnographer, seems designed to channel the voices of those who have been silenced from the historical record" (264). Lisa Lowe's seminal reading of *Dogeaters* describes a similar way this might be accomplished, looking at how gossip (or *tsismis*) represents an alternate channel of information that resists the narratives of colonialism and patriarchy in the novel and beyond. Gossip, because it is "spontaneous, decentered, and multivocal" (115), poses an alternative to a singular narrative of history that necessarily excludes as it attempts to consolidate specific positions of power.<sup>1</sup> This alternate discourse makes possible a reformulation of exclusive power structures. Lowe lays out the stakes of this intervention, saying: "*Dogeaters* dramatizes the recollection of history as spasmodic hearsay and as an ongoing process of partial, imperfect

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<sup>1</sup> Helena Grice contends this decentering of narrative is gendered, calling *tsismis* a "genderlect" that "is pitted against official versions of events" (183).

recollection. In the displacement of the authority of official historical representation, *Dog eaters* rehistoricizes differently the material conditions of colonialism, neocolonialism, and continuing civil war” (120). The process of “rehistoriciz[ing] differently” takes on a specifically formal character in Lowe’s reading, and this directs our attention to how formal aesthetics can augment our understanding of literary critiques of political structures.

Hagedorn’s novel performs this rehistoricizing not only through *tsismis*, but through the dispersal of its narrative voices and points of view; the novel’s story is triangulated through an ever-increasing list of characters. Yamashita’s novel is a useful companion to Hagedorn’s, because it also diffuses its perspectives and can therefore be read as proposing a similar historical counter-narrative that refutes singular histories. However, Yamashita’s novel exhibits a tension between these multivalent tendencies and its linearizing and cartographic elements, establishing a more hybrid site; thus it rehistoricizes differently *differently*. The contrasts between these novels with similar projects—if different contexts—reveal much about the effects of their different strategies. *Tropic of Orange* proposes a refraction of events into perspectives that resists a singular cultural vision, emphasizing the fluidity of cultures and populations, yet its vision of breaking down geographic and racial boundaries requires a more deliberate and somewhat more ambivalent engagement with those boundaries than Hagedorn offers in *Dog eaters*. Racial constructions are destabilized by the fluid nature of the seven narrative positions of *Tropic of Orange*, and the character arcs reflect movement toward acceptance of ambiguity and cross-fertilization. However, the strict linearity of the novel’s paratext and its arrangement of those positions suggest a closer relationship to the very Cartesian order the novel upsets.<sup>2</sup>

By reading together Yamashita’s primarily North American vision and Hagedorn’s complex meditation on the impact of American neocolonialism in the Philippines, we can see different sides of American Literary Globalism more clearly: one focused on a contemporary hemispheric perspective<sup>3</sup> and the other more squarely engaging a trans-Pacific vector. This difference is complemented by different formal strategies. By focusing attention on the modes of resistance these novels offer, we are able to develop a more detailed picture of how texts in this new period impact communities and culture. This attention to the specificity of different paths of resistance to hegemony is crucial; as Sue J.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on characters’ movement toward what he calls “positive pollution,” see John Blair Gamber (123-24).

<sup>3</sup> This approach is favored by Kandice Chuh in “Of Hemispheres and Other Spheres.”

Kim notes, “what is important is not simply the disruption of ‘received history’ that will allow historical injustices to come to light, but the *kinds* of challenges and revisions that are made to that history” (69).<sup>4</sup> Both novels strongly critique the consolidated voice of the conventional novel and the power of that voice to write history in such a way as to obscure its workings and foreclose challenges to its authority. Still, keeping in mind that “[f]ormal disruptions to hegemonic historical narrative can have various kinds of political valences” (Kim 69), we may still differentiate the *ways* these novels resist discursive—and consequently material—hegemony. By producing tension within narrative structures (in *Tropic of Orange*) or multiplying those structures (in *Dogeaters*), these novels demonstrate some of the ways neocolonial cultural and economic discourses can be supplanted by more egalitarian, decentered ways of being and knowing.

### **Narrative Tensions in *Tropic of Orange***

Both *Tropic of Orange* and *Dogeaters* take on elite cultural/political structures that script and delimit spaces and histories; as a challenge to these limitations, they refract interconnected storylines through lenses situated in multiple social positions, dramatizing the diffuse discursive authorities that operate within a supposedly univocal system. Despite these similarities, important differences also emerge from close analysis. Paratext, especially, will be invaluable in my reading of *Tropic of Orange*, despite its seeming supplementarity, because certain paratextual moves frame the narrative power given to the characters and suggest a complicated project that both relies on and exceeds the conventional linearity of the novel form.

Scholarly work on *Tropic of Orange* generally emphasizes the novel’s anti-linear tendencies and the way it imagines a less bounded national space and less homogenous community. Like Adams, Kandice Chuh argues that Yamashita’s novels (including *Tropic of Orange*, but also the earlier *Brazil Maru* [1993]) express a fundamental uneasiness with borders and other kinds of real and imagined lines, as well as with the literary conventions that reinforce them (primarily Realism and teleological narration). Chuh notes, for example, that Yamashita’s “writings are coherent wholes without insisting upon or privileging unity” (621) and that “[h]er creative visions reject the progression-orientation of a world mapped in two dimensions (the flat world of modernity that bifurcates neatly into north and south, east and west,

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<sup>4</sup> Emilio Sauri also cautions against moves to de-emphasize the role of the U.S. in hemispheric and transnational studies, when such moves occlude the important historical impacts U.S. hegemony has had (481).

modern and not). Instead, they demarcate a circum-oceanic spatial logic characterized by cyclicity and infinite connectivity" (622). Chuh links the blurring of genre boundaries represented by Yamashita's literary innovation to the transnational and cross-border trajectories of the characters and plots within her narratives, a connection Adams also notes. Similarly, John Blair Gamber contends that *Tropic of Orange* understands "human identities, cultures, language, and space as always in flux." He further argues that "Yamashita wields Southern California's seismic activity, location along the Pacific Rim and Ring of Fire, shared border with (and perhaps more importantly, historical location *in*) Mexico, and role as global center as a site for recognizing fluid natures of a humanity that cannot properly understand itself within any manner of static construction" (22). In this matrix of form and content, nodes of connection and allusion proliferate, a multiplication that may not arrive at totally infinite spatial logics, but points toward them while being based in numerous intersecting national, racial, and economic sites.

For Chuh, this is representative of a particular emphasis on characters as character-spaces (a notion she borrows from Alex Woloch). Character-spaces emphasize relations rather than subject positions, and attending to characters in this way makes evident the nodes-and-connections aesthetic of Yamashita's work. For this reason, I begin my analysis with a consideration of character relations. The novel's opening pages center on Rafaela Cortes. The chapter is told in the third person, distancing the reader from Rafaela and inviting him or her to treat the character as an object rather than site of projection or identification. This objectification is reinforced by the narrative's focus on Rafaela's body. There are references to "Her slender arms," "her feet," "her fingertips" (Yamashita 3), and "her feet" again (4), all in the first paragraph, and these construct a dismembered corporeality that foreshadows her encounter with a body-part smuggling ring later in the novel. In this passage, any agency Rafaela might possess is superseded by her corporeality, subjecting her to extreme objectification by the text, even at the expense of the integrity of her body.

The predominance of prepositions reinforces this interpretation, highlighting not Rafaela's actions, but her interactions. In one passage, for example, we read "Rafaela Cortez spent the morning barefoot, sweeping both dead and living things *from over* and *under* beds, *from behind* doors, and shutters, *through* archways, *along* the veranda—sweeping them all *across* the deep shadows and luminous sunlight carpeting the cool tile floors" (3, emphasis added). The prepositional phrases here suggest movement—a major theme of the novel—but they also convey relations of space and objects, and Rafaela becomes a marker of these relations while her own agency is downplayed. Her purpose here seems primarily to be

to facilitate the movement of “both dead and living things,” and though she is the main character in the chapter, her role is in service to others. The third-person narration of this section indicates Rafaela’s instrumentality with respect to the reader, while the focus on her body and relation to others indicates a similar instrumentality with respect to the plot and its actors.

Her disempowerment is also evident during a phone conversation with another character, Gabriel Balboa, when narrative attention switches to Gabriel. The narration of the conversation includes Gabriel’s internal thoughts, even though Rafaela could not know them, indicating that what had been a narration dedicated to the viewpoint of Rafaela now includes elements outside her perception and is focalizing instead through Gabriel. Interestingly, later, there is a similar pressure that yields different results. When it looks like the attention paid to Rafaela will again give way to another character, Doña Maria, she is described as “pushing back” her hair from her forehead (Yamashita 8). This “pushing back” is significant, because it echoes the moment when Rafaela is described as “pressing the back of her hand against the sweat of her forehead” (4) a few pages earlier, during the conversation with Gabriel. In that earlier moment, her “pressing back” is unsuccessful; in the later moment of dialogue with Doña Maria, the “pushing back” is successful. By resisting the older woman’s desire to have her palm read, Rafaela also refuses the Doña’s desire to usurp the central role in the chapter and supplant Rafaela’s story with her own. Rafaela, then, has some power—relative power—over her place in the narrative. In this way, we can see that positions of subject and object with respect to the narrative discourse are fluid within the chapters, and this reveals an important element of the textual dynamics of *Tropic of Orange*, one that, as I will explore later, echoes the fluid dynamics that alternately subjectify or objectify characters in *Dogeaters*.

The relationship of the characters to the narration in the novel reveals much about how the book envisions one’s own story in relation to the lives and stories of others. The character Manzanar Murakami gives us one of the most significant examples of this formal aspect of the novel. Manzanar is emphatically in charge of the point of view in the chapters that concern him, while arguably being the least materially empowered of any of the characters, since he is homeless and perhaps mentally ill. In his chapters, the narrative is so deeply embedded in his subjective experience that the empirical referents of the narration are often obscured. The process by which this perspective is developed both begins and ends in the character’s mind. As the first chapter where he appears begins, Manzanar appears to be listening to orchestral music: the “violins, accompanied by violas and cellos, exchanging melodies with the plaintive voice of the oboes,” have caused tears to “run down his face and onto the

pavement" (Yamashita 33-34). However, we gradually learn that he is instead listening to the hum of freeway traffic. This sentence marks the slow transition from the musical experiences in Manzanar's mind to the referential (and literal) ground from which they spring. The world touches Manzanar and enters the narration through his feet: "Manzanar Murakami sensed the time of day through his feet, through the vibration rumbling through the cement and steel, and by the intervals of vehicles passing beneath him" (34). This referential foundation, the concrete pavement, however, veers back into Manzanar's internal mental world shortly thereafter, when we read that "Such a traffic window was essential for the third movement" (34). It is through music (and thus through his interpretation of the empirical referent) that Manzanar is empowered. In his mind, he is conductor, "his arms ... opening and closing as the wings of a great bird, coaxing the notes tenderly to brief life, conducting sound into symphony" (35). The synthetic power of focalization creates a closed system—into Manzanar's feet, out his eyes as tears, which fall back to the pavement under his feet, and then back into his body—whereby Los Angeles exists as the catalyst and expression of a musical world-view unique to the character. Cars, movements, daily schedules—these are how the lives of Angelenos are codified. But it is more than the inhabitants of the town; Los Angeles itself is seen only through these musical systems: "The freeway was a great root system, an organic living entity. It was nothing more than a great writhing concrete dinosaur and nothing less than the greatest orchestra on Earth" (37). The entire fabula, the setting of Los Angeles, and the events that transpire there, are only musical notes for the subjectivity of the character. In addition to pluralizing the discursive field of the novel, because Manzanar's view of the world almost entirely overlaps with that of the narrative, it represents a great investment of discursive control in a figure at the very fringes of society.

In a somewhat inverted case, we can see the weakness of apparent positions of authority by looking at the chapters of Yamashita's novel concerning Bobby Ngu. The facility with which Bobby navigates his multilingual cosmopolitan existence, the assiduity with which he manages his business, and the *sang-froid* with which he handles an attempted carjacking all indicate a man in charge of his world. Moreover, he demonstrates a savvy understanding of international politics in his adoption of the guise of a Vietnamese refugee in order to immigrate to the U.S., despite being ethnic Chinese from Singapore. However, Ngu's position in the narrative is one of objectification, though attempts to describe the narratological structure in these chapters reveal irreconcilable tendencies.

There is evidence, for example, that despite the third-person narration, the chapters in which Bobby appears are narrated by him.

Bobby's story is told by a narrator that speaks in extremely short sentences and uses culturally-specific slang. The first sentence of the chapter is "Check it out, ése. You know this story?" (Yamashita 14). *Ése* is a specific linguistic marker indicating (a caricatured) Hispanic identity for the speaker/narrator. We know that Bobby is "Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown" (15); since he "speak[s] like a Mexican," it makes sense that this could be him. Additionally, the short sentences seem to suggest Bobby's quick pace of life. He is "too busy. Never stops. Got only a little time to sleep even. Always working. Hustling. Moving" (16). The abrupt sentences might be those of a man with little time to talk. Both of these factors lend credence to the notion that Bobby is telling his own story and invested with narrative power.

But there are contrary indicators, as well. For example, the fact that he speaks like a Mexican and the text uses some Mexican slang is not conclusive, because the spoken English in Los Angeles borrows so much from Chicano culture. Thus, nearly anyone from Southern California could write in this voice. In addition, Bobby has so little time that "He don't have time to tell no stories" (Yamashita 16), and therefore ostensibly cannot be bothered to relate his own life story—he's too busy living it. Similarly, an early anecdote about Bobby beating up a carjacker is introduced as a story told by others: "You know this story? Yeah, over at Sanitary Supply they always tell it" (14). Instead, the narrator of these chapters treats Bobby as the object of a story he recounts only second-hand. Bobby may seem to be in control of his life, but his control over the narrative's presentation of seems limited.<sup>5</sup> These contradictions have another interesting explanation. Bobby—clearly savvy about how particular kinds of personal narratives are told and can be manipulated—could be narrating his own story in the third person, a form of free-indirect discourse. In this sense, then, his self-objectification would be a marker of an understanding of the mutability of histories and their relationship to stereotypes. What emerges is a balance or tension between positions of power and disempowerment, and we have some reason to believe this might be a deliberate co-optation of objectifying discourses by a clever manipulator of his own life story.

Still, the novel likely makes a stronger statement by failing to resolve this issue than it would if it were more conventional. This instability in narrative positions and the difficulty of knowing where discursive power is located does not make the narration incomprehensible, but it *does* foreclose the possibility of total textual

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<sup>5</sup> Bobby, of course, is not in control of his life; his lack of unambiguous narrative control in some ways crystallizes this.

power, and it is this ambiguous dynamic that suggests the novel's political valence. This is a novel, after all, about viewpoints (televisual, nationalist, etc.), but it suggests that they cannot always be delimited or categorized—or even fully known. In this way, *Tropic of Orange* offers an alternative to the unitary discourses of globalized capital and of neocolonial authoritarianism.

Despite this destabilization, the unusual paratext in *Tropic of Orange* suggests that notwithstanding a narrative authority that is highly diffuse, there is a structural constraint that remains. Set against the dispersed point of view, which argues that no hermeneutic satisfaction is possible (we cannot ultimately know certain things), there is a voice that comprehends the novel in its entirety. While there is much richness in the chapters themselves, various paratextual elements, including the chapter titles, strip away nuance to present a codified and comprehensible whole. For example, each chapter title is double; in addition to a location (such as “Downtown,” “Chinatown,” “I-5,” or “Virtually Everywhere”), each includes a word or phrase that indicates a character-specific thematic category. Rafaela's chapter titles, for example, all mention the time of day; Bobby Ngu's include a financial responsibility. The novel's seven characters alternately command focalization, and these notations indicate that each chapter primarily belongs to one character. In contrast to the chaotic nature of the narration, this paratext then divides the text into discrete, character-bound, thematically cohesive strands.

The significance of these structural elements of the novel becomes particularly legible in the pages before the story even gets started. The table of contents is highly detailed and extensive, listing not merely chapter numbers and pages, but also the double titles mentioned above and grouping all of this under section headings. These headings break the novel up into seven sections each named for the day of the week on which the events in those seven chapters take place. In a partial way, the Table of Contents, then, orders what is to follow for the reader.

A table of contents, though, is not out of the ordinary. What is unique about *Tropic of Orange* is that its somewhat-more-comprehensive-than-usual table of contents is immediately followed by a grid that contains the same information and a great deal more. This doubles the information and stresses both the importance of making the novel's chaos legible and the difficulty of doing it completely in any one way. The “HyperContexts” chart that follows the Table of Contents lines up each character's chapters horizontally, using parallel arrangements to demonstrate parallels among the various chapter titles. By presenting each character as governing a distinct line of the narrative and suggesting equivalence among those characters, this part of the novel begins to construct a regimented organization of subjects. These subjects are of

equal value and vary from each other according to specific, discrete differences. Reading down the columns, we see that each day of the story's progress will be divided among the seven characters. For this reason, we intuit a unity of time and regularity of chronological movement. This is a false intuition, as the novel's time does not progress consistently, nor do the sections each character tells comprise the same amount of time or move the story forward at the same rate. The charting of time according to the HyperContexts, then, is out of sync with the narration and seeks to impose an artificial regularity. Nonetheless, the two strains of the chart, horizontal and vertical, characterological and temporal, seek to map out the seeming wilderness of the novel that will follow. We might see in this the binary logic something of what Chuh called "the flat world of modernity that bifurcates neatly into north and south, east and west, modern and not."

Still, as with most elements of this novel, this tendency toward order is not totalizing. In her discussion of the HyperContexts, Ruth Y. Hsu argues that this gridded encapsulation of the text stresses human connectivity. She contends that by seeing the novel's events and characters as a spatial array, rather than a linear arrangement, we perceive a complex interaction between characters that seemingly have little in common at the outset of the novel. This spatiality resists the ideology of causation that accompanies linear narrative. This seems like an important aspect of this visual depiction of the novel, but I would argue that we cannot ignore the rigid linearity in the chart. It is, after all, not an array, but a highly regular grid, with distinct axes and perfectly matching matrices (for example, there are the same number of characters as there are days, making the chart perfectly symmetrical—even square). The novel's vision of the interplay and inter-reliance of destabilization and enforced stability is admittedly complex. The novel creates a seemingly chaotic environment of character and events, but the paratextual voice seeks to order that chaos—though even that order is itself multivalent.

The presence and imperfection of the chart are complementary. Adams contends that though the HyperContexts chart "locates the central characters in time and space, it also provides a deceptive sense of order to a narrative that ultimately refuses to come together in any coherent manner" (259). Though Adams uses the word "evoke" to explain the relationship between the novel's content and its form, I lean toward using the word *map*, a notion borrowed from cartographic readings of the novel.<sup>6</sup> I would suggest that the novel's form significantly maps the characters into their situations in the global network, rendering them known, linear,

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<sup>6</sup> For such cartographic readings, see Ruth Y. Hsu, "Cartography of Justice"; Caroline Rody, "Transnational Imagination"; and Kevin Cooney, "Metafictional Geographies."

and legible. By mapping the nodes of connection, overlap, and exchange, Yamashita's novel goes part of the way (though not fully) to making sense of the teeming chaos it dramatizes. Still, for Adams, the novel's very rigidity is indicative of the forces that impel us to find new ways of being and that foretell a future not bound by such strictures. She writes that "Yamashita's readers ... will not find themselves confined in a claustrophobically self-referential fiction designed to mirror a lack of agency over their own lives. ... Rather, they are confronted by circumstances that force them outside the enclosed boundaries of the stories that they know, causing them to see and feel the world differently" (266-67). This is a notion shared by Gamber, who finds it at work in the character arcs, wherein "Each character must release some toxic, self-destructive, unhealthy, or erroneous notion of stability and simplicity in order to grow or survive" (126). Thus, for Adams and Gamber, the novel emphasizes the human and the meaningful against the indeterminacy or technocracy of postmodernism, and, in this way, directs our reading toward the important political ramifications of postmodernist experimentalism and of global literatures. The novel's means of doing this, they argue, begins in and requires a confrontation with the forces of order that must be transcended.

By providing unique information about the novel's temporality and characters, the HyperContexts become indispensable while also imposing Cartesian reading modes. The novel's well-documented tendencies to move boundaries and demonstrate the irregularity of culturally imposed linearity<sup>7</sup> are implicitly referred back to the novel's opening pages where this grid re-writes and tames the more unruly parts of the novel.<sup>8</sup> However, the free play of narration is in tension with, rather than subsumed by, the ordering tendency of the paratext. As Caroline Rody notes, "[b]efore the frenzied backdrop of [its] plot, *Tropic of Orange* maintains its highly ordered, multicultural chapter structure, giving each major ethnic character the equal respect and attention due a traditional novelistic hero; its just that each is swept up in or nearly destroyed by world changes of a colossal order" (139). This contradiction may not be

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed analysis of the way *Tropic of Orange* disrupts cultural, political, and geographic boundaries, see Rody (133-40).

<sup>8</sup> If the paratext remained confined to its early place in the text, it might be possible to argue that its linearity is undermined through the course of the novel, supporting a reading that highlighted the novel's move from this more regimented mode toward free-form associations. However, because the chapter titles are reiterated at the opening of each chapter, the paratext's influence is re-asserted periodically throughout the novel. In addition, the narrative perspective represented—organizing, knowledgeable about all facets of the text—positions itself temporally after the completion of the novel; it must be so in order to "know" the novel's end. Ultimately, then, there is nothing about the paratext that relegates it only to the beginning of the novel—rather, its position at the beginning with knowledge of the end causes it to exist through all stages of the text.

easily resolved because neither tendency is completely ascendant. While a paratextual voice can be positioned as subsuming the voices it presents, it cannot ultimately contain the disrupting potential those voices offer. Hsu points out the seeming destabilization of the novel's multiple methods of narration in terms that resonate here, declaring "that a complete picture of anything is impossible, that there is not a single reality" (90). Instead, the simultaneous suspension of relative chaos and relative order between the chapters and the paratext may suggest an important form of textual politics that is rooted in ambiguity and shifting locations of power.

*Tropic of Orange* thus emerges as a text in productive conflict. Its contrary tendencies to contain and to disperse can be seen as dramatizing the specific conditions of the U.S. at the turn of the twenty-first century and a multiculturalism that artificially accommodates plurality and difference by reducing them to parallel equivalences. On the one hand, the novel depicts a world of teeming masses, of destroyed boundaries, of surging human potential. On the other hand, it maps that world through categorization, linearity, and order. Because of this contradiction, the consequences of *Tropic of Orange's* alternative mode of historical discourse—of its rehistoricizing differently—are difficult to determine. This difficulty, though, encourages us to recognize the fluidity of the discursive structures that have perpetuated injustice in the past. Their fluidity, after all, suggests their vulnerability to change.

### **Narrative Proliferation in *Dogeaters***

In Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, a proliferation of narrative points of view provides an important frame of comparison for the type of destabilization in *Tropic of Orange*. While Yamashita's novel stages a tension between linearity and its transgression, Hagedorn's novel is more fundamentally unstable, producing a profusion of perspectives that seems unlimited. No HyperContexts maps the novel's characters in advance, and readers experience a series of mild surprises with the frequent introduction of new viewpoints without warning. The result is that in *Dogeaters* the narrative voice must be understood to be theoretically limitless; at any point in the text, a new character or narrator might be introduced.<sup>9</sup> This not only prevents any one position from claiming a privileged perspective, it also

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<sup>9</sup> The plurality of narrative perspectives in the novel is difficult to catalogue definitively because of the various ways that they are represented. Myra Mendible suggests that there are "three subjective narrators in the novel" ("Dictators" par. 8). Mendible marks Rio Gonzaga and Joey Sands as subjective narrators, though she does not name the other. Romeo's first-person narration suggests him as the third, but those of Pucha Gonzaga and Clarita Avila (in epistolary sections that are not embedded within a third-person frame narrative), begin to complicate this number, pushing us to at least five. As I describe in this section, even this number is a starting, rather than ending, point.

forecloses the idea that *any* perspective might be privileged entirely; all positions of power vis-à-vis narrative information are temporary and relative, and the reader quickly learns to treat them as such.

Though much of the narration in *Dogeaters* is done from a detached third-person perspective, looking beyond that expansive position by emphasizing a diversity of central characters within that narration allows us to see that while a unity of narrating voice seems to pervade these sections of the novel, points of view actually multiply within them. Many of the novel's secondary characters' subjectivities control or at least constrain what the narration produces within these passages and thereby determine what the narrative represents, what sites become possible settings, and what relations can be dramatized.

For example, Leonor Ledesma, wife of General Nicasio Ledesma, is the focus of only one chapter, but her absolution of the sins of her husband through vicarious penance is critical to the novel's treatment of the ruling dictatorship's relationship to conscience and religion. General Ledesma himself anchors two chapters, but he shares a significant amount of the attention in these chapters with his mistress, the movie star Lolita Luna. Passages concerning the General are always characterized by his own self-interest, especially sexual,<sup>10</sup> in striking contrast to the body-denying passages concerning his wife. As Maria Zamora notes, "Leonor's religious asceticism, her constant prayer and masochism seeks to expiate the General's perversities. Leonor Ledesma's bodily disavowal seeks to compensate for other female bodily violations" (176). The exchange of one person's sin for another person's penance is a critique of the symbolic structures that facilitate the operation of oppression and a major feature of the novel's indictment of rapacious strongmen and economic exploitation. By making obvious the impossibility and extravagance of such exchanges as the transference of sin, the novel makes clear the hypocrisy of a ruling order that offers abstract compensation (such as martyrdom) or material trifles (in the form of consumerism) for significant suffering and disempowerment. Moreover, the dualism of the treatment in these chapters mirrors the dualism of the symbolic/moral economy and makes apparent the inter-connectedness of the male and female, libidinous and prudish. This inter-connectedness nuances a vision of the power structures *Dogeaters* represents, forcing us to recognize the complex relationship between patriarchy and the related-but-distinct discourses that sustain it.

The third-person narrator in the sections just mentioned also circumscribes character perspectives representing multiple social strata.

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<sup>10</sup> In describing the scene of the rape of Daisy Avila, Mendible reveals the sinister effect of Ledesma's gaze ("Desiring" 297).

The General and his wife, the first lady of the Philippines (“Madame”), Girlie and Baby Alacran, Daisy Avila, and Pucha Gonzaga are all upper-class and privileged, yet we also see a large number of lower-class characters: Romeo Rosales and Trinidad Gamboa most notably. Even more interesting than the profusion of characters, though, is the instability of narrative modes even for characters that are the focus of a great deal of the novel’s attention. This instability complicates a notion of narrative power accruing to any central character, since all of them are constantly re-positioned vis-à-vis the narrative voice, which treats them with almost callous disregard, shifting from a character empowered in the novel’s fabula (such as Madame) to one who is not (such as Romeo Rosales).<sup>11</sup>

One important reversal of narrative power concerns Romeo, who is often the object of the gaze of his girlfriend, Trinidad Gamboa. Romeo’s shifting position demonstrates how the novel alternates between treating characters as subjects and as objects. We read, for example, of Trinidad’s gaze on Romeo: “The first time Trinidad Gamboa had set eyes on Romeo Rosales, she was flabbergasted. He was much younger and better looking than her idol, Nestor Noralez, and certainly more available” (Hagedorn 49). The reader’s image of Romeo is filtered explicitly through Trinidad’s eyes and in relation to her fantasy of an ideal mate, her interpellation into media culture, and her concern for the availability of a potential love interest. Thus the story’s hermeneutic power resides provisionally with Trinidad while Romeo is objectified. However, this dynamic is quickly reversed. A short while later, we read of Romeo viewing Trinidad: “Her face might be plain, and her body much too slender; Romeo had never gotten used to her sharp, bony angles and gold front tooth” (53). Ironically, he then proceeds to *not* see her: “But Trinidad Gamboa was receptive and eager in bed, and he would simply close his eyes and imagine the torrid siren Lolita Luna” (53). Romeo’s concerns now control the imparting of narrative information about Trinidad, especially as it allows what he sees to be replaced by what he wishes to see. In the inverse of her accommodation of his distance from her ideal (he was more available than Nestor Noralez), Romeo overwrites his fantasy onto Trinidad, removing her from the narrative momentarily through the

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<sup>11</sup> As an early reader of this article pointed out, the novel’s use of multiple modes of narration—including radio broadcasts, speeches, and newspaper articles—complicates efforts to state unequivocally what the dynamics are that determine narrative authority. Because different media call for different conventions and negotiate textual voice in concert with constraints stemming from a need to be objective, to entertain, or to inspire, one must attend to significant nuances in style. For my purposes here, the proliferation and profound complexity of these considerations supports the suggestion that *Dogeaters* seeks to comprehensively undermine the notion of textual (and historiographic) authority and render it provisional. These insights bear significantly on similar passages of *Tropic of Orange*, where Yamashita also borrows from a number of genres.

power of his gaze and relegating her to the object position he had previously occupied. The novel poses the two viewing each other and alternating subjectification and objectification, reminding us that perceptive power in the novel is provisional at best.

In a novel with little stable ground, Rio Gonzaga's position is one of the most reliable and therefore merits close attention. As a girl child, she is not able to directly wield the kind of political, economic, or military power that adult male members of her privileged family can. Still, Rio's is a dominant voice in the text, which reflects the way that she can indirectly influence such political, economic, and military forces. Thus, these passages demonstrate how the novel not only diminishes the power of those who are already in control, but gives a gaze to the unseen, suggesting that the destabilization of discursive authority has a specific redistributive political vector. In addition to powerful elites, *Dogeaters* makes prominent those characters whose social status normally makes them invisible. This move does not create a previously non-existent power that it then lavishes on those who were marginalized in the old order; rather, the novel reveals endemic fissures in colonial discourse that have always been exploited and that might be widened.

The sections of the novel that Rio focalizes crystallize this process. Told continuously in the present tense, these sections have a diaristic feel that suggests a focus on the speaker as the center of an intimate, self-actualizing discourse. However, the language prohibits such an interpretation. In a single passage dated "1956" early in the first chapter, more than thirty sentences include subjects besides Rio; only two include her as subject (Hagedorn 6-9). Her narration lavishes attention on her family: her mother "envisions [her father] a recluse, living out his last days in some rotting villa in Manila" (7); her father and uncle "are smug and mysterious men, especially at the dinner table" (8). Even when Rio is the grammatical subject of the utterance, her words are striking because they nonetheless focus on others (especially her father): "I never worry about my father"; "I am still not sure what sort of passport he waves in the air" (7). This focus on the description of others is not only a narrative feature, but also a meta-narrative feature. That is to say, it sheds light on Rio's situation in the story and her relationship to how the story is told. In one of the most important, if seemingly insignificant, moments later in the text, Rio is finally noticed during a gathering of her family where she has been ignored: "For the first time in the entire evening, *Tita* Florence focuses on me. 'And how is your *Lola* Narcisa these days, Rio?' She pats me on the head" (67). In this instance, it is acknowledged that in the story, as well as the narration, Rio is instrumental in both positive and negative senses; she is a source of information about others, but not recognized as a full subject in her own right.

This new insight about Rio's status as an informant, then, inflects our interpretation of other passages. By attending to how hermeneutic content is filtered, we are able to see the significance of a moment that might otherwise have seemed like only a minor element of characterization. For example, when one of Rio's mother's confidants mentions a possible object of her adulterous attentions, everyone in the room is suddenly aware of the danger Rio presents as a source of forbidden knowledge about others. Rio relates, "My mother winces at the mention of the Brazilian ambassador's name. She suddenly notices I am there, in the room with them. 'Rio, please go to the kitchen and tell Aida to bring us some drinks and *merienda*.' She winks at Salvador and Uncle Panchito" (Hagedorn 82). Rio's mother ushers her out of the room in order to stem the potential hemorrhage of information that Rio represents, demonstrating the power she holds and the anxiety it causes. Rio's hermeneutic power is significant for the politics of the novel, because while Rio, as a female child, lacks direct influence over the events of the fabula, she nonetheless holds significant sway over the circulation of knowledge within the story and how the story itself is communicated.<sup>12</sup> Within the novel, what she knows could disrupt a marriage or ruin a political career. Because this element of the story operates as a metaphor for the circulation of and resistance to hegemonic discourses such as those underwriting dominant histories or propaganda, the novel as a whole can then call our attention to the ways strategic use of non-dominant knowledge channels can destabilize oppressive regimes. In this way, the power of the abject informer is dramatized within the text, making this a signal moment demonstrating the danger that the diffusion of narrative authority represents to existing structures of exclusion—as well as the anxiety with which it is policed.

No character does more to decenter dominant discourses of narrative power than Joey Sands, who is pivotal to the plot and to any understanding of perspective in the novel. He is outside the imagined racial mainstream (because he is bi-racial), outside the imagined nationalist mainstream (because he shares U.S. and Filipino parentage), outside the imagined familial mainstream (because he is an orphan), outside the imagined sexual mainstream (because he is bisexual), outside the imagined economic mainstream (because he is a sex-worker), and outside the imagined bodily mainstream (because he is a junkie). In many ways there is no end to the chain of abject signifiers one can write onto or

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<sup>12</sup> Gladys Nubla describes the novel's location of power in marginal characters, writing that *Dogeaters* "focus[es] on the experiences of characters that are considered marginal by the society in which they lived: the daughters, wives, and sisters of powerful male senators and generals as well as working class Filipinas and impoverished male sex workers" (200).

read into Joey Sands. He is the object society must ignore. And yet, importantly, *Dogeaters* puts him front and center.

At least as powerful as Rio in the narration, he also escapes her power, as she is unable to narrate him in the way she narrates the members of her family who belong to the regime's ruling class. This is due in part to their separation in space and time, each narrating different eras and social spheres. However, Joey's independence in the narrative does point to Rio's cloistering and a concomitant restriction of her ability to influence discourse; the fact that she does not narrate Joey is a marker of the societal, geographic, and political boundaries around the power she does have. For his part, Joey is his own (narrative) master and more mobile in his social affiliations. He is especially adept in those practices that cross class boundaries, for example, sex and drug use. He also shares with Rio the distinction of sustained first-person narration. Moreover, while Rio does not, Joey is able to recount his experiences in the past-tense, demonstrating a self-specularity that suggests more profound control over how he is seen.<sup>13</sup>

His awareness of the power of the gaze—and of his vulnerability as object of that gaze—is central to understanding his role in the novel. While Rio wields the power to view but remains unseen, Joey annexes the power of viewing and is very much seen. Joey's knowledge of his desirability, the way he is constantly watched as he dances or spins records in a nightclub, affords him financial power over those men who desire him. Similarly, he seems to be aware of his ability to toy with the reader who "watches" his narrative. The novel invests Joey's perspective with the task of recounting the most momentous event in the plot—the assassination of Senator Avila—yet we are not allowed to trust his account because he has told us "Maybe I'm lying. Uncle says I was born a liar, that I can't help myself. Lies pour out of my mouth even when I'm sleeping" (Hagedorn 45). Joey's half-confession is just enough to put us in doubt about the events he recounts, even though, as readers, we crave certainty. In fact, like the sections of *Tropic of Orange* about Bobby Ngu, we are forced to go along through the narrative without resolving fundamental and important uncertainties. The novel, then, permanently defers hermeneutic truth and subjects us, instead, to the power of the abject character's gaze.

Taken together, along with the many other perspectives and documents in the novel, these voices represent the diversity of positions in Philippine society under the Marcos regime. Many of the narrative viewpoints are important because they juxtapose voices of power with those excluded in a class-oriented and patriarchal dictatorship and

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<sup>13</sup> Rio's narration, in contrast, is in present tense.

thereby dilute the centralized power over national narratives that we normally associate with oppressive political institutions. In this way, the multiplication of voices in the novel suggests a possible analog to a multiplication or dispersal of historiographic voices. By diminishing the power of singular historical narratives in favor of diffuse ones, the novel offers an image of a society in which power is less centralized, less racialized, less dependent on class, and less heteronormative. Conversely, it may also suggest that even in situations where power is seemingly concentrated, it actually finds alternate channels.<sup>14</sup> Further, just as narrative positions are destabilized, so, the novel suggests, are the narrative positions of patriarchy and authoritarianism.

Reaching beyond the text itself, the novel may play a significant role in how power is circulated and maintained. Lowe suggests that it is often through cultural production that resistance must come into being: “Because culture is the contemporary repository of memory, of history, it is through culture, rather than government, that alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life are imagined” (22). As a site of alternative imaginations, *Dogeaters* exercises this power to rehistoricize differently. It does so in ways that parallel *Tropic of Orange*: both give discursive power to those who typically lack it; both displace unitary voices; and both represent as ascendant those marginalized figures who are aware of how they are represented in dominant culture and are able to manipulate those representations.

### **Rehistoricizing Differently, Differently**

With *Dogeaters* multiplying and diffusing focalizing power, and *Tropic of Orange* similarly pluralizing it but in tension with a strong structural voice, we are left with meaningfully different operations within novels that share significant generic features. Hagedorn’s novel introduces an ever-growing *dramatis personae* that also constantly shifts the treatment of these characters by the narrative. Those players who control information in one situation are the object of control in another. Those who are outside the structures of official power carve out realms of autonomy through appropriating power over information. The novel continues to build on its many perspectives until *no position* can have authority. Yamashita’s novel moves in this direction, but begins by staging the conflict of unitary and dispersed discursive modes. The structure of the novel is both plural and delimited, part of its project of ultimately overcoming those structures of limitation.

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<sup>14</sup> For an examination of how creole and pidgin languages operate to this end in the novel, see Nubla’s essay “The Politics of Relation.”

One productive way of understanding Yamashita's novel is not as one characterized only by plurality and chaos, but one that proposes alternative ways of conceiving the cartography of space without fully rejecting mapping, lines, and borders. This reading accords with other cartographic readings, while also attending to some of the important cautionary notes sounded by Emilio Sauri about the dangers of moving beyond national frames so rapidly that we forget the tragic histories of those frames. The contours of this element of the novel's project emerge if we return to the first chapter, where Rafaela began by sweeping a cyclically reappearing menagerie of living and dead creatures from Gabriel's house in Mazatlán. In years past, Gabriel has brought a number of fruit trees to plant on his property, part of a plan to encourage a verdant and limitless growth that the novel reveals to be a fantasy. He has brought plants, such as peach and plum—"exotic northern trees" (Yamashita 11)—that are not suited to the environment and which die predictably. The ones he brings that are native to those latitudes, such as mango and papaya, thrive, so much so that "their fruit rotted in steaming ditches everywhere" because no one is around to harvest the bounty (10). Where Gabriel has attempted to merge ecological zones, he has failed totally. Where he has encouraged plants in their native habitat, he has succeeded excessively. The contrast suggests that though human boundaries and cultural divisions may be arbitrary, there are geographic or environmental processes that remain effective and meaningful.

This corresponds to the importance that the novel places on a non-human dividing line: the Tropic of Cancer. The line demarcating the northern limit of the tropics is a very real border in the novel. This line of latitude shifts through the novel—one of the primary magical elements. It begins in its accustomed place, running through Gabriel's property, hitched to an orange that grows unaccountably from one of his trees transplanted from Riverside, California. The line begins as a tenuous and ethereal thing: "finer than the thread of a spiderweb" and "most visible in the dewy mornings as the sun rose from the east; at other times, it was barely visible" (Yamashita 12). However, despite this etherealness, Rafaela "always sensed its presence" and was aware of its "very supple strength" (12). She also senses that the line continues off either side of the property, "east across the highway and west toward the ocean and beyond" (12). In this way, the line of latitude transcends the man-made (the highway) and the natural (the ocean) and is possessed of a strength that is both flexible and enduring. Though the symbols are hardly univalent, they point toward the adoption of more global and more cosmological understandings of borders, not toward their complete disavowal. The novel exchanges national borders that are increasingly obvious in their arbitrariness for a set of borders that emphasizes the relations of plants

and people to celestial movements. As Gamber might note, the novel is offering a re-alignment that accords more with the world and less with human politics. In this way, a novel of American Literary Globalism might productively engage environmentalism as well as state and economic power.

The tension in *Tropic of Orange* might be understood more fully by looking at the novel's negotiation of power relations between its multiple structural voices. Is the voice of the novel's structure—one that threatens to impose the very limitations the novel resists through its polyvocal narration—more or less powerful than its storyline—which dramatizes and makes visible America's oppressed in complex ways? This ambiguity may not be fundamentally resolvable, but we can return to Gamber for an indication of how we might move forward. As he notes, the character arcs start in constraint but veer toward liberation. This movement signals the importance of constraints within a novel about the lack of them, the importance of cartography in a borderless world, and the significance of linearity for a novel that transcends it. The novel remains productive; its project begins with a confounding contradiction in order to break free of it.

Turning to *Dogeaters* we see a representation that avoids contradicting itself not because of a perfect correspondence between its fabular politics and narratological ideologies, but because it refuses the binary logic that is the underlying condition for contradiction. Thus, Hagedorn's novel does not sustain two conflicting discourses, but deploys many polyphonic discourses. The limitless multiplication of narrative perspectives disallows a homogenizing codification of racial or ethnic signifiers or of those based in gender, class, sexuality, or national origin. The space of *Dogeaters* is simply too full to be ordered, even with a unifying multicultural aesthetic like that described by E. San Juan, Jr., as "a wish-fulfillment for a freewheeling social order founded on the principle of unity in multiplicity" (*Hegemony* 223). Without an overarching recuperative voice, the novel escapes the imperative of universalism that is the hallmark of exclusive historiographic discourse.<sup>15</sup>

A comparative reading of the two texts, then, provides useful insights into the effects and methods of constructing narratives of history and culture and also into the specificity of alternative historiographies. These techniques work directly against tendencies toward consolidation and suggest instead aesthetics of dispersal and contingent, if meaningful, connections. Alternately staging order in order to overturn it and reveling

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<sup>15</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., is very skeptical that this lack of unity succeeds in being truly disruptive. He writes elsewhere that "The novel is less a resolution of conflicts and ambivalences than a symptom of aestheticist resignation to them. ... [I]ts oppositional impulse dissolves in exhibitionist and stylized gestures of self-transcendence" (*After Postcolonialism* 128).

in seeming chaos, *Tropic of Orange* and *Dogeaters* are boldly anti-authoritarian. But they carry out their iconoclasm in distinct ways, and thereby give us an important idea of some of the central features of, and variations within, new movements in global literature.

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