

**DISPLACED & MINOR CHILDREN IN SELECTED
CANADIAN LITERATURE**

**DISPLACED AND MINOR CHILDREN
IN SELECTED CANADIAN LITERATURE:
An Analysis of Ethnic Minority Child
Narratives as "Minor Literatures" in
*Funny Boy, Lives of the Saints, and
Obasan.***

By

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ethnic minority experience and its effects on approaches to childhood in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, and Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints*. The novels' protagonists, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio, are marginalized not only geographically, but also in terms of age, language, race, and sexual orientation. In addition to having been written and narrated by members of ethnic minorities, the novels concentrate on characters belonging to the age of minority. Using these "child focalizers" in order to depict defamiliarized, displaced, and minor perspectives, the authors write in the genre I call minor literature, a term adapted from Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of such literature.

In focalizing various linguistic deterritorializations and socio-political displacements through the eyes of minor children, the authors disturb and deconstruct social norms and conventions. In the thesis I analyze the minor child focalizer's vulnerabilities to, and subversions of, major languages, social conventions, and codes of behaviour. I argue that the children's identities as ethnic minorities intensify and complicate their various displacements, and allow for the authors to comment on the radical experience of multiple deterritorialization. I establish three categories in my discussions of these novels as minor literatures and their protagonists as minor focalizers: the disturbance and manipulation of language, the minor-adult's alignment with the child's subject position, and the transgressive nature of identity-performance. The children's manipulation of language, bodily expressions and performances of gender and language are all means of resistance to major adult impositions of expected identities and behaviours. I demonstrate how the processes by which these children "resist" impositions of identities expose the artificialities of those identities.

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Introduction: Child/Minority Imaginaries --

(Dis)Orienting Narrative Perspectives

In Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, and Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints*, the child protagonists are perpetually displaced and disoriented. Adult authority figures dictate where and when Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio migrate. Arjie and Vittorio are cast out of Sri Lanka and Italy respectively and Naomi is forcibly removed from Vancouver. The child protagonists can be likened to what Zygmunt Bauman terms "vagabonds." Bauman argues that "we are all in travel, whether we like it or not" (85), meaning that we move even as we stay still as when, for example, we surf the net. The amount of agency a person has over his or her "mobility" indicates that person's rank and level of power in society. For example, forced migration, when imposed upon Arjie and Naomi, designates their powerlessness.¹ Identifying two kinds of mobility at opposite ends of the scale of social status, Bauman identifies the "tourist" as experiencing "postmodern freedom" whereas

the "vagabond" experiences the "postmodern version of slavery" (92). Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are, like Bauman's vagabonds, reluctant wanderers:

They are on the move because they have been pushed from behind -- having first been spiritually uprooted from the place that holds no promise, by a force of deduction or propulsion too powerful, and often too mysterious, to resist. They see their plight as anything except the manifestation of freedom (92).

Bauman also argues that the "vagabond is the *alter ego* of the tourist" and that one cannot exist without the other (93-94). He refers to vagabonds as "unwanted" in a society of consumers/tourists and, thus, the "natural objects for stigmatizing and scapegoating" (96). Not surprisingly, then, we witness the scapegoating of Japanese Canadian families such as Naomi's, the scapegoating of Vittorio and his mother for violating village expectations, and the scapegoating of Arjie's Tamil family for being in the racial minority. More particularly, Arjie himself is scapegoated for upsetting heterosexual norms. Like Bauman's vagabonds, these child protagonists experience disorientations and stigmatizations that

alienate them from their homelands and, in the case of Arjie and Vittorio, lead to eventual relocation in Canada.

Even before the geographical displacements occur these children do not feel at home in their native lands. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are marginalized not only geographically, but in terms of age, language, race, and sexual orientation. These multiple marginalizations contribute to my definition of *Funny Boy*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Obasan* as "minor literatures." In addition to having been written and narrated by ethnic minorities, these novels concentrate on a character belonging to the age of minority. The term "minor literature" is taken from *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, in which Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define such literature as having three key characteristics: "language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization," "everything in [minor literatures] is political," and "everything takes on a collective value" (16-17). Deleuze and Guattari

initially proposed the concept of minor literature to account for the work of Franz Kafka, a Czech-Jewish writer using the German language, whose off-centre perspective destabilized German assumptions. As Réda Bensmaïa writes in the foreword to *Minor Literature*:

Kafka appears as the initiator of a new literary continent: a continent where reading and writing open up new perspectives, break ground for new avenues of thought, and, above all, wipe out the tracks of an old topography of mind and thought . . . the new category of minor literature is essential because it allows one to dispense with dualisms and rifts -- whether linguistic, generic, or even political -- that have ultimately constituted a sort of vulgate (a fortress, if you will) that, although not indisputable, has been at least sufficiently restricting to impede access to what has been characterized as Kafka's "epoch." (xiv-xv)

The category of minor literature that Deleuze and Guattari formulate with respect to Kafka is useful to this study because its characteristics can be applied to *Obasan*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Funny Boy*. In particular, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka "deterritorializes" the "major" language in which he is writing through a series of "displacements" and

proposes a new way of using that language (xvi). As I argue in Chapter One, a similar process of linguistic deterritorialization occurs in the novels being analyzed in this thesis. While Deleuze and Guattari comment on the politics of Kafka alone, their theory of minor literature is formulated in such a way that it lends itself to texts beyond Kafka and, in fact, they propose that while Kafka is used as their case study for minor literature, the category itself should be extended and transferred into other literary studies.²

My extension of the category of minor literature to the aforementioned texts is generated by the child's unique and dual position as minor both in age and character. Not only does the child belong, legally, to the age of minority, but Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's minority statuses are amplified by their existence as adult ethnic minorities in Canada recollecting their childhood experiences. Since children, like ethnic minorities, are alienated from home in these novels, they are doubly

detrterritorialized. Marginalized on many levels, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are romanticized others, positioned on the borders of their worlds and enabling their authors to critique the existing societies and dominant power structures. Even when they do begin to learn the rules of their adult societies, their age and ethnicity in the case of these novels, bars them from participating in the dominant spheres of power and authority.

By using a child focalizer, the author minoritizes language and therefore intensifies its content and expressions. Authority is, in a way, destabilized when one writes from a child's narrative perspective. The adult author cannot claim to be an authority on the voice(s) of children and children are not regarded as developed or articulate enough to be authors of their own legitimate texts and voices. The minor child's voice allows for a polyphony of discourses and counter-narratives that ultimately disorganizes its own (major) forms. Child protagonists accomplish similar disorganizations, as

we will see in Chapter One and Chapter Three when I discuss how Arjie dismantles the poems "The Best School of All" and "Vitae Lampada." Moreover, the child's perspective estranges the reader from certain major signs and symbols, giving voice to areas of experience that heretofore have had none -- an act according to Deleuze and Guattari that minor literatures, in general, accomplish.

In their discussion of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari describe his minority status as a Jew living in the Czech territory and writing in German. Kafka writes in Prague German, a "deterritorialized language" that is, according to Deleuze and Guattari "appropriate for strange and minor uses" (17). Similarly, Arjie -- a Tamil in Sri Lanka and an immigrant to Canada -- is part of a minority and, by virtue of his sexual orientation and his child-status, simultaneously marginalized from it. Similar simultaneous multiple marginalizations exist for Naomi and for Vittorio. Naomi's Japanese origin minoritizes her political status in Canada and her child status

excludes her from vital knowledge of her fate and family. Vittorio's mother's unconventional behaviour minoritizes him from the other villagers, and his child status, like Naomi's, excludes him from vital knowledge. Though *Funny Boy*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Obasan* are vastly different in terms of time, space, and character, the child protagonists' experiences of deterritorialization reveal similarities among the three.

In narrating experiences of displacement and forced migration through the perspectives of children, Kogawa, Selvadurai, and Ricci demonstrate the links that exist between the child's transition to adulthood and the migrant's frequent need to orient him/herself with respect to newly encountered nations, languages, and authorities. Like the migrant, the child protagonist navigates the borders of society, family, and identity. The borderlands that these child protagonists occupy are, in Mary Henley Rubio's definition, territories that lie between two regions: "These regions may be physical entities like mountains

and valleys, philosophical constructs like nature and civilization, psychological states like sanity and madness, or developmental categories like childhood and adulthood" (4). Rubio identifies children as the "archetypal explorers of these borderlands" (4). The child protagonist moves within a "transitional zone," attempting to make sense of the knowledge and expectations received by him/her from the surrounding adults. The child's youth is in an intensified state of development and transition. This newness, combined with the child's longing for "at-homeness," results in the vigorous traversal of multiple worlds, psychological, developmental, and geographical. While navigating these borderlands, however, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio have trouble making sense of the majority rules and conventions and, instead, assert their own minor perspectives and desires. Thus, they find themselves on the edges and borders of the worlds they explore, strangers inhabiting strange lands they think they knew. Indeed, Margaret Steffler calls this

border country or edge "the province of the child in Canadian literature" ("Border Country" 6).

The literary discussion of the border country or "edge" becomes complex when that discussion combines experiences of displacement with the figure of the child. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio not only cross borders between childhood and adulthood but also undergo geographical migrations that intensify their experiences of alienation. Whereas Steffler describes Romantic child figures at home on the edge and comfortably traversing these borderlands, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are confronted with violence and adversity at every turn.³ They do not comfortably traverse their respective borderlands; rather they become lost and bewildered in them. They long for a sense of belonging to the majority, but their keen senses of observation and justice place them in the minority. Their experience of deterritorialization can be regarded as another kind of edge. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio's multiple identities as minors become amplified by their geographical migrations,

which are forced on them by the majority world of the adult. Like Bauman's vagabonds, even before the child protagonists are physically removed from their homes, those homes are symbolically moved out from under them. Thus, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio share an intense longing for a home, or an overall sense of security and belonging, that is forcibly kept from them by the very authority figures upon whom they rely.

In her study of literary children as articulators of adult interiority, Carolyn Steedman says:

It seems important to emphasize, very early on, that the imagination under discussion here is that of the adult, that this book concerns the adult beliefs, desires and fantasies that are expressed in the figure of a child, and that it does not attempt at all to describe childhood experiences, or to recapture the state of being a child through the words of those who recall it in fictional and other writing. (5)

Most studies of the child in Canadian fiction discuss pastoral representations of child characters⁴ or focus on representations of children as they relate to social trends and theories of child psychology.⁵ Steedman, for example, proposes the "idea of the

unconscious as a meta-theory of childhood" (95) and Naomi Sokoloff focuses on narrative voice and "the discourse of the child" as a narrative strategy, engaging in a process of defining what she refers to as "a subgenre of the Bildungsroman" in Jewish literary works (x). Margery Fee's "Romantic Nationalism and the Child in Canadian Writing" highlights the child as a symbol of nature (*à la* Rousseau) and interior identity, demonstrating how writers have linked the child to the nation. Fee primarily discusses land, child, national identity, and the artist and asserts that "an examination of Canadian Literature might reveal many child figures being used to establish not only some connection with the land, but also a secure title to it" (50).

While Fee's examination of the child as representative of nation (in this case, Canada) does indeed recall our Romantic history of linking the figure of the child with the natural landscape, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio establish neither a connection with the land nor a secure title to it. Rather, these

child protagonists expose their insecurities with respect to their homelands, and their minor identities and migrant experiences complicate any sort of secure title they might have claimed to "the land." However, Fee's analysis and those of others are certainly useful in that they explore the complex and sometimes contradictory representations of childhood as a state of acute vision, innocent wisdom, pastoral communion with nature, and unconscious awareness, and, in addition, a terrifying condition of confinement, imprisonment, and powerlessness.

For example, in *Demon or Doll* Ellen Pifer seeks to examine the "cultural ramifications" of the "child theme" in a number of texts -- our "culture's collective values, fantasies, and fears" (8). Though she does not examine Canadian literature *per se*, Pifer points to the crux of all analyses of the figure of the child -- its symbolic value as a representative of culture, society, and the adult self (16). Thus, Pifer writes:

to study the image of childhood is to study ourselves, not only because we all were once

children but also because the child's changing image is inscribed by the force of our feelings and fears -- our beliefs, prejudices, anxieties, and conflicts. The fate of the fictional or literary child, in particular, says much about the way we view our own nature and destiny and even, as many works of contemporary fiction attest, our chances for succeeding as a species on this planet. (16)

Pifer is not alone in her assertion that the child's image is a reflection of our adult beliefs and prejudices, and this concept certainly underpins my own work on the figure of the child in *Obasan*, *Funny Boy*, and *Lives of the Saints*. The critical commentary identifying childhood as a narrative of self-definition and as a narrative mode that allows its author to reflect on and critique society is especially useful. Specifically, the child's perspective allows the author to make our cultural codes and conventions seem strange, unfamiliar, and unjust. For Kogawa, Selvadurai, and Ricci the child focalizer is a way of exposing the strangeness, or "constructedness," of generally accepted beliefs, prejudices, and conventions. And when I examine the way the minor child's identity combines with that of

the ethnic minority's identity, specific concerns regarding constructions of race, language, and hierarchy will be brought to the fore.

My critical approach to fictional childhood intersects with minority literature and theory, in particular, Deleuze and Guattari's "minor literature." Unlike Reinhard Kuhn, who seeks to better comprehend the "real child" by "proposing a phenomenological description of his fictional counterpart," my interest lies in the ways in which the literary figures of children reveal adult concerns and vulnerabilities (3). Assuming that childhood does indeed articulate adult interiority, it is my hope that this analysis of displaced children might yield insights into our encapsulation and articulation of child and minority identities and expose the dislocations present in the novels.

This is not the first study of Canadian child protagonists; however, it differs from those that have come before. While Steffler focuses her discussion on a "continued interest in" the "Romantic child in the

Canadian landscape" my discussion is of children in non-Canadian contexts ("Border Country" 6). In the cases of Vittorio and Arjie, their stories take place primarily on Italian and Sri Lankan soil respectively; and, in the case of Naomi, her forced migration to the interior of Canada represents an act that is (as her Aunt Emily argues) unconstitutional and, therefore, anti-Canadian. Another study, Theresia Quigley's *The Child Hero in the Canadian Novel* (1991), seems on the surface to encompass the main concerns of this thesis; however, Quigley's analysis is comprised mostly of a chronological comparison between English-Canadian writers and French-Canadian writers. She claims that "[c]hildren are not portrayed as important in their own right in the Canadian adult novel until after World War II" and asserts that *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947) contains "the first fully developed child character in this genre" (3-4). Quigley has taken on such a large segment of Canadian literature that her conclusions are too general and her claims too broad. She does not account for novels that contradict her

conclusions such as, for example, L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, first published in 1908, long before *Who Has Seen the Wind*.

Quigley's analysis of the child hero in the Canadian Novel is linear and evolutionary. She argues for a steady and chronological progression of, and increase in, the depiction of childhood as:

a very vulnerable time indeed, far from the protected, secure period of happy existence with which both literatures began their fictional portrayals and with which society generally still likes to identify childhood. If one were to chart the changing perception of childhood as evident in the Canadian literary world of adult fiction, one would have to draw a vertical line, plunging downward and eventually disappearing altogether, to represent the French-Canadian perspective, while the English-Canadian viewpoint would best be represented less drastically by a more gradually declining line, eventually progressing, somewhat uncertainly, in a horizontal manner. (133)

My approach to the depiction of childhood in Canadian adult novels is less linear and resists the temptation to impose an artificial sense of quantitative progression on the genre as a whole. The wide array of individual Canadian novels depicting children -- French or English Canadian -- cannot be

plotted in a steady progression of childhood happiness. Portrayals of childhood are dynamic and include, in many cases, the possibility for contradiction and paradox in a single character.

The children in *Obasan*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Funny Boy* are newcomers, foreigners who are distanced from the centre, where "those with power and agency, even just assurance, at-homeness, hold sway" (Kulyk Keefer 102). Yet, Iain Chambers, in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, argues that

the stranger is an emblem -- she or he is a figure that draws our attention to the urgencies of our time: a presence that questions our present . . . that stranger, as the ghost that shadows every discourse, is the disturbing interrogation, the estrangement, that potentially exists within us all. It is a presence that persists, that cannot be effaced, that draws me out of myself towards another. (6)

The stranger urgently links the reader to the experience of estrangement. While we may not be "familiar" with the minority experience, we are strangely familiar with, though distanced from, the experience of childhood. Using this definition of "the stranger," I argue in Chapter Three and

throughout the dissertation that the figure of the child in these texts is a unique sort of stranger. Since we have all experienced childhood, childhood experiences are distantly, or strangely, familiar. Because we are now distanced from the realm of childhood, the use of the literary figure of the child evokes the "experience of estrangement" to which Chambers refers. By choosing to render experiences of displacement through a child's perspective, Selvadurai, Ricci, and Kogawa intensify the transitory nature of the ethnic minority's sense of self as other. As these experiences are filtered through the child's perspective, the texts become sites for alternative and re/membered vision. The adult author imagines a child's imaginings and, in so doing, transports the reader into a realm of displaced safety and security.

Before I proceed with this analysis of child protagonists, I want to establish some fundamental theoretical issues about children and narration and deal with some key questions. How and why are minor

children such as Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio "unique" sorts of strangers? Why do their narrative perspectives warrant special examination? How, exactly, do I define childhood and how does this definition differ from those that have preceded it? Defining child and childhood is a problematic task. Childhood has variously been described as something that is disappearing, something that has been invented, an innocent, ignorant state of being, and an age that requires adult protection, direction, and intervention. We have trouble ascribing a specific age-range to childhood. Does Arjie exit the realm of childhood when he has his first sexual experiences and/or when he witnesses the riots? Does Vittorio step closer to adulthood when he finally understands and acknowledges the truth of his mother's affair and/or when his mother dies at the end of the novel? Does Naomi's labour on the beet farm constitute a forced removal from the so-called innocent state of childhood?

One common marker of childhood, it seems, for the three children discussed here, is their encounters with, and incomprehension of, expressions of sexuality. Arjie does not understand what "funny" means nor does he understand his father's declaration that he must "become a man," Vittorio denies or misinterprets his knowledge of his mother's affair, and Naomi thinks her mother left because of Naomi's encounters with Old Man Gower. The adult reader's comprehension of these expressions of sexuality results in the knowledge that these child protagonists belong to the world of children by virtue of, at least in part, their level of incomprehension. As a result, we are confronted with a series of ironic gaps between the child's interpretation of events and our own.

Is the child's incomprehension of sexuality the only marker dividing childhood from adulthood? What of the child who is not ignorant of sexuality (Shehan in *Funny Boy* and Fabrizio in *Lives of the Saints* come to mind)? Neil Postman begins *The Disappearance of Childhood* with the statement that "childhood is a

social artifact" (143). Childhood is constantly being invented and remembered from a wide spectrum of possibilities ranging from the good, pastoral child to the marginalized, powerless, oppressed child. Philippe Aries alludes to the invention, or constructed nature, of childhood in *Centuries of Childhood* when he refers to the "idea" of childhood and the "discovery" of childhood in his discussion of artistic renderings of the child (33). In *Nursery Realms: Children in the Worlds of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror*, Frances Deutsch Louis defines childhood as "a lack of context -- the absence of a framework" (20). This definition is, in my opinion, an objectionable one. While an individual child may feel the lack of context, readers of literature that represents children do not lack contexts for interpreting the lives of children.

We cannot help but approach the child figure in literature with our well-established notions of childhood in general. The child is sometimes a Christian symbol of innocence before the Fall,⁶ and

other times a Freudian metaphor for the unconscious, the "inner child," or a repressed trauma. The child may be a Darwinian example of "primitive," uncivilized man, a Romantic symbol of innocent wisdom, or a portrayal of Rousseau's *tabula rasa*. Though approaches to "child" and "childhood" vary widely from the enigmatic to the redemptive, the menacing, to the meek, the powerful to the powerless,⁷ the fact that children are used as vehicles in literature for exploring and symbolizing identity remains constant.⁸

As Peter Coveney writes:

[t]he importance is that for [Blake Wordsworth, Dickens and Mark Twain] the child became a symbol of the greatest significance for the subjective investigation of the Self, and an expression of their romantic protest against the Experience of society. (32)

In "Songs of Innocence," William Blake illustrates how, through the visionary innocence of the child, one is able to see the "unfallen" world. While, in Blake's poetry, the world of the child is paradise, Blake's "Songs of Experience" depicts an adult's world of uncertainties and corruption.

William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" uses metaphors of darkness and mourns the loss of vision that accompanies adulthood. The journey into adulthood is a journey into prison where one does not have vision (light), but only the memory ("intimations") of that special vision one possessed as a child. According to Romantic philosophy, humans are corrupted as they move into the adult "civilized" world. The child, on the other hand, is linked to imagination, emotion, intuition, innocence, and goodness.

North American readers come to novels such as *Obasan*, *Funny Boy*, and *Lives of the Saints* with a predetermined set of symbolic associations attached to the figure of the child. We imagine and desire child figures to be more "natural," or less socialized, than adults and therefore more curious, observant, and trainable. That the protagonists of *Obasan*, *Funny Boy*, and *Lives of the Saints* are children creates an expectation in the reader. We expect and anticipate certain characteristics of children. As Mieke Bal

writes in her discussion of characters in *Narratology*, "[t]he story may fulfil [our expectation], but may just as easily frustrate it" (124). Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci indeed "frustrate" those expectations. Our romantic desires are queered and questioned in novels such as *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints*, by child figures who are marginals and misfits, who do not feel at home in their own lands, genders, or skins.

Kogawa, Ricci, and Selvadurai resist Romantic visions of childhood, subverting the Romantic perception of childhood as good, innocent, natural, and close to the Divine. They play with these stereotypes of childhood and inject them with irony, demonstrating that our past, or childhood, is certainly not romantic. Whereas the early scenes of childhood in their novels tend to be romantically idealized, these scenes are quickly exposed as false. The romantic visions of Valle Del Sole are deflated by the villagers' cruel and petty treatment of Vittorio and Cristina. Arjie's site of childhood play (the

backyard where he plays bride-ride) is declared off-limits to him; and, most disturbingly, Naomi's backyard becomes a site of secrecy and danger with the ever-present threat of Mr. Gower.

These early childhood alienations, combined with late childhood dislocations, represent a series of jarring displacements from that which is safe, familiar, and comfortable. They result in the children's experience of a lack of "at-homeness." Childhood is represented as a prison rather than a paradise where children are subjected to the tyrannical wills of the adults who assert the rules and conventions of the majority. Furthermore, children (notably, not the child protagonists) often acquire the cruel natures of their so-called caregivers and are, thus, nothing like the innocent lambs depicted by the Romantics.

Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci do subscribe, however, to the Romantic notion that children have a particular clarity of vision and insight into truth that adults have lost. While they cast serious doubt

on the notion that childhood is a period of innocent joy, they do support the Romantic notion that children are somehow separate from adults, devising their own subculture of rituals, games, rites of passage, and languages. Yet this separateness contributes to the sense of foreignness that adults and children feel toward each other. Hence, childhood is a lonely and frustrating period of life during which one may be gifted with sharper vision (of adult hypocrisy and cruelty) while remaining virtually helpless to combat what one sees.

Vittorio, Naomi, and Arjie are Romantic children in that they are solitary. They are removed from society because they are not accepted by it. And their ejection from society is a negative, alienating force that reveals racism and hypocrisy. The natural landscapes to which these children initially turn for refuge (gardens, backyards, mountain paths) are invaded and made unsafe by members of their community (neighbours, classmates). While the Romantic children described by Steffler in *Canadian Children's*

Literature "transfer the wisdom and integrity gained through an immersion in the natural world to society, usually benefiting society to some degree," the children in the novels I discuss struggle to hold onto their integrity in the face of social adversity (10). One might argue, however, that the adult narrators' acts of return to their childhood experiences constitute a means of affecting -- or at least critiquing -- the "civilized" world (Steffler, "Border Country" 10). In particular, by re-membering their childhood struggles these adults demonstrate the disunities and incivilities present in the so-called civilized world. Furthermore, remembering childhood allows for a momentary distancing from the adult world. As Steffler argues, communities and individuals are "judged by their responses to this figure of the child" and "repression, insularity and judgmental attitudes characterize these communities" ("Border Country" 15).

Because the figure of the child is an invention, an imaginary construct, but also a "real" experience,

the child's identity is multivalent. Sokoloff notes that, "[t]he imagined child is unavoidably a highly divided construct, its voice a hybrid of youth and maturity" (33). Childhood could exist in the context of memory; a child could be innocent, lacking in sexual awareness, pre-pubescent. On the other hand, in psychological terms, we make references to an adult's "inner child" and we are therefore hard-pressed to define an age when the child is no longer a child. Children do not simply cross a line, or border, into adulthood; rather, they experience fluctuating levels of experience, maturity, and knowledge. While Chapter One argues that Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's linguistic misunderstandings are signposts of childhood states of mind, these demarcations of childhood are fluid and these children's identities are constantly changing and maturing. Furthermore, in novels such as *Funny Boy*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Obasan*, the child's experiences are embedded in the adult writers' memories and expectations of childhood. Therefore,

the realms of childhood that are depicted are inextricably linked to the adult writer's imagination. The three novels discussed, however, privilege the child's first-person point of view over the adult narrator's view. Thus, the novels have, in Leona Fisher's words, a "dual perspective: the language of an adult retrospective narrator juxtaposed with the nearly exclusive focalization" of the child (4).

The adult writer who imagines childhood does not render this portrait of childhood in a vacuum. The writer and reader are influenced by images of children that have been depicted in art and literature for centuries. Despite the fact that Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are conceived by different authors and inhabit separate geographical, gender, and racial spaces, their identities as child protagonists make them members of a symbolic group that can be temporarily joined together, compared, and discussed. As minor children, they share similar vulnerabilities and similar desires for agency. All three children, for example, wish to be free of disapproving adult

restrictions and expectations. Arjie dreams of being free to exercise his imagination and explore his homosexual desires; Naomi dreams of being freed from forced migration and separation from her mother; and Vittorio dreams of being freed from the disapproving gossip of the villagers and the cruelty of his classmates. These child protagonists occupy similar subject positions and struggle to resist outside control over their developing identities.

In examining the category of childhood, I briefly stretch it beyond its biological demarcations. In Chapter Two I examine the similarities between the child protagonists and various minor adults in the novels. I argue that the category of "childhood," is intensified by its conceptual connections with adults who are "child-like," or occupy a child's "subject position." In her article, "Technologies of 'the child': Towards a Theory of the Child Subject," Jo-Ann Wallace uses the term "the child" "to denote a subject-position rather than an identity based on biological immaturity" and points out that "the child"

has "frequently been a subject-position imposed on colonized adults" rather than children (286). Dominant colonial powers have a history of infantilizing adults belonging to ethnic minorities. Infantilization became a colonial technique for disempowering those being colonized. Minor adults forced into the child's subject position are regarded by major adults as dependent upon others and requiring the guidance of major, normative values. For example, as I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter Two, Kogawa parallels child-Naomi's subject position with that of the Japanese-Canadians' lack of agency during World War Two. Japanese-Canadians were not only rendered dependent upon -- and powerless against -- the white, Canadian government, but were also demonized by it.

Wallace argues that childhood refers to "a state of being" (like femininity) rather than a specific group of people (288). For example, in *Obasan*, Naomi insists, "At thirty-six, I'm hardly a child," yet she occupies the child's subject position even when the

narrative is focalized through her adult self (3). Although Naomi is an adult throughout much of the novel, the beginning of the book indicates her lingering position as a child in relation to her uncle. In particular, the facts of her mother's death are still being kept from Naomi. She recalls her uncle evaluating her age at eighteen and deciding, "'Too young . . . Still too young.' He smiled the gentle half-sad, half-polite smile he reserves for small children and babies" (3). Naomi's uncle withholds information "*Kodomo no tame.*" / "For the sake of the children" (240). Furthermore, as a member of an ethnic minority in Canada, Naomi is still trying to decode signs and messages as an adult. When Obasan's neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Barker, stop by to extend their condolences on the death of Naomi's uncle, Naomi wonders:

what foreign odour sends its message down
into [Mrs. Barker's] body alerting her
limbs? . . . We are dogs, she and I,
sniffing for clues, our throats quivering
with subliminal growls . . . I clear my
throat and stammer. I lack communication
skills. (245-6)

This sense of foreignness in her native land places Naomi in a position of discomfort similar to that which she experienced during portions of her childhood. Naomi's experience as an ethnic minor is therefore intensified by its linkage, in the context of the novel, with her child-perspective.

Naomi Nakane's teacher-child interactions with her students, for example, place her in the role of minor subject. Sigmund, one of her students, asks her personal, impertinent questions such as "Have you ever been in love," and "Are you going to get married" (5-8). When Naomi hesitates to answer the questions, Sigmund fills in his own answers, calling her a "spinster" (8). She tries to defend herself with lessons in language and grammar -- "What does that word mean?" and "Is there some way I can turn this ridiculous discussion into a phonics lesson?" -- but in the end, Naomi "throws up [her hands] in futility" (8). In this exchange, a white, male child displaces an adult-Japanese-woman-teacher's authority. He draws attention to himself, authoritatively asking invasive

questions and eventually "defeating" Naomi. Thus, even as an adult, Naomi occupies the subject position of the child.

This study, like that of Wallace, uses the term child to denote a subject position; however, this position is inextricably linked to children who belong to the age of minority. Even in adult-Naomi's case, her adult narrations are tied to the portions of the narrative focalized by her minor-child self. While boundaries of childhood are stretched to include adult-Naomi, this inclusion is predicated on Naomi's childhood narrations throughout much of the novel.

The category of child can also be stretched when the adult re-enters childhood through memory and recollection. Childhood has elastic borders or boundaries yet these borders are, ultimately, finite. There are characters in these novels who are decidedly not children because they have entered the realm of adulthood. Characters such as Black Tie (*Funny Boy*), Mr. Gower (*Obasan*), and Guiseppina (*Lives of the Saints*) impose adult expectations and standards,

sometimes by force, on the child protagonists. In order for events to be depicted through the child's perspective there must be characters who stand against the child, who are located both physically and psychologically outside the realm of childhood. While I might expand and contract the boundaries of child to include a child-like adult such as Marta (*Lives of the Saints*), and exclude adult-like children such as Salgado (*Funny Boy*), the boundaries are ultimately finite. Certain characters simply cannot be included in my conceptualizations of childhood.

As children, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are written and read by adults. Childhood is to some degree imagined, invented, and created through the prism of adult memory and past experience. Since these children are conceptualized as outside of, or minoritized within, the adult community, they offer a distanced perspective of the conventions and behaviours of that adult community. Adult treachery, racism, violence, cruelty and abuse are revealed through the child's eye/I. While not all children in

the narratives offer "distanced perspectives," Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are unique, or special, children in that their minor points of view constitute the main focalizations for these narratives. The notion of these child protagonists' perspectives is particularly relevant to this discussion because its focus is on the child as narrator and focalizer of the narration. The child is a "focalizer" because that child's perspective is, of course, directed or coloured by the adult author. As defined by Mieke Bal in *Narratology* "[t]he focalizer . . . is an aspect of the story this narrator tells. It is the represented 'colouring' of the fabula by a specific agent of perception, the holder of the 'point of view'" (19). Bal defines "focalization" as "the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen,' perceived" (142). The reason Bal uses the term "focalization" rather than, say, "point of view" or "narrative perspective" is because "[such terms] do not make a distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the

voice that is verbalizing that vision" (143). Thus, "[f]ocalization is the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees, and that which is seen" (Bal 146).

The concerns of this thesis echo those of Sokoloff, who, in *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction*, writes:

It should be noted first that my concern is with texts that feature a child whose perspective orients the narrative. In Genette's terms, this figure is a 'focalizer,' as distinct from the narrator, who composes the words actually constituting the text . . . This character's perceptual apparatus looms large as the filter that subjectively interprets the outside world (28).

The child acts as a filter, or focalizer, for the author's political predilections. Why do the adult authors focalize their views through child narrators? What distinguishes the child narrator from any other type of narrator? What is it about the child's narration that changes the reader's expectation and reception of the book? As Bal observes,

whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain 'vision.' A point of view is chosen, a

certain way of seeing things, a certain angle . . . Perception . . . is a psychosomatic process, strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body; a small child sees things in a totally different way from an adult, if only as far as measurements are concerned. The degree to which one is familiar with what one sees also influences perception. (142)

Child focalizers such as Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are special kinds of witnesses whose testimony is both privileged (uncluttered by adult socialization and biases) and trivialized (regarded by adults as naïve and therefore of minor importance).⁹ Children are constructed as inexperienced, and therefore honest, observers of society. Their minor observations and misunderstandings disturb major language and their diminutive statures allow them the freedom associated with going unnoticed by adults. Childhood is defined in *Obasan* as "the age of questioning" (250). When asked about the child narrator in a reading at McMaster University in February 2001, Selvadurai said that the child narrator is unreliable to the extent that he is a child but is reliable in that he "cuts through the crap," presents the world honestly, and

asks the questions the adults should be asking themselves [with respect to racism].

Fisher describes the child focalizer as the "naively just point of view" (2). That is, the adult first-person narrator, identified by sophisticated language, remembers and records the (often traumatic) memories that are focalized through the child (2). Fisher writes, "[u]tilizing memory, the adult narrator reconstitutes the past from his internal perspective as a boy, as he then felt, saw, thought, perceived, imagined" (4). The "focalizing consciousness" is naively just and thus the discourse is dominated by a tone of "ignorant wisdom" (Fisher 4). There is an ironic gap between the narrating adult language and the focalizing child. This gap is meant to make us aware of the ironies and cruelties that exist in society. In other words, gaps, minor fissures, and margins are supremely important in these texts with child focalizers. Similarly, Fisher notes the specific significance of a minority focalization of majority social groups, values, and customs:

Through the depiction of a 'minority' subjectivity . . . the multicultural text succeeds in presenting alternative subject positions for all its readers, broadening their historical and cross-cultural knowledge. (2)

Fisher stresses that defamiliarizations "produce new perceptions and perspectives" (11). The result of multicultural¹⁰ child focalization, according to Fisher, is "a renewed sense of the culture's racial oppression, as materialized in the consciousness of the wise child" (12).

Fisher's mention of the "wise child" recalls the romantic sense of the child as intuitive and visionary. Depictions of children in literature continue to be influenced by romantic notions of the child as symbolic of innocence, hope and purity. The child's "innocent eye" and "subject position" are like those of the artist, the alien, the immigrant, and the stranger and this is why -- as I will elaborate on in Chapter Two -- Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi are aligned with other "minor-adults" in their texts. These minor-adults, however, are satellite-characters who illuminate the main anxieties of the child

protagonists. Filtering the protagonists' subject positions through the child's gaze allows Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci to intensify the experiences of alienation. Crucial perceptions are communicated through the child's inarticulateness. The child's eye is capable of seeing the familiar as unfamiliar and, therefore, can cause a shift in perspective, a disjunction that reveals the author's critical and satirical commentary on adult nature and behaviour. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio introduce us to adults who are free to bar these children from vital knowledge, and restrict and control their desires and behaviour.

These child figures are set apart from other child characters in the novels. Not all are minors and marginal. There are rifts between the special child and the "becoming-adult" child (children who mimic major adult behaviour) in the novels. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are special in that they focalize the narratives and possess particular insights, wisdom, and intuition that non-focalizer children do not necessarily possess. In fact, much like the

adults, many of the children betray and alienate the child protagonists. Though we may anticipate a community of children who share similar desires and behaviour, these authors expose the rifts present in these imagined communities. Gangs of children, cruel children, powerful children, and major children are contrasted with Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio. For example, in *Obasan*, white children constitute a threat to the othered Japanese children. Stephen is stalked and threatened by white Slocan boys who break his violin and make racist comments and Naomi is accused by a little white-haired girl of killing a kitten in the outhouse (172). Even the game the children play, entitled *Yellow Peril*, identifies Naomi as the yellow "enemy other" (165). As Aunt Emily writes, "children can be such savages" (90).

Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are all betrayed by members of their own child-communities. The actual relationships between children in these books set Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio apart from their "fellow" children. As focalizers, they are able to comment

from the borderlands of their societies, illuminating the contradictions and injustices that exist within them. As I will argue, the child protagonists' experiences as minors cause them to act out a series of displacements, or disturbances, of the major language and culture. I will discuss, primarily, the ways in which these children use minor languages, minor performances, and alliances with other minor figures in order to subvert the normalizing pressures of major societies. In focalizing these minor disruptions through ethnic minority children, Selvadurai, Ricci, and Kogawa write in the genre of minor literature, exposing the artificial structures of vehicles, such as languages and costumes, and construct and support social hierarchies of race, gender, and culture.

Chapter One, "'Tell me a Story': Language and Learning the Rules of Engagement," enters into a discussion of Selvadurai's, Kogawa's, and Ricci's use of the child's perspective in achieving measures of linguistic deterritorialization. As child

protagonists, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are inexperienced users of adult language, struggling to interpret the various adult signs and symbols that order their lives. Their unfamiliarity with language allows the authors to expose processes of socialization and make explicit the illogic of certain adult conventions, rules, and expectations. Furthermore, the child protagonists' identities as biological ethnic minorities intensify their experiences of alienation especially with respect to linguistic alienation. From the child's and the ethnic minority's perspective, these texts are thus multilingual (and in Deleuze and Guattari's sense, minor) in their orientation. For example, Arjie is a member of the Tamil minority but he speaks Sinhalese because this is the dominant, or official, language of his country (59). As in Deleuze and Guattari's definition of minor literature, Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci use their child protagonists' minor discomforts with language to disturb the signs and symbols of their major language. The ironic gaps

present between speech and knowledge in the texts result in linguistic deterritorializations that are subversive in nature. Furthermore, in depicting their child protagonists as future writers/storytellers, Kogawa, Ricci, and Selvadurai provide the children with a measure of agency over language and ownership of their own stories.

Chapter Two, "Displaced 'Minor-Majors' and the Child Subject Position," examines the affinities forged in these novels between the child protagonists and various displaced and minor adult characters (those to whom I refer as "minor-majors"). The chapter argues that these alliances intensify the child focalizer's expressions of displacement and demonstrate the ways in which childhood can be regarded as a subject position as well as a biological state of being. In Chapter Two there is an extensive discussion of *Lives of the Saints*, applying Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature to the novel and demonstrating how Vittorio is minoritized and deterritorialized in a number of ways. Ricci

demonstrates how children, like major-adults, have the capacity for cruelty and this is examined in a comparison of Vittorio, a "becoming-minor," with the "becoming-majors," who gang up on him (see Chapter Two for a definition of "becoming-major" and "becoming-minor"). The becoming-majors depicted in *Lives of the Saints* and *Funny Boy* serve to further isolate Vittorio and Arjie, intensifying their sense of confusion and vulnerability and highlighting their gifts of insight and intuition. Furthermore, their multiple marginalizations and experiences of displacement demonstrate the inextricable links between socio-political hierarchies and familial, romantic, and community relations. Minor incidents and characters become sources of major significance in these novels. Finally, this chapter contrasts Ricci's and Selvadurai's use of minor-major characters with Kogawa's alignment of Naomi and the Japanese Canadians during World War Two. Kogawa aligns Naomi with the entire Japanese Canadian community rather than

specific individual minor-majors and this chapter speculates on her reasons for doing so.

Chapter Three, "Performance, Costume, and the Minor Body," integrates Judith Butler's work on performance into a discussion of the novels as minor literature. The chapter examines the ways in which Arjie is a minor performer on centre stage, discussing the ways Arjie and other child protagonists costume themselves in order to perform certain identities of their choice. The chapter also deals with the way the child's body itself constitutes a "performance piece" upon which the child's desires and vulnerabilities are written and performed. In *Obasan*, for example, Naomi's encounters with Old Man Gower demonstrate the range of her vulnerabilities to a white male figure of authority. Like the child's manipulations of language (discussed in Chapter One), performance and costume offer these children a measure of agency -- and reveal the absence of agency -- in fulfilling their identity-related desires. Additionally, their failures to control certain performances, costumes, and bodily

expressions draw attention to the artificial nature of major adult conventions and expectations, and the constructedness of identity in general.

In the cases of all three chapter discussions the minor child focalizer's vulnerabilities to, and subversions of, major languages, social conventions, and codes of behaviour are examined and analyzed. Their identities as ethnic minorities intensify and complicate the children's various displacements, and allow for their authors to comment on the radical experience of multiple deterritorialization. Essentially, I establish three categories in my discussions of these novels as minor literatures -- and their protagonists as minor focalizers: the disturbance and manipulation of language, the minor-adult's alignment with the child's subject position, and the transgressive nature of identity-performance. As Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio experience multiple displacements from their homes, languages, and families, they also exhibit certain levels of resistance. Through their minor disturbances of major

languages, characters, and codes of behaviour, the children achieve measures of agency over the (re)constructions of their own identities.

Furthermore, even when they fail to retain agency over their situations, these children expose the artificial and unjust natures of major institutions and conventions. In using child protagonists to deconstruct and subvert their society's major apparatuses and institutions, Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci convey intensive social critiques, and strive to deterritorialize their the readers from their comfortable, secure assumptions, expectations, and biases.

Chapter One: "Tell me a Story" -- Language and
Learning the Rules of Engagement

In Deleuze's and Guattari's discussion of minor literature, they ask the following question: "How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve?" (19). These questions are particularly interesting to me in that they reveal an important element in Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the minor in literature. Deleuze and Guattari characterize minors (specifically, ethnic or racial minorities) as characters who are less familiar with, and thus claim less ownership over, the major language of the place in which they live. Deleuze and Guattari's definition of minor literature can be extended to novels such as *Funny Boy*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Obasan* that foreground the perspectives of children who have relative inexperience and unfamiliarity with language.

In fact, each author's construction of a child protagonist's point of view hinges on the child's misunderstanding of, and unfamiliarity with, adult conversations, vocabularies, signs, and behaviours. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are all expected to serve the major (adult) language of their countries and families regardless of whether they understand or are comfortable with it. Through their child protagonists' linguistic misunderstandings, Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci demonstrate the ways in which minor perspectives can prompt a re-vision of majority rules.

The problem of a minor literature is, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, "how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own langue?" (19). How do authors such as Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci, who are writing and publishing in English, present a resistance to that very language's

dominant signs, symbols, and conventions? As I argued in the introduction, *Obasan*, *Funny Boy*, and *Lives of the Saints* contain multiple deterritorializations, not least of which are linguistic. The child protagonists' inexperience with language causes a deterritorialization, a dislocation, from the major language and text that, in Deleuze and Guattari's words "challenges the language." However, do these novels make the language "follow a sober revolutionary path"? Some minor authors, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, "reterritorialize" language by infusing the major language with additional symbols and archetypes. This sort of embellishment, or "artificial enrichment" of the language, constitutes, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, a "symbolic reterritorialization" of the language of which they disapprove (19). Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka as a successful "deterritorializer." They argue that Kafka succeeds in making his Prague German a minor language that challenges major German by presenting it "as it is and in its very poverty" (19). He is able to accomplish

this because, as Deleuze and Guattari write, "the situation of the German language in Czechoslovakia, as a fluid language intermixed with Czech and Yiddish, will allow Kafka the possibility of invention" (20). Authors achieve "sober, revolutionary" deterritorializations of language when they, like Kafka, abandon sense and push language to the extremes of deterritorialization and disorganization (19). This action, Deleuze and Guattari argue, allows for a certain sort of liberation and thus allows Kafka the possibility of invention (20-21). They argue that Kafka's minor literature intensifies deterritorialization, resulting in a new "sobriety" (25).

Do Kogawa, Ricci, and Selvadurai similarly "sober up" and dry out traditional romanticizations and myths of childhood by intensifying their protagonists' deterritorializations? Do they, like Kafka:

push [language] toward a deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth, that will be an absolute deterritorialization, even if it is slow, sticky, coagulated. To bring language slowly and progressively to the desert. To

use syntax in order to cry, to give a syntax
to the cry. (Deleuze and Guattari 26)

Do Kogawa, Selvadurai, and Ricci artificially enrich
the Romanticism of early childhood and thus
reterritorialize it, or do they deterritorialize
childhood through sobriety, intensity, and dryness?
Ricci, Kogawa and Selvadurai only briefly touch on the
perfection of early childhood before they deconstruct
these nostalgias with childhood traumas and linguistic
confusions. If we find "romanticizations" of Arjie,
Vittorio, and Naomi in the novels (as solitary,
intuitive children), it is because the figure of the
child cannot be fully extricated from our own
preconceived notions of children. If these children
are to represent perspectives from the age of minority
as ethnic minorities they will necessarily be
solitary, special figures. There is no need for
romantic symbolic embellishment of the child's
solitary role in these novels since their identities
as ethnic minorities are already imagined as such by
the white Canadian reader.

Much of the novels deterritorialize and "sober up" the worlds of children. For the most part, the authors write against romantic symbolism and ethnic exoticism. In the case of *Lives of the Saints*, *Obasan*, and *Funny Boy*, the uncomfortable perspective of the minor child deterritorializes the child from our comfortable, familiar, major conventions. And neither Arjie, Naomi, nor Vittorio is comfortably reterritorialized in Canada. Once they are wrested from the comfort of their homes and languages, their childhood narratives continually displace them from that which is safe. Thus, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense, their childhoods follow a "sober revolutionary path" whereby the minor literature can be torn "away from its own language."¹¹

One of the ways Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci challenge the "major language" is to focalize their stories through the child's point of view. Though we have stories that are written in the language of the majority, they are conveyed from the perspectives of minorities and, consequently, are disturbed by minor

displacements between "saying" and "knowing." For example, in *Funny Boy*, when Tanuja challenges Arjie's position as the "bride," her tactics prove ineffective. Tanuja is, in this situation, the "foreigner" who has "just come from abroad" and therefore finds that her major knowledge of gender and commodity as vehicles for power and centrality have been rendered ineffective amongst Arjie's minor peers (7). First, Tanuja uses consumer tactics as she tries to "seduce the other cousins away from" Arjie by showing off her dolls (9). When this plan fails, Tanuja commodifies the bride by portraying the groom as a pirate assessing the value of his "bonny lass" (10). Finally, she cites gender rules in her bid to be the bride, declaring that "[a] girl must be the bride" (11). Although Tanuja's tactics briefly disturb the children's usual routines, those routines ultimately clash with Tanuja's major values. Sonali supports Arjie's position as bride by arguing that he is the "bestest bride of all" and tells Tanuja to "go away" if she "can't play properly" (10-11). Thus,

this female community of children allies itself against Tanuja's attempted imposition of major gender roles. In a last bid for success, Tanuja resorts to name-calling; however, her vocabulary of insults is unsuccessful because none of the other children, including Arjie, know their meaning:

Her Fatness looked at all of us for a moment and then her gaze rested on me.

"You're a pansy," she said, her lips curling in disgust.

We looked at her blankly.

"A faggot," she said, her voice rising against our uncomprehending stares.

"A sissy!" she shouted in desperation.

It was clear by this time that these were insults.

"Give me that jacket," Sonali said.

She stepped up to Her Fatness and began to pull at it. "We don't like you any more."

"Yes!" Lakshmi cried. "Go away you fatty-boom-boom!"

This was an insult we all understood, and we burst out laughing. (Selvadurai 11)

While the reader presumably knows the meaning of Tanuja's insults, just as we know the meaning of the term "funny" in the context of the novel, Selvadurai presents a minor challenge to the authority and legitimacy of these insults. Tanuja's authority is displaced by the children's ignorance of the terms she

uses and her authority is subverted by the use of the insult, "fatty-boom-boom," that is familiar to all the children. Ironically, the insult that the children understand is one that takes the linguistic form of nonsense language. The "fatty-boom-boom" insult belongs to the language of children, carrying within it an element of nonsense that mystifies Tanuja because she is a newcomer and an advocate of adult roles and definitions. As Laurence Ricou argues in *Everyday Magic*, what is "distinctive about child language" is that "it is language in the *process of being learned*" (4). It is also, as we see with Arjie and his childhood friends, in the process of being made up. Those children who know, and have participated in the process of creating, this "child language" feel a sense of belonging that children such as Tanuja do not. In contrast, when Arjie is removed from his group of children -- those who speak the same language as he does -- he becomes vulnerable to multiple displacements and linguistic confusions.

The children's knowledge of the term "fatty-boom-boom" and their ignorance of the terms "pansy, faggot, and sissy" unify them as a group that can resist Tanuja's invasion into their midst. The term "fatty-boom-boom" need not adhere to official codes of grammar as long as its meaning is mutually understood by the group of children who use it. Thus, while the children resist Tanuja's major linguistic attempts to displace Arjie, they exhibit their own creative, and minor, means of excluding unwanted others who disturb their status quo. Just as the term "funny" later destabilizes Arjie and causes his exclusion from the group of girls, the children's use of the term "fatty-boom-boom" destabilizes and excludes Tanuja. We also observe Arjie participating in the oppression of the body when he names his cousin "Her Fatness," an imposed identity which turns the other children against her and transforms their laughter into weapons.

Arjie's experience of bodily oppression and deterritorialization at the hands of the adults,

however, is permanent whereas the children's destabilization of Tanuja is temporary. Ultimately, the tyrannies of the major adults are confirmed as Arjie is forcibly transferred from a place of linguistic creativity and community to that of linguistic disorientation and alienation. Only when Tanuja involves the adults she is able to wrest power from Arjie. While amongst the children, Tanuja is the only one who knows the meanings of her insults, amongst the adults, Arjie is the only one who is ignorant of their meanings. Amongst the children Arjie's use of the term "fatty-boom-boom" renders him an insider and Tanuja an unwanted challenger; whereas, amongst the adults, his ignorance of the meaning of the term "funny" renders Arjie the outsider and transgressor. By preceding Arjie's confusion about the word "funny" with the children's confusion about such words as "funny," "pansy," "faggot," and "sissy" (14), Selvadurai challenges the social implications of all such words. Arjie's minor perspective, which disturbs and defamiliarizes Tanuja's and the adults'

major language, has already been normalized in the realm of the children.

Leona Fisher's article, "Focalizing the Unfamiliar: Laurence Yep's *Child in a Strange Land*" is useful in defining the term "defamiliarization" with respect to the child protagonist's perspective. Fisher distinguishes three levels of defamiliarization that take place in the child focalizer:

Such estrangement from the "familiar" may be seen to function at the level of the word or object; in turn, at the conceptual or thematic level; and finally, at the sociological or political level. Through the child's unfamiliarity with the new language and culture, [the author] produces the effect: first, of surprise or delayed comprehension . . . and second, of potential resistance or subversion. The "automatic" view of culture and history becomes decentered, its hegemonic perspective called into question and ultimately undermined and substantially altered. (5)

As Fisher argues, the defamiliarized narrator compels the reader to "see with fresh eyes" (5). In Fisher's words, the "certain stable cultural meanings" we "habitually expect words and objects to possess" are destabilized (5). For example, in *Funny Boy* Arjie's

location in time (childhood) and space/place (Sri Lanka) renders western clothing and food unfamiliar. Rhada Aunty's bell bottoms and platform shoes have no name that Arjie knows, and hamburgers and strawberry cake are regarded by him as "exotic" (46, 101).

Through Arjie's decentred perspective, the western reader's "automatic," or "habitual" expectations are perhaps momentarily destabilized. As Sokoloff writes,

focusing on the novelty of a young character's outlook can yield texts that felicitously capture the newness of new worlds or of worlds made strange through the breakdown of previous custom and understanding. (x)

While Fisher's analysis of the effects of the child's estrangement from the familiar apply to Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio, these child focalizers are also linked by their status as ethnic minorities, their experiences of dislocation, and their experiences of linguistic defamiliarization. Their defamiliarization at the levels of word/object, concept/theme, and social/political is intensified by their geographical and cultural estrangements. For

this reason I will be relying mainly on Deleuze and Guattari's term, "deterritorialize" rather than "defamiliarize" to describe Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's linguistic estrangements. As a result of the experience of their forced displacements, these child focalizers' levels of defamiliarization include the significant element of territory.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialized language is "appropriate for strange and minor uses" (17). They argue that "[o]nly the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, minor literature, and so on" (18). The child's use of language is a critique of major (adult) language and can be, in that sense, revolutionary. Thus, the use of a child focalizer is one way the literature effectively "treats and develops" its revolutionary contents, digesting or "working over" the material more thoroughly by devoting closer attention to minor details and language (Deleuze and

Guattari 19). One expression ("funny" in the case of *Funny Boy*), or one symbol (a snake in the case of *Lives of the Saints*) is highlighted and developed through the child's maturing breadth of knowledge. The child's perspective deterritorializes words, sounds, and images such as "funny," "snake," and "sick bay" -- examples that will be dealt with in greater depth later in this chapter and in Chapter Two.

The child protagonist's defamiliarized, deterritorialized perspective shakes the "sturdy" foundations of such institutions as school, government, and church. In both the personal and political realms, these child focalizers reveal the strange and hurtful characters of the adults with whom they interact. Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's encounters with adults are punctuated by betrayal and disillusion. Teachers, neighbours, and family members who are expected to nurture and protect these children betray our expectations and, instead, traumatize the children. However, through the act of writing, or storytelling, Naomi, Arjie, and Vittorio resist social

boundaries imposed by adults, empowering themselves and asserting their own voices as central rather than marginal. This centrality, however, exists only insofar as the child protagonists are at the centres of their stories. The very notion that something can be central is disassembled by the child's deterritorialization of major structures in general. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio do not take steps to authorize their childhood perspectives as authoritative; rather, they question and subvert claims of authority in general. In *Obasan*, official government documents are fragmented and ridiculed; in *Lives of the Saints* religious authorities are revealed as corrupt; and in *Funny Boy* government authorities are revealed as racist and familial structures are exposed as homophobic.

Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's multiple deterritorializations with language are inextricably linked to other minor positionings such as age, gender, sexual orientation, and race. Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's perspectives not only disturb

the adult narrative with their lack of experiential knowledge -- Arjie does not understand the term "funny," Naomi does not understand the term "sick bay," and Vittorio does not understand the metaphorical connotations of his mother's snake bite - - but also confront us with instances of cultural and linguistic deterritorialization: Arjie belongs to the Tamil minority and speaks the majority language, Naomi's Japanese origins negate her Canadian citizenship in the political arena of World War Two, and Vittorio comes to Canada speaking only Italian.

Arjie and Vittorio literally speak a different language than the one in which they write their narratives. Non-English words and expressions are used in *Funny Boy* and *Lives of the Saints*, which remind the reader that, from the perspectives of the child protagonists, English is not the major language of their childhood experiences. In fact, Selvadurai even provides a glossary of words at the end of his novel. In *Obasan*, although Naomi is not fluent in Japanese, she uses the Japanese words and expressions

made familiar to her by her family. In signaling the linguistic dualities present in the lives of their protagonists, Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci destabilize, to a degree, our assumptions of English as the major language of these texts. Furthermore, in Arjie's case, the political tension between Sinhalese as the would-be major Sri Lankan language and Tamil as becoming-minor language, introduces a third level of destabilization. Are these linguistic "reminders" enough, however, to prompt significant destabilization of the major language (in this case, English) in the novels? While they certainly signal the protagonists' experiences of ethnic displacement, the binary of minor childhood/major adulthood remains firmly in English. Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's troubles with language -- and their minor subversions of it -- occur in English. While the authors deterritorialize English's principal grammars, their narratives -- rendered in English -- may, as Dr. Daniel Coleman suggests, quietly "reterritorialize" English perspectives as confidently major and dominant. This

minor deterritorialization from within the major language is the main characteristic of Deleuze and Guattari's view of minor literature. There will always be a certain measure of authority given to the primary language of a text; however, minor displacements from within result in a more subversive dismantling of that language.

In the foreword to Deleuze and Guattari's *Minor Literature*, Réda Bensmaïa writes:

Kafka's work is revolutionary in the way it affects the language in which it is effected. A language that is a 'major' language is affected by a strong deterritorialization factor and is subjected to a series of displacements that make it slow down to a crawl in certain texts (contexts) . . . or send it into a panic, unfolding at vertiginous pace. (xvi)

Similarly, a child's point of view alters a language's "speed" and a single word such as "funny" undergoes a series of displacements. For example, Arjie does not quite understand why Amma has shut him out of her room:

It was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn't comprehend. I thought of what my father had said about turning out "funny." The word

"funny" as I understood it meant either humorous or strange, as in the expression, "that's funny." Neither of these fitted the sense in which my father had used the word, for there had been a hint of disgust in his tone. (17)

In a similar way, when Radha Aunty calls Ammachi a racist, Arjie comments, "I did not understand the meaning of the word 'racist,' but I could tell that it was not a nice thing" (59). To use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, the minor language effects a destratification of the language's principle strata. Or, as Bensmaïa puts it, the child's perspective in minor literature is "capable of disorganizing its own forms, of disorganizing the forms of content" (xvii). Whereas the adult reader (to use Fisher's term) "automatically" understands the connotations of the word "funny," Arjie's detailed articulation of his confusion prompts a pause in the narrative that enables Selvadurai to subvert the word's legitimacy. While Arjie's intuition tells him that his mother's behaviour and his father's use of the term "funny" are somehow related, his ignorance of gender codes and sexual orientations brings those adult associations to

the fore. Arjie's reliance on his knowledge of the dictionary meanings of the word funny only leads to more confusion. Although the principal strata of the term "funny" are identified by Arjie, his ignorance of major cultural codes and language (another set of principal strata) results in a destratification of those principle strata. Arjie's suspicion that "funny" is somehow linked to behaviour that is regarded by his parents as "wrong" and "disgusting" is confirmed by our own cultural knowledge. While we might normally and habitually have attached our cultural associations to the term "funny" without hesitation, Arjie's failed explication of the term provides a narrative hesitation that effectively destratifies and disorganizes the term on our behalves. Thus, Arjie's minor approach to the language he encounters (in this case, the word "funny") constitutes a narrative displacement from the major language in which Selvadurai operates. The child focalizers of *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints* are constantly confronted

with strange adult rules, conventions, expectations, and language designed to shape them into major adults who will perpetuate major institutions and hierarchies. Naomi, Arjie, and Vittorio express their discomfort with these adult expectations and through their uncomfortable gaze the authors interrogate the major language and rules of engagement that the child protagonists encounter. Recall Ricou's statement that "[w]hat is distinctive about child language" is that "[o]bviously, and primarily, it is language in the *process of being learned*" (4). We are prompted to recall the minor's state of being socialized -- the often painful process of learning to make sense of adult language, signs, and expectations. Child focalizers experience a disorienting mix of knowledge and ignorance -- knowledge of their unstable positions and ignorance of why they are in these positions and how they can gain some agency over their own fate.

In *Obasan*, the adults' decision to withhold information from Naomi is justified by the adult principle of "*Kodomo no tame*." / "For the sake of the children" (240). Naomi says, "The memories were drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence. Everywhere I could hear the adults whispering, '*Kodomo no tame*. For the sake of the children' Calmness was maintained" (22). In this imposed state of ignorance Naomi expresses confusion and imagines terrifying scenarios. The adult policy of *kodomo no tame* results in a constant state of fear for Naomi:

At night I lie awake thinking of dangerous people wielding hooks and prongs, but during the day there is another danger, another darkness, soft and mysterious. I know it as whispers and frowns and too much gentleness. Then, one spring evening, the two shadows of day and night come together in a white heavy mist of fear. (79)

Naomi's fears are obscured in mist and shadows. She cannot quite solve the mystery of the adults' behaviour. Though Naomi is "protected" from knowledge by "whispers" and "gentleness," a general sense of fear is created in the place of knowledge. Furthermore, her misunderstandings are intensified by

language she cannot quite decipher as she hears her father and Aunt Emily discussing Grandpa Nakane at Sick Bay:

Grandpa Nakane at Sick Bay? Where, I wonder, is that? And why is it a cause of distress? Is Sick Bay near English Bay or Horseshoe Bay? When we go to Stanley Park we sometimes drive by English Bay. Past English Bay are the other beaches, Second and Third Beach where I once went to buy potato chips and got lost . . . If Grandpa Nakane is at the beach now, could he be lost the way I was? Should we not go to find him? (80)

As Emily rushes home after curfew through the back alleys, Naomi thinks, "[a]ll this talk is puzzling and frightening" (82). While the child is small enough to go unnoticed and is therefore privy to information (Naomi hides under the bed and eavesdrops), she confuses the information she overhears. Because the child mistranslates adult language, Kogawa exposes the calculated cruelty of language, how such government euphemisms as "Sick Bay" obscure reality. While the implication is that "sick bay," a common term for a hospital ward, is meant to heal the sick, the

Japanese Canadian experience in "sick bay" reveals that it was a place that caused degradation of health and spirit. Adult labels and names reveal their complexities through the child's innocent confusion. Naomi and Stephen even have trouble identifying themselves: are they "Japs" and therefore "bad," as a classmate declares, or are they "Canadian" as their father declares? For Naomi and Stephen, this business of identification is another frustrating mystery: "It is a riddle, Stephen tells me. We are both the enemy and not the enemy" (76). The children's perspectives reveal how puzzling, contradictory, and unjust is the government treatment of the Japanese Canadians. The child's perspective reveals the terrifying logic of adult actions. The adults' racist actions and language, spurred by hate and xenophobia, contradict Naomi's assumptions -- taught to her by adults -- that people are inherently good and will treat one another with justice and respect.

Throughout *Obasan*, Naomi's knowledge of events critical to her own life is circumscribed and controlled by adults. Aya, for example, forbids any discussion of the Japanese dispersal in front of the children. All they are told is that "they're going on a train ride" (117). Later, Naomi comments, "[t]his is the way it is whenever I ask questions. The answers are not answers at all" (146). Childhood, it seems, is a lack of knowing. As Obasan teaches Naomi not to be "wagamama -- selfish and inconsiderate," Naomi says, "[i]t is such a tangle trying to decipher the needs and intents of others" (138). Naomi's lack of knowing is intensified by her inability to read Japanese. When they receive a letter from her father, Naomi "could only stare at the waves as Stephen deciphered their code" (147). When Naomi's father receives orders from the government to leave Slocan, Naomi is once again kept from knowing what is going on. She does "not understand the words" her uncle and father

speak, and when she asks Stephen why they cannot go home, he answers: "Because, that's why" (189). More than once, when Naomi asks where she is being taken, no one answers her (191, 210).

In *Lives of the Saints*, Vittorio is, like Naomi, kept in the dark, his knowledge of events circumscribed by the adults around him. Speaking of their future emigration to "America," Vittorio's mother observes, "Poor Vittorio. No one ever tells him anything" (159). Even such a major event, one that will change Vittorio's life forever -- deterritorializing him from his home, his family, and his language -- is kept from him. Ricci demonstrates Vittorio's subjugation to the wills of adults from the very beginning of *Lives of the Saints*. Not surprisingly, Vittorio's desires do not conform to the rules and conventions laid out for him by the adult world. Ordered by his mother, on a hot day in July, to "catch up on his lessons," Vittorio cannot help but succumb to a world that seems "wrapped in a warm, yellow dream" (9). Vittorio resists the logic of

Principi Matematici whereby "1+1=2" and, instead, falls asleep "while a happy host of apples and numbers, freed from the tyranny of the book, danced in my head in wild combinations" (10). Here, on this hot day in July, we first encounter the constant push and pull between adult rules and child dreams. Vittorio's desire to escape "the tyranny of the book," however, will not do. Though Cristina had previously laughed off his teacher's concerns, she now takes up an interest in "reforming" Vittorio -- he must now learn that "1+1=2" (19). So, from the beginning of the novel Ricci makes it clear that Vittorio has become subject to his mother's whims and desires. Unbeknownst to Vittorio, Cristina uses this book as a device to keep him busy while she meets her blue-eyed lover in the stables.

Previously an ally and kindred spirit, Vittorio's mother has become implicated in an adult world that prescribes knowledge to the child. When, for example, Vittorio stumbles upon his mother in the barn, she

scrutinizes him and becomes another figure of
authority like *la maestra* and Father Nicola:

'What did you see when you came down here?' she said finally. She stared at me hard a moment, her eyes narrowed; but when I did not answer she put her hands gently on my shoulders.

'Don't be afraid,' she said more softly. 'Maybe other people will ask you too. What will you tell them?'

Question and answer: that was how *la maestra* taught us our lessons at school and how Father Nicola, the village priest, taught us our catechism. Every question had its right response; from everything you had heard and learned you had to pick out only what was necessary, only what was required.

'I didn't see anything,' I said finally. (13)

Vittorio's answer prompts a kiss on his forehead from his mother, indicating that this answer has been "sanctioned" by his mother. The child has entered into the adult world where the truth is not necessarily what one sees but, rather, what one says. Vittorio's mother, the most influential figure in his life, confirms *la maestra's* and Father Nicola's lesson that the right response is more important than a truthful response. Vittorio's state of being has been shifted -- he is learning how not to see. Thus, the

real story exists in what has not been said (that Vittorio's mother has slept with a man in the stable) and is intensified by the reader's observation of Vittorio's silence and ignorance. In addition, Vittorio's understanding of his mother's sexual affair and consequent pregnancy is confounded and confused by village superstitions and his own ignorance of such matters. Struggle as he may, Vittorio cannot decode the snatches of adult gossip he overhears. Though there are references to a curse and a scandal with respect to his mother's snake bite, Vittorio cannot quite grasp why this is so. In fact, Vittorio becomes so accomplished at not seeing the truth of his mother's affair that even Fabrizio's matter-of-fact statement, "she was screwing in the stable," is emphatically denied by Vittorio (104). Vittorio has become more comfortable with a general lack of knowledge than he is with the sudden comprehension of harsh truths.

The child focalizer's linguistic encounters and misunderstandings reveal explicit social power

relations and hierarchies. Though the child protagonists do not immediately realize the harsh truths about their society, their struggles to interpret adult behaviour and language prompt the reader to see these harsh truths all the more plainly. The child is constantly being socialized into major adult conventions, rules, and expectations. By concentrating on the minute details of socialization, the child's perspective emphatically reminds us that these conventions and rules are learned and not innate. Furthermore, in the uncomfortable process of socialization the child focalizers become deterritorialized from these oppressive conventions and rules. For example, from the moment Arjie enters his grandparents' home in *Funny Boy*, we see that the children are socialized to adhere to adult patriarchal hierarchies. Ammachi and Appachi are described in clear terms as powerful figures of hierarchical and generational power. The children must "pay [their] respects" to Ammachi and Appachi who sit "enthroned" in their chairs. The grandparents use their fingers

as instruments of power to "beckon," as would "royalty," the children to them. Ammachi is decked out with jewelry (her diamond nose stud) and anointed with oil. The children's "audience" with their grandparents is formal, uncomfortable, and painful. Linger in the background is the threat of physical violence: "the thought of the big canes she kept behind her tall clothes almariah" is strongly imprinted in the children's minds (2). Ammachi is also compared to a goddess -- one who must not be "disturbed from her tranquility" (3).

This generational hierarchy extends to Arjie's parents and his encounters with them reveal the patriarchal powers at play in his family. When Appa suspects that Arjie is "funny," he blames Arjie's mother. He declares that Arjie is to play with the boys; however, Amma is left to enforce the declaration. Furthermore, although it is Appa's will that Arjie play with the boys, Amma is the figure to whom Arjie appeals. Arjie's objections and pleadings are countered by Amma with non-explanations and non-

sense. Amma turns to natural law in the form of a children's nursery rhyme -- "Because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly, that's why" -- to "explain" why Arjie cannot play with the girls (19, 23). When he persists in his questioning, she says, "Life is full of stupid things and sometimes we just have to do them" (20). Arjie's child-sensibility can discover no sense or reason for these gender restrictions. As a child, Arjie is not yet familiar with the expectations and anxieties of adult society and is therefore able to comment on, and perform, the absurdity of that which he experiences. Through the child's eyes, Selvadurai likens society's gender divisions to a silly rhyme without reason. The gender divisions about which Arjie is forced to learn and to which he must adhere are presented as arbitrary, non-sensical, and indefensible.

Furthermore, Amma's use of a children's rhyme demonstrates the adult's power to transform child-language into that which supports adult hegemony. Whereas a child's use of nonsense can be regarded as a

form of "play," Amma recontextualizes the child's playful rhyme in order to place restrictions on Arjie's literal play with other children. While, in general, one might regard child-language as a pre-social approach to words -- one that treats words as new, or strange rather than fully defined and structured -- Amma's recitation of this childhood rhyme does the opposite. Under Amma's control, the words of this childhood rhyme become the means by which she can enforce Appa's restrictions on Arjie without needing to generate a legitimate explanation for these restrictions. As Ricou argues, the child's use of non-rational language (language which does not rely on formal patterns of grammar) results in the child's occupying a "state of having a language *different* from that of the adult, more individualized, less rational in structure" (Ricou 9). This can be regarded as a positive state since the child can be seen to possess a more "natural," "intuitive" relationship with the world; however, when Amma takes control of the child's rhyme and nonsense she uses

that irrationality against the child, hegemonizing the language and exerting her power over that child. So Selvadurai shows that the effects of child-language and nonsense depend on who controls the words. As Ricou states, words are objects that are manipulated in the "game of nonsense" (118). Since, however, Amma's actions are focalized through Arjie's narrative, Amma's manipulation of these words is revealed as "stupid," and her directives toward Arjie are exposed as illogical and unjust. Ultimately, as the narrator of his own text, Arjie maintains control over the "words," whether they are sense or non-sense.

As a child, Arjie begins to learn the significations of various adult names and labels. Arjie's childhood frustration is that he continually misunderstands and confuses identities and meanings. Adults bar him from knowledge: "It's too hard to explain. You'll understand when you're older" . . . "But I want to know now" (61). In a sense, Arjie's experiences as a child are a bit like detective work. Confronted with racism, homophobia, and political

violence, he must solve a set of mysteries by decoding the adult codes of language, conventions, norms, power hierarchies, and gender roles. In their decoding, he moves closer to adulthood and thus loses the misunderstandings integral to the child's perspective. Arjie is also a witness to and participant in, covert, unauthorized activities. He is an "unwilling accomplice" in his mother's involvement with Daryl Uncle and is "implicated" by Radha Aunty in her relationship with Anil (118). He even participates in Amma's "investigation" of Daryl Uncle's murder -- an investigation that reveals the injustices and abuses of power present in authorized institutions such as the police and government and backed by a society that silences "uncomfortable" questions.

What makes Arjie a child and deterritorializes him from adults is that he has not yet learned or assimilated their rules, roles, and conventions. In Arjie there is an ever-present sense of the estranged familiar. Arjie's childhood deterritorializations are couched in an adult narrative perspective familiar

with adult codes, practices, and conventions. Thus, as adult-Arjie (writer-Arjie) returns to his childhood through memory, he and the reader undertake a migration of the imagination that destabilizes the narrative temporally, spatially, and linguistically.

As White says,

it must be noted that amongst all the literature of migration the highest proportion deals in some way with ideas of return, whether actualised or remaining imaginary. To return may be to go back but it may equally be to start again: to seek but also to lose. Return has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. For the individual returning to their 'own' past and place it is rarely fully satisfying: circumstances change, borders in all senses are altered, and identities change too. But for many in the Age of Migration the time and place to be returned are ill-defined.
(14)

In novels such as *Funny Boy* the age of minority, or childhood, is necessarily an age of migration. Though child focalizers such as Arjie may not cross geographical borders in the pages of their narratives, their experiences with the signs, conventions, and languages of adults constitute the border-crossings of their multiple migrations. Furthermore, the very act

of writing and re-membering brings with it a sense of awakening, renewal, and empowerment. In a book review of *Funny Boy*, Sengupta writes, "[i]t is really a story about the power of stories -- the bitter truths, the mythologies, the fantasies that make and maintain families and nations" (1). The act of storytelling, or re-constituting the past, enables Arjie to re-envision that past from his own perspective. At the same time that Arjie recalls his lack of power and authority as a "funny boy," he is creating a new sort of authority through the authorship of the text itself. Although adult-Arjie is still in a position of marginalization (he is a minority subject in Canada), he re-imagines and re-envisions this position of marginality as one of possibility, creativity, and self-empowerment.

Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio all gain some agency by writing. That Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio become writers who represent their own childhoods is significant. In so doing, they resist forces that seek to limit their self-representations. In writing

their histories, Vittorio, Naomi, and Arjie manipulate the English language. Their recollections of the past actively interrogate our assumptions about language and culture, proving them to be agents rather than passive receptors of the language in which they write. "The child," as a minor who, in Jo-Ann Wallace's words, is a "citizen-in-information," or "citizen-in-training" is "never able to represent him/her self" (293). While Wallace refers particularly to representation in the legal sense, I believe that "the child" as a subject is unable to fully represent him/herself in a much broader sense.

In her article, "Technologies of 'the child': Towards a Theory of the Child Subject," Wallace argues that "[u]ltimately, the question that a theory of 'the child-subject' must address is the question of agency" (294). Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio experience a variety of prisons, exclusions, and traumas as children. They are uprooted from home, distanced from parents, and forced to forget their home languages. They reluctantly inherit unjust social codes, gender

and class barriers, and power inequalities. In short, they lack agency in most areas of their lives.

Parents and influential adults attempt to model the children in their own images, leaving little freedom for them to pursue "other" desires and build "other" identities. Thus, for example, Arjie is sent to school to "become a man" so that, as his brother Diggy explains, he will not "[turn] out funny or anything like that" (210). Although Arjie does not yet understand the meaning of turning out "funny," the reader realizes that in sending Arjie to Victoria Academy, Arjie's father is attempting to "force me to become a man," by which he means a heterosexual male (210). Ironically, as a result of attending this boys' institution, Arjie meets his first love and begins to explore his homosexual desires.

Through the act of writing, these children assert agency over their own memories and experiences. Arjie's recollection of Victoria Academy, for example, constitutes a resistance against the dangerous effects of nostalgic remembrances. He distinguishes between

the construction of Victoria academy as "The Best School of All" and his actual experiences as a student in what is, perhaps, the worst school of all. He rebels against the nostalgic impulses that would wash these memories in pleasant "pink" hues, erasing the school's prison-like atmosphere and Black Tie's physical abuse of the boys:

The whole building was illuminated in a coral pink that swiftly deepened as the sun set. How peaceful and stately it looked. The balcony where Black Tie stood each morning, and where Shehan and I had spent many awful hours, now seemed cleansed in the rays of the setting sun. A few boys came strolling down to the gate, their cricket bats across their shoulders. As I gazed at this idyllic scene, the refrain from "The Best School of All" came to me: "For working days and holidays, / And glad and melancholy days, / They were great days and jolly days -- " what foolish lines they were. Still, as I looked at the Victoria Academy, a voice in me said that this was how I would remember the school when I was no longer its captive. This was how my father must remember it, washed in the coral pink of memory.

No, I vowed to myself, I would never remember it like that. (273)

Arjie's conscious decision to resist nostalgia draws our attention to the constructed nature of memory itself. Furthermore, Arjie's resolution to resist the

"coral pink of memory" demonstrates that there is agency in memory. One can either resist or collude with the tendency to mitigate painful memories. The way one remembers something can be a form of protest or resistance. Arjie actively associates the school with imprisonment and rules -- "a code that was unfair" and that teaches him that "[r]ight and wrong, fair and unfair had nothing to do with how things really were" (273). We are made to realize that "what one person considers an ideal dream might to another person seem a nightmare" (Booker 3). In having Arjie consciously resist the "coral pink" memory, Selvadurai demonstrates the dangers in colluding with a memory that erases pain and trauma.

Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi all exhibit characteristics of the writer in their narratives largely because the narratives themselves are told from their perspectives and are thus written by adult versions of themselves. These child protagonists also communicate their fascination with stories and imaginative worlds. They engage with language in a

"writerly" manner. Though they may not know it yet, they are budding writers/storytellers and their narratives provide clues to their destinies. One recalls, for example, Arjie's capacity for rearranging the poems he must recite at school, or Vittorio's fascination with the stories in *la maestra's Lives of the Saints*. Vittorio is fascinated by the tales of the saints and Father Nick's stories of the seminary. Stories become Vittorio's escape and mode of education. Even Naomi, who expresses little faith in the power of Emily's words and letters, recognizes the value of telling her family's story.

As a child, Naomi receives nourishment through stories: "Each night from the very beginning, before I could talk there were the same stories, the voices of my mother or my father or Obasan or Grandma Kato, soft through the filter of my sleepiness, carrying me away to a shadowy ancestry" (58). Her experience with stories, then, is ritualistic: "the telling is a chant" (59). The story is magical, communicated in a special language that especially attracts the child --

no matter what race or background. As Rough Lock Bill observes, "Never met a kid didn't like stories. Red skin, yellow skin, white skin, any skin" (157). Thus, the story allows for a special kind of border-crossing, in which the minor perspective and language disturbs and reorients the major. Naomi's childhood encounter with Rough Lock Bill hints at her development as a writer/storyteller. When Naomi meets Rough Lock Bill, she writes her name in the sand for him, but does not speak to him until after he tells the children a story. He says to her, "Can't read. Can't talk. What's the good of you eh?" (157). What is the good of Naomi? She has already demonstrated to Rough Lock Bill that she can write, and, though he may not yet know it, Naomi possesses the writer's gift of observation. She is a witness to events around her and, in retelling these events, Naomi juxtaposes official historical documents and records (the major, authoritative story) with her own, personal history of dreams, trauma, and memory. Naomi's compelling, emotional, fragmented version of events subverts the

authority of impersonal documents and, thus, her focus on minor stories results in a disturbance of the story's major forms.

For example, Naomi's assigned "home" in Slocan is nearly invisible, overgrown with weeds and crumbling with lack of care. Like Vittorio's house, Naomi's Slocan cabin is located at the end of the road, on the margins of the town:

We walk a few steps farther down the path,
and there, almost hidden from sight off the
path, is a small grey hut with a broken
porch camouflaged by shrubbery and trees . .
. From the road, the house is invisible,
and the path to it is overgrown with weeds.
(129)

The gate is broken, the porch step is rickety, and inside the cabin all is "grey." The low ceiling is made with grass and manure and Naomi says it feels "underground" (130). Sensei calls the house "[a] small house for small people," (130) calling to mind Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of minor literature since the term "small" is one of the many signifiers for the term "minor." Though the house is small and almost invisible (it is minor), and Naomi and her

family are seen as "small people," their perspectives and experiences form the major foundation of Naomi's narrative. Through a minor child's eyes, a "small house for small people" is a major cause for concern and recollection. Through Naomi's eyes we observe the minor details that have been erased by our own major histories.

Kogawa intensifies this attention to minor details by privileging the "private" stories of Naomi and her family in *Obasan*. Authorizing and highlighting these private stories in the narrative, Kogawa destabilizes the authority of major, government-authorized histories of Japanese-Canadians. For example, when Naomi opens Emily's package, she finds a journal, "the private words of Y. Emily Kato" rather than the expected "conference papers, perhaps documents" (33). Marginal voices (such as a child's voice, or a private diary) are significant: a package pulled from forgetfulness, from beneath a table, from the cobwebs of Obasan's mind, "nudge [Naomi's] early morning thoughts to flame" (33). In Apollo Amoko's

words, Kogawa's writing technique acts as a "supplement" to official history. This "'supplement' -- as something that comes after or in addition to the 'original' -- possesses the advantage of 'belatedness' or 'secondariness' that enables it to challenge and disturb the primacy of the 'original'" (10). Amoko argues that "Kogawa offers a sustained example of the power of the supplement as she writes against the official multiculturalist vision of Canadian nationality" (10). Like Detective Columbo's "just one more thing . . ." in the *Columbo* television mysteries, the supplement or afterthought is a highly significant part of the narrative, disturbing the status quo with its minor interrogations of "official truths."¹² As Amoko writes, "Kogawa structures the novel in such a way that the official version of events (as found, for example, in government reports and contemporary newspaper accounts) is disrupted by a series of supplementary interventions" (11). Furthermore, in placing an official document, an excerpt from a 1946 government report, at the end of the novel, Kogawa

makes it the supplement or afterthought to her main text, in doing so disrupting traditional minor and major categories.

In "Minority History as Metafiction" Donald Goellnicht points out that the very construction of a historical fiction -- the use of diaries, letters, newspaper clippings in a fictional narrative -- is disruptive and unrealistic: in Linda Hutcheon's words, it is "historiographic metafiction" (288). He argues that *Obasan* is "doubly revealing because its narrative position is that of a doubly marginalized subject: a Japanese Canadian woman" (288). If one adds the child to Goellnicht's identification of the narrative subject, one can argue that Naomi is a triply marginalized subject. Goellnicht argues that Naomi "self-consciously reinterprets history from an ex-centric, minority position, presenting the Japanese Canadian perspective of what happened largely through the eyes of an 'innocent' child, telling its 'truth' in this work of fiction" (290). In fact, the use of a child's narrative perspective is a significant

contributing factor to the disruption and contestation of what Goellnicht calls "the dominant culture's totalizing, omniscient voice of history" -- a rupture that "constitutes both a break and an opening for revision" (294).

However, in that silence can be a measure of powerlessness and inarticulateness. The child's subject position, often silent and invisible, can be destructive. Thus, Naomi's emergence from silence through the articulation of her narrative constitutes, in Goellnicht's words, "the breaking of silence, and, through the discursive power of language . . . a discovery of self not only for Naomi and Kogawa, but for Canada, which must also come to terms with its heterogeneous identity" (297).

By remembering childhood experiences, authors such as Kogawa are able to combat the processes of repression and articulate that which has heretofore remained repressed and unarticulated. So, for example, Naomi looks at a newspaper clipping showing a Japanese family "grinning and happy" amongst a pile of

beets and says, after providing her own version of the hellish experience, "[t]hat is one telling. It's not how it was" (217). Naomi's afterthought, or minor snapshot, disrupts the authority of major versions of these events and her recollection of events becomes accepted as truth in Kogawa's narrative. Naomi is positioned, in Kristie McAlpine's words, "at the intersection of these competing dialogues" (135), dialogues which convey dominant hierarchies and power structures and "received information" (historical documents, news clippings, and family members' memories). The narrator "recontextualizes" the information "so that a new discourse is formed" (135). It is, as McAlpine states, a "re-evaluating of the evidence" (135).

Another technique Kogawa uses to "recontextualize" the information she conveys is through Naomi's chronological shifts between adulthood and childhood. Like Arjie's deliberate mangling of his school poetry recitation (discussed in Chapter Three), Naomi's "disorderly" narrative constitutes a

minor displacement of major expectations. However, rather than have Naomi enact a parody of poetry, or linguistic displacements, Kogawa has Naomi present the readers with a series of temporal displacements that de-normalize the entire narrative. Like Arjie, Kogawa -- through Naomi -- uses a strategy of displacement in order to disorient the audience/reader and cause a shift in power dynamics and hegemonic expectations. Using different forms of retaliatory displacement, Arjie and Naomi "disorder" the anticipated "order."

In *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal uses a number of terms that prove useful to this discussion. A "fabula," she writes, is "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (5). When "differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula" occur, Bal calls these "chronological deviations or anachronies" (83). Though *Lives of the Saints* and *Funny Boy* do not contain these chronological deviations or anachronies to the same extent as does *Obasan*, their adult-

narrator / child-focalizer split results in minor anachronisms throughout the novels. In particular, the "primary time" of each of these texts is unquestionably the past-embedded "fabula," indicating the power of the past to change -- and rearrange -- the present (Bal 88).¹³ Telling a story from a child's point of view necessarily engages the text in temporal rearrangement. The constant shifts between the adult narrator's and child protagonist's perspectives¹⁴ enact an ongoing temporal fluctuation in the text -- what Marta Dvorak refers to with respect to *Lives* as a "shifting back and forth on the axis of temporality" (105). As simultaneous adult narrators and child characters, Vittorio, Arjie, and Naomi express the past, present, and future.

Displacements between past and present are particularly apparent in Kogawa's *Obasan*. Chapter One of *Obasan* begins with a time and date ("9:05 p.m. August, 1972") and a geographical description of place, measured in miles, promptly follows: "half a mile from the Barkers' farm and seven miles from the

village of Granton" (1). The first few sentences of the narrative are anchored by the rational ordering of geography, time and history and we perhaps anticipate a linear history, ordered and precise. This initial orientation, however, is destabilized by Kogawa's shifts between present and past, between place and place, between oral history and metaphoric description and written documents and letters. The flashbacks, embedded documents and newspaper clippings, and the three interconnecting narratives of child-Naomi, adult-Naomi, and Aunt Emily's diary combine to form a "constantly shifting narration" (Vautier 122). Naomi's declaration that "[n]othing changes" is invalidated by her recollections of the past. Even by Chapter Two, which also begins with a date ("September 13, 1972"), Kogawa confounds any stable sense of time with Naomi's simultaneous reference to present, past, and future: "In the future I will remember the details of this day" (5).

In her discussion of the children's book *Something Very Sorry*, Mieke Bal observes that the

"movement back and forth from present to past to present is the story's basic rhythm" and that these "delicate alternations contribute to the story in a very meaningful way: they provide insight into the broken sense of self of the traumatized child in a modulation that makes the reader experience it with her on an emotional level as well" (83). This is the effect of *Obasan's* temporal shifts as well. As Kogawa writes:

All our ordinary stories are changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past. Potent and pervasive as a prairie dust storm, memories and dreams seep and mingle through cracks, settling on furniture and into upholstery. Our attics and living-rooms encroach on each other, deep into their invisible places.
(25)

Initially, the experience of recollecting the past is distasteful to Naomi. Rather than a freeing experience, it is an ensnaring one. For example, after following *Obasan* up to the attic in the middle of the night to search for something unknown, Naomi says,

we're trapped, *Obasan* and I, by our memories of the dead -- all our dead -- those who

refuse to bury themselves. Like threads of old spider webs, still sticky and hovering, the past waits for us to submit, or depart. When I least expect it, a memory comes skittering out of the dark, spinning and netting the air, ready to snap me up and ensnare me in old and complex puzzles . . . After all these years, I find myself wondering, but with the dullness of expecting no response. (26)

Naomi's painful and mystifying memories prompt her to reject Aunt Emily's argument that "[t]he past is the future" (45). She shies away from Emily's aggressive statements such as, "[y]ou have to remember . . . You are your history. If you cut any of it off you're an amputee. Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene" (54). Naomi argues that "what is done is done . . . and no doubt it will all happen again, over and over with different faces and names, variations on the same theme" (219). She expresses her desire to "get away from all this. From the past and all these papers, from the present, from the memories, from the deaths" (201). Although Naomi approaches Emily's enthusiasm for the past with trepidation, her narrative acts of remembrance

demonstrate that Emily's statements do not go unheeded. While Naomi is reluctant to revisit the past, such revisiting becomes the main purpose of her narrative.

For Naomi, however, past and present become conflated during the course of her narrative recollections:

I am sometimes not certain whether it is a cluttered attic in which I sit, a waiting room, a tunnel, a train. There is no beginning and no end to the forest, or the dust storm, no edge from which to know where the clearing begins. Here, in this familiar density, beneath this cloak, within this carapace, is the longing within the darkness. (119)

Naomi dislocates her own narrative in time and space and, therefore, transgresses major, familiar narrative strata. She is an active agent in the telling of the story -- a subversive de-constructor of the narrative. Naomi's "jumps" in time not only displace the anticipated "order" of the narrative itself, but also subvert that narrative with the child's deterritorialized, minor perspective.

Child-Naomi's linguistic disorientation combined with her experiences as a member of an ethnic minority provide her with a minor perspective that allows Kogawa to present society and its authorities from a minor, non-standard vantage point. The categories of minor and major, big and little, are temporarily reversed and displaced when they are focalized through the eyes of the child. The world becomes, as in Naomi's view of her village from "Minnie's Bluff" and "Mickey's Bluff," as "immense as sky and tiny as the pin-dot flowers in the moss" (152). Major historical documents become insignificant in Naomi's narrative while letters written in a minority language become highly significant. Furthermore, Naomi's engagement with English is tempered with an appreciation for Japanese communicative nuances. Although Naomi cannot read Japanese, Kogawa successfully pluralizes the reader's exposure to language in *Obasan*, perhaps subverting the reader's initial tendency to accept English as the major, dominant language of the text.

Kogawa presents us with various languages in *Obasan*: language of eyes, language of silence, Japanese, English. Child-Naomi is taught the nonverbal languages as well as the verbal and wonders, "[w]ho is it who teaches me that in the language of eyes a stare is an invasion and a reproach . . . Aunt Emily and Father, born and raised in Canada, are visually bilingual. I too learn the second language" (51). In observations like these the reader is positioned with Naomi on a site of disjunction and dislocation "where the 'mother' language and adopted language(s) meet" (Conway 58). Also, Naomi learns (at least) two different kinds of language/voice modeled by her two aunts, Emily and Obasan: speech ("word warrior") and silence (gestures, intuitiveness). Aunt Emily would argue for Naomi to "Write the vision and make it plain Habakkuk 2:2" (32). Naomi is wary of Emily's approach and disclaims it as a "crusader's" approach: "For my part, I can only see a dark field with Aunt Emily beaming

her flashlight to where the rest of us crouch and hide, our eyes downcast as we seek the safety of invisibility" (32). However, despite her proclamations of reluctance, Naomi's actions tell a different story as when, in the previous chapter, Naomi stands in an attic, flashlight in hand. Both Naomi and her Aunt Emily shine light into the darkness and strive to make the past visible and "plain."

Indeed, Kogawa prefaces her novel with a question that highlights the importance of speech and telling: "Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word . . . If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word?" Indeed, Naomi comes into "telling" and "speech" in *Obasan*; however, she does not discount the power of her Obasan's silent approach: "The language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances.

Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful" (14). Like Naomi's story, Obasan's "answers are always oblique and the full story never emerges in a direct line" (18). Naomi's narrative style communicates truth in pieces and delays answers to questions and mysteries. Naomi fuses these two approaches into her own controlled yet indirect language and narrative. "Like Naomi," Kogawa states in an interview with Sue Careless, "[m]y first language was silence; my second was speech. I understand the language of silence; yet I need a lot of communication" (1). Thus, Naomi limits the introduction of Emily's crusader voice into her narrative. Naomi reads Emily's package of documents, letters, and journals at intervals and, thereby, as Teruyo Ueki argues, heightens "the impact of speech through controlled exposure while bringing out the hidden depth of the language of silence" (10). Similarly, Kogawa's use of Naomi's child-voice, with its limited and

controlled narrative perspective, results in the heightened impact of her observations. The language of the child -- which is silenced, limited, and inexperienced -- contains a hidden depth that reflects Deleuze and Guattari's argument that the minor contains within it a powerful commentary on, and illumination of, the major.

In her article on "Ethnic Writing and Canadian Literary Criticism," Alison Conway writes:

In their definition of minority writing Deleuze and Guattari focus primarily on the question of language . . . Language for the minority writer must always be the site of disjunction and dislocation where the "mother" language and adopted language(s) meet. The "natural" element of language is stripped away in these circumstances, exposing its ideological functionings. (58)

As child/minority writers, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio similarly "strip away" the notion that the language they encounter and use is "natural" or communal and therefore comes "naturally" to them. Rather, they reveal aspects of their languages' constructedness. Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's link to language

(written and oral) is important because though they have been relegated to the margins of their societies, their acquired positions as writers and first-person narrators of their own experiences navigate them back to the centre of the story. Their privileged positions as writer-narrators enable them to generate atmospheres of inclusion for readers as they deal with experience of exclusion in their own lives.

Given power, the oppressed are in danger of becoming oppressors and the children may very well become (tyrannical) adults. Independence from oppressors and social constraints, and clarity of vision, are rare commodities. The authors bestow their child protagonists with special insight and superior vision that are preserved in the adult-narrator/writer. The child protagonists' experiences of dislocation are combined in the children's characters with a state of heightened awareness and vision. More importantly, they retain this heightened awareness in adulthood, as is suggested by their vocations as writers and storytellers. Rather than

exhibiting the characteristics of their major tormentors -- in childhood or adulthood -- these children develop their modes of minor resistance against oppressive majors. As adult writers, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio depict their childhood perspectives as especially aware of adult injustices and as particularly resistant to major influences. These deterritorialized children become "minor-majors," writers who have reached the age of majority but who continue to convey the "minor" subject positions of their youth. Thus, they are saved from becoming the tyrannical adults against whom they struggle. The narrators' special talents as writers, combined with the retrieval and reconstruction of their past, become weapons of resistance against the barriers society attempts to erect around them.

For example, Arjie's first sustained act of writing constitutes a response to the disorientation and violence occurring around him. Arjie is unable to sleep, unable to read: "The only thing for me to do is write" (287). "Riot Journal: An Epilogue"

represents Arjie's attempt at imposing some sort of order -- keeping a log of events organized by date and time -- over the disorder of the times. Moreover, Arjie's journal-style narrative supplements the official history of the riots in Sri Lanka with the unofficial story of the minor participants and victims. As the riots occur, Arjie's home becomes an alien landscape: "The back garden looked menacing, and the trees and bushes seemed strange and unfamiliar. Even the verandah seemed alien" (295). Like the brief joys of Arjie's childhood, the roses have lost most of their petals and the garden has been raided by thieves. The chants of the disembodied mob approach. The children's game of hide and seek referred to in the previous chapter becomes a nightmarish reality as Arjie and his family sneak through gardens and hide in cupboards. Arjie's backyard and home are looted and burned.¹⁵ The place where he originally played and dressed up freely, and from which he was forcibly removed by the "loving" adults in his life, is now permanently destroyed by

the violent adults populating the city. In his journal, he writes:

I sat on the verandah steps and wept for the loss of my home, for the loss of everything that I held to be precious. I tried to muffle the sound of my weeping, but my voice cried out loudly as if it were the only weapon I had against those who destroyed my life. (311)

All Arjie can do is write and cry out. His voice -- oral and written -- is the only weapon he has.

The child's voice, or perspective, in these narratives, however, is a formidable tool. It provides Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio with a measure of agency that they would not otherwise possess as minor children. Though Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio cannot grasp certain key words and cultural signifiers, their acts of recollection and writing allow them to invest the language with their own meanings and significations. Thus, for example, Naomi's assumptions surrounding the term "sick bay" reveal the government's perversion of the language. The adult narrators inject the major, institutional versions of social, historical, and religious events with healthy

doses of minor childhood insecurities and confusions. In so doing, they resist and dismantle the authority and legitimacy of these institutions. Nothing, not even childhood itself, is washed in the "coral pink of memory."

These children's discomforts with major language and behaviour are intensified by their affinities with other characters similarly displaced and minored by society. While child focalizers regard major hierarchies and conventions with particular intensity and deterritorialization, they do not occupy the sole position of the outsider. In fact, as children constructed by adults, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are meant to illuminate adult experiences of dislocation and repression. These child figures represent elements of our own identities and reveal the adult's capacity for occupying a child's subject position. In *Funny Boy* and *Lives of the Saints*, Arjie and Vittorio forge alliances with various marginalized adults, thus elaborating on their own experiences of displacement within the texts. In *Obasan*, Kogawa links Naomi's

child-subjectivity with that of the Japanese Canadian community, intensifying her critique of the major white Canadian infantilization of an entire ethnic minority in its midst. In all three cases, the authors demonstrate that while their child protagonists may experience radical alienation and dislocation, they also possess certain affinities with other minors, marginals, and ethnic minorities.

Chapter Two: Displaced "Minor-Majors" and the Child

Subject Position

To enter the world of the child and to create a fictional account focalized through the eyes and voice of the child is to explore an element of one's own identity. In particular, in presenting the alienations experienced by Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci explore our alien and minor identities -- our shadow-selves, repressed desires, minor cruelties, and cultural performances. We construct childhood to serve our own purposes of self-examination and denial. Though these child protagonists are outsiders and minorities within the context of their stories, they are meant to reveal interior elements of the reader's identity. As Naomi Sokoloff writes:

Otherness, unavoidably, is an issue that impinges at some level on every depiction of children in adult literary works . . . fictive portrayals of childhood often reveal less about the nature and behavior of children than about images and values imposed on children by grown-up narrators . . . Children, though, present a special case, since in an especially intense way, physically and psychically, they are a part of their parents as

well as apart from them. Consequently, they are often the objects on whom adults foist their highest hopes and deepest fears and insecurities. Children, in addition, live an accelerated process of growth and change, and their changes constantly defy and challenge any fixed ideas their elders may adopt about them. (191)

Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's minor vocalizations of otherness and displacement are "special," then, because they are expressed through the child -- the frequent representative of adult hopes, fears, and insecurities. We know, in particular, that Arjie and Vittorio are meant to represent the lives of marginals and misfits because their respective authors align them with other marginalized minors in the novels. We know that Naomi is meant to express minor disturbances in *Obasan* because Kogawa aligns her with an entire group of marginalized and displaced characters, the Japanese Canadians. Although they are not children themselves, characters such as Silvio and Marta in *Lives of the Saints* and Radha Aunty and Jegan in *Funny Boy* convey elements of the child's alien perspective and are thus linked to the child focalizer. These characters are "major" because they are adults, but

"minor" because they occupy the subject position of the child. The alliances forged between the child protagonists and various "minor-major" figures or groups in the texts intensify Arjie's, Naomi's, and Vittorio's subject positions and estranged perspectives. In fact, one of the crucial characteristics of an adult minor-major is often the possession of a child's gaze.

In *Lives of the Saints*, for example, Ricci aligns minor-major characters with Vittorio, illuminating and expanding upon Vittorio's identity as a significant minor. In particular, characters such as Vittorio's cousin Marta, the village postman Silvio, and Vittorio's friend Fabrizio, occupy subject positions similar to Vittorio's own minor position. Vittorio's descriptions of these characters echo his own experiences as a child relegated to the margins. Like Marta, who seems to possess mystical powers, Vittorio sees the world as "oddly warped and unstable" (47). Like Silvio, a postman-poet who occupies the place of

solitary fool in the village, Vittorio is a developing writer who becomes isolated from his community.

Although her age marks her as an adult, Marta is an excellent example of a character who possesses the estranged perspective of the child. Vittorio notes that Marta "had always seemed ageless to me -- she might have been fifteen or fifty, her large dark eyes wary and child-like but the skin around them wrinkled with age" (47). Though Marta is beyond the limits of childhood in terms of age, her "child-like" eyes suggest her minor perceptions. Vittorio aligns himself with "strange," "invisible" Marta when he says, "and I felt suddenly as if I had crawled up inside her eyes, from where the world looked oddly warped and unstable, like something seen through a piece of curved glass" (47). Marta possesses the same ability as the child to embody both "simplicity" and wisdom at once. Consequently, Marta's speech wavers "between nonsense and sudden lucidity" (131).

Through Marta, Vittorio expresses his perceptions that something significant, something he cannot seem

to pin down, is happening to his life. He notices that she glances at Cristina's "belly with what seemed like sharp understanding" (131). Marta is an outside observer whose gaze points to that which is significant in Vittorio's life:

From a corner of the room Marta watched over us all like a fate, nibbling on a host, and when I followed her eyes they seemed always to light away from the centre of things -- on my mother scrubbing glasses at the sideboard, her back to the room, her shoulders working with restrained violence; on my grandfather turning suddenly to spit into the fire. (144)

Vittorio is the watcher of the watcher. He evaluates Marta as someone whose gaze is significant. She, perhaps, holds the key that would unlock the mysteries of Vittorio's own situation. Yet, unlike the other adults in Vittorio's life, Marta is, like a child, treated partially with condescension, as if she were not quite competent, not quite mature (178). In highlighting Marta's "strangeness" Ricci intensifies Vittorio's own estrangement from adult knowledge and major conventions (47).

Like Vittorio, Arjie is estranged from the major community in which he lives. In a public reading of *Funny Boy* in February 2001, Selvadurai called Arjie a "stranger in a strange land." Arjie is a multiple minority, displaced from the heterosexual, ethnic, and linguistic norms of his society. As Raj Rao observes, each story in *Funny Boy* "concerns a particular character, who can be classified as subaltern in terms of race, sexuality, or gender" (118). Each story, or chapter, in *Funny Boy* introduces a new form of marginalization and difference into Arjie's experience. In "Pigs Can't Fly," Arjie inhabits the world, or territory of the girls. In "Radha Auntie" Arjie learns what happens when a woman seems to deviate from the conventions of marriage and racial boundaries. In "Small Choices," Arjie witnesses a man, Jegan, ejected from his home and community as a result of his ethnically defined political affiliations.

Each story conveys Arjie's encounters and relationships with other "funny" characters -- be they

boys, girls, aunties, uncles, or even mothers. Thus, as Arjie aligns with and relates to these minor-major characters, his experience of radical marginalization and displacement is defined and revised by Selvadurai. Selvadurai's language clearly signals these differences. In "Pigs Can't Fly," Arjie realizes that he "would be caught between the boys' and the girls' worlds, not belonging or wanted in either" (39). In "Radha Auntie," Radha Auntie is "different from other adults" (49) and so is her suitor Anil. Arjie says, "I was struck by how different he was from men like my father and uncles" (84). In "See No Evil, Hear No Evil," Daryl Uncle lives on the margins of the community; his house is "the last one on the road, and beyond it [are] the railway tracks and the sea" (120). In "Small Choices," Jegan's presence invests Arjie's "commonplace, familiar environment with something extraordinary" (163). In "The Best School of All," Shehan's difference is signaled constantly as Arjie realizes that "[t]he difference within me that I sometimes felt I had, that had brought me so much

confusion, whatever this difference, it was shared by Shehan" (256). And, finally, in "Riot Journal: An Epilogue," Arjie's "difference" culminates not in a relationship with an individual character but in his dislocated relationship with the world around him. Arjie writes, "I find it impossible to imagine that the world will ever be normal again" (308).

In each story leading up to the Epilogue, a minor-major character is restricted by patriarchal and social conventions and expectations which hand down major directives and judgments such as: "Most people marry their own kind" (54), Arjie and Shehan are "funny," Tamil tigers are "terrorists," and *Little Women* is not for boys. In *Funny Boy*, no one difference is privileged. It is not simply a "coming out" novel that foregrounds homosexual identity nor is it simply a "postcolonial" novel that foregrounds racial identity. Rather, Arjie has multiple claims to, in Gopinath's words, "alterity" and "displacement" with respect to his ethnic

identity, his experience of forced migration, his childhood, gender, and sexuality (475). Each chapter's misfit, or minor-major, occupies the child's subject position in some way. Often Selvadurai's language signals this alignment. For example, Doris Aunty calls Radha Aunty "child" when she wishes to offer her advice or comfort: "Child, our families have been friends for a long time . . . I'm sorry, child." (80, 97) and Q.C. Uncle tells Amma, "I'm sorry for you, child . . . Let it rest child" (141).

In "Radha Aunty" Arjie is swiftly aligned with Radha Aunty, an adult who is "different from other adults" (49). As Arjie gets to know Radha Aunty, he comes to realize that he belongs to her world much more than to that of his father and grandfather. Both Arjie and Radha Aunty are different in their attempts to resist the norm, and so they forge an alliance. Radha Aunty defends Arjie and protects him from Ammachi. And she allows Arjie to observe the adult world of covert relationships, dirty jokes, drama and

deception. She allows him to enter into new arenas for his desires and imagination and to escape from the oppressive gaze of his Ammachi and other adults. Radha Aunty introduces Arjie to a new performance, allowing him to be an actor in a play. He is allowed to "wear make-up and costumes and dance around the stage" in a performance of *The King and I*. Because he is so interested in Radha Aunty's world and the activity of the stage, Arjie does not join the other children in their games (57).

Later, as Radha Aunty's romance with Anil is opposed by her family, Arjie is told that "without your family you are nothing" (78). The "real world" reveals the ill-conceived nature of Arjie's romantic assumption that "[i]f two people love each other, the rest is unimportant" (78). Arjie's relationship with Radha Aunty, and especially his observation of her minor subject position with respect to the other adults in their family, prompts a questioning of his initial illusions and romantic idealizations of brides and weddings. Arjie realizes that marriage is an

oppressive, patriarchal institution. His first clue to the unromantic structure of marriage is the set of values listed by the adults planning Radha Aunty's wedding. They are impressed with her suitor because he belongs to a respectable social class, is a professional, and he is "not insane" (42). In a series of signs and images, Selvadurai disorients Arjie from his "realm of romance" (45). Radha Aunty's unromantic musical taste ("Chopsticks"), dark skin (like a "labourer"), frizzy hair, thin build, flat chest, and hippie clothing shake the foundations of Arjie's love-comic-inspired models (47). Yet Arjie's disorientation and initial disappointment are only briefly negative and he comes to identify with Radha Aunty's frustrations with their family's values.

The family, an institution that solidifies class, gender, racial hierarchies and roles, prevails over minors and minor-majors such as Arjie and Radha Aunty. One notes, for example, the irony of the adage, "most people marry their own kind" (*Funny Boy* 54) which literally can be applied to homosexual love but is

conceptually incompatible with the prevailing "family" values. Thus, the adage applies to Radha Aunty's marriage to Rajan Nagendra but cannot apply to Arjie's homosexual desires. Radha Aunty's experiences highlight both patriarchal oppression and female complicity in it. Ammachi slaps Radha Aunty when she discovers her forbidden relationship, and Radha's sisters "inform" on her, declaring, "without your family you are nothing" (78). Thus, the family is exposed as another site that reinforces patriarchal hierarchies and heterosexual norms. Through Radha Aunty, Arjie catches a glimpse of how political events can alter personal choices and identity. For example, political acts of violence such as the death of Ammachi's father at the hands of the Sinhalese in the 1958 riots and the attack of Radha on the Tamil train, prompt Radha Aunty to reject a mixed marriage. Similarly, Arjie will be forced to break off his relationship with Shehan as a result of political upheaval.

The story "See No Evil, Hear No Evil" takes place during the 1979 Jaffna riots after the Prevention of Terrorism Act has been passed. Burgher Daryl Brohier, known to Arjie as Daryl Uncle, a foreigner of Dutch lineage, is Amma's lover and a substitute father to Arjie. Like Daryl Uncle, Arjie is caught between worlds -- a foreigner of sorts. Daryl Uncle goes to Jaffna with the mistaken opinion that "[n]either the army nor the Tigers care about someone who looks like a foreigner" (117). He is killed during his visit and Amma's investigation into his murder is fruitless. As in "Radha Aunty," Arjie is party to the minor-major world of secret relationships and unjust consequences. As an unauthorized intruder into the family unit, Daryl Uncle is shunned by Amma's sister and two of her three children. It becomes impossible for Amma to maintain her relationship with Daryl inside the home. Uncomfortable in her own home, Amma and Daryl leave the centralizing power of the house and family and escape to a temporary home in the country. Arjie, the sickly child, functions as the legitimator for Amma's

departure from the home. Hence, Amma, Arjie, and Daryl Uncle create a new, transgressive, and temporary family unit.

Though their country home seems idyllic, the major world of politics, shame, and violence is destined to infringe on their temporary peace. Even when Daryl Uncle has been murdered, Amma receives no support from her sisters, who remind her that "[s]ociety is not as forgiving as a sister is. You have a husband and three children to think about" (125). Amma is threatened by all forms of legitimate power: Her sisters, two of her children, the police officers who have a network of male alliances -- one of the officers tells Amma, "I actually play squash with your husband from time to time" -- the government, and the servant boy's family and fellow villagers (132). By the time Amma finds evidence proving her case, she has been effectively silenced, intimidated, and shamed by her enemies and family alike. While, on the surface, the source of deceit and lies seems to be the adulterous relationship

between Amma and Daryl, Selvadurai demonstrates that terms such as "democracy," "freedom of the press," and "prevention of terrorism" mask the true nature of the society that so threatens Amma and that the police and the government are the true sources of that threat.

In "Small Choices," Appa takes on a surrogate son; however, he can control neither Jegan's political affiliations nor Arjie's sexual orientation. Jegan's position parallels Arjie's and both boys are treated the same by Appa once he discovers that Jegan is a Tiger (terrorist) and Arjie is a homosexual. As Rao argues:

Both discoveries are unacceptable to Appa, whose maleness in both cases is threatened. Terrorism threatens to destroy his patriarchy (this is partly because he is helpless in the face of militancy and cannot be the protector and provider any longer), and homosexuality his masculinity. Feminism, if one were to add it to the paradigm, would pose a threat to *both* his patriarchy and his masculinity. (123)

Both of these so-called deviancies (homosexuality and political radicalism) are seen to threaten the integrity of the family, home, and nation. Thus, Arjie and Jegan are perpetually outside the boundaries

of nation, home, and family (Gopinath 469). The family is crucial to the nation in that it reproduces citizens, gender roles, and hierarchies -- heterosexuality is also crucial to the preservation of the family and thus to the nation. As we read about Arjie's personal experiences of estrangement and dislocation, we are necessarily drawn into the wider political issues at hand.

As the displacements of the novels' protagonists multiply, so, too, do the texts' political implications. As Selvadurai says in an interview,

From my earliest days, then, at some level of consciousness I was aware of the interaction between the personal and the political. How the intimate workings of a family could represent or reflect a larger political context. This awareness of the ways in which the personal and political are intertwined intrigues me; that the capacities for racism, homophobia, sexism, and other injustices and hatreds are present at all levels within a society.
(<http://way.net/sawa/convers.html>)

It is not surprising that Arjie's -- and Vittorio's and Naomi's -- personal experiences are inherently political. According to Deleuze and Guattari's

definition of minor literatures the political and personal are explicitly and inextricably linked:

The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political . . . its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. In this way, the family triangle connects to other triangles -- commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical -- that determine its values. (17)

In *Lives of the Saints*, one of the ways in which the personal becomes inextricably linked to the political is through Ricci's reference to and use of the term "Saint," highlighted of course in the title of his novel. *La maestra* teaches her school children that "the saints were not merely the ghosts of some mythical past but an ever-present possibility, the mundane and everyday verging always on miraculous" (40). Perhaps this can also be said for a child's point of view. In a child protagonist's world, the mundane becomes meshed with the miraculous (and grotesque). Minor incidents are infused with major significance and major events often go unrecognized or

misinterpreted. For example, the old *lira* coin that Luciana gives to Vittorio on his seventh birthday is a symbol of Vittorio's own identity as a minor, yet significant, character. The coin, though it is worth less than the other "tinny" five and ten *lire* coins Vittorio receives, has weight, density, and a story that gives it significance. Emphasizing the connection between Vittorio's identity and the strange, magical quality of the coin, is Luciano's statement to Vittorio: "It even has your name on it" (65). The gift of the coin momentarily places Vittorio "in the spotlight" (66). When, at the end of the novel, Vittorio tosses the coin into the ocean, it becomes symbolic of his very identity -- an attempt, perhaps, to toss away old identities and stories or, perhaps, to change his luck. Through these minor incidents and minor characters, however, we come to recognize the importance of small displacements and minor disturbances and the ways in which our everyday actions order and socialize our behaviours. One recalls Deleuze and Guattari's contention that major

political, religious, and social stories of power, hierarchy, and convention vibrate within the seemingly minor, personal story of a child's experiences.

In particular, Ricci establishes symbolic and experiential connections between Vittorio's life and the lives of various Saints. Titling his novel after *La maestra's* book of the same name, Ricci seems to widen his definition of the saints to include the minor-major characters of Valle del Sole -- *la strega*, Cristina, Fabrizio, Marta, Giardini the recluse, and Silvio the postman/poet, to name a few. These characters and others populate Vittorio's daily life alongside the larger-than-life saints such as San Leonardo, San Victorinus, San Vittorio, and Santa Cristina who inhabit his imaginary landscape. Vittorio develops a particular affinity for the saints he reads about in *La maestra's* book. And Ricci attaches an air of transgressiveness to "*Lives of the Saints*" when he has Vittorio's schoolteacher draw it out of a handbag located "down between her legs" (132). The image of the book being drawn from between

a woman's legs prompts an association of these stories with the mysteries of adulthood -- taboo knowledge for a child such as Vittorio. As Vittorio suspects, the teacher's actions constitute "some new devilment" (132). Despite the negative connotations of the term "devilment," however, *la maestra's* actions are conveyed by Ricci as positive. Although these stories separate Vittorio from his classmates and offer him refuge, they also feed his creativity and constitute the building blocks for his future vocation as a writer. One might wonder, however, if feeding one's creative imagination necessitates a "separation" from one's peers and their "threat[s] of violence" (132).

Vittorio's imagination is sustained through an "almost daily ritual" of reading stories that glorify marginal figures and their miraculous acts of self-sacrifice (132). He prefers the afternoon readings during which he "drift[s] briefly out of the world as into a dream" to the "thickening gloom of my grandfather's house" (134). His experience with others comes to be based on his readings of

extraordinary characters and their unorthodox actions. Vittorio is introduced to a world of men, such as San Leonardo the conqueror of serpents, who have attained a measure of power through their marginality. The saints after whom Vittorio has been named are also, however, men who glory in their suffering and achieve martyrdom in the most violent ways. As titled saints, these figures are glorified scapegoats. They are men and women who have been singled out and abused by whole communities and then glorified -- defined and codified into religious symbolic significance -- for their sufferings. Ricci's overview of these saints' lives strips away the glamour of the title, "saint," and reveals the mire of a scapegoat's existence. Thus, Vittorio's own experiences of village scapegoating are contextualized and punctuated by the saints whose lives he does not envy. While, in theory, it may be desirable to be noticed, important, and at the centre of attention, in Vittorio's experience taking a major role in the drama of his peers becomes a harrowing, traumatic ordeal whereby

his classmates regard him -- by association with his mother -- as the source of village evil and punish him for his unnamed crimes. In keeping with the imagery of the saints, Ricci even depicts Vittorio and his mother, Cristina, as quasi-Christ figures who are censured by the villagers and ejected from the community (135-6).

Furthermore, Ricci actively deflates Vittorio's "nostalgic" vision of his Italian homeland through "the continuous interplay of text and countercontext" (Dvorak 110). The stories that Vittorio's teacher reads to him from 'The Lives of the Saints,' for example, act as Ricci's "countercontext" to the "text" of myth and paradise (Dvorak 111). Though the townspeople of Valle del Sole preach and perform religious ritual, miraculous possibility, and reverence,

[i]f we pierce through the religious veneer, we find that the world of the ancestors is not a paradise, but a world of superstition, ignorance, bribery and corruption, poverty, hatred and envy, a world of violence. Violence is present at all levels of society, present within the family, within the community and among communities . . .

The community attacks non-conformists, those who, like Cristina, transgress the social code . . . The greatest concentration [of violence], ironically enough, is to be found in the stories of the lives of the saints, who are systematically mutilated. (Dvorak 111)

Thus, the child's point of view reveals what lies beneath the veneer of religiosity, politics, and community: a repressive society entrenched in violence. Dvorak identifies Ricci's construction of Canada as "a New Eden: 'That Canada, the Sun Parlour, is a land where people learn to live together in peace and harmony'" (112). However, I am wary of this identification. It is suspicious that the name of Vittorio's new home, Sun Parlour, is an English translation of Valle de Sole. Despite what Dvorak defines as the New World's "double structure" that "allows the past, the present and the future to coexist" and makes it an "'always potential' paradise for future generations," the echoed name anticipates Vittorio's struggles (in the two novels that follow *Lives of the Saints* in the Italian trilogy) to demystify yet another "lost paradise."

Through Vittorio's alliances with minor-majors, as well as his own experiences as a minor, Vittorio learns that being at the centre of attention can be a curse rather than a blessing, especially when the person at the centre is a minor child lacking power and knowledge. Vittorio Innocente is troubled by how little he understands because of his minority status. As a minor, he is not privy to vital information and strives, therefore, to piece what he observes together into some sort of comprehensible whole. In particular, lack of sexual awareness plagues the child protagonists of *Lives of the Saints* and *Funny Boy*. Like Arjie's frustrated attempts to understand peoples' references to him as "funny," Vittorio fails to decode villagers' references to his mother's affair. As I have already argued, though Vittorio observes all the salient signs and symbols (the snake bite, the blue glasses, Father Nick's sermon, Maria and Guiseppina's strange behaviour, his mother's reference to "a little gift"), he is unable to fit them together into a comprehensible whole.

The ironic disjunction between what the readers understand and what Vittorio understands serves to intensify the seriousness of the politics of adulthood. Vittorio, who suffers silent resentment (69) and feels that he and his mother have committed some crime or sin together, cannot pin down exactly what that crime is. Yet it is precisely Vittorio's inexperience as a minor child that reveals the absurdities and hypocrisies of the adult world. In focalizing this story through the eyes of a child, Ricci conveys the disturbing clarities that can result in the misunderstanding of, and estrangement from, adult behaviours, values, and relationships. Sokoloff's comments in her study of the child in modern Jewish fiction can be applied to *Funny Boy*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Obasan*:

Predictably, as these narratives privilege a once subdued voice, they achieve a novelty of outlook. Much as would be the case in any literature, the young figure fosters an innovative angle of vision through its naiveté, its immature understandings, or its unusual perceptions. In addition, as these child characters make frequent readjustments in their views of the adult world, an emphasis on changeability, on unfolding

development or nascent understanding, enlivens the upending established ideas proffered by these texts. As elsewhere, too, the young figure always serves as the expressive vehicle for a more mature perspective, that of the adult author who constructs the child character. Imagining the child therefore may occasion sensitive exploration of juvenile thinking, but at other times it serves mainly as a pretext to promote adult ideas. Either way, the status of the child as an outsider on the margins of adult activity proves congenial for the purposes of the artist whose aim is critique or reinterpretation of a status quo. (7)

Ricci's portrayal of children and other minor-major characters in *Lives of the Saints* highlights their strange, and often painful, process of socialization into the adult world. In foregrounding child-Vittorio's disorienting experience of, and resistance to, socialization, Ricci returns us to a time when adult conventions, assumptions, and institutions have not yet been solidified. As Sokoloff suggests, a child such as Vittorio fosters an "innovative angle of vision through its naiveté, its immature understandings, or its unusual perceptions" (7). In following Vittorio's journey, our environment may become destabilized and the status quo reinterpreted.

We are shown that behaviours are often performed rather than being only innate. Such is the case, for example, when Vittorio is brought before a gang of his peers. Although Vittorio seems to have done nothing to incur the wrath of his schoolmates, the cruelty and conventions of adult society are also present in the world of children. Just as Cristina is censured by, and eventually ejected from, the village, Vittorio is threatened by, and cast out of this group of boys. The children in the novel disturb us, and surprise Vittorio, by playing out and mimicking adult attitudes and behaviours. As in *Funny Boy*, the boys form gangs and imitate the violence and hypocrisy of their parents.

Ricci, therefore, sets Vittorio apart from the other children in the novel. Vittorio Innocente is special and different from his peers. Vittorio seems to occupy the time of pre-adult assumptions and conventions, a position suggested by his incomprehension of the significance of the snake that has invaded the Edenic aspects of his childhood realm.

In contrast, the other boys have already gained some access to these adult conventions and connotations and use their knowledge to band together and exert power over Vittorio "the innocent." Similarly, Naomi and Arjie encounter children who mimic the cruelties of their adult worlds; yet, they themselves are distanced from these practices and set apart from their peers. They observe, as outsiders, the other children's development into the adults they must become. As Deleuze and Guattari write, children "are caught in an irreversible becoming-big" (37). Will these "becoming-big" children, however, become socialized into the major conventions and behaviours of their parents or will they set themselves apart from those conventions and continue to question and subvert that which surrounds them? Will Vittorio retain in his identity and perspective some of the connotations, however ironic, of his "Innocente" name? As future writers of their stories, expressing the minor perspectives and rebellions of their youth, Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi are, in Deleuze and Guattari's

terms, "becoming-minors" (27). They will inevitably become adults (and therefore majors), but -- as is anticipated by their alignment with the minor-majors in the texts -- they will become minors in terms of perspective and expression. Whereas the schoolboys and child-gangs in these novels are "becoming-majors," the child focalizers and their adult counterparts retain their minor subject positions (Deleuze and Guattari 27).

Fabrizio, although not a writer or focalizer like Vittorio, occupies a similar minor subject position. Fabrizio and Vittorio are drawn together by their similar experiences as marginals in the community. Fabrizio is a rule-breaker who teaches Vittorio how to smoke cigarettes. Together, they laugh "because sheep fell off cliffs, because fathers beat their sons, and because the world, for all its seeming stability, was actually spinning around at a tremendous speed," a passage indicating the ironies involved in Vittorio's "innocence" (76). Fabrizio encourages truancy, leaves games in mid-play, laughs in the face of abuse and

poverty, and reveals the world's instabilities to Vittorio. He is an element of Vittorio's identity. When the boys exchange saliva, Fabrizio says: "It's to make us brothers . . . Like we had the same blood. A person can never hurt someone who has the same blood" (168). Fabrizio is the part of Vittorio that is recognizably different and therefore subject to the hatred and marginalization of others. Yet Fabrizio finds a way to rationalize the negative treatment he receives. Bragging of his father's abuse, Fabrizio tells Vittorio: "'Now I'm just like Christ,' because they hit him too" (76). Fabrizio, though a child like Vittorio, possesses knowledge that Vittorio lacks. He is the only one who can unlock the secrets and decode the signs that Vittorio has been unable to read. He is a mixture of the innocent and experienced child whereas Vittorio is, as his name proclaims, fleetingly Innocente. Thus, Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci do not approach childhood with great faith or hope in these novels; rather, with the exception of the protagonists and occasional outsiders such as Fabrizio, the novels

suggest the capacity for cruelty of becoming-major children.

In fact, the gang of boys that stalk Vittorio are quite brilliant in their capacity for cruelty. When Vittorio manages to evade individual attacks, the boys join together and stage a performance that is designed to draw Vittorio into their inner circle so that they may cast him out all the more forcefully. Guido begins by approaching Vittorio and making overtures of friendship on the boys' behalf. Throughout their conversation, Vittorio's "head was spinning with all these complicities. Nothing [Guido] said made sense - - it was as if the world had abruptly changed into its opposite, been completely overturned" (121). Confronted with Guido's deceit, Vittorio's world is destabilized. Though Vittorio has noted earlier the two-faced nature of his mother's so-called friends, he does not initially conceive of the possibility of one of his peers resorting to false-friendship. As he begins to realize the insincerity of these boys' friendliness, Vittorio's thoughts begin to "clot"

(124). Ricci intensifies Vittorio's confusion by describing the once familiar mountain paths as unfamiliar, "winding and twisting in all directions, through thick patches of bush, over steep rocky slopes, across half-familiar streams" (122). Vittorio becomes "disoriented and lost, the landscape seeming to repeat itself endlessly, as if we were going in circles" (122). Vittorio becomes alienated from his home territory -- to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, Vittorio has been "deterritorialized." As the boys mimic adult concerns and cruelty, they disorient Vittorio and his own landscape becomes unfamiliar. Neither Vittorio's external surroundings nor his internal intuitions provide stability.

The actions of the gang of boys constitute a premeditated attack. Vittorio says:

great forces were gathering against me,
preparing a day of reckoning; and no one
would be there to protect me when some rough
hand dragged me behind a bush and paid me
with a fist for the immunity I'd enjoyed.
(120)

The boys address Vittorio as "Vitto" and ask him to be "Friends." He is told to sit beside Alfredo (the

leader) as the boys form a circle in front of him. They are the audience to their own performance. They thrust him into their midst against his will. Although Alfredo is Vittorio's classmate, he takes on the role of inquisitor and -- like the adult villagers in their dealings with Cristina -- uses words as weapons. When Alfredo asks Vittorio about the snake, the reader understands the sinister sexual innuendos as well as Ricci's reference to the serpent in the garden of Eden, but Vittorio does not. Instead, Vittorio fears that he has "been party to some unspeakable crime which Alfredo would slowly unmask now" (125). Yet, knowledge of this crime is perpetually hidden from Vittorio. What is "unmasked" is not the explicit knowledge of his so-called crime but the awareness of the boys' implicit capacity for cruelty. In this scene, Ricci demonstrates that children carry within them the seeds of corruption.

Vittorio is forced into exposure, forced into nakedness -- turned into a specimen of difference and abnormality. Vittorio is told, "First you have to

show us your bird, to prove you're a man, and then if it's big enough you can join."¹⁶ Vittorio says it was "as if I was being forced to swallow something I didn't like, the bile already beginning to collect in my throat at the thought" (125). Vittorio's exposure, disguised as a test of his manhood and made up by a group of boys, is described by Ricci at length and is placed almost exactly at the centre of the novel. In this pivotal scene Ricci means to disturb his readers by rooting the actions of these children in Christian iconography. Vittorio is the scapegoat and Jesus-figure of this drama; the boys pin Vittorio by his arms and ankles, his "body held to the ground as if nailed there" (126). At the same time that he is aligned with the minor-major saints for enduring unjust treatment for events beyond his control, his peers brand him a sinner by association. Vittorio's identity -- even amongst the other children -- is as an outsider, a minor.

Ricci's depictions of the saints in previous chapters simultaneously reduce and enlarge the child's

significance within the text. Major saints are reduced to marginal outcasts and this reduction results in their alignment with Vittorio as a minor outcast. This alignment demonstrates how a child's experiences can take on major significance, how the minor details of everyday life become ritualized and memorialized. Conscious of the ways in which memorialization tends to "blank out" conflict, Ricci counteracts this repression with images of violence and acts of hypocrisy and false friendship. Vittorio and his name-saints are thus simultaneously figures of importance and unimportance, saints and scapegoats who disturb the status quo.

The gang of boys legitimate and enforce Vittorio's identity as other by making him the centre of attention, peering and staring at him, and inspecting his naked penis and calling it irregular, old-fashioned, and foreign. By exposing and dominating Vittorio in this way, the boys succeed in increasing their own authority and control. They enjoy a taste of what power might feel like in the

adult arena. Perhaps, one might argue, these children enact what adults can only desire. Whereas in the arena of the adults, Cristina can merely be ignored and censured, in the arena of children, Vittorio is subject to physical aggression and is stripped naked. Guido says of Vittorio's penis: "it's not the regular kind . . . [t]his is the kind they used to have before the war" and others identify it as "more like the kind the Africans had" (126). Using Vittorio's penis as the physical marker of his capacity to belong, the boys use authoritative categories such as history and geography to render it strange. As readers, we know that the boys' comments are based not in fact but on their own desires to humiliate and exclude Vittorio. The boys mimic their parents' prejudices; they need their scapegoat. As Naomi observes in *Obasan*, "the fears of the collective can only be calmed by the sacrifice of a minority" (37). Like their adult counterparts, the boys who surround Vittorio have learned that a "boys' club" has the power to make up rituals and rules and to enforce

arbitrary identities and roles. Mimicking adult methods of deduction and scientific observation, the boys have also learned how to legitimate, perpetuate, and thus obscure, the arbitrariness of "made up" rules and social roles.

The boys' actions are so convincing and authoritative in Vittorio's eyes that he hangs onto the hope that the shameful exposure he is enduring will lead to his acceptance into the group. His desire to conform is so strong that when Fabrizio comes to save him, Vittorio confuses friend with foe:

He had ruined my chances now, that was certain, and as I struggled up, still buckling my pants, I felt myself flush with anger and hate, hate for Fabrizio, my only friend, who seemed suddenly stupid and useless beyond all bearing. I hated him in that moment more than I had ever hated Vincenzo or Alfredo or any of the boys who tortured me at school, hated him as if he were something shackled to me that I must cut away at all costs, the way animals gnawed off their own limbs when caught in a hunter's trap. And I hated him even though an awful truth was already forcing itself on me, all the events of the afternoon beginning to distort and skew like objects in a curved mirror. (127)

In a final desperate attempt to belong to the gang of boys Vittorio misdirects his hate towards Fabrizio, an

outsider like himself. Vittorio's desire to conform and to remain at the centre of the circle of boys, no matter how uncomfortable that centre may be, is so strong that it distorts and confuses his knowledge of the truth. Vittorio's desire to fit in has temporarily erased his doubt and confusion, and he wishes to prolong this illusion of stability. Just as Vittorio has managed to reterritorialize himself within the gang's domain, Fabrizio's actions expose the gang's fragile performance and insincere promises and Vittorio becomes disoriented yet again. In this moment, as the truth (in the form of Fabrizio) struggles violently to set Vittorio free, Ricci demonstrates the lengths to which one will go for the illusion of stability. Vittorio aligns himself with the enemy so that he will not become the scapegoat. He colludes with that which is distasteful in his attempt to avoid becoming the object of distaste. Though Vittorio struggles to transfer his hatred to Fabrizio, Fabrizio is symbolically a part of Vittorio's identity, the part of Vittorio's self that

knows the truth; earlier, Fabrizio tells Vittorio:
'What's the matter with you . . . It's not your fault,
it's your mother. Because she was screwing in the
stable' (104). When Vittorio attacks him, Fabrizio
takes back the knowledge: 'Si, si, stop, it was only
the snake, you're right, it was only the snake.'
(104). It seems that Vittorio can only handle the
truth when it is obscured through metaphor.
Vittorio's betrayal of Fabrizio constitutes a denial
of the truth and a self-betrayal.

If we return, then, to the notion of the
scapegoat as constructed by Ricci in *Lives of the
Saints*, we understand that the scapegoat can be
identified as both an outsider, and located within.
As Kristeva writes of the "foreigner," or the "other,"

The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner
is neither the romantic victim of our clannish
indolence nor the intruder responsible for all
the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on
the move nor the instant adversary to be
eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group.
Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is
the hidden face of our identity, the space that
wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding
and affinity founder. By recognizing him within
ourselves, we are spared detesting him in
himself. (Kristeva 1)

Retrospectively, adult-narrator-Vittorio comes to recognize Fabrizio as well as other minor-majors in the novel as part of himself. Yet at the moment that the child focalizer-Vittorio experiences hatred for Fabrizio, he clumsily attempts to transfer his unwanted identity as "foreigner" or scapegoat to Fabrizio. Wishing to identify Fabrizio as "stupid and useless," Vittorio leaves him to be sacrificed, or beaten, by the gang of boys. Rather than acknowledge the "hidden face of his own identity," Vittorio becomes Fabrizio's betrayer.

At the end of this pivotal chapter, Vittorio realizes: "I had betrayed Fabrizio, as surely as if I had wished him dead . . . I had sunk so low in shame now that no magic or miracle could ever reclaim me" (128). The final words of this chapter signal a close to Vittorio's "innocent" childhood. As Coe writes:

[t]he experiences of childhood take place in a dimension, whether material, spiritual, or linguistic, *different* from that of the adult . . . their remoteness and their "Otherness" constitute their unique role. It is this clearly sensed, yet rarely analyzed awareness of a wholly different mode of

being in the world that is so frequently
referred to by the all-embracing term *magic*.
(241)

Whereas Vittorio as child can potentially be "claimed"
by magic or miracle, he has reached a point where his
vision is coloured with the adult awareness of what it
is like to see through the eyes of the betrayer.

Vittorio has, momentarily, attempted to change his
identity from that of a becoming-minor to that of a
becoming-major. His capacity for cruelty and for
denial, however, is not large enough and his attempt
is unsuccessful. The attempt itself, though, leaves a
lasting impression on Vittorio that diminishes his
faith in magic or miracle.

As an adult writer Vittorio succeeds in
reclaiming bits and pieces of the magic and miracle of
his childhood state of awareness through the
remembrance and narration of events of his childhood.
These fragments of Vittorio's "innocent" childhood are
intensified by the contrasting cruel behaviour of the
gang of boys to which Vittorio succumbs. Though he
betrays Fabrizio, we recognize that in the context of

the novel Vittorio identifies Fabrizio as his friend and as somebody who, to use Kristeva's words, "lives within" himself and is the "hidden face" of his own identity (1). Vittorio's vision has indeed been skewed and distorted as a result of a series of displacements imposed upon him by the major boys; however, through these displacements and distortions Ricci is able to expose the shaky ground upon which our social behaviours are constructed and performed. A minor character's actions are thus revealed to be of major significance and the socio-political implications are meant to resonate in our minds. Ricci demonstrates that wrecking our abode and shattering our understandings may yield rewards. Confusion over who or what to detest may lead to a reexamination of the strange processes by which we begin to define and detest so-called foreigners, whether they are children, or saints, or scapegoats.

In *Obasan*, Kogawa demonstrates the major significance of a minor character's experiences. However, Kogawa does not align her child protagonist

with specific minor-major characters but, rather, parallels Naomi's experiences of displacement with that of an entire community of ethnic minorities, the Japanese Canadians during World War Two. Naomi is a minor child in a minor community. Like Arjie, who belongs to the Tamil minority and is therefore racially different from the Sinhalese majority, Naomi's Japanese origins render her a visible minority -- and an official "enemy alien" -- in Canada during World War Two.¹⁷ As Kogawa says, "[d]uring the Second World War, we Japanese Canadians were the demonized people of the day. Our entire community was uprooted and relegated to the cesspool. The racism I imbibed as a child was profound" (Careless 1). The Japanese Canadians are, in Aunt Emily's words, "the billygoats and nannygoats and kids -- all the scapegoats to appease this blindness" (95).

Unlike Selvadurai, however, Kogawa demonstrates how Naomi's subject position as a child is comparable to the subject positions of all Japanese Canadians at the time. Perhaps, as Dr. Lorraine York suggests,

Kogawa does not build the sorts of minor-character alliances we find in *Funny Boy* and *Lives of the Saints* because she sees Japanese Canadians as more profoundly isolated in this historical context. The experience of internment and removal of basic rights was imposed by the Canadian government on an entire community. The displacements Naomi and her community experience in *Obasan* are radical and dehumanizing. As Naomi recalls in 1942 as the community is sent into the interior:

We are the chips and sand, the fragments of
fragments that fly like arrows from the
heart of the rock. We are the silences that
speak from stone. We are the despised
rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio,
camera and every means of communication, a
trainload of eyes covered with mud and
spittle . . .
We are the Issei and the Nisei and the
Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We
disappear into the future undemanding as
dew. (119-120)

Naomi's use of the pronoun "we" indicates that Kogawa has aligned her with all the Japanese Canadians. Her experience of isolation and displacement is shared not simply by a few highlighted minor-major characters, but by an entire community of minors. Later, in 1963,

Naomi takes a trip through the interior of British Columbia looking for evidence of the Japanese presence there: "Where on the map or on the road was there any sign? Not a mark was left" (125). Faced with the overwhelming erasure of an entire community's displacement, Kogawa demonstrates the magnitude of Naomi's personal experiences as they relate to "the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei" (120). Child-Naomi is a minor within a minority and her narrative perspective therefore intensifies the experiences of deterritorialization experienced by all those belonging to her community. Like Naomi, who as we have seen in Chapter One, is barred from knowledge of her own fate "for the sake of the children," the Japanese Canadians are dispossessed of their homes and land with little notice. Echoing child-Naomi's sentiments, Aunt Emily writes of the Japanese Canadian experience, "It's horrible not being able to know" (102).

By communicating Japanese Canadian experiences during World War Two through the eyes of a child,

Kogawa demonstrates how the Canadian government infantilizes the Japanese Canadians, taking away their adult powers, restricting them from ordering and organizing their homes, language, and vocations. They were told, in Naomi's words, to:

Be good, my undesirable, my illegitimate children, be obedient, be servile, above all don't send me any letters of enquiry about your homes, while I stand on guard (over your property) in the true north strong, though you are not free. B. Good. (39)

Like minor-majors such as Radha Aunty in *Funny Boy* and cousin Marta in *Lives of the Saints*, the adult Japanese Canadians in *Obasan* are explicitly referred to as "children" in the narrative and experience the same sort of deterritorialization as do the child protagonists. Doris Aunty's references to Radha Aunty as "child," possess, in addition to condescension, an element of sympathy and concern; in the same way, Vittorio's references to Marta's child-like nature are tinged with respect. Kogawa's depiction of white Canadians' treatment of Japanese Canadians as children carries no such positive elements. Naomi's subject position is linked to an entire community experiencing

infantilization characterized by degradation and dehumanization.

In *Obasan*, Kogawa demonstrates how the Japanese Canadian experience of this infantilization leaves a lasting impression on her community. Similarly, Naomi struggles to overcome the traumas of her past -- Old Man Gower's abuse, her mother's absence, her loss of home. In both cases, we see that the traumas of the past are very much alive in the present. As Kogawa says in an interview with Cherry Clayton:

I think people who've been oppressed or identified as undesirable develop an abiding anxiety, a sense of non-belonging and worthlessness, and the struggle to come out of that is tremendous and lifelong . . . these are the psychological realities common to many immigrants. When the mainstream group identifies any other group as less than desirable then you have a gap, and have to overcome that gap one way or another. (3-4)

Perhaps this is why, in the first few pages of *Obasan*, Kogawa aligns the subject position of the Japanese Canadians with that of the First Nations. Squatting near an old Native buffalo jump, Naomi observes, "Uncle could be Chief Sitting Bull . . . he has the same prairie-baked skin, the deep brown furrows" (2).¹⁸

Kogawa also depicts Naomi and her uncle on "virgin land" and alludes to its historical significance as an old "Indian buffalo jump" (2). This reference to a stretch of prairie that "has not been cut" serves as a reminder to the readers that white Canadians were once the alien invaders of the land. Thus, the white identification of First Nations and Japanese Canadians as ethnic minorities and enemy aliens is exposed as an historic construction. Kogawa further emphasizes the artificial nature of these historic constructions by having Naomi imagine her Uncle as a postcard-Indian in costume: "All he needs is a feather headdress, and he would be perfect for a picture postcard -- 'Indian Chief from Canadian Prairie' -- souvenir of Alberta, made in Japan" (2). In this brief alignment between a Japanese Uncle and an "Indian Chief," Kogawa interrogates racial identities, national borders, and official histories. And, while Kogawa aligns Japanese Canadians with First Nations subjects, she critiques white Canada's tendencies to commodify and homogenize ethnic minorities. Kogawa makes clear that First

Nations and Japanese Canadians have experienced similar displacements at the hands of white Canada. For example, Naomi says: "some of the Native children I've had in my classes over the years could almost pass for Japanese and vice versa. There's something in the animal-like shyness I recognize in the dark eyes. A quickness to look away" (2). Ultimately, however, Kogawa resists the temptation to "pass" one ethnic minority off as another. She does not construct parallels with Naomi and specific First Nations subjects; rather, she alludes to minority positionings that *almost* pass for one another, but by virtue of their magnitude belong in separate investigations of Canadian history. While Selvadurai and Ricci build affinities between their protagonists and other minor-major characters in order to demonstrate the negative effects of major normalization on the minor individual, Kogawa does not. Rather, she uses Naomi's child-subject position to demonstrate the traumas caused by the Canadian

government's minoritization and displacement of one entire community.

The magnitude of the Japanese Canadian community's sufferings is illuminated in *Obasan* by a minor child's traumas. In particular, her abuse at the hands of Old Man Gower -- and the psychological trauma this experience entails -- intensifies the reader's sense of the Japanese Canadians' reluctant vulnerability to the forces of white, male oppression. Arjie and Vittorio also experience bodily traumas at the hands of major, and becoming-major, individuals; however, they also enjoy brief successes in resisting and disturbing major powers of oppression. While, in Chapter One, I examined the child protagonists' subversive positions as becoming-writers, in Chapter Three I will show how Kogawa, Ricci, and Selvadurai use child performances of the body to subvert and expose the artificial nature of social structures of identity. In particular, through their various performances, costumes, and bodily expressions, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio resist the normalizing pressures

of society and also demonstrate their vulnerabilities
to these pressures.

Chapter Three: Performance, Costume, and the Minor

Body

Chapter One argued that one of the methods that Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio use to gain agency over the construction of their own identities is to write/tell their own stories. In becoming writers, these protagonists retain their minor perspectives and manipulate language and narrative in order to disturb the major positionings of their respective societies. This chapter examines another means by which the child focalizers attempt to achieve agency over their own identities: the act of performance. Their various performances, costumes, and bodily expressions, permit Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio to resist the normalizing pressures of society and to demonstrate their vulnerabilities as children to these pressures. Even when they fail to gain control over their own performances, their experiences expose the artificial, constructed nature of social expectations. *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints* reveal the performative nature of identity in general and

demonstrate that identity-performances must be made visible before they can be deconstructed. As Judith Butler argues:

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (173)

Butler's theories of gender and performativity support this dissertation's treatment of the fictional child focalizer as a vehicle for adult expressions of desire and dissent. Kogawa, Selvadurai, and Ricci's child focalizers illuminate, in Butler's words, the "cultural fictions" of their protagonists' times (178). Selvadurai focuses on Sri Lanka in the 1980s, Ricci on Italy in the 1940s and '50s, and Kogawa on British Columbia and Alberta in the 1940s. Each of these settings similarly oppress ethnic minorities and

perpetuate heterosexual and patriarchal codes of
behaviour.

Butler identifies gender as:

a construction that regularly conceals its
genesis; the tacit collective agreement to
perform, produce, and sustain discrete and
polar genders as cultural fictions is
obscured by the credibility of those
productions -- and the punishments that
attend not agreeing to believe in them; the
construction 'compels' our belief in its
necessity and naturalness. (178)

In *Funny Boy* we witness Arjie's struggle with the
heterosexual norms imposed upon him. He is punished
for not behaving or dressing in accordance with these
norms. His initial attempts, during the game of
bride-bride, to perform and enact "abnormal" gender
fantasies are swiftly regulated and controlled by the
adults around him. Selvadurai demonstrates that
Arjie's identity -- as it is conveyed to the major,
adult world -- is, in Butler's terms,

an effect and function of a decidedly public
and social discourse, the public regulation
of fantasy through the surface politics of
the body, the gender border control that
differentiates inner from outer, and so
institutes the "integrity" of the subject.
In other words, acts and gestures,
articulated and enacted desires create the

illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (173)

However, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio also use their bodies as sites of resistance and advantage. Being small and therefore avoiding major notice can be an advantage for these children as when Naomi hides under the bed and overhears adult conversations or when Arjie stands beneath a window or sneaks out of sight and eavesdrops (62,164). One of the most striking examples of bodily resistance and performance is Arjie's game of dress-up at the beginning of *Funny Boy*.

Physical bodies in these novels are modes of expression and therefore the ways in which these minor children are depicted and treated by majors becomes highly significant. The ways in which Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio dress, behave, and speak expose the social codes Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci are attempting to deconstruct. A further exposure of the children's vulnerabilities takes place as major adults

attempt to control and define the children through abuse and manipulation of their bodies. I regard the body, as does Anne Cranny-Francis, "not as something neutral and natural, but as socially (re)produced and inscribed according to specific practices and discourses" (19).

The child's body is smaller than the adult's and therefore more vulnerable to manipulation. The figure of the child is necessarily in the process of "growing up" -- a process that prompts adults in that child's life to socialize the child. The authors demonstrate how adult-majors and becoming-majors such as Black Tie in *Funny Boy*, the gang of boys in *Lives of the Saints*, and Old Man Gower in *Obasan*, treat the child protagonists' bodies as sites of inscription of cultural codes, desires, and expectations. Depictions of the child's body demonstrate adult attempts at inscribing that body with prevailing values and identities. In response to these major-adults' attempts at imposing their cultural codes, child protagonists such as Arjie use their bodies to enact

resistance to major expectations. Because Naomi, Arjie, and Vittorio use various techniques of resistance against these imposed inscriptions, the unnaturalness of the cultural codes is emphasized in the novels.

The children often fail in their attempts to control and costume their own bodies. As multiple minors, these children are faced with the pressures of major identity codes and costumes and are often forced to conform to those codes rather than their own desires. They are disoriented by the identities they are told to enact. The children, as in Julia Kristeva's description of the foreigner, "do what *they* want *me* to, but it is not "me" -- "me" is elsewhere, "me" belongs to no one, "me" does not belong to "me," . . . does "me" exist?" (8). In *Strangers to Ourselves* Kristeva's study of the foreigner or stranger, she alludes to the ways in which the foreigner's identity is constructed out of majority social codes and conventions. Foreigners are pressured to do what "*they*" (majors) want and are

therefore tormented by competing, conflicting identities. Though foreigners (or what I would call "minors" -- that is, fools, children, minors, vagabonds, immigrants, and refugees) enact these socially imposed roles, they are usually not comfortable in their roles. Silvio the poet in *Lives of the Saints* appears as the village fool but his eyes belong to a "different person" (97); Arjie is forced to wear the uniform of Victoria Academy but does not "become a man" in the way that his father intends; Naomi sees newspaper clippings of Japanese Canadians "[g]rinning and happy" alongside a pile of beets and says, plainly, "[i]t's not how it was" (*Obasan* 217). While these minor characters' actions and appearances may, on the surface, be forced to conform to social expectations, minor literatures such as *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints* counteract majority assumptions by conveying minority perspectives. For example, in *Lives of the Saints*, Vittorio, his mother, and his grandfather walk out of their house and to Church on Christmas day, united (139). Cristina means

to demonstrate their unity in the face of the villagers' petty judgments and gossip. She means to perform their defiance of social expectations by asserting her presence in public. Yet the villagers make "a small arc around [them], eyes averted" (139) and convince themselves that this familial "march" to church is a sign of repentance. Cristina's audience transforms the performance Cristina wishes to enact into acceptable behaviour. For the villagers, Cristina's act of resistance becomes an act of compliance. The reader, privy to Cristina's point of view, recognizes Cristina's act as a defiant one. Cristina's minor-major perspective disturbs the villagers' major assumptions.

In minor literatures such as *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints*, characters' expressions of discomfort or artistic difference constitute minor disturbances and resistances to majority expectations. For example, Arjie's initial cross-dressing in "Pigs Can't Fly" signifies a border crossing in the arena of gender play. Later, when Arjie's sari is forcibly

replaced with a school uniform, he expresses himself by reciting jumbled poetry and his writing his riot journals. Similarly, Naomi resists the racist attitudes of her time through self-examination and exploration of personal histories that counteract "authorized" versions of history. Naomi's self-expressions are integrally linked to body language; one might argue, as Smaro Kamboureli does, that Naomi's

body functions as a memory site where the constructions of race, gender, sexuality, and nationalism are implicated in each other while remaining distinct dimensions in her formation as subject. (177)

With his mother, Vittorio also expresses his frustrations and rebellions through references to bodily displays and performances, as when Vittorio is stripped by a gang of boys, or when he and his mother dance at the village's annual festival. The performances that characters such as Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi enact -- like the child protagonists' acts of writing and storytelling discussed in Chapter One -- are modes of agency. Through creative bodily

expressions of desire and dissonance, Arjie, Naomi, Vittorio, and their fellow minor-majors, perform brief but significant rebellions against the status quo.

Performances are most often signalled by the presence of a stage -- a platform upon which minors and minor-majors can amplify their voices and draw attention to their acts of rebellion. Ricci highlights the significance of the stage as an arena for destabilizing major and minor categories of power. Characters who are minor, or marginal, in Valle del Sole briefly become central when they ascend the stage as, for example, when Silvio the postman recites his poems at Valle del Sole's annual festival. Silvio is "the first act" of the festival (97). As a marginal member of society, Silvio occupies -- like Vittorio -- a minor subject position. He is aligned with Vittorio through linguistic markers that characterize him as childlike. For example, Cristina observes that Silvio smiles through his performance "like a child" (97).

Silvio also occupies the role of the fool in the eyes of the villagers: A failed gambler and a drunk, "Silvio's yearly recitations had become a kind of joke the villagers indulged in, as if to remind themselves of the dangers of high aspirations" (97). In order to attract the attention of the majority, Silvio (and Arjie when he recites the school poems) must perform that which is regarded as alien, or abnormal. Arjie's and Silvio's performances evoke (whether deliberately, as in Arjie's case, or not, as in Silvio's case) majority ridicule, while at the same time attracting majority attention. To be displayed on stage is to become subject to the majority's gaze and judgment. Actions that are abnormal or alien become emphasized, as if the members of society are inspecting and reacting to these actions in minute detail, through a glass that enlarges and therefore distorts.

Silvio performs the role of the village fool, clothed in the costume of one who stands out and is

different. He stands on "centre stage in the light of a few lamps, his checkered suit too tight over his plumpish body, a missing button on his shirt revealing a patch of pink, hairless belly" (97). His appearance is alien and distorted,

his head seeming squeezed out of it like a balloon, his ruddy cheeks showing the effects of too much wine; though his eyes, dark pools that brimmed with moisture, seemed to belong to a different person, as if his body was a mask or costume that had trapped some stranger inside it. (97)

The poet's eyes reveal the existence of a mask, a costume, a constructed and performed identity. In occupying centre stage, Silvio is forced to contend with harsh majority ridicule but nonetheless gains an opportunity to express himself. He is dominated by the passion of his performance and his poetry rather than defined by the villagers' loosely masked mocking. When he finishes his recitation, Silvio "bow[s] away, his face beaming, from centre stage" (98).

Silvio's role as fool in *Lives of the Saints* complements Vittorio's child perspective, and poses

yet another image of difference curtailed by the surrounding majors. As Sokoloff writes:

Sustained representations of children's perspectives, a very modern literary experiment, make possible the same uncomprehending presence the fool once provided. Therefore, far from being a marginal phenomenon concerned with a negligible Other, the representation of the child's mind facilitates a highly effective extension of major trends that have defined the novel as a genre from its inception . . . Young figures, close in nature to Walter Benjamin's view of the child as the best revolutionary, can similarly unleash transformative and critical energies as their immature premises clash with social fact and conventional wisdom. (25)

Silvio's minor voice adds volume to Vittorio's own minor voice and the revolutionary nature of these minor voices is enhanced. Furthermore, Silvio's performance sets the stage for an evening filled with strange and minor disturbances of everyday, "normal" behaviour. For a brief moment, the "strange and foreign" band "sashays" across centre stage and mesmerizes its audience (99-100). The band's accordion, its "melancholy notes seeming all in a *minor key*" takes centre stage and the crowd dances with increasing intensity (101 *my emphasis*).

Vittorio observes that "the energy of the crowd seemed to have reached some strange peak" and people dance "out of all time with the music, with a kind of joyless intensity that bordered on violence, as if they were anxious to spend before the end of the evening some anger or resentments that had been bottled up inside them" (102). Although this minor music allows Vittorio and his mother a brief opportunity to blend in and become part of the crowd, the experience is a strange one. As they approach the stage with the intention of dancing:

heads turned . . . couples in the dance area edging away . . . clearing a small circle as if to cordon us off. But as soon as the band had begun to play we seemed to be forgotten, the crowd of other dancers slowly closing in around us, as if the music had made us suddenly anonymous, invisible. (102)

Though they are not the centre of attention Vittorio and Cristina occupy the centre of the dance area:

"[a] crush of bodies churned around my mother and me like the wheels of some great machine, jostling us to the centre of the dance area" (103). A strange energy has infected everyone and Vittorio and his mother

twirl with each other "at a breathless pace, faster and faster, the crowd around me fading to a dizzy blur" (103). The act of dancing in this scene is creative, strange, alien, permitting expressions of passion that are usually repressed by society. Cristina's social transgression is momentarily forgotten amidst the intensity of the music and dance, and Vittorio and Cristina mingle freely with the majority, blurring the borders between them.

Acts of creativity and difference such as Arjie's and Silvio's recitation of poetry, Arjie's cross-dressing, and Cristina's and Vittorio's dancing, allow for moments of freedom from, and revolution against, social constraints. These creative acts permit the exploration of activities proscribed by society. Such acts, however, are fleeting; major-adults regularly confiscate costumes, reclaim centre stage, and ridicule minor performers. Minors are only briefly allowed to occupy the major, centre stage. When Silvio, for example, seems about to return to the stage for an encore, the chairman of the *comitato*

"frowned at him and shook his head disapprovingly" and takes over centre stage himself (98). Although Mario and Maria have mesmerized the crowd for a time and dominated the stage, they bow away from the stage after their final song "as if retreating from a threat" (103). Furthermore, as the final fireworks begin, Ricci closes the chapter with an image of the Madonna "*cloistered* in her little chapel" (103 my emphasis). Minority freedom seems perpetually cloistered by the major institutional forces that control and regulate society. Only brief moments of strangeness are allowed to enter the hierarchical world of adult-majors, a brevity that intensifies the protagonists' frustrations and their struggles for self-expression.

When the child protagonists' bodies are abused, cloistered, or forcibly costumed, we see the minor-child's subject position and lack of agency. The child's body can be regarded as a site of inscription upon which, in Anne Cranny-Francis's words, dominant social "regimes of power and knowledge" (for example,

heterosexuality) are being "written" (28). The exploration, Cranny-Francis observes, of "both individual experience and the nature of not only subjectivity but also contemporary social practice has come to include an analysis of body inscription" (2). Since, in *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints*, the child is a vehicle for the expression of social practice and subjectivity, I include in this study "an analysis of body inscription." In particular, I regard the child protagonist's body as a performance piece oscillating between acts of resistance and compliance to the social pressures of its time and place.

The child protagonists' vulnerabilities are conveyed, in part, through attacks on their bodies. Society supports major adults in their endeavours to mould and control minor children and, thus, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are subject to the values and desires of various adults and becoming-adults. While the general intention may be to protect the welfare of children, this social support of adult authority over

children sometimes condones their abuse instead. If, as Cranny-Francis observes, "postmodern critics . . . conceptualise the material body as inscribed by those discourses and material practices that constitute its social environment," one of the methods for analyzing the social practices and behaviours that Ricci, Selvadurai, and Kogawa critique is to observe the ways in which they conceptualize and "write on" the bodies of their characters (2). How, and by whom, are these children's bodies molested, abused, ignored, and desired? Arjie is beaten by his school principal, Vittorio is stripped and inspected by a gang of school boys, and Naomi is sexually molested by the elderly man next door. These bodily attacks, as well as traumatic events such as the death of parents and the exile from home, prompt the children to begin searching for modes of agency and power. They instinctively seek out ways of defending and expressing their own desires even as they are forced to perform (like Kristeva's "foreigner") what others want.

While all bodies can be regarded as texts which process and produce social codes and practices, children, by virtue of their inexperience, are particularly pliable and, therefore, particularly vulnerable to imposed texts. In *Funny Boy*, Black Tie uses physical force against Arjie in an attempt to "help" him commit the poems, "Vitae Lampada" and "The Best School of All," to memory. Before caning Arjie's legs, Black Tie says, "One day, Chelvaratnam, you will thank me for this" (237). Through the threat of bodily harm Black Tie attempts to transform Arjie into a powerless figure who will recite the texts of Black Tie's choosing and represent the type of student Black Tie wishes him to be. Ironically, Arjie's forced recitation is regarded by the adults as an honour bestowed upon him by Black Tie.

As Steedman observes, childhood is a category of dependence, "a term that define[s] certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority or weakness" (7). Children's bodies are largely unprotected and can be attacked by almost

anyone defined on social and racial hierarchies as superior to them. Selvadurai, Kogawa, and Ricci demonstrate the ease with which their child protagonists' bodies are attacked and manipulated. The children's attempts at non-conformity and resistance to socialization often result in bodily harm as adults demonstrate their power over the bodies of their minor subjects. For example, in *Funny Boy*, Soyza comes under attack when his long hair -- signifying his difference from the other boys -- is noticed by the school principal. Black Tie slaps Soyza twice "with force" and cuts his hair short (223-4). When Arjie questions Black Tie's right to alter Soyza's appearance, Soyza responds, "Of course he had the right to . . . He's Black Tie" (224). Whereas Arjie and Soyza's homosexual bodily desires are considered taboo, there is no taboo against institutional violence. In fact, the school principal's violence against children is institutionally sanctioned. Children's bodies are under adult control and supervision and adults have

the power to use, abuse, and even costume these children's bodies according to their own desires.

In *Obasan*, Naomi's encounters with Mr. Gower highlight Naomi's overall sense of discomfort and powerlessness. Mr. Gower's very gaze paralyzes Naomi and she finds she "cannot play" with her dolls and stuffed animals while he is watching (67). Old Man Gower's physical molestation of Naomi's body results in deterritorializations of her mind and spirit. Despite Nomura-obasan's and Obasan's comments with respect to Stephen's leg that "[w]ithout doubt, the young heal easily . . . it is an easy matter for the young," Naomi's recollections demonstrate that her young mind has not healed easily (148). Her recollection of Gower's sexual abuse is "a fiddlehead question mark asking with its unformed voice for answers still hidden from me" (65). Though Kogawa's depictions of Naomi and Mr. Gower span only a few pages, those few pages constitute a radical disturbance of Naomi's, and presumably the reader's, level of comfort. Naomi is too small, too young, to

resist Mr. Gower's aggressions: "I do not wish him to lift me up but I do not know what it is to struggle" (65). The reader watches helplessly as Old Man Gower carries Naomi away into his domain:

I am a small girl being carried away through the break in the shrubs where our two yards meet. Old Man Gower is taking me to the edge of his garden on the far far side away from the street. His backyard is a jungle of bushes, flowering trees, weeds, and flowers. Near the farthest corner is a thick arch of vines . . . I do not move.

When he sits on the bench, no one can see us. The vines are so thick I cannot see my house or his. He does not release me. When I make the faintest move he puts his hand on my skirt . . .

'Would you like me to tell you a story?' he asks.

I do not respond. If I am still, I will be safe.

Is this where the terror begins?

I am four years old. His hands are large and demanding. He caresses my head as if I were a small animal. My short black hair straight across my forehead like a broom is blown aside as he puts his mouth on my face . . . (67)

Here, in this anti-Edenic garden, Gower takes advantage of child-Naomi's vulnerabilities. Naomi is small enough and silent enough for Gower to manipulate. Taken from the safety of her own home, Naomi is transplanted to a place where "no one can

see" her and movement represents danger. Her modes of resistance -- silence and stillness -- are ineffectual in this unfamiliar setting. Naomi's terror is likened to scenes from a fairy tale: "I am Snow White in the forest, unable to run. He is the forest full of eyes and arms. He is the tree root that trips Snow White. He is the lightning flashing through the dark sky" (69). Like Vittorio, who becomes disoriented and lost when his classmates make false overtures of friendship, Naomi's sense of safety is destabilized by Gower's false offerings of stories and friendship.

In one encounter, Old Man Gower's attack on Naomi is disguised as an act of healing when he professes to fix a scratch on her knee (68). Naomi is disoriented by Gower's deception. As a child, she does not have enough experience with lies to resist Gower's ambush. As she gets up to go, "[h]is hand holds my skirt . . . The soft elastic around the waist pulls at the straps criss-crossing over my shoulders. I cannot move. I cannot look at his face. It is unthinkable to be held by force" (67-8). Gower takes Naomi into the alien

domain of his house. The darkness of the room is "unfamiliar" to Naomi and the bed is "strange" (68). Naomi is forced into an uncomfortable performance of Gower's desires: "He begins to undress me. I do not resist. One does not resist adults. But I know this is unnecessary for my knee. He is only pretending to fix my scratch" (68). Though she is aware of Gower's pretence, Naomi is forced to separate her inner knowledge from her outer behaviour. She believes that if she speaks, she "will split open and spill out. To be whole and safe I must hide in the foliage, odourless as a newborn fawn" (68). When she is tempted to cry to her brother for help, Gower covers her mouth, silences her, locks her in: "I am not permitted to move, to dress, or to cry out. I am ashamed" (69).

Naomi's nostalgic remembrances of childhood home, family, and dress intensify her later loss of safety and at-homeness. In her childhood home, Naomi is comfortable in her own skin. She is not a foreigner nor is she a stranger to herself. Nudity is

"completely thinkable" (52). She takes baths with Grandma Kato that are, despite the hot water, "sweet torture" (52). Naomi says, "I will suffer endless indignities of the flesh for the pleasure of my grandmother's pleasure" (52). After the bath, Naomi is dressed in a "nemaki" (a sleeping garment) that "Grandma has sewn by hand" and in which Naomi is "supremely safe . . . under the heavy bright-coloured futon in my house" (54). Like Arjie's sari, there is a level of comfort and at-homeness associated with garments.

Kogawa contrasts Naomi's discomfort and paralysis in Old Man Gower's hands with the early security she experiences at home with her family. Gower's incursions into Naomi's physical and emotional stability are foreshadowings of the Canadian government's treatment of Japanese Canadians during the war. Although Naomi only refers to Mr. Gower briefly during the narrative, this revelation of sexual molestation and her simultaneous guilt at its pleasurable qualities are central to Naomi's

exploration of the ways in which power hierarchies have affected her developing identity. The threat and trauma exist -- unwritten -- throughout the narrative and indicate the nature of power hierarchies as systems that are rarely articulated but ever-present in our treatment of each other.

Like child-Naomi, the Japanese Canadians are forced into positions of dependence. They are dispossessed of home and forced into uncomfortable performances of white, racist desires. Kogawa translates Naomi's trauma into bodily pain and likens the recollection of this trauma to an operation of the body. For example, after recalling portions of her hardship on the beet farm, Naomi says, "I cannot tell about this time, Aunt Emily. The body will not tell" (217). Similarly, when Naomi tells Penny that her father is dead -- when she utters the fact aloud -- she finds herself "collapsed on the sofa with a sharp pain in my abdomen and a cold perspiration forming on my forehead" (231). Her reaction to emotional trauma is one of bodily pain.

The Canadian government's forced displacement of Naomi and her family is inscribed on Naomi's body. Her body becomes disjoined, torn apart through Old Man Gower's unwanted looking and touching. Similarly, as Aunt Emily makes clear, governmental and racist messages are inscribed on the body: "[e]verything was done . . . officially, unofficially, at all levels and the message to disappear worked its way deep into the Nisei heart and into the bone marrow" (202). While Naomi is being displaced within her own country, she is taught at the same time to be uncomfortable in her own skin. Amoko writes that Naomi must come to terms with "the history of racial injustice that has left traces of trauma on her body as well as on the collective body of her ethnic community" (11). Moreover, Naomi's mother's body has been traumatized and disfigured by the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Naomi's Mother and Grandmother have trauma and memory written on their bodies: "the visible evidence of horror written on their skin, in their blood, carved

in every mirror they passed, felt in every step they took" (257-8).

Kogawa makes us perpetually aware of Naomi's oscillations between self-inscription and social inscription of her body and identity. In retrieving her past, Naomi scrutinizes social inscriptions of her body and identity and destabilizes their authority. Naomi struggles with the difficulties involved in conceptualizing an identity that has been written for her. Before she can become an agent in reshaping her identity, Naomi must come to terms with the fact that she has assimilated some of the attitudes and behaviours that were once imposed on her. Naomi confesses that she eventually goes "to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway. I clamber unbidden into his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable. In the centre of my body is a rift." (69). She is both repulsed by and attracted to Mr. Gower. Furthermore, she confesses that "[i]t is not an isolated incident. Over and over again, not just Old Man Gower -- but years later there is Percy in Slocan . . . I am filled

with a strange terror and exhilaration. When does this begin -- this fascination and danger that rockets through my body?" (65). Old Man Gower's desires, initially imposed and unwanted, become Naomi's own secret desires. This revelation separates Naomi from her mother. While, in general, Naomi claims "[t]here is nothing about me that my mother does not know, nothing that is not safe to tell," there is "one secret thing" she admits she cannot share with her mother (65). She says, "here in Mr. Gower's hands I become other -- a parasite on [my mother's] body, no longer of her mind" (69). With regret, Naomi says, "[i]n my childhood dreams, the mountain yawns apart as the chasm spreads. My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. We cannot reach each other. My legs are being sawn in half" (70). Naomi's forced entrance into sexual experience constitutes a violent loss that haunts her in the past and present. Additionally, her guilty revelation regarding the pleasurable qualities of these encounters with Old Man

Gower reminds the reader of child-Naomi's physical and emotional vulnerabilities.

Child sexuality is regarded as taboo. While society influences minor children like Arjie to become heterosexual and "act" their gender, it also pressures minor children to act their age. The child is expected to be innocent of sex, and knowledge of all things sexual is, in general, withheld from the minor child. So, when a child like Naomi is sexually abused, the experience becomes shrouded in silence and secrecy. Old Man Gower reinforces this message of secrecy when he repeatedly whispers in Naomi's ear, "[d]on't tell your mother" (69). In breaking the silence and confessing the secret, Naomi resists social pressures. As she narrates the circumstances of her helplessness with Mr. Gower, Naomi achieves a measure of agency over the experience. Furthermore, in conveying her taboo and disturbing desires, Naomi draws the reader into her state of disorientation, of "answers still hidden" (65).

Because Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi are perpetually uncomfortable with the behaviours they are forced to enact, the performative nature of these behaviours is all the more evident. In *Funny Boy*, for example, Selvadurai wraps identities around the body like a sari. Boundaries are transgressed and borders are crossed in the uses (and abuses) of stages and costumes. In his ecstatic acts of cross-dressing and childhood play Arjie experiences the freedom and power to perform and thus (temporarily) satisfy certain gender-related desires. Though Arjie -- child, refugee, and homosexual -- is triply marginalized and disempowered, he plays with and manipulates his multiple identities of race, nation, age, gender, and sexuality in episodes such as the game "bride-bride" and in his recitation of the poems "The Best School of All" and "Vitae Lampada." Despite, or perhaps because of, his minor status Arjie achieves a certain measure of agency and power. Consequently, his multiple oscillations between central and minor player disrupt the conceptual boundaries between centre and margin,

major and minor. While Arjie might ultimately fail in his attempts to gain power and "play" with his identity, the processes of resistance -- the minor disturbances -- that take place in this novel succeed in deterritorializing major powers and hierarchies.

Arjie's childhood manipulations of costume and stage reveal the disjunctions that exist between a minority-individual's lack of socialization and the identity that is imposed upon the minor by a majority's conventions and norms. In depicting the ways in which Arjie's gender-play evoke anxiety and opposition amongst his adult overseers, Selvadurai reveals that Arjie is not the only one playing dress-up. Arjie's dynamic, imaginative performances reveal a set of dangerous, effacing performances played by adults, and imposed upon children, in their "real" lives on a regular basis. As Arjie is forced to wear the masks and uniforms of heterosexuality, of racial minority, of conformity, the reader may be reminded of his/her own adult imposition and perpetuation of these roles and expectations. Although Arjie and his family

will seek refuge in Canada, there can be no refuge from these costumes and these performances. We may be reminded that this so-called place of refuge, barely mentioned but ever-present, will introduce its own challenges and alienations.

In *Funny Boy*, Arjie is uprooted, disoriented, marginalized, and moved. Even as one who is, for most of his story, on the verge of emigration to Canada, Arjie is a displaced child. He does not feel at home. Arjie's return to, or re-collection of, his childhood memories of Sri Lanka signifies a kind of border-crossing to the (home)land of memory and to the prisons of the past. The first such childhood memory takes place in Arjie's grandparents' garden and involves the elaborate dress-up game of bride-bride. Selvadurai demonstrates that playing dress-up can be a dangerous game. Even in the absence of adult interference, the children choose to handle conflict in much the same way as adults: by "territoriality and leadership" (3). In "Pigs Can't Fly," we see Arjie navigating a hazardous landscape divided by

arbitrary borders. These borders divide and separate adult territory from children's territory; boys' territory from girls' territory: the boys play in the front garden, the road, and the field in front of the house; the girls are "confined" to the back garden and the kitchen porch (3). In effect, Selvadurai maps out a set of gendered spaces. The girls' domain is bounded -- a marginal space which rarely comes under direct adult scrutiny; yet this marginal space allows for the "free play of fantasy" and imagination (3).

In "Pigs Can't Fly" bride-bride is an arena for performance. This game allows Arjie to perform his desires to cross-dress, both literally and figuratively. Not only does Arjie cross gender boundaries through the ecstatic donning of the "clothes of the bride," but he also -- in this "free play of fantasy" -- becomes the leader and the star performer of the game (3-4). As in his experience playing the bride, Arjie's spectatorship of Amma in her dressing room produces a "joy akin to ecstasy" (15). Furthermore, Radha Aunty becomes Arjie's friend

and ally when she beckons him into her dressing room and allows him to play with her make-up and jewellery. The stage -- whether it be a garden, a school auditorium, or a Convent rehearsal hall -- and all that goes with it (costumes, make-up, performances, pretending), is a platform for imagination and free play. It is a space of joy and satisfaction for Arjie. Whereas the masks of society (gender, race, ethnicity, class) constrain and oppress Arjie, the masks of make-believe allow him to escape constraints and bend conventions. Whereas the adult world and its hierarchies and conventions attempt to limit and confine Arjie's identity and actions, a children's game such as bride-ride allows "voyages of imagination" -- it permits multiple identities and self-propelled actions. Even so, Arjie's game of bride-ride is highly scripted and regulated, as is demonstrated when Tanuja attempts to interfere. Arjie's love-comics inspire his ideas of how a wedding should proceed and, aside from his bending of gender

roles, Arjie does not radically transgress social customs and rituals.

With this child's game, Selvadurai demonstrates the extent to which gender and sexual identity are staged and performed. Arjie's cross-dressing disrupts our perceptions of the gendered body and draws attention to the constructedness and performative nature of gender itself. As Butler asserts, "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (174). Arjie's comfortable and authoritative performance as a bride challenges the majority's "assumed coherence or integrity of 'interior' and 'exterior'" (Cranny-Francis 31). Furthermore, Arjie leads the others in the invention of costumes that complement their voyages of imagination. For him, the culmination of this game, and his ultimate moment of joy, is when he puts on the clothes of the bride. The process of cross-dressing

is described in detail -- Arjie becomes an icon (like the "goddesses" of the cinema):

The dressing of the bride would now begin, and then, by the *transfiguration* I saw taking place in Janaki's cracked full-length mirror -- by the sari being wrapped around my body, the veil being pinned to my head, the rouge put on my cheeks, lipstick on my lips, kohl around my eyes -- I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve. It was a self magnified, like the goddesses of the Sinhalese and Tamil cinema, larger than life; and like them . . . I was an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested.
(4-5 my emphasis)

Cross-dressing permits Arjie's "transfiguration." At times, we observe the (adult) world restricting Arjie's identity to that of a minor player: Tamil, child, homosexual. In this game, however, Arjie is transfigured by the other children; he becomes both beautiful and central: his body is wrapped with the sari, his face is masked with make-up. Arjie is allowed to take on his desired identity: "I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into

another, more brilliant, more beautiful self" (4).

The joy, the ascension, is of course rooted in the fact that Arjie's cousins, or his imagined community,¹⁹ (in Selvadurai's words in the above citation, those who "represent" the "world") participate and rejoice in Arjie's transfiguration. Furthermore, as Butler argues:

part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (175)

In contrast to Arjie's experiences in the patriarchal world of adults, this world of children temporarily accepts and fulfils Arjie's desires for agency. He takes pleasure in the "denaturalization" of "cultural configurations" and exposes the "cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity." Yet, while Arjie "ascends," to what he regards as a position of centrality, he

simultaneously occupies -- from the perspective of the adults -- a position of otherness.

Arjie's transfiguration is disturbed and restricted by adult anxieties and aggressions. As Selvadurai points out when Arjie gazes at himself in Janaki's mirror, the mirror is cracked (4). The utopic garden in which Arjie's performances are enacted is, just as the Greek root of "utopia" suggests, a "no-place." It is a platform invented by children but bounded, raided, and ultimately destroyed by adults. Thus, Arjie's costume becomes uncomfortable when he is found by, and displayed before, the adults: "The sari suddenly felt suffocating around my body, and the hairpins which held the veil in place, pricked my scalp" (13). At this point, his costume no longer liberates because the adults interpret, or read, it differently than do the children. Arjie is not regarded as an icon of beauty but, rather, as a violator of gender boundaries. He is transformed, under the gaze of the adults, into a figure at risk of becoming "funny,"

different, abnormal. The figure of a boy wrapped in a sari and masked in make-up threatens to queer adult assumptions of normative gender roles, heterosexuality, and familial structures.

Bride-bride is a game that mimics the fundamentally heterosexual ritual of marriage between a bride and a groom. However, as a result of Arjie's drag performance, his mimicry of this ritual is, in the eyes of Tanuja and the adults, flawed. Despite Arjie's attempts to recreate the "normal" rituals of marriage, his drag performance as the bride constitutes a deviation from the norm that will not be tolerated by the heteronormative structures of his parents' community. Furthermore, Amma and Appa's discomfort with Arjie's drag performance demonstrates the significance of the performance itself. Arjie's "flawed," or "funny," performance threatens real-world expectations that he conform to heteronormative models of behaviour. Even as a young child, Arjie is expected to "successfully" enact heteronormative gender roles or be the subject of ridicule and

concern. Arjie's early enjoyment of bride-bride as a normal game of pretend, however, subverts his parents' later judgment of Arjie's participation in the game as abnormal.

Arjie's misperformance of gender norms not only demonstrates how gender expectations themselves are artificial, but also that deviations from these norms constitute acts of minor-agency. As a boy dressed in female clothes, mimicking an institutionally-sanctioned heterosexual ritual, Arjie briefly exposes the illogicalities of, and sets himself apart from, his social circumstances. Arjie's bridal array and the subsequent adult discomfort it evokes serve to reframe initial gender identifications. As Butler writes, "the performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (175). Since Arjie's anatomy is distinct from the "gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance . . . [i]n

imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself -- as well as its contingency" (Butler 175). While adults such as Arjie's father are uncomfortable with the dissonance created by Arjie's performance, the reader is prompted to sympathize with Arjie. His act of cross-dressing is depicted as a pleasurable experience so that Arjie's confusion and disappointment at his father's negative reaction to the performance are intensified by its abrupt discontinuation.

Because Arjie's performances are regarded by the adults as deviant, Arjie's freedom to make-believe is increasingly restricted and punished by patriarchal authorities. Caught in the "wrong" territory, Arjie is punished severely. He is barred and exiled from any sort of entry into these female spaces (the back of the house, his mother's dressing room). Arjie is not even allowed to watch from the sidelines. The door is literally shut in his face. He is physically beaten and forced to do menial labour as punishment, exposing once again the ways in which major-adults

impose social expectations on minor-children through
bodily manipulation.

We are witnesses to the injustice of Arjie's predicament.²⁰ We watch as Arjie is forced -- with the threat of physical punishment -- to bend to his parents' will. The adult authorities rip off Arjie's costume and cut short his performances. Unhappily, Arjie's cousin, Tanuja, supports the adults in their cause. Using adult gender expectations (Tanuja declares, "a bride is a girl, not a boy" [11]) and power hierarchies in her own bid for centrality, Tanuja's savage attempt to wrest the sari from Arjie's grip results in it being torn "all the way down" (35). One recalls that the sari is essential to the game. Arjie must smuggle it in his sister's bag and it becomes his bargaining chip for getting back into the girls' world. When the sari is torn, Arjie emits a wail of anguish (35). Tanuja, agent of the adults (a "becoming-adult" in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology), has caused the first tear in the fabric of Arjie's desires and childhood freedoms. She has

demonstrated Arjie's lack of power to "play" at length with major gender expectations and performances.

Arjie's adult overseers attempt to cast him in a new role not of his choosing. Yet Arjie cannot comfortably exist in the territory of boys. Arjie's is a confused identity. He realizes that he "would be caught between the boys' and the girls' worlds, not belonging or wanted in either" (39). Eventually, as adult anxieties regarding Arjie's confused identity increase, he is forcibly re-costumed in the school uniform of Victoria Academy and told that he is "to become a man" (210). Thus, Arjie's joyous moments of self-creation and performance have been replaced with uncomfortable costumes and foreboding roles (213). Arjie observes a new sort of "brutality" in the children's games at his new school (214): territories are divided along racial lines; familiar names are replaced with surnames or labels such as "hooligan" and "scallywag" (223); adult authorities are free to physically punish children; and scenes of ambush and violence take place in the school bathrooms. At the

Victoria Academy, Arjie is truly a minor player with little control over his lines or costumes. It becomes clear to Arjie that if he wishes to protect his body from harm, he must conform to the role he is given.

Arjie is confronted with new lines in a performance he does not understand. Though he is told it is an honour to be selected to recite the poems, "The Best School of All" and "Vitae Lampada," Arjie cannot commit the lines to memory. The meaning of the poems he must recite eludes him. According to Arjie's experiences, they are lies (233). These "foreign," "senseless incantations," however, form the bases of a tangible physical threat against Arjie (235). The threat of physical abuse (the cane on Black Tie's desk) renders him inarticulate; he can neither speak nor process Soyza's words. When Arjie fails to make sense out of nonsense -- or at least make it appear sensible -- he is thrashed by Black Tie.

Arjie wonders how "some people got to decide what was correct or not, just or unjust" (274). He comes to realize that

it had to do with who was in charge;
everything had to do with who held power and
who didn't. If you were powerful like Black
Tie or my father you got to decide what was
right or wrong. If you were like Shehan or
me you had no choice but to follow what they
said. But did we always have to obey? Was
it not possible for people like Shehan and
me to be powerful too? (274)

Arjie gains power by his deliberate, public
dismantling of the poems he is asked to recite. Arjie
fashions a new role and new lines out of those that
have been prescribed. He is meant to be a mouthpiece,
or tool -- used to enhance Black Tie's own speech --
but once Arjie acquires the knowledge of Black Tie's
political agenda, he becomes his own director and
writes his own script. The poetry recital enables
Arjie to shift the power dynamics. His control of his
own voice enables him to become an active agent rather
than a passive tool. While earlier Amma had used
nonsense in her attempt to solidify hegemony (as I
discussed in Chapter One), Arjie uses nonsense here in
order to deconstruct hegemony. Thus, Selvadurai
demonstrates again that the effects of "nonsense" and
child-language are dependent on the context and user.

Being in control of "the words" is a significant source of power.

In order to trouble gender -- or the cultural reproduction of identities -- Judith Butler suggests that we "need to look for self-consciously denaturalized positions[s]" (110). Butler cites drag parodies as examples of denaturalization; however, as Dr. Daniel Coleman points out, "there are many places to look for denaturalized or eccentric positions" (*Masculine Migrations* 33). Arjie's garbled recitation of the poems is one such act of denaturalization. In garbling the words of the poems, Arjie succeeds in dislocating Black Tie from his own prepared speech, effectively dismantling his rhetorical power. Black Tie's voice cracks, he speaks too loud, and the microphone squeals. First, the audience is uncomfortable, and then they laugh at Black Tie's attempts to alter his speech to suit the unexpected situation. Finally, Black Tie realizes that he cannot go on with his speech, falls silent, and exits the stage.

Arjie's linguistic performance is affected by social scripts of age, gender, and ethnicity. Arjie's status as a multiple minor -- child, Tamil, and homosexual -- causes disturbances in the revolutionary nature of the performance. In misreading the poems, Arjie "troubles" Black Tie's major position of power over him. In subverting Black Tie's authority, however, Arjie also subverts Black Tie's attempt to defeat Lokubandara's purist agenda. Black Tie's nationalist educational philosophy, which argues for the inclusion of all races and religions, is being threatened by the Vice-Principal's new ethnic purism. Although Black Tie's code is the major code to which Arjie is forced to conform, it is a code that is -- in the wider political and racial arenas -- minoritized by the Vice-Principal's Sinhalese majority government. Therefore, Black Tie himself is engaged in a minority battle against majority influences, attempting to destabilize prevailing social constructs. The reader is thus confronted with the irony of Arjie's situation. Black Tie's contradictory position as both

a major and minor figure in the text serves to blur the boundaries between major and minor even further. Arjie will not be able to deterritorialize one major figure (Black Tie) without reterritorializing another (Lokubandara).

It is likely that Arjie has used his power to solidify a worse evil. In Dr. Daniel Coleman's words,

when Arjie misperforms Black Tie's poems, he's once again a minor (a child in a school system), who's required to perform according to one 'major' code (Black Tie's nationalist educational philosophy), but that 'majority' is cross-hatched with instability (Black Tie's idea of nationalism incorporates an ethnic liberalism that is being threatened by the new ethnic purism of the Vice-Principal and the Sinhalese 'majority' government). The displacements between 'majority' and 'minority' (central and marginal) here are fascinating and complex.

While Arjie's minor-major relationship with Black Tie is indeed destabilized by Arjie's misperformance of the poems, Black Tie's major status with respect to Arjie is already couched in the instability of Black Tie's minor nationalist philosophies. While Arjie succeeds in upsetting his own minor, or marginal, status with respect to Black Tie, this ultimate

subversion of Black Tie's major status causes a further solidification of the Vice-Principal's major Sinhalese status and codes which relegate Tamil-Arjie to a minor position in school and society. So, as a minor child in a school system, Arjie achieves temporary centrality; however, his method for doing so may in fact result in the further solidification of his status as an outsider or minor.

While he may be aligned with Black Tie as an ethnic minority, Arjie's sexual difference combined with his vulnerability as a child, negate the loyalties he might feel for the Tamil principal. Caught between the responsibility (articulated by Mr. Sunderalingam) to support the Tamil cause and the desire to "trouble" Black Tie's authority over him and Shehan, Arjie chooses the latter. His personal experience of disempowerment overrides his knowledge of the school's racial politics. Arjie's first priority is to defend Shehan from further abuse. His plan is to cause Black Tie to lose his battle to Lokubandara, be forced to resign, and therefore "solve

things for Shehan" (277). Mr. Sunderalingam's assertion that Arjie's loyalties, as a Tamil, must be with Black Tie simply re-emphasizes Arjie's sense of isolation and entrapment(246-7). The information Mr. Sunderalingam uses to justify Black Tie's cruelty towards Arjie does not succeed in winning his sympathy or loyalty (247).

Recollecting all of Black Tie's cruelties, Arjie is "not sure that, as a Tamil, my loyalties lay with Black Tie . . . Although I did not like what Mr. Lokubandara stood for, at the same time I felt that Black Tie was no better" (247). As witnesses to Black Tie's abuses of power, the readers are prompted to sympathize with Arjie's personal agenda rather than Black Tie's political agenda. The individual child's immediate needs override the needs of the group, and Black Tie's cruel treatment of Arjie and Shehan negate the positive nature of his political aspirations. Arjie realizes that he must use his brief time in the public eye -- on centre stage where his voice is amplified by the microphone and the attention given to

him by the institutional authorities -- to enact his rebellion against Black Tie.

In this instance, then, Arjie simultaneously deterritorializes and reterritorializes the hierarchies of the status quo. Arjie's performance is disturbing in its capacity to work for and against his revolutionary goals. In displacing Black Tie's power, Arjie reinforces the school's Sinhalese powers. Though he has momentarily increased his agency as a child, Arjie has also reinforced his subject position as an ethnic minority. As Coleman says:

in the ability to *improvise*, to 'read' a new scene and produce a performance, the actor demonstrates the ability to exert a kind of agency *within* the set of social circumstances, the cultural scripts, that he or she is given. (*Masculine Migrations* 50)

While Arjie does indeed exert "a kind of agency" in his recitation of the poems, he does so within a "set of social circumstances" that ultimately restricts his agency. However, while Arjie may not be a wholly successful revolutionary in this instance, Selvadurai's depiction of the competing interests in Arjie's performance demonstrates the contradictory

nature of childhood, especially when cross-hatched with other states of minority such as ethnicity and homosexuality. Furthermore, in positioning Arjie's resistance to gender-fascism against Black Tie's resistance to ethnic-fascism, Selvadurai emphasizes the important influence that personal behaviour has on wider political events.²¹ As a result of Black Tie's institutionally sanctioned acts of cruelty, Arjie finds that he cannot align himself with Black Tie and, instead, uses what little power he has in order to -- for better or worse -- destabilize Black Tie's position of power. Arjie realizes that, regardless of its political structure, he is trapped in an institution that sanctions the oppression of "different" children such as Shehan and himself. Consequently, Arjie takes whatever means are necessary to attain agency and disrupt existing power hierarchies within this oppressive institution.

Arjie's decision to "remember" the school as it was rather than "washed in the coral pink of memory" (273) can be regarded as a form of protest. The power

to shape memories, tell stories -- to name and identify -- is crucial in *Funny Boy*. As a Tamil child who is "funny," Arjie does not have much power or agency; however, as an adult writer recalling his childhood he is able to "write back" and critique the injustices of his youth. Arjie's decision to "confuse" the poem and "jumble the lines" -- to render the poems "senseless" -- is his only viable option for rebellion and resistance (277). And following Deleuze and Guattari's description of minor literature as a "language torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralization of sense" (21), we can see Arjie's reshaping of the poems as constituting his own foray into the creation of minor literature. Arjie's (re)composition of the poems simply articulates what has always been the case with respect to his readings of the poems, and his actions reveal the non-sense of his situation. By disordering the words, he will de-authorize them and disrupt the current positions of authority.

Significantly, Arjie's site of resistance is at the centre of a stage. Here, he is able to survey his audience and claim ownership of his role. Arjie's act is simultaneously one of passion (a performance) and aggression (he "defeats" Black Tie). It seems that he has, indeed, effected change. However, in breaking from the boundaries of adult expectations, and in developing a sexual relationship with Shehan, Arjie comes to realize that he is "no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me" (285). Arjie has located himself on the margins of not only his society and school, but also of his own family.

Arjie's position of distance as a child is complicated because he is a member of an ethnic minority. Even in his homeland, Arjie undergoes the experiences of a stranger or foreigner. Like a refugee in his/her adopted country, Arjie is "forced to keep [his] distance from the centre of things -- 'centre' being [in Kulyk Keefer's words] the place

where those with power and agency, even just assurance, at-homeness, hold sway" (102). Arjie -- as a child, an ethnic minority, and a homosexual -- is triply marginalized and distanced from power, agency, and home. However, through his manipulations of language and costume (as a child and, simultaneously, as an adult writing of, or reconstructing, his childhood), Arjie achieves a symbolic return home and the power to re-write the authorities of his youth.

Selvadurai uses the child's experience to disorient the "centre of things." Costumes transfigure, stages shift, language jumbles and boundaries are transgressed. Selvadurai's narrative is deliberately transitory. Boundaries are unstable and identities are in transformation. Although the act of migration is only alluded to in the narrative, the experience of displacement is ever-present. At the same time that the migration has already occurred, the nature of the narrative as a recollection, a set of memories, sets the migration in the future tense. Thus, even time is in process -- it is folded onto

itself -- in this text. Migration, transfiguration, and maturation are processes that destabilize the depictions of identity in *Funny Boy*.

Earlier, I noted that although Arjie and his family seek refuge in Canada, Selvadurai's narrative indicates that Canadian society will present its own challenges and alienations. *Funny Boy* points to several means of resistance against the oppressive forces of prejudice and patriarchy. In particular, he demonstrates that the imposition and performance of identity must be rendered visible before it can be disrupted. To recognize one's own costume, however, is a difficult achievement that necessitates the transportation of one away from oneself. The narrative of the other -- the minority, the stranger, the foreigner -- is just such a vehicle, and focalizing the perspective of the other through the child adds intensity to this process of disruption and deterritorialization. As the ethnic minority's experiences are filtered through the child's perspective, the text becomes a site for alternative

and re/membered vision. The adult author imagines a child's imaginings and, in so doing, transports the reader into a realm where identity is performed and enacted.

Afterword

The majority of this thesis has been devoted to examining the significance of the figure of the child in three particular novels: *Funny Boy*, *Lives of the Saints*, and *Obasan*. I have set out to analyze how Selvadurai, Ricci, and Kogawa use their child protagonists -- more specifically, their child focalizers -- as vehicles for social critique and commentary. In so doing, I have argued that the minority status of these children intensify their authors' social critiques and classify their novels as what Deleuze and Guattari have called minor literatures.

In discussing the children's experiences, three main categories of minor resistance to major norms presented themselves: the disturbance and manipulation of language, the minor-adult's alignment with the child's subject position, and the transgressive nature of identity performance. While, of course, the children's avenues of agency and resistance are manifested in different ways (and with

different levels of success) in each of the novels, it becomes clear that each of the authors is attempting to deterritorialize the culture, language, and major values of the societies in which their protagonists live. As a result, Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio experience linguistic confusions that expose the faults of the major languages, they become aligned with adult-minors (or, in the case of Naomi, an entire community of minors) who intensify the sense of displacement conveyed in the text, and they enact identity performances and bodily vulnerabilities that reveal unjust power hierarchies and normalizations.

While I note that these child focalizers share their experiences of displacement and their subject positions as children, I would like to briefly consider the "Canadianness" of the novels in which they appear. Should, for example, the "Canadian" element of these selected texts have been identified and particularized in this study? Would these child focalizers be somehow different if they were not found in something called "Canadian Literature"? One

recalls that at the margins of *Funny Boy* and *Lives of the Saints*, barely spoken but ever-present, is the experience of migration to Canada. In these novels, Canada is constructed as the margin -- as the unknown, distant land -- the land to which Arjie and his family, and Vittorio, will be exiled / take refuge. It is the land to which Arjie's father, the centre and source of patriarchal power and authority, heterosexuality, conventionality, is reluctant to migrate. It is the land in which Vittorio will live -- in the absence of his mother -- with his father, a virtual stranger.

In *Funny Boy*, Canada is alluded to as a place of refuge and escape from the political and racial turmoil of Sri Lanka -- a place from which adult-Arjie can write back, or reconstitute, his child-self. We know, however, that Arjie's differences (his sexual orientation and status as member of an ethnic minority) will be a source of difficulty even in the so-called "cultural mosaic" of Canada. In *Lives of the Saints*, Canada (misnamed by the characters as

Canada) America) is described as a place of refuge and escape from the unrelenting, closed-minded judgment of the Italian villagers. However, Cristina's death changes the nature of Vittorio's hopes for Canada. Again, Vittorio has been displaced and dislocated and, as we discover in Ricci's subsequent novels, Canada presents a new set of problems for Vittorio and his family. In Selvadurai's and Ricci's representation of a foreign land -- that which is not Canada -- they interrogate Canadian nationalism and identity. Kogawa, on the other hand, interrogates and critiques Canadian nationalism and identity from within. Selvadurai destabilizes, or "queers," Canadian nationalism and identity in presenting us with a Canadian text that is set outside of Canada and foregrounds a homosexual Sri Lankan boy. Ricci plants the seeds of his critique of Canada through Vittorio's deconstruction of the "miraculous," the "saintly," and (in the subsequent two novels, *In a Glass House* and *Where She Has Gone*) the "promised land." While *Lives of the Saints* and *Funny Boy* indicate that Canada will not be the hoped-

for land of refuge and belonging, the majority of their critique is directed at Valle Del Sole and Sri Lanka respectively. Perhaps this indicates the transmutability of Canadian identities in these novels, or the evacuation of meaning for a term such as "Canadian identity" altogether.

Itwaru argues, "Canada, out there, that land mass, this terrain, is also here, in us, uncreated, evolving. It is our invention which invents us" (19). What is the nature of these newly invented Canadian identities? In casting their child focalizers as writers, performers, and storytellers, Ricci, Kogawa, and Selvadurai reconfigure identities -- Canadian and other -- and show them to be revealed by minors and strangers as alien, artificial, and migratory. As Kulyk Keefer asserts:

it's as much in the subject position of the writer as in his or her geographical location or regional identity that 'Canadianness' lies. It's the writer's being situated on the bridge between cultures, and thus free to turn her or his gaze in any direction, to critique, to defend, to redress wrongs -- not just in the adopted but in the home culture as well -- that makes him or her Canadian. And all

Canadians, whatever their colour or
ancestral culture, are the richer for it.
(105)

In the novels with which I have dealt the narrative perspective of the child protagonist is used as a way to traverse the boundaries of our imagined communities. Consequently, identities become dynamic and transitory. We are meant to become open to new lines and languages, different costumes, other performances.

The fact that these authors' social critiques may present themselves inside or outside of Canada, with little or no emphasis or description of Canada, demonstrates, however, that the category of "Canadian Literature" is mainly practical. I did not choose these novels because they exuded some unique sort of "Canadianness"; rather, I chose them because Canadian literature is my area of specialty and these particular novels excited my interest. Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi share much more in their experiences of ethnic-minority displacement and their linguistic deterritorializations and manipulations

than they do in their connections to Canada. Thus, it is my hope that this examination of a select few minor, displaced child focalizers can be extended to considerations of other child focalizers, Canadian or not.

A narrative focalized through a child protagonist is characterized by unfixed boundaries: maturity within immaturity, migration within stasis, past within present. As Sokoloff writes in her study of the child in modern Jewish fiction,

the child character filters the words and actions of grown-ups around it through the prism of its own understandings. These texts imagine a child's imaginings, and in both the plot actions and the act of storytelling the imagination of the child involves dynamic interactions between mature and immature voices. The result: oscillating perspectives that bring about an exploration of clashing cultural codes. (ix)

This clash of cultural codes is meant to destabilize the reader's cultural presuppositions. Through the child's minor gaze, the author is able to challenge and decode prevailing cultural values and conventions. Not surprisingly, then, the condition of children such as Naomi, Arjie, and Vittorio is one of postmodern

homelessness and instability. These children are alienated from family, community, country, and language. Their identities are characterized by experiences of otherness, minority, and displacement.

In *Funny Boy*, *Obasan*, and *Lives of the Saints*, the state of childhood intensifies the experience of dislocation because the child protagonist possesses an identity that is both familiar and unfamiliar to the reader. Childhood is familiar because we have all experienced childhood and we recognize and use child figures as expressions of adult identity. The state of childhood is unfamiliar to the white, Canadian reader in the case of Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio because these children are ethnic minorities and marginalized others. Therefore, the child's minor perspectives are not so strange as to alienate the reader, but not so familiar as to make that reader feel "at home" in the child's experiences either.

Some have argued that the child focalizer possesses a dual identity and, thus, a dual perspective. Carolyn Steedman writes that

children were *both* the repositories of adults' desires (or a text, to be 'written' and 'rewritten', to use a newer language), *and* social beings, who lived in social worlds and networks of social and economic relationships, as well as in the adult imagination. (97)

To say that the child focalizer has only a dual existence, however, implies a limited range of perspectives and identifications. This dual existence, rather, is multiplied and complicated by the fact that the experiences of Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are founded on radical displacements (racial, temporal, geographical, and linguistic to name a few). Vittorio, Naomi, and Arjie's minor-child and ethnic-minority perspectives distinguish them as strangers within the communities, countries, languages, and even families to which they are expected to belong. As such, their recollections of these communities are designed to destabilize the social norms and conventions being observed.

Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio are used as "revolutionary" voices against normalization, hegemony, social codes and conventions. Their minor

disturbances of major hierarchies expose the constructedness of social identity and, thus, the injustice of imposing these expectations on children who somehow deviate from social norms. These minor, seemingly powerless children destabilize authority, in no small part, because they later (i.e. in the present narration of each novel) develop roles as authors/tellers of their own experiences. Arjie, Naomi, and Vittorio gain agency over their experiences through the re-constitution of those experiences in their own voices. Although they recall many instances of failed resistance to adult power, they take control of the narrative itself. In narrating the details of their experiences of displacement, Arjie, Vittorio, and Naomi creatively and actively displace the displacers.

¹ Bauman writes, "All people may now be wanderers, in fact or in premonition -- but there is an abyss hard to bridge between experiences likely to emerge, respectively, at the top and at the bottom of the freedom scale. The fashionable term 'nomads', applied indiscriminately to all contemporaries of the postmodern era, is grossly misleading, as it glosses over the profound differences which separate the two types of experience and render all similarity between them formal and superficial" (87).

² Deleuze and Guattari write, "We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (18).

³ Briefly, Steffler discusses works that "parody and pervert the position and function of the Romantic child" and argues that "the traditional solitude is replaced with alienation." Thus, the "positive effects associated with the Wordsworthian child: a love of nature eventually leading to a love of community" are disturbed and the child's alienation gives him/her "insight into the horror, rather than the beauty, of his world" ("Border Country" 15). Steffler specifically refers to Hooker Winslow of Timothy Findley's *The Last of the Crazy People*.

⁴ As in Margaret Jean Steffler's *The Romantic Child in Selected Canadian Fiction* (Ph. D. thesis 1987).

⁵ As in Theresia Quigley's *The Child Hero in the Canadian Novel* (1991).

⁶ Pattison argues that the child is inextricably linked to "ideas of our original nature, our fallen condition, and our hopes for salvation" (20).

⁷ As Coveney observes, "Frequently, indeed, as in the case of Dickens, there was an amazing inconsistency within the work of the same author. The child is now a symbol of growth and development, and now a symbol of retreat into personal regression and self-pity" (*Image* 32).

⁸ As Sokoloff writes, "In short, children have been at times idealized and sentimentalized, at other times demonized. Still other texts have presented the child as enigma and so turn this figure into a symbol of otherness itself" (5).

⁹ Wallace writes, "that which is typically attributed to childhood: the attraction to primary structures and colours, the still uncertain mastery of fine motor skills, the undeveloped but growing grasp of language -- in short, it evokes a subjectivity-in-formation, a subject-to-be-educated" (288).

¹⁰ Fisher uses "multicultural" in the American sense as referring to "ethnic minority" and so not in the Canadian sense of the official recognition of multiple cultural ancestries.

¹¹ In the case of these novels, the minor languages in question are Tamil, Japanese, and Italian respectively.

¹² See <http://pomo.freesevers.com/derrida.html> for more on "The supplement." In particular, the website observes: "Derrida takes this term from Rousseau, who saw a supplement as 'an inessential extra added to something complete in itself.' Derrida argues that what is complete in itself cannot be added to, and so a supplement can only occur where there is an originary lack. In any binary set of terms, the second can be argued to exist in order to fill in an originary lack in the first. This relationship, in which one term secretly resides in another, Derrida calls invagination."

¹³ Bal writes: "Playing with sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides" (82).

¹⁴ Dvorak refers to these simultaneous perspectives as "the narrator as voice, an older voice" and the "narrator as character" and points out that the older voice is "made explicit through tense only rarely" (105).

¹⁵ Recall that in *Obasan*, Aya's home is looted: "just the dead plants left and some broken china on the floor" (112).

¹⁶ As in *Funny Boy*, "being a man" is of value to society. Ricci and Selvadurai both demonstrate the arbitrariness of this label.

¹⁷ Emily writes, "Nisei are called 'enemy aliens'" (Kogawa 99). Daniel Coleman writes: "'Enemy alien' was an officially used term in both WWI and WWII in Canada: in WWI Canadians with connections to the Austro-Hungarian side of the war were interned as 'enemy aliens' and the term was used again for the internment of Japanese Canadians in WWII." Also see Valerie Knowles' *Strangers at Our Gates*, ch. 7.

¹⁸ Daniel Coleman writes: "One irony in this image is that Sitting Bull was not a 'Canadian' Chief. He was a Lakota Sioux who fled the US marshals after the Battle of the Little Big Horn and came with his people into southern Saskatchewan. At first the Canadian govt welcomed him, but with pressure from the US, the NWMP detachment at Ft. Walsh was told not to provide Sitting Bull's people with any food and the Lakota

Sioux were eventually starved into going back to the US."

¹⁹ This term is borrowed from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983).

²⁰ Kamboureli, in her discussion of *Obasan*, reminds us that "a witness is an observer whose gaze is, more often than not, trained to objectify, to implement the logic of visibility. Witnesses who do not resist what they see, who do not shift from their position of observation, perpetuate the very ideology that discriminates against Naomi and others like her" (219).

²¹ I borrow the terms "gender-fascism" and "ethnic-fascism" from Dr. Roger Hyman.

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