

From the Editors

SPECIAL ISSUE: LANGUAGE VALUE IN MINORITY LITERATURES

In the wake of Nigerian independence and in contrast to African writers who took an essentialist view that equates language with cultural identity (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example), Chinua Achebe declared that “[a] language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself” (1975: 67). According to his vision, the colonizers’ languages, English and French, even if they were not African languages, because of their grasp on African history, were part and parcel of African experience. Yet, for Achebe, this did not mean that, through the use of these historically imposed linguistic systems, African authors were simply mimicking the colonizers’ *Weltgeist*, but rather they were using them to empower themselves and fashion them to represent their experience. In this sense, their writings constitute what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* as a “minor literature”, that is, a literature which is produced by a minority in a major language in order “to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (1986: 17). “Minor literature” includes three characteristics: “in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization”; “everything in it is political”; and “in it everything takes on a collective value” (1986: 16). The first characteristic enlightens the language question surrounding the discussions of some of the writers studied in this issue of *LANGUAGE VALUE*. Historically dispossessed of their original languages, they turn to English and discover minor usages that open and unsettle the language by creating new meanings. In the same way as Kafka used German, these writers’ deterritorialization of English becomes a strategy to deal with the dilemma of deploying English, the master’s tongue.

These writers have become “minor”, then, not out a personal choice, but out of historical political impositions that deprived them of their native tongues. This is shown in contemporary scholarship in the history of literary writing in the United States.

Unlike other countries with a clear national linguistic policy secured by their constitutions, recently revised histories of the beginnings of the United States highlight the fact that the language of the United States was never English only. *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* (2000), edited by Marc Shell and Werner Sollors, and *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (1998), edited by Werner Sollors, argue for the acceptance of an early multilingual and multicultural country. Viewing English-written literature as the sole dominion for literary American expression is to displace and marginalize a vast array of legitimate American multilingual articulations.

In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur explains that “[w]e tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative” (Ricoeur 1984: 175). The United States is, according to political theorist Michael Walzer in his *What it Means to Be an American*, “a political nation of cultural nationalities”, where “citizenship is separated from every sort of particularism: the state is nationally, ethnically, racially, and religiously neutral” (1992: 9). This issue of *LANGUAGE VALUE* aims at studying how writers belonging to some of these American cultural nationalities have questioned this ideal of neutrality and have used literature to express their experience as part of a history of the defeated and the lost. To such an end, they have used the English language to dismantle the shortcomings of their abused representations and have secured new, although sometimes problematic and controversial, visible textualities.

For Antonio Gramsci, “[e]very time the question of the language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize cultural hegemony” (1991: 183–84). His words clarify the fact that speaking about language is always a political question, and that national languages are

bearers of power relations which affect minority communities in processes of adopting, passively or actively, the dominant culture. In “American Citizenship and Minority Rights”, Pierre-Luc Dostie Proulx explains the complex interplay of diversity and homogeneity that characterizes American life, and how the main reason for its “political stability, in spite of the strong polyethnic constitution of the country”, is due to diverse processes of voluntary integration (1984: 44). In *Multicultural Citizenship*, Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka argues that before the period of the Civil Rights Movement, immigrants were expected to assimilate following what is known as the “Anglo-conformity” model of immigration. Assimilation was considered “essential for political stability, and was further rationalized through ethnocentric denigration of other cultures” (1995: 14). Kymlicka makes a distinction between national and ethnic communities, and claims that, when minorities integrate into a larger community, they shape their political status, following two broad patterns of cultural diversity – national minorities and ethnic minorities. For Kymlicka, a nation is “a historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture. A ‘nation’ in this sociological sense is closely related to the idea of a ‘people’ or a ‘culture’” (1995: 11). These national minorities may have undergone a process of forced conquest or voluntary assimilation. Native Americans and Chicanos (Hispanics in the Southwest who were annexed after the Mexican War of 1846-1848 and who had previously formed part of the northern provinces of Mexico) would come under the first categorization. Ethnic minorities, on the other hand, would include immigrants, whose cultural heritage (even with rights to be respected) must not thwart their expected integration into the larger community. For Kymlicka, however, the main obstacle hindering the creation of “a fluid conception of American multiculturalism remains the disadvantaged and stigmatized status of African Americans” (1998: 73). This is so because “being ‘black’ is an ascribed identity that is difficult for most African Americans to escape or renounce”, and the main challenge is to reduce this stigmatized element, so that being black can come to resemble other ethnic identities in America.

In *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*, Louis Owens declares that human beings have “the power to heal our tongues and learn to speak in any language

on earth or to imagine a new one”. Furthermore, we have “the ability to appropriate and liberate the other’s discourse. Rather than merely reflecting back to him the master’s own voice, we can, in an oft-quoted phrase, learn to make it bear the burden of our own experience” (1998: xiii). In the contributions to this issue, their authors study how the colonizer’s language in the hands or, better, in the tongues of Native American, African American, Japanese Canadian, Chicano, Panlatino and Catalan writers articulate worlds that, paraphrasing Owens’s terminology, “find themselves whole” (1998: xiii). Kalenda Eaton and Agustín Reyes Torres focus on how African American writers have redefined their histories of slavery and racism through the neo-slave genre and children’s literature. Nephtalí de León and María Henríquez-Betancor address the situation of Chicanos and Latinos as national and immigrant groups from different perspectives that shatter the image of a monolithic approach by peoples of Hispanic descent in the United States when confronted by the ongoing attacks to disempower them and eliminate their sense of a distinct national identity. Anna Brígido-Corachán analyses how American Indian writers make a claim for the distinctiveness of their cultural and historical differences through performative uses of language that go back to native traditions of storytelling. Eva Pich Ponce studies Canadian nationalism as it appears linked to the questionings of ethnic minority groups. Unlike the American Anglo-conformity model of assimilation, which advocates a kind of immigrant integration that entails the loss of the different ethnical distinctive cultural elements, Canadian society has created the “multicultural mosaic” metaphor. This multiculturalist policy, adopted in 1971, conveys the image of a country in which different races, cultures and religions live together on an equal footing. It treats “immigrant ethnocultural affiliation as voluntary and encourages the members of the different immigrant groups to interact, to share their cultural heritage, and to participate in common educational, economic, political, and legal institutions” (Kymlicka 1998: 74). However, Pich Ponce focuses on Hiromi Goto, a Japanese Canadian writer, to show how authors writing from within that cultural minority experience denounce this contradiction. Last but not least, Dídac Llorens Cubedo delves into the literary correspondence between Salvador Espriu and African American Cyrus Cassells and how Cassells, from his own liminal condition of being

black and gay, has felt inspired by the plight the Catalan poets living in linguistic and political borderlands of Fascist Spain.

These scholars show, then, how authors belonging to the American minorities analysed here confront American and Canadian processes of assimilation through an energetic reclamation of the English language to shake the embedded principles of cultural and political hegemony. English is undoubtedly a tool that can be used to oppress and dominate, but it is also their most powerful instrument for self-definition and communal resistance.

In “Diasporic Dialogues: The Role of Gender, Language, and Revision in Neo-slave Narrative”, **Kalenda Eaton** studies how, throughout the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, two black authors, Ishmael Reed and Maryse Condé, have re-written early African Diasporic experience through the genre of “neo-slave narratives”. In *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999), Ashraf H.A. Rushdy defined the genre as composed of “contemporary novels that assume the form, the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (1999: 3). These works allowed him to study the social logic of the literary form of the neo-slave narrative: its origins, in the social, intellectual and racial formations of the sixties, its cultural politics as these texts intervene in debates over the significance of race, and its literary politics as these texts make statements on engagements between texts and between mainstream and minority traditions” (1999: 3). Taking into account this previous scholarship, Eaton explains that, unlike the slave narratives composed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Reed’s *Flight to Canada* (1976) and Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992) tell palimpsest narratives deploying new uses of form and style that afford them the ability to re-create, re-member, and re-historicize their texts, in a process that renders their narratives liberated from the static representations of slave experience. Without obviating the seriousness of struggling with the plight of slavery conditions, Reed and Condé confront the reality of chattel slavery in the Americas through narrative experimentation using parody or satire, “a survival technique and a weapon of the weak

against the strong” (Jones 1969: 3) and black humour, to come to terms with the suffocating and annihilating historical circumstances surrounding slaves’ lives. At the same time, Eaton promptly readdresses her analysis to the ways the empowering use of satire in the neo-slave narrative might reinforce the gender and racial stereotypes Reed and Condé are attempting to subvert. Yet, as she explains, Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* (1976) and Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992) go beyond a mere depiction of dynamics of masters and slaves, and delve into the intricacies of black slave experience, Africans in the diaspora, capitalism, and gender relationships.

Eaton discusses the controversies generated around Reed’s negative deployment of black female characters in his text. The language of satire, though, provides his characters with an agency to decide their fate, which in the case of Mammy Barracuda apparently parodies the traditionally idealized mammy figure, a construct of white sentimentalization that ignored the humanity and womanhood of black women. Yet, for all his good intentions, Reed’s use of satire as a playful style does not address the issue of gender imbalance in the text. Whereas his male slave characters seem to subvert the myths about black male experience in slavery through the textual opportunities granted to them in the text to redeem their previously silenced voices, his female slave characters remain a caricature, cornered in the interstices of history.

Unlike Reed’s *Flight to Canada*, Condé, according to Eaton, plays with conventions but steers clear of the caricatures of his text. Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* makes full and explicit use of comic irony and satire to refashion the female protagonist’s servitude in New England and her role in the cause of the seventeenth-century witchcraft hysteria. This neo-slave narrative transforms the flimsy existence of Tituba as a mere footnote in historical records into a full-fledged character, whose voice was always a matter of speculation. To do so, Condé manipulates Western concepts of speech and projects Tituba’s voice through alternate means of communication and parodies of various episodes of historical collective consciousness. Playing with the title of one of Audre Lorde’s celebrated essays (1984/2007), Condé uses the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house and attempts to recreate the colonized language in a new context. Thus, for Eaton, *I, Tituba*, acknowledges the issue of an authoritative

presence that attempts to erase the voice of the subject while at the same time, through imitation and parody, Condé revises the silencing tropes of the nineteenth-century slave narrative and disrupts any serious imaginings of the character. For Eaton, both *Flight to Canada* and *I, Tituba* might be considered examples of what Linda Hutcheon (1988) labelled as “historiographic metafiction”, and thus problematize history’s objectivity and the possibility of knowing the past through historical fiction. As such, both novels are self-reflexive, lay claim to historical characters and events, and manifest a theoretical self-awareness of History and fiction as human constructs that question historical discourse as a discourse of power. Both works then use language with a post-modern reliance upon textual play, parody and historical re-conceptualization.

The question of how literature, through the values encapsulated in language use but also through visual images, gives form to the experience of the cycle of life and how this process needs exploring in accordance with the particular historical circumstances of human beings is studied by **Agustín Reyes Torres** in “Jacqueline Woodson’s Narrative Style in *The Other Side: An African American Picture Book for Children*”. Reyes Torres analyses *The Other Side* (2001), a children’s picture book written by Jacqueline Woodson and beautifully illustrated by E.B. Lewis’s evocative watercolours. The plot of the book brings to mind Robert Frost’s famous poem, “Mending Wall”. Frost published this metaphorical piece written in blank verse in his *North of Boston*, his second collection of poetry. The poem tells about a man who asks why he and his neighbour must rebuild the stone wall dividing their farms each spring. As if offending nature, the wall stones crumble every year and the wall needs rebuilding. “Good fences make good neighbours”, insists his neighbour rejecting any possibility of destroying the border dividing their properties. For Reyes Torres, *The Other Side* is articulated around the central metaphor of the fence that divides blacks from whites, and makes use of children’s literature to delve into the experience of what it means for a young black girl to grow up in the United States and to come to terms with a racial reality that stubbornly builds and, if ever broken, mends dividing walls.

Reyes Torres highlights how African American children’s literature was from its inception a radical site of representational resistance and “has its roots in African

Americans' determination to maintain a sense of themselves as fully human in the face of their legal status as property and to maintain some control over their own lives" (Bishop 2007: 4). Thus, Woodson firmly establishes herself within a tradition strengthened during the first half of the twentieth century to counteract the pernicious effects of black representation by white culture, in an attempt to foster a dignified view of blacks maligned by both written and visual exclusionary practices. *The Other Side* caters for the need to have more children's books through which young African American readers can relate to the protagonists. As in other textual practices, children's literature has always been part and parcel of the process of colonization, where the language of racialization implemented by the colonizing power was imposed on the black community through legal and educational measures. In *The Other Side*, both Woodson and Lewis try, through words and pictures, to break black children's isolationism, promote acceptance of themselves and others, and foster commitment to family and community. Woodson's language is enhanced by Lewis's watercolour illustrations, which set a tone of warmth, happiness and love, and symbolize knowledge, dignity, creativity and self-esteem. Furthermore and in the same way as the written plot, Lewis's expertise and proficiency break old stereotypes about the visual representation of black people. From the tandem struggle against linguistic homogenization and essentialism encapsulated in traditional children's literature, Reyes Torres concludes that *The Other Side* portrays the initiation of children's racial reality in the United States and teaches them to be brave and overlook differences in skin colour in favour of friendship, knowledge and solidarity.

Nephtalí de León, one of the most important contemporary Chicano authors, honours this issue with "The Use and Abuse of Language by a Chicano from Aztlán (both words unknown)" in *A Poet Speaks about...* His piece is not an academic article but a manifesto about what it means to be a Chicano in the United States of the third millennium. De León, who calls himself "the Gypsy vagabond poet of his community", grew up as a migrant worker and lives his life in a territory that might undoubtedly be dubbed as physical, spiritual and linguistic borderlands. Self-taught, his approach to his craft is non-academic and, as he himself highlights, it is the result of his multilingual and multicultural dialogue with immigrants and natives. This has also encouraged him

to freely practise “the visual and literary arts that have a resonance and relation to the community he comes from”. He is also the author of one of the first books to come out in the early 70s that theorize about the creative force of the Chicano community and tackle the issue of their bilingual and bicultural identity: *Chicanos: Our Background & Our Pride* (1972, reissued by PUV in 2010), a volume that traces the origins and traditions of Chicanos and pays homage to their struggle for dignity in Anglo-American territory.

As a manifesto, his article celebrates the importance of language as the most relevant tool of humankind, and focuses on a very specific use and abuse of it: how it has identified, trapped, occupied and liberated the Chicano people of the nation of Aztlán. De León explains that Chicanos are those Native Americans often referred to as Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, Mestizos, Cholos and Raza. In fact, they are the descendants of the people that once lived and continue to live in their homeland, Aztlán. As such, their native language is neither English nor Spanish, but Azteca Náhuatl, a language suppressed to such a degree that very few Chicanos are even aware of it. The political oppression exercised by the United States government on Chicanos through the exercise of a policy of genocide, based on the use and abuse of language, is responsible for what De León calls the life of semi-existence of Chicanos. The abuse of language originated the blurring of the race and triggered an extreme xenophobia about their presence that has historically brought about the dehumanization of Chicanos through a process of their being labelled as “illegals”, “undocumented” and “aliens”. In America, claims De León, the possessors have ignored the language of the dispossessed, have used language politics to mask unbalanced power relations which cloak, deceive, distract and euphemize “what has been a constant realpolitik of destruction meant to annihilate my people, community and ancestral memory”. Political violence exerted on the Chicano community has, according to De León, succeeded in erasing their language. Yet, constant aggressions have failed to obliterate the most important element in their ancestral roots and in the memory of themselves, namely, their knowledge that they descend from a people of mythical proportions.

Similarly to Nephtalí de León, **María Henríquez-Betancor** devotes her article to the Chicano experience, yet with a focus on Gloria Anzaldúa's construction of identity as "the new mestiza" in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), a turning point in the studies of race, class, gender and sex in the 1980s. Henríquez-Betancor analyses how, in the seventh essay of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, entitled "*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*", the author contests and revises inherited gender and cultural roles. Anzaldúa rejects the dual personality that classifies her as a Mexican-American and embraces the "new mestiza's" plural identity in order to break alienating dichotomies of thought. The "new mestiza" is a survivor who has overcome the rupture with cultural patriarchal patterns and the limitations of gender. For Henríquez-Betancor, the consciousness of Anzaldúa's "new mestiza" is "a structural process of change in which the acceptance of cultural and personal problems, the meeting and intermixing of different groups with which Anzaldúa identifies, and the possibility of reconciliation with the white society conflate in a linear and non-linear fashion". She questions the concept of masculinity in the Chicana community to finally return to her homeland, but carrying out a transformation.

Henríquez-Betancor explains how Anzaldúa traces the journey towards the mestiza consciousness and how Anzaldúa represents three voices – the "I", the "we" and the "she" – as her strategies to explore what she deems as her collective identity as a Chicana and as a "new mestiza". This positioning of herself in three different voices bespeaks the complexity of her identity. When she uses the "I", she links herself with her personal identity, defines her feminism and creates a new culture as a "new mestiza". Her "I" is a new hybrid identity that transcends her origins to become a critical being. When she uses the third person singular, "she" ("the new mestiza"), she adopts a chosen subject with the purpose of triggering change, and it becomes a potential "we" since it invites the collectivity of Chicana women, but also homosexual men of all races and nationalities together with lesbians, to join in the regenerative process of establishing a new and powerful identity. For Henríquez-Betancor, Anzaldúa creates what she calls "a collective and cultural self-definition as she mixes the personal with meaningful shared cultural elements" in a process that is non-linear and progressive, fluid and concrete. This multiplicity of identities resists exclusionary linguistic practices and aims at a real

representation of transnational historical memories, forging solidarity across experiential borders.

Anna M. Brígido-Corachán's “*Wordarrows: The Performative Power of Language in N. Scott Momaday's Non-Fiction Work*” analyses how contemporary Native American literary works, mostly written in English, reflect on the role of tribal native languages as part of their legacy, taking into account the fact that out of the two hundred indigenous languages spoken in United States now, only twenty are taught at home as a first language. Brígido-Corachán argues how the unstoppable erosion of tribal languages by the overwhelming presence and historical educational imposition of English on Native Americans explains why most contemporary authors use English and exhibit very little command of the languages once spoken by their ancestors. That being the case, Native American writers, if interested in contributing to reverse the colonial imbalance, must necessarily subvert the language of historical subjugation and dominion, and deploy new language strategies to rewrite their personal and communal histories.

Her essay then focuses on Momaday's non-fiction piece *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969/2001) and on his seminal essay “The Man Made of Words” (1997), as examples of orality and performative conceptions of language in the Kiowa storytelling tradition. In “The Man Made of Words”, Momaday declares: “We cannot exhaust the power of words; that power is intrinsic”. This is further explained in his essay “The Native Voice in American Literature”, where he defines what language stands for in the Indian tribal worlds: “Words are intrinsically powerful. They are magical. By means of words one can bring about physical change in the universe”. Momaday holds a relevant position within what, in 1983, Kenneth Lincoln baptized as the *Native American Renaissance*. In fact, the crucial event that marked its origin was the awarding of the 1968 Pulitzer Prize to Momaday, a Kiowa writer, for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. After his national and international recognition, other Native American writers followed. Yet, the division of Native American traditions into two stages has been opposed by some critics, since the period inaugurated by Momaday obscures not only the written work of previous nineteenth-century authors, but also the extraordinary legacy of oral works created in the different tribal languages spread around the North American continent.

For Brígido-Corachán, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* – thematically divided into three blocks having to do with the Momaday’s personal spatial dis-locations – traces the movement of his affiliation strategies into tribal culture from his academic studies in California. This journey back into the heart of his indigenous community is shaped by juxtaposing not only words (the mythical, the historical/anthropological, the family version of stories and reminiscences) but also his father’s drawings, and creates a polyphonic version of Kiowa historiography that breaks the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and myth. Thus, for Brígido-Corachán, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* becomes a resisting text that questions the authority of the written word and echoes the structural and aesthetic traits that conform traditional native storytelling, boldly recreating its performative aspects as it reproduces an audience, a place, a particular oral rhythm and the voices from the past. As a Native American storyteller, Momaday develops what Brígido-Corachán calls “a sort of cartographic language” in this work. He facilitates a map for readers with the paratextual pieces wrapping up the text, thus allowing them to infer ultimate meaning out of the active weaving of the passages in their minds. Taking into account Gerald Vizenor’s new coinages and the way they construct a new vision of the world that moves away from the hackneyed language of victimry, Brígido-Corachán concludes that Momaday’s language can also be articulated around the notion of Vizenorian *wordarrowary* and, as such, a powerful vehicle that opens up a new historical space for his personal and communal imagination. Engaging in an act that Arnold Krupat calls “anti-imperial translation”, Momaday’s performative use of storytelling both in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and “The Man Made of Words” reconstitutes the English language as a linguistic code capable of tracing new and transfiguring *Kiowascapes*.

In “Memory and Language in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*”, **Eva Pich Ponce** focuses on how Japanese Canadian author Hiromi Goto deploys linguistic codes to construct social and cultural identities that break stereotypical images of the Japanese in the country. The novel describes the intercultural experience of these Asian immigrants through the lives of three generations of women belonging to the same family. The polyphonic nature of the narrative, the choral rendering of living in new cultural and social borderlands, enhances Goto’s intention to embrace a diversity of discourses on

immigration, ethnicity, and identity. These discourses are widely represented by the inclusion of personal recollections, Japanese legends and journal articles. Taking into account the metafictional categorization of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Pich Ponce analyses Goto's subversion of realism and her strategies to destabilize narrative unity, reliable point of view and coherent character presentation, in an attempt to problematize Canadian fixed notions of multiculturalism. For Goto, Pich Ponce argues, the protagonists' construction of an identity together with their willingness to keep their native cultural and national legacies are mainly rendered in terms of linguistic conflicts. In the face of the colonizing changes suffered by these characters, Goto tackles the thorny question of assimilation in the Canadian scenario. Naoe, the grandmother, tries desperately and against all odds to remain faithful to her roots, refuses to forget her past and Japanese culture, and defiantly rejects using the English language. Her language is pierced by memories, pain and desire that, far from romanticizing the past, question her native culture and history. Keiko, her daughter, decides to go Canadian for the sake of Muriel, her own daughter, who has embraced English as her language. Her will to assimilate into Canadian culture reveals how the country's rhetoric of multicultural acceptance is in fact pervaded by racism and homogenizing tendencies that betray an exclusionary politics.

Language, then, becomes a site of struggle for Goto as she describes the reapproachment of the three women through their deployment of new linguistic practices. The narrative includes many words in Japanese without translation into English, a conscious strategy to invert the relationship between the margin/immigrant Japanese and the centre/national Canadian, and highlight the fact that differences exist. This omission forces readers to reflect upon the fact of translation and how new kinds of communication can be established through body language and imagination. The protagonists change names, play with Japanese and English throughout the text, composing a hybrid narrative that challenges accepted notions of identity. Refashioning the oral tradition of telling stories, these characters reinvent themselves as hybrid ethnic subjects and show that, as one of them declares, the nature of words changes with the telling. Thus, their ultimate truths offer multiple perspectives that disrupt readers' stereotypical expectations about the Japanese immigrant minority in Canada.

In “The Voice of the Cypress. Cyrus Cassells and the Poetry of Salvador Espriu”, **Dídac Llorens Cubedo** tackles transnational and translinguistic influences between one of the most revered twentieth-century Catalan poets, Salvador Espriu (1913-1985), and African American poet Cyrus Cassells. As the president of the International Association for the Defence of Menaced Languages and Cultures, during the early 1970s, Espriu campaigned for the survival of minority languages spoken all over the world. As a writer, he produced a body of literature that attests to his unflinching vindication of Catalan, a language persecuted during Franco’s regime. Cassells’s own sense of marginalization, as a man who is both black and gay, has drawn him to read and translate Catalan poetry into English. Similarly to Espriu, he is a poet in debt with previous poetical traditions and poets. Llorens Cubedo focuses on Cassells’s poem “To the Cypresses Again and Again” (1986), a piece published a year after Espriu’s death, which was meant to pay homage to the Catalan bard. His analysis on aspects such as the point of view, the imagery and the themes, as well as his exploration of the reasons that engaged Cassells’s passion for Espriu, shows how two apparently divergent poetical traditions converge through space and time in Cassells’s poetry. Llorens Cubedo brings to the fore the importance of how artists’ creativity is reinforced across historical, personal and communal experiences and, most relevant to the point analysed in this issue, how it is forged across and against different languages.

Finally, before concluding this introduction, it is worth remembering that, with regard to language rights in American multicultural society, in 1998 the Linguistic Society of America issued a “Statement of Language Rights”. This document recognizes that the eradication of most of the indigenous languages of the United States was a “deliberate government policy” and that their decline “has been closely linked to the loss of much of the culture of their speakers”. And secondly that the country is “home to numerous immigrant languages other than English”, the presence of which offers “both challenges and opportunities”. Both indigenous and immigrant non-English languages conform a multilingual America and present the nation with “many benefits and opportunities” (1998: 389-390). Hence, the contributions to this issue of *LANGUAGE VALUE* attest to the multiplicity of approaches followed by ethnic minority American and Canadian writers to tell their stories, leaving behind complaints of the colonizing effect of English

and revealing its liberating potential in the tongues of the inhabitants of linguistic borderlands.

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