

# Ethnic Relations

**Mail Order Bride** by Mark Kalesniko (Victoria University E.J. Pratt call no. PN6727 .K2715 M35 2001)

Monty Wheeler, aged 39, is a Canadian comic store owner and virgin surrounded by things that he collects (including a stash of "oriental" porn which creates a series of female Asian stereotypes in his mind). Kyung Seo is his Korean "mail-order" bride, who speaks perfect English, smokes pot, and poses nude for a Chinese-Canadian photographer. Their story is powerfully told in a graphic novel format and examines the very real contemporary issue of women searching for a better life in the Western world through being matched with lonely men.

**George & Rue** by George E. Clarke (Robarts call no. PS8555 .L395 G46 2005)

George Elliott Clarke's *George & Rue* takes place in Barker's Point, New Brunswick during the 1940s. At the time, the town was fraught with racial tension. On one side, there were the Africanadians, a community struggling to better their circumstances; on the other, the town's Whites, who saw the struggling black community as a threat to the established order. In 1949, brothers George and Rufus Hamilton committed the heinous crime of bludgeoning one of the town's taxi drivers to death. The brothers were both hung for the crime and the murder site still carries the name "Hammetown" to this day. Clarke reopens this dark chapter in Canada's history by reimagining the lives of these two brothers up until their deaths in 1949.

**Slash** by Jeannette Armstrong (Univesity College call no. PS8551 .R574 S4 1988)

The social and political challenges facing Canada's Aboriginal community are seldom discussed in the mainstream media. Jeannette C. Armstrong bravely tackles these issues in her acclaimed novel *Slash*. The novel's narrator and protagonist, Thomas "Slash" Kelasket, has a huge chip on his shoulder. He spends so much of his time and energy being angry at the outside world that he is unable to connect with his true self- an Okanagan man living in politically heated times. He is a lost man afraid to confront the realities of his present situation. Eventually, Slash finds himself and returns to living a more traditional way of life with family. However, upon returning to family and traditional life, he must confront some of the darker realities of life on a reserve. *Slash* has gained notable acceptance among Canada's academic community.

**Two Murders in My Double Life** by Josef Skvorecky (Robarts call no. PG5308.S52 T86 1999)

In Skvorecky's *Two Murders in My Double Life*, the narrator and protagonist lives a playful double life. In one life, he is steeped in his "old country" past, surrounded by émigrés, exiles, and old friends. This life is filled with old rivalries, betrayals, nostalgia, gossip, love and friendship that have survived through revolutions and wars. His past is also brought to life by his wife's business of publishing literature that was suppressed in their native country. The other life is as a pampered academic in a Toronto university. Both worlds are suddenly rocked by two separate murders: The one in the academic world reads like a tacky detective novel, while the "old world" murder reads like a Greek tragedy. The contrast of the two worlds, and the way Skvorecky frames the murders that take place within them, makes this an original, entertaining, and worthwhile read.

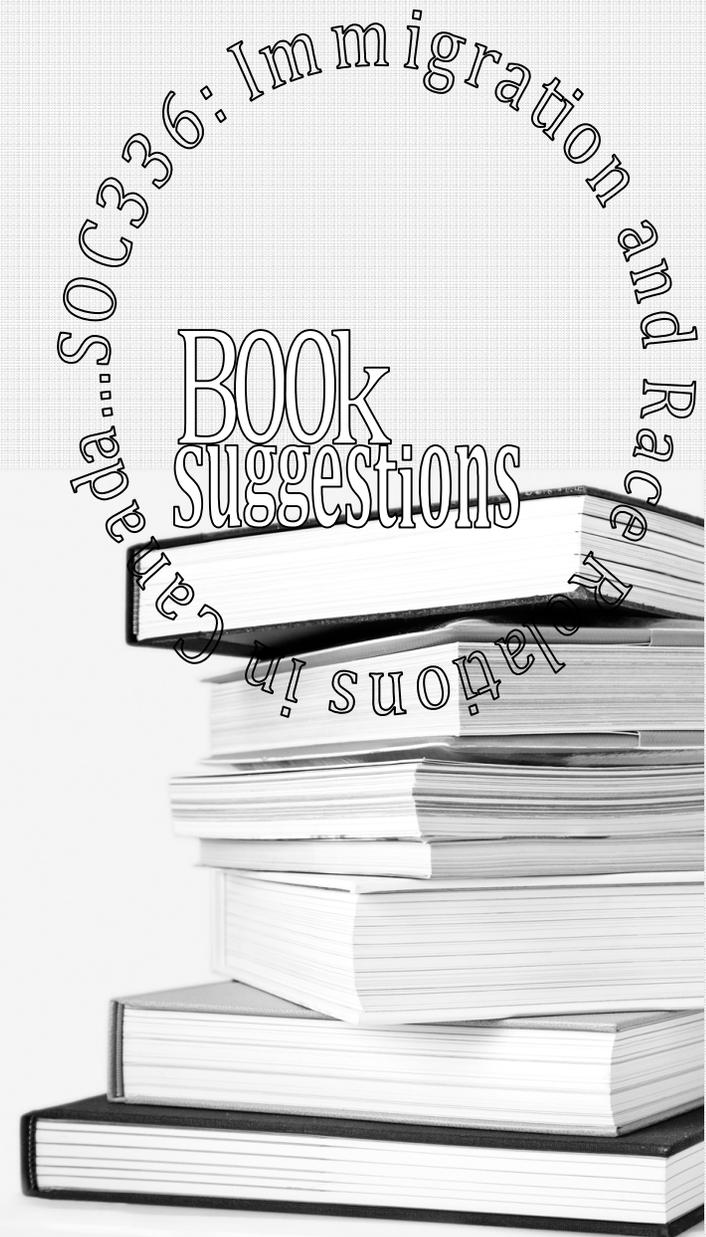
**Under the Ribs of Death** by John Marlyn (Robarts call no. PS8525 .A74 U5 1990)

John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* is set in the immigrant quarter of Winnipeg's North End during the Great Depression. The novel's protagonist, Sandor Hunyadi, is young boy ashamed of his Hungarian ancestry who yearns to be a "real Canadian". Embittered by the social degradation and poverty that plagues his life; Sandor decides to reject the idealistic and moralistic philosophy of his father and strives to become a successful businessperson. In his quest for a better life, Sandor comes to realize that his drive for material success was baseless and rediscovers the virtue of his father's teachings. "Under the Ribs of Death" wrestles with the complexities of assimilation and is relevant to a contemporary audience.

**Truth and Bright Water** By Thomas King (Robarts call no. PS8571 .I67 T78 1999b)

Thomas King's *Truth & Bright Water* is a set in the prairie region along the Canada-U.S. border. On the U.S. side of the border is the small town of Truth, Montana; On the Canadian side is the reserve town of Bright Water. In addition to being divided along political lines, the towns are also separated by a river. The narrator and protagonist is a teenage aboriginal boy named Tecumseh, who witnesses a mysterious woman jumping off a cliff and into the river. The plot revolves around Tecumseh's nomadic interactions with relatives on both sides of the border, particularly his cousin Lum, and his quest to find out the story behind the mysterious woman (which is partially resolved in the end). In addition to being a coming of age story with elements of intrigue and mystery, "Truth and Bright Water" touches on issues of racial identity, nomadic life, and traditional customs in the contemporary age.

\* Graphics courtesy of Microsoft Word



# The Immigrant Experience

***The Amazing Absorbing Boy*** by Rabindranath Maharaj (Robarts call no. PS8576 .A45 A62 2010)

Following the death of his mother, inexperienced and naive Samuel emigrates from his native country Trinidad to Toronto to live with his estranged father in Regent Park. Not having seen his father for over 10 years, Samuel gets thrust into a new and foreign world and quickly realizes that he is a burden. As he drifts through his days, Samuel grows lonesome in the “big mall of a country”. However, he clings to memories of superheroes — his mentors — as he encounters molemen, chimeras, trolls, super-villains, and a multitude of sidekicks which guide him as he explores Toronto’s urban multicultural landscape. “Maharaj . . . offers an exhilarating interpretation of immigrant experience. . . . [And] superbly articulates the longing for home, on the one hand, and the dream of success in Canada on the other.” — *The Globe and Mail*

***Behind the Face of Winter*** by Nigel Thomas (Robarts call no. PS8589 .H636 B43 2001)

Set in Montreal and on the fictional island *Isabela* in the Caribbean, this coming-of-age novel highlights Pedro’s journey from a nurturing yet impoverished home into the world of the poor black youth in Canada. *Behind the Face of Winter* is a story about the life of Pedro’s immigrant youth as he sways on the edge of oblivion and self-destruction amongst racist and brutal police forces, insensitive educational systems, and little prospects for the future. Although a hard story and desperately bleak, it is undeniably beautiful as it reveals the numerous and destructive secrets we all keep – even from ourselves – and the spiritual costs of concealing those secrets.

***Where She Has Gone*** by Nino Ricci (Robarts call no. PS8585 .I23 W43 1998X)

*Where She Has Gone* deals with the longing to make sense of one’s own personal history. It tells the story of a young boy Vittorio Innocente whose mother had an affair and died giving birth to his half-sister Rita and whose father emigrated from Italy to Canada. Set in Toronto and then in Italy, soon after his father’s death Vittorio becomes drawn to his half-sister as he realizes that although he has been yearning to rekindle a relationship with her he has also been longing to discover their shared history and secret burdens, which originated in a small village in Italy where Vittorio was born.

***Lost in Translation: A life in a new language*** by Eva Hoffman (Robarts call no. E184 .J5 H63 1989)

*Lost in Translation* is a classic of exile and immigrant literature, and a penetrating and poetic coming-of-age memoir of immigrant Eva. Born and raised in Central Europe in the 1950s, the book moves from Eva’s childhood in Cracow, Poland to her adolescence in Vancouver, British Columbia where she struggles and finds it nearly impossible to forge a new identity in her foreign environment. Eva then journeys to Texas and Massachusetts for her university years where she continues to toil under a false identity and ultimately ends her journey in New York City where she works for the New York Times Book Review as an editor and writer. This story challenges its readers to reconsider their own childhoods, cultures, autobiography and language as its multi-layered narrative encompasses such themes as the costs and benefits of changing cultures, the defining power of language, the construction of personal identity, the effects of a lingering nostalgia and the profound consequences for a generation of post-war Jews of Communism and Nazism.

***The Concubine's Children*** by Denise Chong (Robarts call no. CS39 .C42 C46 1994)

This is the true story of Denise Chong’s grandparents, written through letters, photographs, and her mother’s memories. Chan-Sam leaves his home in China in the early twentieth century to pursue a dream of the “Gold Mountain” in Vancouver. He leaves his wife and children at home and takes with him a seventeen year old beautiful concubine, May-ying. Two families, separated by an ocean, are supported through May-ying’s work in tea houses. Six decades later, May-ying’s granddaughter travels back to China and reconnects with the other family.

## Intergenerational Relations

***The Innocence of Age*** by Neil Bissoondath (Robarts call no. PS8553 .I78 I55 1992)

This novel is set in the Black community of Toronto. An immigrant father and son, Pasco and Daniel, struggle with poverty, racism, and conflicting ideals. Pasco’s worldview is incompatible with that of his son who is lured by promises of power and easy cash. Daniel sees drugs and theft as his only options for escaping the type of life to which he and his father have been relegated. This is a story about survival, desperation, and love.

***Holding My Breath*** by Sidura Ludwig (Robarts call no. PS8623 .U387 H64 2007)

Set in the North End of Winnipeg, Canada, spanning from the 1950’s and into the 70’s, *Holding My Breath* is a coming of age story. Told through the eyes of Beth Levy this book chronicles the life of a young Jewish woman struggling to discover her own identity and the delicate balance between living up to family expectations (in a household of two generations of strong Jewish women) while trying to follow one’s dreams and longing to escape while navigating between the new and old world, and the mounting pressures to conform to traditions.

***My Darling Dead Ones*** by Erika de Vasconcelos (Robarts call no. PS8593 .A83 M92 1997)

*My Darling Dead Ones* tells the powerful story of four generations of women who are separated by physical and cultural boundaries. Fiona, a young mother living in Montreal is involved in an affair. Her mother, Leninha, has become a recluse from the world and has retreated into herself and her gardening. Her grandmother, Helena, is a passionate Portuguese woman with many secrets and her Great-Aunt, Magdalena, is the matriarch holding them all together. A web of love letters, memories, oral history, myths, poetry, and journal entries artistically weave the lives of the characters. The reader is treated to the beauty of old Portugal and modernity of today’s Toronto.

***All That Matters*** by Wayson Choy (Robarts call no. PS8555 .H68 A64 2005)

This coming of age story takes us to Vancouver in the 1930s and 1940s. It centers on the First Son of a Chinese-Canadian family, Kiam-Kim. The process of growing up is complicated for Kiam-Kim by a struggle with the intersection of the old, traditional Chinese world with his new Canadian world. His grandmother, Poh Poh, does not like that he speaks English or has an Irish friend. Meanwhile, the onset of a world war means that Kiam-Kim is faced with the decision of whether to go back and fight for China or stay in a country that he considers home but that won’t accept Chinese soldiers.

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