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Surviving in the City: A Comparative Study of Qiu Huadong's The City Chariot [Cheng Shi Zhan Che] and Tomson Highway's Kiss of the Fur Queen

by

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To grandpa

It is one of the regrets in life that I missed the last chance to see you

I am very upset and sorry

I know you loved me and probably still love me in ways that are imperceptible to me

You will not be able to understand what I wrote, but I know you will be proud

I miss you and I love you

Abstract

This is a comparative study of a Chinese novel and a Canadian novel, which share similar theme of depicting young artists migrating from the country to cities. The purpose of this research has been to explore how the migration process affects the identities of the artists and how they negotiate their identities in the new urban environment. From juxtaposing these two texts, I want to argue that consumer culture has transformed the migrants' perspectives and values, leaving them in an "in-between" situation as they are unable to fully identify with either home or the city and are thus forever haunted by the sense of homeless. Therefore, in order to negotiate the hazards of everyday life and to assert their sense of belonging in a complex urban setting, they use sexuality and ethnicity as "points of alignment."

Preface

It took way longer than I expected to finally finish the thesis and it has been, well, not easy. Surprisingly, the dragging process is mainly due to my depression rather than the thesis itself. There are other reasons that triggered depression, like the pleasant Edmonton weather and loss of my grandpa, but mostly is my false thinking pattern. I have some sort of perfection complex: everything must work out perfectly as I planned and if it did not, it is because I am bad. I kept asking my therapist whether she thinks I am bad. She smiled and said:" you think you are bad." It is a long way, lots of digression, therapy and antidepressant, for me to realize that what I perceived as fact was merely my imagination. It is OK that things do not work out the perfect way because normally they don't. I was reading a book on yoga the other day and some of the lines are really illuminating. It says that when doing yoga, you need to practice with a sense of *maitri,* a Sanskrit meaning "unconditional friendliness toward one's experience" and not to worry about being what you think you should be. The practice of yoga is a way to focus inward and relax into who you are rather than a competition against your ego or others. I did the opposite of *maitri* this entire time—I was very disappointed and discouraged by myself, thinking it's not going to work out, which made me act hostile towards the thesis process and possibly towards people who were trying to help me.

The thesis process did SEEM more difficult for me than for others and I did not like it most of the time—I might change my mind when I get old. But I should, and I actually am, proud for what I did and for what I had to overcome. I want to end the preface by a poem, simply because it is a reflection of my own experience.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

Portia Nelson

I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in
I am lost…I am helpless
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street,
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in…it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down a different street.

Acknowledgment

I am indebted to lots of people who helped and encouraged me during my thesis process. First, I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisors, Dr. Albert Braz and Dr. Daniel Fried, both of whom are very dedicated and helpful. Their advice, from the structure to word choice, has been most helpful. Also, I want to thank professor emeritus Leung Laifang for her encouragement and help, in my academic work and much beyond that. I want to extend my appreciation to my therapist Shauna Rosiechuk. I probably would not stick to the end if were not for her encouragement and expertise. My dear friends Peter and Jolie Haug have read my early drafts and edited for me. Their love and their strong faith in me have made the process easier. Some friends offered advice in revising the drafts: Joy Gunnaway and Shumaila Hemani. Other friends offered their support and kindness: Zhu Liangxu, Tan Ke, Wang Xiuhua, Xie Liqi, Ding Ding, Li Xiaopei, Bahar Brocken, Shao Dan, Yan Ting, Zhou Yan, Tarzan Mak, Cheng Ming, Guan Ningfeng, Bijan Asdaghi, and my acupuncturist Liu Haiyan. Of course, there is always the unconditional love from my family, my parents and my grandparents.

I am grateful for everything that I have experienced and yet to experience, but mostly I am grateful that the thesis process ended and for all the people that have helped me along the way.

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Introduction

Migration is defined as a form of spatial mobility between one geographical unit and another, generally involving a change in residence from the place of origin or place of departure to the place of destination or place of arrival (Van de Walle 92). The phenomenon of migration has become a basic feature of social life around the world today, the cause of which lies in an increasingly globalized and interlocked world system. Massive populations have migrated across national borders, from the countryside to the city and between socio-economic regions, for various reasons: war, social disruption or hope for a better life. As Rina Benmayor points out, migration is essentially the act of crossing and the underlying assumption is that, “at a certain point, migration ends and a process of assimilation/integration and upward mobility begins” (Benmayor and Skotnes, “Some Reflections” 8). So the issue of how migrants reconfigure their identities to adapt and flourish in the new environment becomes the focus.

Migration and identity are profoundly interconnected. The research on these issues focuses mostly on the identity problem in international migration, thus making border-crossing and citizenship the focal points. Benmayor and Skotnes’s collection On Migration and Identity explores the identity issue as people move between fundamentally different cultures and

in a number of different social settings: Puerto Rican women in New York, West Indian families in Great Britain, and even transnationalized Third World students and intellectuals. For example, Elizabeth Crespo tackles the issue of Puerto Rican women experiencing racial discrimination when moving to New York City (138). Mary Chamberlain's research illustrates how Barbadian families evolve through the trans-generational migratory traditions and how their children deal with class and race and construct complex transnational identities. Similarly, the informants of Third World students and intellectuals demonstrate that people who cross different borders form hybridized identities (Chamberlain 121). The complexity of the issue of migration and identity should not be overlooked since migration and identity intersect different branches of social and cultural sciences, sociology, anthropology and cultural/literary studies.

Different methodologies can be adopted for conducting research given the interdisciplinary nature of the issues. The widely used sociological approach is designed to analyze life stories, personal testimonies, and individual experiences based on interviews. The value of such an approach, as noted by Benmayor and Skotnes, is that "it allows glimpses into the lived interior of migration processes and it allows understanding of how moving matrices of social forces impact and shape individuals, and how individuals in turn, respond, act, and produce change

in the larger social arena" (14).

However, what is missing from the current research is an analysis of the identity problem within internal migration process. There is a massive body of literature produced on identity by literary theorists, but most of it focuses on identity as a general concept rather than situate it in a particular scenario, say migration. The reason why this particular issue has not been really taken up by either sociologists or literary theorists is probably that for sociologists, the contributing factors like race, gender, and citizenship do not seem to change much when people migrate within a country. Also for the literary theorists, if they grapple with a complex and multifaceted issue like identity, the whole analytical structure probably will not incorporate such a specific lead. Therefore, in my thesis, I attempt to explore the identity issue within the internal migration process, more specifically, countryside-city migration. Rather than use the sociological approach of conducting interviews and collecting personal testimonies, I choose to do a comparative study of two novels—The City Chariot by the Chinese author Qiu Huadong and Kiss of the Fur Queen by the Canadian author Tomson Highway— which document the experiences of young artists migrating from the country to cities. The purpose of my project is to explore, through the reading of Qiu's and Highway's novels, how the migration process affects the identities of the artists and how they negotiate their identities in

the new urban environment.

The value of choosing novels and doing textual analysis is that novels are more representative than individual stories since the narration allows the author to synthesize different narratives. Also, both novels are semi-autobiographical, so the authors do project their own experiences into the narration, which is a combination of personal testimonies and literary interventions. Besides, the validity of the oral testimonies lies in the truthfulness of the interviewees, which cannot be determined by the interviewer. But for novels and textual analysis, particularly for semi-autobiographical novels, the factual basis is implied.

From juxtaposing these two texts, it is clear that, despite the geographical and cultural differences, socio-economic conditions and career advancement opportunities in the cities are the major reasons that prompt the artists to migrate. For both novels, consumer culture becomes the dominant urban culture, and the initial urban experiences of the young artists are marked by the feeling of alienation, otherness and displacement due to their inability to identify with the consumer culture. I want to argue that consumer culture has transformed the migrants' perspectives and values, leaving them in an "in-between" situation as they are unable to fully identify with either home or the city and are thus forever haunted by the sense of homeless. Therefore, in order to negotiate the hazards of

everyday life and to assert their sense of belonging in a complex urban setting, they use sexuality and ethnicity as “points of alignment.”

Qiu’s The City Chariot depicts a group of wandering avant-garde artists—poets, writers, literary critics, photographers, independent film makers, performance artists, body artists and pop singers—who come to Beijing to seek their fortunes, fame, and dreams. The novel is a rather discontinuous series of anecdotes about the artists, punctuated by the narrator Zhu’s own meditative monologues and the description of the city. As artists, they use their artistry to express themselves and, precisely because of the abstract means they employ, most of their works are not well received or appreciated. They are talented people full of aspiration and ideas, but they live an indigent life, lingering around the outskirts of the city and starving half of the time. Since the story takes place in Beijing, they are exposed to the temptation of urban life, the glamorous and materialistic lifestyle. The sharp contrast between the two experiences creates in them anxiety, disappointment, and depression, which leads them to resort to drugs, alcohol, and sex to release tension and to seek their true identities.

Zhu has an affair with a rich housewife named Yu Hong, but the affair gradually evolves into a real, compassionate relationship between the two. It is fulfilling in that they come to realize who they are and what they want to do with life. Yu Hong decides to divorce her husband later on, but driven by

humiliation, her husband stabs her to death while she is on stage. Zhu Wen, meanwhile, reflecting on his experiences in the city, the struggles, the loss of his love, and the tempting urban lifestyle, decides to go back home.

The urbanization process that took place in the West during the nineteenth century happened in China in the late twentieth century, which is almost one and a half century later. It was the Open-Up policy of the 1980s that stimulated the growth of the economy and, in turn, expedited urbanization. In the 1990s, when the sweeping tide of economic globalization hit China, it also brought consumerism to Chinese cities, which has changed the contemporary city culture and laid the cultural context for the emergence of a new genre of fiction in the nineties: urban fiction. Qiu Huadong is one of the so called *Xin Sheng Dai* writers who mainly capture the hustle and bustle of city life and how the creation of a consumer society has changed people's values and lifestyles. Those writers work from a rather personal standpoint: some women authors like Wei Hui and Mian Mian are known for their depiction of the urban experiences of young women and their unrestrained exploration of their sexuality; He Junzhi is more concerned about what is happening outside the mainstream cultures; and Han Dong is more interested in finding the beauty amidst mundane life (Jia 129-32).

What differentiates Qiu from his peers is his unique outsider

perspective in portraying the city; the fact that he himself is an outsider to the city also affects how he approaches his texts. The major problem with Qiu's writing is that his characters appear to be quite similar; it is almost as if he were mass-producing a certain type of personage in his stories rather than develop each individual character as the plot unfolds. Born in a small town in Xinjiang province, in Northwest China, Qiu came to work in Beijing after he graduated from university. He is a very prolific writer, especially given that he has a full-time job as a journalist. Qiu has published three volumes of short stories: Don't Trap me [不要把我困住], The New Generation of Urban Dwellers [都市新人类], and Beijing Rock n' Roll [摇滚北京]; three novels, The Taboo of the Summer[夏天的禁忌], The Promise of the Night [夜晚的诺言], and The Turmoil of the Day[白昼的躁动], besides The City Chariot, and two volumes of poetry, The Flower and the Rock [花朵与岩石] and From Fire to Water [从火到水] (Fan 76-77).

Kiss of the Fur Queen portrays two Cree brothers leaving their home in a Cree community in northern Manitoba for a Catholic residential school and later for Winnipeg and Toronto. It is a coming-of-age story, fraught with the pain of being separated from their family and Cree heritage and undergoing the brutal sexual abuse by a priest as well as difficult experiences in the cities. Highway adopts a semi-autobiographical approach based on his own experiences and those of his younger brother. The novel begins

before the two central characters are born, when their father Abraham becomes the first Indian to win the world championship dog derby. After a carefree childhood in the small Cree village of Eemanipiteepitat, the brothers are sent to a Catholic residential school where they are deprived of their Cree heritage. Their artistic talents are developed as they move first to Winnipeg and then to Toronto (Methot 1; Fee 156). Jeremiah becomes a promising pianist, who later ends his career because of his alcoholicism and identity crisis, but eventually overcomes his problems with the help of the Fur Queen and his brother. His younger brother Gabriel becomes a well known ballet dancer, and his unbridled exploration of his sexuality eventually leads his to death, which seems to be the ultimate salvation for him.

Highway was born into a Cree family on a reserve in the northwest of Manitoba. He studied classical music and English literature, but instead of pursuing a career as a professional concert pianist, he decided to make his talent useful to his people, and became the Artistic Director of the Native Earth Performing Arts Company in Toronto, where he directed new plays by emerging Native playwrights. He is probably best known for his award-winning plays The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing. The former features a group of Native women dreaming of winning the biggest bingo in the world. Highway weaves in traditional Cree

elements, the Trickster figure and the Cree language into the writing. The latter work, the second in a seven-play cycle, takes place on the same reserve, featuring seven Native men and the game of hockey (Nothof 34-45).

Kiss of the Fur Queen seems to be a continuation of his previous plays in that like them, it draws the reader's attention to the survival experiences of the Native community in a society dominated by white culture, the brutal sexual abuse of the Aboriginals and how the Native spirituality, represented by the Trickster, functions in their healing process—only instead of taking place on a reserve, most of the plot unfolds in the city. Moreover, the protagonists possess artistic talent and the novel depicts the interaction between the Native artists and the milieu of the city, which gives the readers new insights into the urban experiences of Aboriginal people.

Although these two novels differ a great deal in terms of geography and cultural background, the more favorable socio-economic condition of the city, the career advancement opportunities, and the educational resources are the major reasons that the young artists in both novels migrate. Globalization is not a country-specific phenomenon and migration as part of the consequences of globalization happens in every part of the world. The economic reform and the internationalization of the Chinese

economy have caused large-scale rural-urban migration, thus creating a unique “floating population” in major Chinese urban centers (Logan 21). The “floating population” always refers to migrants, without much education, doing menial jobs in the plants for international corporations and living in enclaves on the urban fringe; so the wandering artists, though do not exactly fall into this category, have similar experiences as the “floating population.” Zhu can live a comfortable life in the small town where he comes from, but he wants to seek fame and fortune in a metropolis like Beijing. In contrast, for the Okimasis brothers, the pursuit of their artistic talents and Gabriel’s troubled sexuality have made their moving to the city a must. The lack of economic prospects on reserves entails limited employment opportunities, which is particularly the case for Jeremiah and Gabriel if they want to become artists.

The identity issue for the artists becomes imminent as they enter the urban milieu and start to interact with the consumer culture. Modern cities are no longer merely geographical spaces where people live, but socio-cultural constructs with specific cultural forms that shape people’s views of themselves, their values, and lifestyles. Iain Chambers asserts that migration, whether it is from Africa to the Americas, from a rural space to an urban one, or from ex-colonies to metropolitan centers, involves a complex transformation (26), which is “inextricably tied to the

metropolisation of the globe, where the model of the city becomes the model of the contemporary world" (27).

Chambers uses the concept of "metropolitan esthetics" to refer to a latent democratization of the use of contemporary sounds, images, and spaces for an unsuspected politics of everyday life (97). Consumer culture is certainly the most influential force within the "metropolitan esthetics" that affects the identity of whoever enters its milieu. Compared to the local residents, the migrants become "the other" in the city. As Mike Featherstone notes, the increasing flows of people around the world means that "the other" is no longer something to be searched out in exotic locations in the distant part of the world by adventures, literary travelers and tourists; the other work and live alongside us in the metropolitan areas (Undoing Culture 128). As Chambers states, "the migrant's sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of this postmodern condition" (27). Both the wandering artists and the Okimasis brothers experience the sense of alienation, otherness, and displacement when they first migrate to the cities, which is due to their inability to identify with the urban culture and lifestyle.

Chambers also asserts that when we migrate, "our sense of center and being is displaced. As historical, cultural and psychic subjects we, too,

are uprooted, forced to reply to our existence in terms of movement and metamorphosis" (24). For the protagonists in both novels, their identities have been modified, adjusted, and reshaped as they migrate into discursive places, so even when they go back home, they will not be able to identify with the collective identity home denotes. Qiu's novel ends with Zhu Wen's determination to return home because of his identity crisis in the city, but we know his homecoming will not be a successful one. In Highway's case, the brothers have gone back to their Cree reserve during summer, but home feels alien to them as well. Stuart Hall points out the impossibility of homecoming, claiming that "migration is a one way trip. There is no 'home' to go back to" ("Minimal Selves" 44).

In his essay on postmodern identity, Douglas Kellner explains how the concept of identity evolves in literary theory. In pre-modern societies, one has a fixed and stable identity, so the individual does not undergo an identity crisis or modify his identity (141). In modernity, however, identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, and self-reflexive. Yet the forms of identity are still relatively circumscribed, fixed, and limited, though the boundaries of possible identities are continually expanding (141). Also, in late modernity, identity becomes other-directed, depending upon others for recognition and for the establishment of sense of self (142). Thus the issue of identity consists in "how we constitute, perceive, interpret, and present

our self to ourselves and to others" (143). The postmodern theory of identity has rejected the essentialist and rationalist notion and builds on its constructive nature (143). So identity in contemporary society is highly unstable, fragmented, and subject to the influences of different forces; one can choose one's identity, modify or discard it at will.

The postmodern recognition of identity as unstable and fluid seems to reduce everything to flux: no fixed boundaries between people, only arbitrary labels. Identities are so relativized that they seem diminished altogether. But for the migrants who are "cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, [they are] perpetually required to make [themselves] at home in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present" (Chambers 6). Being in unfamiliar urban milieus, the migrants obviously need something to hold onto, something to help them maintain their sense of self and to survive the alienating environment. As Jeffrey Weeks explains why people cling to their identities:

> In a world of constant change, people apparently need fixed points, points of alignment. Identities, personal and social, are both precarious and essential, historically shaped and personally chosen, affirmations of self and confirmations of our social being. We construct narratives of the self in order to

> negotiate the hazards of everyday life, and to assert our sense of belonging in an ever more complex social world. (33)

Identity is a collective concept and it is constituted and shaped by different elements—national identities, sexual identities, racial and ethnic identities, religious identities, consumer identities, and so on—what Weeks terms "fixed points [. . .] of alignment." "Fixed" in this sense does not mean that these identities cannot be changed; rather, it means that no matter how much a certain "point" or "points" are modified, switched and altered, they remain central to one's sense of self and belonging. Particularly for these two novels, our protagonists use ethnicity and sexuality as "points of alignment."

Weeks maintains that changes of sexual mores affect men and women alike, but the impact is a gendered one (39). In Qiu's novel, the protagonists make sense of themselves through the exploration of their sexual identity. Women, particularly, are empowered by their sexuality and the sexual freedom they have in contemporary China, and they are not afraid to take advantage of that. More educated women realize that their sexuality is the shortcut to fame and fortune, and they are willing to provide sexual favors to men as a trade-off.

In Highway's novel, the two brothers have different paths of survival in the city. Jeremiah's survival in an alienating urban milieu relies on his

ethnic identity. According to Stuart Hall:

> There is no way, it seems to me, in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk, can begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from some place, they come from some history and they inherit certain cultural traditions. […] You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all. Thus, we cannot do without that sense of our own positioning that is connotated by the term ethnicity. (“Ethnicity” 18)

Ethnicity, according to Hall’s definition, entails more than just a sense of grouping. It also implies a large sense of cultural heritage, history, tradition, and philosophy. In Jeremiah’s case, the Cree mythological figure Trickster and the Son of Ayash story are crucial to his survival.

Gabriel’s survival, on the other hand, relies on his sexual identity. Weeks contends that “inevitably, then, our sense of our self, the meanings we attach to our lives, are closely shaped by our sense of our sexuality. Sexuality may be a ‘historical construct’ but it remains a key site for the construction of personal meaning and social location” (38). Gabriel’s homosexuality is deeply historical—the sexual abuse by the priest due to notorious residential school system. Hall says that “the notion of an identity that knows where it came from, where home is, but also lives in the

symbolic—in the Lacanian sense—knows you can't really go home again ("Ethnicity" 20). The spiritual home is the only place that Gabriel can go back to.

In the following two chapters, I will analyze the two novels separately and attempt to demonstrate that consumer culture changes the way the artists see themselves, their values and lifestyles, and that they negotiate their new identities through ethnicity and sexuality.

The first chapter will focus on Qiu's novel. Before analyzing how consumer culture affects the young artists, I will devote the first part to the urban space of Beijing. In his narration, Qiu carefully paints a map of Beijing, whose landscape has changed from horizontal to vertical. The topographical change is an important manifestation of the "metropolitan aesthetic" that Qiu tries to convey.

But of course, the consumer culture not only changes the urban space, but also the lifestyle and the values of Beijingers, so the second part will deal mainly with the experiences of the wandering artists and the transformations they go through. Zhu Wen and his artist friends are exposed to new and tempting things in the city: marijuana, bars, rock music, and they start to believe that "the meaning of life is to be found in the things we possess" and that "to consume is to be fully alive and to remain fully alive we must continue to consume" (Sklair 297). The clash between the

affluent urban lifestyle and their own humble situation, living on the periphery of the city and lacking basic sustenance, has placed the artists in a dilemma. On one hand, they distain material comfort, refuse to be homogenized, but on the other hand, they cannot resist the sweeping tide of the city's consumer ethos, and they have a ferocious desire to possess. The "art-for-art's sake" or "art-for-money's-sake" struggle has tormented Zhu Wen and his artist friends. The mixed feelings have all contributed to their sense of alienation and otherness.

The third part will deal mainly with how Zhu Wen finds his sense of self through his love affair with Yu Hong. Again before getting to the analysis, I will make a digression by talking about Qiu's peer female writers, Wei Hui and Mian Mian, the reason being that most of Qiu's female characters bear a striking resemblance to those of Wei Hui and Mian Mian: materialistic and pragmatic, trading love for material success. Unlike the female writers who seem to endorse the practicality of these women, Qiu expresses his contempt towards them in the novel. But he does make an exception with Yu Hong, who departs from the other female characters in the sense that she has not been fully contaminated by the urban culture. Relationships become the focus of personal identity (Weeks 33). Zhu has several sexual encounters in the novel, which can only be categorized as "plastic sex" and it is through his relationship with Yu Hong that he finds

what Weeks terms as the “nodal point for personal meaning in the contemporary world” (37).

The next chapter will be on Highway’s novel. Highway does not use urban topography to embody consumer culture; the only symbol in the text is the gigantic shopping mall, or to be more accurate, the abundance and the consumption associated with the mall. Similarly, the two brothers experience a sense of alienation and otherness living in the city. Being a student, Jeremiah does not have a Cree community where he can find company, and the city seems very empty and aloof to him. He lives in a basement, practises piano around the clock and has no friends.

The Okimasis brothers have different ways to negotiate their identities in the city—Jeremiah through ethnicity, Gabriel through sexuality—so I will divide the rest of the chapter character-wise. Jeremiah initially struggles with his Cree ancestry: he is the one who follows the preaching of his parents and the priests, the one who consciously avoids talking about Native history in class and the one who has thought of himself as having been born in the wrong race. Later in the novel, Jeremiah is weakened and dispirited by his drinking problem, which is just an explosion of his long time identity problem. He finally recovers from his protracted degradation by embracing his ethnicity and finds peace. In Highway’s novel, Cree ethnicity is embodied in the Cree mythology, notably the pivotal

figures of the Trickster and the Weetigo, Powwow, and the oral tradition of the Son of Ayash myth. The mythological figure, Fur Queen, and its various forms—the shaman Chachagathoo, the Weesageechak, Jeremiah's piano teacher, the woman who gives the brothers tickets to the New Year's Eve Gala, and Amanda's grandmother, Poosees—act as a guide or a protector of the brothers.

Gabriel, on the other hand, uses his sexuality to define who he is. In the text, Gabriel is the one who is comfortable with his own identity and the Cree cultural heritage and who resists Christianity to his dying breath. His homosexuality becomes his means to break away from his childhood nightmare, to find meaning in life, and to survive his historical past. Thus, in order to make my points clear, I will include some historical information about residential school. His only way of survival, though, is to go back to the spiritual home when the Fur Queen takes him upon death.

My thesis will then close with a short conclusion, summarizing the main points about the significance of my study.

Chapter One: Qiu Huadong's The City Chariot

This chapter will focus on Qiu's novel. The first part examines Beijing's urban space; the second part deals with the urban experiences of the artists and how they are transformed by the consumer culture; and the third part explores how the characters maintain their sense of self by exploring their sexuality.

Map of Beijing: A Different Urban Topography

According to Iain Chambers, "In its everyday details, its mixed histories, languages and cultures, its elaborate evidence of global tendencies and local distinctions, the figure of the city, as both real and an imaginary place, apparently provides a ready map for reading, interpretation and comprehension" (92). In his novel, Qiu carefully paints us a map of Beijing:

> Around me, the Kunlun Hotel, Jingcheng Center, Hilton Hotel, Great Wall Hotel and Liangmahe Center—all tower extravagantly and mightily.[1] [在我的周围，昆仑饭店，京城大厦，希尔顿酒店,长城饭店，亮马河大厦豪华又庞伟的矗立着.](2)
>
> If we look to the west, we can see numerous skyscrapers and highways and the remote west mountain amidst the fog. [北京真的太美了!...如果往西看，我们可以看见无数幢崛起的高楼大厦与

立交桥，以及遥远的隐于雾气之中的西山.] (52)

Beijing, a three-thousand-year-old city, is expanding. The old things are dying and new roads are being built and foolhardy constructions tower everywhere. […] This is city where zither music mixes with rock, blending into a new tempo, a tempo that makes the seniors do *yangge* dance under the overpass and enables the youth, with their electrified bodies, to dance crazed disco at midnight. This is Beijing, a big ship with more than ten million passengers. It always brings you towards where the sun arises. [而北京这样一座三千年古城的道路还在扩展,更多陈旧的东西在衰亡，而新的道路也在建立，到处都耸立着胆大妄为的建筑. …这是一座古筝与摇滚交相混杂的城市,这种节奏让老年人在立交桥下扭起秧歌，让年轻人像带电的肉体一样在午夜跳狂欢迪斯科. 这就是北京，一条带着一千万人的睡梦航行的大船，它总想把你带到太阳出发的地方.] (94)

It is a new picture of Beijing, an emerging globalized metropolis with its new vertical spatial representation as opposed to the horizontal one. Economic reform and globalization have changed the topographic and social spaces in contemporary urban China. Many urban researchers have noticed this change in Beijing's topography. Anthony King and Abidin Kusuo, for instance, argue that the design and social production of

buildings are crucial to the construction of social relations and social structures. Skyscrapers, once the particular metaphor of modernity and the paradigmatic statement of American architecture and urbanism, have been cut from the western historic urban experience, pasted into Beijing, the capital of a country experiencing phenomenal economic development, and edited in order to help construct new, though not necessarily seamless, transnational spaces in China (49,52). As Lu Jie argues, the high-rise is part of the skyscraper iconography that epitomizes and defines the contemporary city and city life and constitutes a new urban geographic centrality and marginality (728). Beijing's ancient architectural style of horizontal development—such as *Hutong*[2] and *Siheyuan*[3]—has been completely transformed into a westernized vertical style, represented by skyscrapers, high-rise apartment buildings and multi-story shopping centers.

These changes to the city are certainly more noticeable to the newcomers than to the locals, who have become accustomed to the pace of change, and this fresh outsider-perspective enables Qiu to sketch the picture of Beijing as modern, dynamic, alluring, and versatile. It is almost as if Qiu were shooting Beijing with a moving camera, giving the readers a panoramic view of the fast-paced metropolis during its transformation. In an interview with Zhang Qi, Qiu says:

> I am interested in city topology. I like the skyscrapers and the high-rises in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen; I like the look of modern Chinese cities. I depict the view of the city just as some essayist describes the idyllic scenery of the country; so in a sense, my novels have become the guide to Beijing modern architecture. (44)

This new map of Beijing is very different from what it was ten or twenty years ago, as appeared in the writings of previous urban authors, when *Hutong* and *Siheyuan* were the quintessential features of the city's residential space and urban everyday life. The old Beijing, the historical and nostalgic aspect of Beijing, is the object of depiction by well-known urban authors such as Lao She and Wang Shuo. Like Qiu Huadong's, most of Lao She's and Wang Shuo's works are solely about the Beijing urban experience. Born into a degraded Manchu family, Lao She did not live a royal life in the palace; instead, he lived in a *Siheyuan*, a cheap residence where he met and got to know the life of the urban poor, so his novels portray the survival of urban paupers in Beijing in the early half of the twentieth century, their joys and woes. In contrast, Wang Shuo depicts the urban life and people's reactions to the transformation decades later, in the 1980s, when the political regime collapsed and the open-up policy started (Tian 1-2). Up to the late eighties, *Hutong* and *Siheyuan* were located in the

center of urban everyday reality, denoting a slow and nostalgic living environment of the Beijingers. However, in the reconfiguration of the city, observes Lu Jie, "*Hutong* is relegated to the status of history, left behind in both time and space," only keeping "its significance in serving as a site for the tourist's gaze, but no longer epitomizing the city and the urban environment" (730). Despite his panoramic sketch of Beijing's modern landmarks, Qiu epitomizes the old nostalgic Beijing in the sculptures of one the artists, Cui Zhan, titled Old Beijing Memoir. The sculptures consist of historical places of interest and old residential areas. Beijing, an ancient city, refuses to be represented in a single facet and retains its distinctive characteristics, despite the influence of global capitalism on the formation of the new city topography. Qiu shrewdly acknowledges this fact by reserving and epitomizing the historic Beijing in the artistry and mapping of a new and energetic Beijing to contemporary readers. As Lu Jie asserts, the new urban imagery of Beijing is the epitome of its urgent need to seek a new identity after experiencing a rupture in contemporary history. The foregrounding of the global sites and the understating of the historical sites, further explains Lu, are "emblematic of China's search for cultural identification outside the nation's cultural roots and tradition" (335).

Metropolitan Aesthetics: Globalized Urban Culture

However, what is being transformed is not just the physical

appearance—the landscape, the exterior of Beijing—but also the culture, the values, the lifestyle, the interior of Beijing—due to the global influences. Regarding cultural globalization, Mike Featherstone claims that the proliferation of consumer goods, advertising and media programs stemming from the West, mainly the United States, has been regarded as the corrosive homogenizing force that taps into the local culture. The boundaries of local cultures have become more permeable and difficult to maintain (Undoing Culture 115). Globalization, consumer culture, and rapid economic growth have brought the new socioeconomic reality and urban culture to Beijing, which in turn have reshaped a modern urban identity and a unique everyday experience. As outsiders to the city, the wandering artists have been exposed to a series of experiences usually reserved for privileged Beijingers: cocktail parties, bars, night clubs, and exotic restaurants. The city is obsessed with consumption, possession and recreation. The ability to consume is elevated to a paramount station, so money is worshiped and the city as an entity provides infinite means, legal or illegal, moral or immoral, to obtain money. To the eyes of the outsiders, the city bears a certain similarity to a casino, i.e. everyone should partake of a share of chance: “Beijing is a vast ocean; people with ambitions are swimming hard in it” [北京真是一个巨大的海洋，有多少怀揣梦想的人在这里游个不停.] (94).

Zhou Sese's experience with the college students gives us a glimpse of the materialistic mindset of the new generation of Beijingers and the over-estimated importance of money in their mind. Zhou, the poet in the wandering artists group, is passionate about revitalizing modern Chinese poetry. In his lecture to college students, he tries to enlist some support from the audience in rediscovering the cleansing nature of poems and how society puts too much emphasis on material wealth: "A great poet should have wisdom, creation, contentiousness, courage, liberation, abstinence and sublimation. A poet should endure hardship and bring people back from the obscene world. Come and join me! […] Poems, only the power of poems is trustworthy!" [因为大诗人首先意味着智慧，创造，良心，勇气，解放，节制和升华，意味着对大众苦难的承受和把大众带出卑污世界的决心. 你们来支持我吧! … 诗歌，只有诗歌的力量是可以信赖的!] (17). He expects some positive feedback from the audiences, but the students despise his ideas and ask him harsh questions: "Do you have material desire? What is your attitude towards money? Do you like money? Poems are useless stuff; we need to be more directed to practicality. We need automobile industry, houses and private planes" [请问你自己有对物质的占有欲么？请问你对金钱怎么看？你喜欢钱么？诗是一种没用的东西，我们应该为工具理性所指导，我们需要的是汽车工业，住房和私人飞机.] (17-18). Zhou is quite discouraged by how students receive his speech and he

finally realizes that “The absence of faith and the worship of money are deeply ingrained in the mind of the new generation, even in the famous university!” [这是信仰式微，拜金主义的新一代．这可是在著名的大学啊!] (18).

The presence of transnational space in China intertwines with the circulation of pop culture, which has contributed to the formation of transnational urban cultures in contemporary China (King and Kusuo 64). The collective identity of Beijing, sustained by tradition, history and arts, gives way to a postmodern identity, an identity characterized by a consumer culture that emphasizes both general consumption and cultural consumption. Zhu’s routine urban experiences consist of clubbing, going to bars, cocktail parties and various restaurants, and those experiences are marked by a fascination with the foreign, with the image of the global and with otherness. It seems that he transforms his own otherness to the city into an obsession with the foreign that a globalized metropolis can offer. He frequently visits a club called Hard Rock, where groups of youngsters gather to drink, dance, and play heavy rock music:

> This is Beijing at night time—I can feel that she is quivering and panting. It seems that the city is trying to consume the energy that it did not use up during the day. I sat there, imagining this giant mock-up of a city swirling unceasingly, all the garbage

emitting odors and all the vagabonds creeping into the sewers. [这是夜晚的北京，我可以感到这座城市完全在颤抖和喘息，仿佛它有用不完的能量要在这夜晚重新消耗掉，我坐在那里想象着这座沙盘一样巨型城市在不停的旋转，旋转，所有的垃圾都在散发着臭气，那些流浪的人全都钻进了下水道.] (29)

The crazy dancers look like electrified limbs swaying powerfully in the wind, exuberant with energy. It is as if everyone is trying to fulfill his dream of breaking the law of gravity. […] In my eyes, people have turned into trees, swaying unceasingly, but what is the fierce wind that shakes them? [在舞池里,那所有狂舞的人都像带了电的树枝在风中摇摆，动作狂放有力，仿佛这时每一个人都想实现脱离大地的愿望….在我眼中，的确所有的人都变成了树木在摇动. 那么震撼他们的是一种什么样的狂风?] (29)

Modern dancing and clubbing are cultural imports that are well received in contemporary China, especially among younger generations. These clubs, as Featherstone puts it, are “fluid postmodern tribes,” where masses of people come together in temporary emotional communities to experience moments of ecstasy, empathy and affectional immediacy (Consumer Culture 99). The club-goers participate in the cultural consumption of the global. According to Sun Yan, clubs are the best location for liberating the loneliness, boredom and depression of city

dwellers and for their secret affairs to take place. She claims that the milieu is not only one of the settings in the novel, but a narrative strategy in the desire discourse which conveys a unique metropolitan sensation (63).

Socializing is an important part of urban everyday life, going to clubs and parties, meeting strangers or important persons with the possibility of starting an affair or a chance for promotion. In the bar, Zhu flirts with a young American woman, who possesses great attributes: “She is a pretty girl and she is smiling while she dances. Her smile is pure and healthy, like a gust of refreshing breeze” [她长的很漂亮，而且她一边跳还一边在笑，她的笑容健康纯洁，像某种自然的风一样叫我心旷神怡.] (30). She is an amicable American who is intrigued by the Eastern culture and wants to study Buddhism and Sanskrit; and more importantly, she is not part of those materialistic-minded new generations of city dwellers that the poet Zhou Sese meets. The foreign has been given what the local lacks.

At another cocktail party, Zhu Wen meets some foreign peers. After flirting with the only female artist, Ellen, Zhu tells her that he is currently working on some pastiche painting, the pieces of which come from Chinese and English magazines. This pastiche is a good example in the novel that signifies the clash of Eastern and Western cultures. Ellen is not too thrilled by this modern fusion of artistry; rather, she points out that most Chinese artists are simply copying the Western artistic expression: “How come you

Chinese artists always follow the Western trend? […] I think Chinese folk art is full of imagination and esthetic values" [可你们中国的艺术家为什么总要跟在西方的后面?...比如你们的各种民间艺术品，我看就特别有想象力和美感.] (45). On another occasion, Wang Sen and Huang Hu, two film directors being introduced to the group, are trying to demonstrate their originality by shooting movies at the height of knee. Later, Zhu finds out that the two showoffs are simply copying Spanish director Luis Bunuel, who had pioneered this innovative approach years ago.

Food culture is another component of Beijing's urban culture. Throughout Qiu's novel, Western food is regarded as something tasteful and exotic. Even going to fast food restaurants, like McDonald's and Pizza Hut, is considered something that "the insiders" do, thus entailing a sense of superiority. Zhu only dines in those places on "special occasions," such as getting extra cash or when dating someone:

> I decided to eat pizza; I love it. People have treated me several times before. […] I walked into the restaurant happily, ordered an large pizza with thick crust, a salad and a beer. It will cost me more than a hundred yuan, but I do not care. […] I am devouring what the Chinese called inside-out-dumplings and my heart is brimming with the passion for life" [我决定去吃比萨饼，我太爱吃比萨饼了，原先我蹭过好几顿这玩意儿….我美滋滋

的钻进去，要了一份"至高至尊"，大号的并且要的是厚的．我还要了一份沙拉和一大扎啤酒．我算了一下，这要花掉我一百块钱，可我一点也不在乎．…我手足并用的吃着那把馅摊在外面的比萨饼，心中洋溢着对生活的激情] (25-26).

The most important event of the year among the artists is also held in a fast food chain, Pizza Hut. The consumption of food in this sense is not to consume the food value per se, but rather to consume signs or the symbolic aspect of the goods that generates gratification; so food becomes a commodity-sign, a concept proposed by Baudrillard (2). Wang Yongbing regards the consumption of exotic foods as the commodification of cultures, through which commercial transactions take place precisely because the substance of cultures has been neutralized (102). Compared to the elevated status of Western food, Chinese food receives little respect—again because of the fascination with otherness and the yearning for the global. At the beginning of the novel, the wandering artists get together in a Chinese restaurant and Zhu is very embarrassed dining there: "Balixiang Restaurant is of course a cheap place. Nobody, except for the dogs, eats here during the day. It only gets busy at night when we poor artists patronize this place" [八里香餐馆当然是一个下等餐馆，白天在这里进餐的我想只有野狗，只有到了夜晚由于我们的出现这里才热闹起来.] (9).

Clubbing, foreign women, and exotic food are all examples of a

globalized urban culture, which not only “globalizes China’s new urban aesthetics,” but also “promises infinitely exotic sensual experience” (Lu 336). Zhu’s urban experience is by no means a comprehensive perception of the city, only a fragmented and incoherent one. Nonetheless, it is sufficient to paint the picture that a slow and quotidian lifestyle is being replaced by a leisure- and pleasure-oriented consumptive style—just as the horizontal landscape is being replaced by a vertical one—and the young generation of Beijingers have a very materialistic mindset due to the influence of the all-encompassing consumer culture.

Being exposed to the tantalizing urban life transforms Zhu in that it changes his perspective, his perception of self in relation to others, his values, and his lifestyle. Zhu gets more perturbed as his experience in the city accumulates: on one hand, he finds himself drawn to the glittering urban life, all the entertainment places, exotic restaurants and clubs, and realizes the importance of money; yet on the other hand, the experience reminds him of his own station in the city, both physically and intellectually. As a wandering artist, he does not own a studio and his works are not accepted by the mainstream galleries or museums, so he must moonlight if he wants to pursue his art. Physically, he lives in an artists’ village on the periphery of the city, together with his artist friends, with no steady income; intellectually, the profession of an avant-garde artist precludes the

possibility of being placed in the center of mainstream society because he needs a buffer zone to perceive the real world in a detached manner. Zhu's marginality is thus pre-ordained. What prompt Zhu to come to the city are the vast opportunities in the city and the excitement of urban life in contrast to the banality of rural life. While his active urban involvement fulfils his yearning for the city, he is unable to fully identify with the dominant consumer culture. Because of Zhu's irreconcilable conflict with the city, his urban experience is doomed to be a transient encounter, "a spiritual intra-urban exile" in Lu's words (328).

Zhu constantly finds himself in a dilemma, an urge to gain as much money as possible and a determination to pursue his artistic career, i.e. "art-for-art's-sake or art-for-money's-sake," as Lu terms it. No matter how much he distains money and material comfort, Zhu is trapped by the city and gives up his art to the "vagaries of the market" (Lu 328). At one point, Zhu has to sacrifice art for money. Mr. K, a well known writer in the circle introduces Zhu to a gallery manager. Zhu thinks this could be the big turning point for him and is excited to meet the manager. The manager seems interested in Zhu's works after meticulously examining and questioning him, and he tells Zhu that he intends to hire him as a contract painter for his gallery. Zhu is in ecstasy upon hearing this, assuming that the manager is satisfied with his works, but it turns out that the manager is

content with Zhu's techniques and he makes an offer of 4000 Yuan per painting to hire him to do forgeries. Zhu is shocked and terrified about the offer and, since he cannot make up his mind, he turns to his friends for help. He tells Wang, a film director, about the offer and Wang, who is shooting some trashy commercial film for the money, advises him to take the offer and get the extra cash: "I think you should do the forgeries. Things will get easier if you have money, better than starving to death anyways. You wandering dog deserve some good meals. Come and work for me. Be my art designer, will you?" [照我看，你完全可以去画那些伪作，只要先挣上一笔钱，就什么都好办，这总比饿死强，你这条流浪的狗，也该吃几顿饱饭了．给我干点美工吧，放点烟火什么的都可以，干不干？ 干不干?] (102). Although Zhu despises this kind of behavior and worries he might be caught, he eventually gives in and accepts the offer. However, he feels guilty, embarrassed, and anxious about getting the money instead of joy.

There are plenty of opportunities like these for the wandering artists to get rich at the expense of losing their integrity and conscience. In this scenario, the aesthetic value of art is totally obscured by its value as a commodity and the artist becomes a pursuer of material desires. Zhu's impossibility of being accepted by the mainstream gallery results from his marginality as a wandering artist and his ambivalent feelings towards material wealth, which appears to mirror the author's own feelings since

Qiu was once an outsider himself. In an interview with Lin Zhou, Qiu says:

> I have quite an ambivalent feeling towards the city. On one hand, I want to identify with it, embrace it and blend in; on the other hand, I am so repulsed and scared by the city that I want to escape. These feelings have a lot to do with my own experiences in the city, especially after I just graduated from university in 1992. At that time my salary was about 200 Yuan per month, so it did not last very long if I went out eating with my friends. Once I spent half of my salary dining out and I ended up eating bread three times a day for the rest of the month. As a newcomer to the city, the stress of not having enough material wealth struck me deeply; people do not have much dignity if they do not have enough money. (87-88)

Zhu's urban experiences and his ambivalent attitude towards the city have created in him a constellation of sentiments: "anxiety, anger, rebellion, disappointment, loneliness, desire, fatigue, depression, misery and delusion" (28). In one of the chapters, Zhu reflects, in a series of flashbacks, on his upbringing, his experience in the city, and the profound anxiety resulting from living there. Zhu feels that he has become more and more paranoid and the good qualities like integrity and kindness have completely left him. In his monologue, he recalls his unpleasant childhood memories:

he was turned down by his teacher as a child when he wished to join a study group; later, he was trying to bribe the teacher, but backed out; and he discovered that his father was stealing money from his company. All of those experiences made him cold and callous as a child. As he migrates to the city, the consumer culture and the materialistic mindset of the urban dwellers have convinced him that the rule of exchange and possession of money are the golden rule of today, which have caused him profound anxiety:

> I did not expect I could think this much when I am starving most of the time. I had an anxiety attack not long ago when I was seized by the desire to possess; I felt suffocated and breathless. [我没有想到我在时常挨饿的威胁下还能想这么多. 就在不久前, 当我在一种强烈冲击下企图什么都要得到的时候, 我突然感到了胸闷, 呼吸困难.] (227)
>
> People must be out of their mind to become avant-garde artists in the present time because it means that you are doomed to breath between the cracks, to flee from persecution, to cry out in poverty and to possess nothing in hardship. [在这样一个时代作为一个流浪艺术家的确是发疯了! 因为这将注定了你将在夹缝中呼吸，在被追杀中奔逃, 在一无所有中呐喊, 在苦难中两手空空.] (228)

As Douglas Kellner notes, anxiety has become a constituent experience for the modern self because it is impossible to know whether one has made the right choice of one's identity and one can always change and modify one's identity at will (162). All of Zhu's sentiments, anxiety, loneliness, and alienation are embodiments of his latent identity crisis. Most of his artist friends are tormented by the same problem and they resort to extreme manners to cope.

Feng Yue, for example, is the most rebellious and extreme person in the group. He once made a piece of performance art of himself by applying honey water all over his body to attract flies, so the complete work would be a naked man covered with living flies. Many people think he is mentally unstable and they call the police to evict him: "When someone becomes a rebel, other people suddenly turn into God, sending him to the final judgment" [当有人想当反叛者的时候, 那么每一个人顷刻之间就变成了上帝, 来对他进行审判.] (59). Zhu interprets Feng's gloomy and rebellious character as the reflection of his own childhood, since he spent his childhood in a rainy province where his house was surrounded by tombs. His work is certainly self-abusive and his determination to become a destructionist is a way to break away from all the existing norms and to release his resentment and discontentment. Feng is somewhat like Gabriel in the sense that childhood trauma has cast negative influences upon both

of them, so they become rebellious as adults.

Gai Di, a singer that Zhu meets on the street, deeply touches Zhu with the genuine feeling of his songs. They become friends and later Zhu invites him to join the artist's circle. Gai is a bit of a rebel too, just like Feng Yue: he escaped from his parents when he was fifteen and never went back. Since then he has done different casual jobs and finally becomes a rock singer. The profession suits him in that Gai identifies with the intense, defiant, and destructive nature of the music, which provides an appropriate means for him to release his inner self. He feels more lonely and alienated after his girlfriend dies of tuberculosis in Tibet and even the hysterical rock music cannot ease his pain, so he resorts to marijuana and alcohol for momentary relief:

> It is like soaring in the sky, an intoxication better than getting drunk, a forgetting of reason and desire, an extreme fleshly relaxation and joy. It is great because I am not dwelling on the unhappiness and misfortune of my wandering life and I am even able to see Lu Liang in my hallucination. She is still alive, smiling at me at the foot of Himalaya, as pure as a drop of morning dew on the grass leaf. [那是一种飞翔，一种比喝醉酒更好受的飘飘然，一种忘乎所以与随心所欲，一种肉体的极度松弛与快乐．简直太好了，让我能忘记我流浪的苦难与不幸，我还可

以在幻觉中见到卢梁，她还没有死，她仍旧清纯的如同早晨攀附在绿草叶子上的一滴露珠，她在喜玛拉雅雪山下冲我微笑.] (162).

Gai has too much to bear in his mind—loss of his love, poor living conditions, an unhappy childhood—thus alcohol and drugs provide quick fixes to his problems. He refuses to be commercialized as a rock star, but at the same time he gets extremely frustrated when he realizes that nobody knows him as a rock singer and karaoke places do not even have his songs. This paradoxical feeling of wanting to be acknowledged but not homogenized and the struggle between “art-for-art’s-sake” and “art-for-money’s-sake” haunts every artist in the group. Consumer culture and urban everyday life have altered their values and their understanding of the city, and they are in a transition period of finding their true identities. Their marginality lies not only in their physical location in the city, but also in the sense of displacement, loneliness, alienation, and inability to identify with the city.

However, Zhu finds some temporary relief. He embarks on a journey with a real vagabond artist, photographer Yan He. Unlike Zhu’s other friends in the group, who is either homogenized by the materialistic culture (Mr. K), or who are adopting drastic postures to fight the urban culture (Feng Yue and Gai Di), or who is mimicking the Western predecessor

(Wang Sen), Yan He seems to find a perfect solution. Yan's wandering does not give him enough time to be contaminated by the material culture, so he is innocent compared to his materialistic and sophisticated peers. He is a vagabond artist in the real sense because he chooses to be homeless, to drift around, and to live in a never-ending mode of seeking and discovery.

It is a cleansing experience for Zhu Wen to leave the claustrophobic city and embrace the tranquility of nature. Lu Jie regards China's native countryside of as a locale of purity and spiritual rejuvenation against the global destructiveness (337). Although Zhu is disturbed by the "uproarious, snobbish, transient, endless, and dazzling atmosphere [嘈杂的，自高自大的，转瞬即逝的，无边无际的，眼花缭乱的气息] " when coming back to the city, he feels that "there is a sparkle arising from the bottom of my heart, a lamp from the earth growing within me. I want to live better, get rid of my pessimistic view of life, and discover beauty and love in life" [但我的心底里升起了一种亮色，那是这块大地中的一盏灯之类的玩意儿长到我的脑门里. 我想好好的活着，更好的活下去，我希望能彻底摆脱我的审丑哲学，我打算确信并去发现生活中的美与爱.] (133). This is a pivotal scene because it happens halfway through the novel when Zhu is paralyzed by living in the city and this getaway detaches him from the urban environment and restores his spirit on his return.

Qiu's novel documents the year-long urban experience of this group of artists and the last event of the group, also the most important event in the novel, is the avant-garde art exhibition held right before the New Year. The artists have presented the most bizarre works one could think of: one performance artist marries a mule, a concept artist sells crabs, and the protagonist Zhu Wen decorates a heap of cow crap with roses. It is the last get-together, an ending for their adventure in Beijing since most people keep wandering to other places, with a new beginning for each individual as they take new departures in their exploration. Lu regards this event as representing the essence of consumer culture, "a fetish of the new, the spectacle, the shock effect and the provocative" (338). Essentially, Qiu paints a picture of the urban imaginary of people with the most imagination, their encounters and how they perceive and interact with the urban milieu. The art exhibition is in fact the most shocking spectacle, a celebration and an embrace of consumer culture. Lu points out that Zhu's engagement with Beijing is fundamentally a struggle for meaning in a reality that has no substance and that the fragmented urban space reflects an individual's response to the bewildering urban spectacle (338). After the exhibition, Zhu makes the personal decision to go back home: "I have decided to leave here and I am not sure if I will come back. […] It feels like I just woke up from the night, starting to realize how and why people choose to end their

life here" [但我已决定离开这里．我不知道我会不会回来.…我仿佛刚刚从黑夜中醒来，找到了很多人在这里生命终结的过程与理由] (285). The city is not the place where Zhu can settle down because he cannot find what he wishes for in the city, and leaving the city after the exhibition is something that is fated to happen.

The death of his lover is not the only reason for Zhu Wen's departure; his identity problem and the sense of homelessness are the main reasons. Cities provide commodities of different sorts and various entertaining ways, but they are not pacifying for the soul, so the outsiders become the "drifters" who are dominated by a sense of "homelessness" (Li 6). Some members of the group have become more assimilated into the city, like Mr. K, who is very much tuned to the city tempo; whereas for Zhu, while he struggles to identify with the city culture, he refuses to be assimilated, and Yu Hong's death finally motivates Zhu's home-coming journey. Zhang Qi also notices that the identity crisis has become the underlying anxiety for these outsiders: "They have stepped out of the totality associated with their life [hometown, family, relatives and memories] and are trying to establish a new relationship with Beijing. But willingly or not, the label of 'the outsiders' never leaves them. As much as they try to identify with the city, they are questioned and repelled by the insiders" (52). The protagonists first depart from their home to the city with ambition, but their identity crisis has made

their experiences in the city unsettling, so another getaway (home-coming) takes place. Qiu's novel ends with Zhu's departure from the city, so we do not know what is going to happen when he arrives back home, but I venture to say that his home-coming journey is not going to be a successful one in that his engagement with the city has reshaped his identity in such a way that he will not be able to identify with the collective identity home denotes. Zhang Qi holds the same opinion in foreseeing the prospect of their home-coming journey: the immersion in city culture has changed their identity in a way that home also becomes "other" to them, a place they are unable to identify with and return to. Their identification problem has made this group of people "homeless" and the sense of home has faded, a result of their departure from home and experience drifting in the city (53). The "getaway," "home-coming," and "impossibility of getting home" are all associated with the fluid and ever changing postmodern construction of identity.

Ways of Being: Sex, Love, and Relationships

Sexuality as an important "point of alignment" is central for the characters to obtain meaning and the sense of belonging in their lives. According to Henning Bech, "The city is invariably and ubiquitously, inherently and inevitably, fundamentally and thoroughly sexualized and that

modern sexuality is essentially urban" (215). He further argues that people have a choice in terms of how far they want to participate in the sexualized dimension of the city and the extent to which they seek to sexualize their own bodies (227-28). But before analyzing how Zhu connects to his sense of self through his relationships, I will talk about Qiu's peer female writers, Wei Hui and Mian Mian, because most of Qiu's female characters bear a striking resemblance to those of his peers. In contrast to the traditional images of Chinese women as docile, obedient, and conservative, Qiu's female characters are depicted as open-minded, materialistic, and licentious, using their sexualized bodies to obtain material wealth and thereby asserting their sense of self in the commercialized urban space. As Weeks contends: "Changes in sexual mores may have sexualized women's bodies to an extraordinary degree, though often exploitatively; they have also opened up unprecedented spaces for autonomy and self-actualization" (40).

The 1990s saw the emergence of a new group of women writers, called *Mei Nu Zuo Jia*. Wei Hui and Mian Mian are the two main representatives of this group, who are known and also criticized for their unbridled exploitation of female sexuality in their works. The specific socio-economic reality of China, which is marked by an increasingly capital-driven economy, is the underlying force that makes the emergence

of these authors and their works possible. According to Megan Ferry, the works of these women authors are usurped by a commercial takeover, exposing the private lives of women for public assumption (657). The public display of female sexuality urges women to possess a visibly sexualized public persona and the success of a female author is measured in terms of the sensation she causes. Both Wei Hui's and Mian Mian's novels revolve around the material life of young women amidst China's rapid economic development and both authors focus on failed marriages and on women who cannot find a balance between love and sexuality. Their heroines are always "bad girls" living in an atmosphere of drugs, prostitution, homosexuality and casual sexual relationships. For example, in Wei Hui's banned novel Shanghai Baby [上海宝贝], CoCo, the heroine, is a young college-educated woman writer who lives with her drug-addicted Chinese boyfriend and has an affair with a German businessman. On her blog, Wei Hui writes her manifesto: "materialist consumption, uncontrolled emotions, constant belief in the impulse of one's heart, to submit to the deep burning of one's spirit, to give in the craziness, to prostrate oneself to every desire, to entertain all kinds of life's elation with greatest passion, including the mysteries of orgasm" (qtd. in Ferry 658). As Ferry points out, Wei Hui plays with the notion of the authentic self, claiming that the bad-girl images in her novels are only fictional characters and thus do not bear any likeness to

herself. Mian Mian is more aware of the consumer culture in Chinese society and how it drives the shaping of a female identity (Ferry 658, 671). China's new socio-economic reality requires the construction of a new identity and sexuality "evoked by both men and women as a way to recover a selfhood" (Ferry 665). The unabashed sexuality and the taboo topics, like homosexuality, AIDS, drugs, and prostitution in Wei Hui's and Mian Mian's works have made them very controversial. Zhang Yingjing has argued that these women authors represent a change in traditional Chinese values, and the potential social transformation these authors may cause can be a disruptive force in society (605). Like Zhang, Ferry maintains that the depiction of sexually active young female protagonists overturns decades of repression of female sexuality (673).

Cas Wouters has divided the sexual revolution into four phases. The first one is the sexual revolution itself, characterized by the emancipation of sexuality and a strong acknowledgement of carnal desire. For both genders, sex for the sake of sex has become a tolerable alternative, allowing more and more women and men to experiment with sex cheerfully and outside the boundaries of marriage. The second phase, from the end of the 1970s to the mid-1980s, is sexual oppression because greater sexual openness and more acceptance of sexuality led to sexual abuse. The oppression has resulted in two extremes: one is the attack on

pornography as a form of sexual desire and the other is to give free rein to sex for the sake of sex. The third period, starting in the 1980s, saw a “lust revival,” acceleration in the emancipation of sexuality. The last one, from the 1990s onwards is the “lust and love revival.” Social interaction between the sexes has become more cautious and more subtle, a process of integration and civilization of the sexes (191-202). China’s history does not quite fit into Wouters’ s model. Because of the famine and the Cultural Revolution, there was not much going on in China besides political persecution in the sixties and seventies. The revitalization started only after the Open-Up policy in 1978, so it seems that in the late nineties, women writers like Wei Hui and Mian Mian are still obsessed with the emancipation of female sexuality. The rapid urbanization and economic advancement have affected how Chinese people perceive themselves, especially women, long represented in literature as powerless and dependent on men.

Qiu’s portrayal of female images in his novel echoes those of Wei Hui’s and Mian Mian’s in that the females in both novels are immersed in the consumer culture and they use their sexuality as means to prove their existence and obtain meaning for their lives. Sexual autonomy allows the women to find their place in a patriarchal society. While Wei Hui and Mian Mian approach their characters with pride, celebrating the power women enjoy by exploring their sexuality, male authors like Qiu Huadong express

distain and contempt towards these materialistic women.

Kong Lin is Zhou Sese's girlfriend when they just come to the city. During the New Year's holiday, her parents arrange a blind date for her, a rich finance manager with an overseas study background. After being "enlightened" by her parents and meeting the rich man, Kong is convinced that material wealth is the first rule when choosing a husband. So she immediately corrects her "mistake" by breaking up with Zhou, leaving Zhou in despair and agony. Qiu comments through the protagonist Zhu: "The rule of exchange is the rule these days. Spirit, ethics, conscience and kindness are as cheap as toilet paper" [交换—人与人之间的交换是最重要的原则，而精神，道德，良知，善则像手纸一样被闲置起来，就连擦屁股也得被人挑选着用.] (80-81).

Another similar female image in Qiu's novel is represented by Zhong Xing's girlfriend Yang Jing, who first meets Zhong Xing, the body artist, while he is performing Rodin's sculpture outside a McDonald's. She expresses her appreciation of Zhong's moving and passionate performance and Zhong is thrilled by her words, for it is the first time that he has received positive feedback from his audience. He asks Yang if she wants to collaborate with him in performing complicated sculptures and Yang agrees. As they start to perform together, Zhong falls in love with Yang: "She has an oval face and her smile is like the ripple in the river [她的

脸像一枚橄榄，眼睛里的笑意像水波一样浮动]" (194). All of his artist friends admire him for finding his true love. But the flower of love withers before it blossoms: a famous director wants to star Yang in his new film and offers her good money, so Yang, without any hesitation, ends her relationship with Zhong immediately and moves in with the director. Devastated and desperate, Zhong locks himself up in a cage, performing the starving David to vent the anger and disappointment of Yang's betrayal. Again the author's contempt toward Yang is voiced through the protagonist: "Didn't you say that you want to change water into oil? You can't do that because water is water and oil is oil—two completely different things. You understand that, right?" [你不是说过你要把水变成油的吗？你变不了，水从来都是水，而油也从来都是油．这个道理你其实早就明白，对吗?] (200). Later, Zhong becomes insane.

Realizing that "a woman, especially a pretty woman, can get a better life only by pricing herself as a commodity" [一个女人，尤其是一个漂亮女人，只有把自己的身体当做某种标价的东西，才可能以交换的方式换得更好的生活.] (151), the novice singer Liang Xiuna leaves her hometown in southern China for Beijing to become a star. She has signed a contract with a famous music broker, Hei Ke, who promises to make her a new idol and win her fortune and fame, but in return, Liang needs to maintain a sexual relationship with him. Everything happens according to plan: Liang has a

huge group of fans around the country and everywhere she goes, she is asked to give autographs. But the fact that she has to work like a machine and do exactly what Hei dictates finally prompts her to terminate the contract with Hei. Liang is soon replaced by other novices and completely forgotten by her fans. She begs Hei to bring her back to the center of attention, but is dismissed by him. Desperate, Liang starts to have delusions.

More and more girls also voluntarily get themselves into prostitution. Dennis Altman contends that sex has become a central part of the economy of all large cities, especially those that undergo fast economic growth and social reform, which is true of Chinese cities since the 1990s, with their rapidly flourishing prostitution and their flashy new rich (11). Imbedded in the story of Liang, we have that of Liang's high school classmate, Yang Lan, who becomes a prostitute. Liang bumps into her in a bar one night and starts catching up with her. Yang has left her abusive husband and come to Beijing, where she becomes a mistress to a wealthy businessman. Soon the businessman abandons her and she decides to make a living as a prostitute. When the two are chatting in the bar, Yang says to Liang, "My motto is to strain the money out of men's pockets. Someday, I will have a huge house with a swimming pool. If that comes true, will you come to visit me? Swim or something. We will party all day

and eat tons of ice cream" [我有的我的生活态度,那就是把男人口袋里的钱都骗到我这里来. 总有一天, 我要有一幢带游泳池的别墅, 真的, 到那一天你会来吗? 来我的别墅游游泳什么的. 开个 Party, 来一大帮子人, 吃掉山一样的冰激凌.] (155-56). A month from the get-together with Liang, Yang is found dead in her apartment, murdered by a sexual pervert she has mingled with.

Urban consumer culture, argues Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, has commodified the bodies, the images and the sexualities of women (51). As a male author, Qiu may just project his judgment of these female writers and their works into the formation of some of his female characters in the novel. He regards those characters as unconventional and impudent and is obviously very critical of them: "What kind of creatures are women? Are they made of water or perhaps air? Or are they just symbols of material wealth, capsules of desire and producers of simple pleasure?" [女人是些什么? 她们是水吗? 她们或者都是空气构成的? 或者, 她们全是物质的化身, 欲望的容器以及简单快乐的催发器?] (144). These characters, in my understanding, serve as contrasts to his heroine Yu Hong, whose relationship with Zhu Wen becomes the survival strategy for both of them. It seems that Qiu identifies more with the traditional romantic love pattern and favors the qualities that traditional Chinese women possess, which he advocates by restoring a romantic love relationship in the novel.

According to Weeks, “We need a sense of the essential self to provide a grounding for our actions, to ward off existential fear and anxiety and to provide a spring board for action. […] It is not surprising that making and remaking of the body then becomes so basic to our assertion of identities”(90). In an alienating urban environment, Zhu is trying to figure out who he is by “making and remaking of the body.” Cities are places with extensive pleasure-based outlets and these places are milieus for socializing, drinking, and more importantly, opportunities for sexual contacts. Also, the population density in Beijing makes this kind of interaction possible. Before his relationship with Yu Hong, Zhu had sexual relations with two other women in the novel, his girlfriend Yan Tong and the African-American Molly.

Zhu identifies Yan Tong as his girlfriend, but he does not love her. Since she carries his baby and is mentally unstable, Zhu feels obligated to take care of her: “I do not love her; my feelings for her are more like responsibility” [可我并不怎么爱她，我对她更多的是一种责任.] (233). Yan Tong is a very shadowy figure, who appears only in Zhu’s narration and does not come into the reader’s view until the end of the novel. This girl is innocent and unsophisticated, which symbolizes the home town, a locale of idyllic scenery and simple lifestyle, as opposed to a dazzling metropolis replete with skyscrapers and hedonistic consumer culture. Later, the death

of his lover and his inability to identify with the city prompt Zhu's home-coming journey; he decides to go back home and raise his children with Yan Tong.

Zhu first meets Molly, an African-American, when he hangs out with friends in a nightclub and she happens to be the date of one of them. Zhu is tempted by Molly and makes out with her after his friend passes out from drinking:

> Molly is chewing her gum and things have become simple. […] After a while, our eyesight meets, an eyesight full of passion and desire. […] I looked back at her. It is like we are the only two people left on a deserted island, two beasts, a male and a female. What else can we do besides leaning towards each other? [本•莫莉在吃着口香糖，事情变的简单了. 过了一会, 不知为什么，我和本•莫莉的目光相遇了, 那种目光中充满了激情…我也盯着她看，这时候仿佛全世界就只剩下了我们两个人，两个在孤岛上的男女，两头野兽, 而她是一头母兽，我是一头公兽, 那么除了向对方靠拢我们还能干点什么?](113)

This encounter happens early in his urban adventure, when Zhu is adapting to the urban tempo and is struggling to define himself. On the one hand, he wants to enjoy the material comforts; but on the other hand, he does not want to sacrifice his art: "Desire! Desire! It pounces on me like a

beast pouncing on its prey. Ever since I moved to the city, the desire to possess never leaves me, sweeping me like a gust of wind" [欲望!欲望! 欲望像一头野兽一样来到我的身上. 自从我来到这座城市, 那种攫取的欲望就从来没有停歇过, 它在我的体内像一阵阵狂风一样刮过.] (118). Thus, Zhu's one-night-stand with Molly is simply a way to release all the tensions in his mind: it is "out of instinct and impulse, a spontaneous act that expresses an emotional constellation of desires, curiosity, selfishness, rebellion, transgression, attraction, dedication and loneliness" [出于本能, 欲望, 好奇爱恋, 自私, 叛逆, 越轨, 吸引, 奉献, 哀怨, 孤独而紧紧结合在一起.] (116). Lu Jie regards the foreign woman in Zhu's affair as "the archetypal seductress who satisfies the native man's mythification of the other and the global" (336). She also points out that the transnational erotic encounter embodies the native's ambiguous and ambivalent attitude towards the global and reflects a cultural yearning (336).

The separation of love from sex as witnessed in Zhu's one-night-stand has become common in the late twentieth century when consumer culture prevails in major cities around the globe. The model of romantic love as an intense and spontaneous feeling has lost its cultural motivation; postmodern romance has been compressed into the briefer and repeatable form of affairs. The one-night-stand, argues Featherstone, "legitimates sex for its own sake and fits in well with consumer culture with

its quest for novelty and pleasurable experiences" (Introduction 6). Eva Illouz also maintains that postmodern love affairs contain a structure of feeling with affinities for the emotions and cultural values fostered by the sphere of consumption, since consumer culture values transience, pleasure, novelty and excitement (176). According to Tibor Scitovsky, "Novelty is a major source of satisfaction, to judge by the large quantity we avidly consume every day and the high value we place on it. First love, first taste of some special food, or a naked body, together with many firsts, are among our most cherished memories" (58). Urban dwellers no longer perceive relationship as a form of commitment and a consequence of love, but as a temporary quest for physical pleasure and enjoyment. Zygmunt Bauman terms sex free of reproductive consequences and responsibility as "plastic sex," which is "suitable for a multiple, flexible and evanescent postmodern identity and free floating eroticism" ("On Postmodern Uses of Sex", 28). However, Zhu's great sensual experience produces some side effects as well: several days later, Zhu finds that he has contracted gonorrhea. His fantasies of foreign women and the city ultimately are associated with danger and decadence. Zhu is more ashamed and guilty than he is sick, since he is avoided by his friends and ridiculed by the doctor in the clinic. This incident makes Zhu reflect on himself and his urban experiences: he realizes that he needs something more substantial

than plastic sexual relationships.

Zhu's sexual encounters with other female characters examined so far are affected by consumer culture in that sex intrinsically bears the same characteristic as a commodity, generating the sense of pleasure and novelty. Nonetheless, Zhu's relationship with Yu is a major departure from his previous sexual encounters. This relationship becomes "the focus of personal identity, in which the personal narrative is constructed and reconstructed to provide the provisional sense of unity of the self that is necessary in the world of post-modernity" (Weeks 37). Sexuality and love are important here because they provide the prime sites for attaining meaning. The significance of this relationship is manifold. First, the relationship transcends consumer culture and its rule of exchange because it is based on mutual affection rather than novelty and excitement. It can be interpreted as Qiu's endeavor to restore the romantic love pattern lost in most (post)modern cities. Second, the identity-seeking journeys of both characters are fulfilled by this relationship; it is through this relationship that they realize who they are. Also, similar to Jeremiah's recovery, the act of putting on the plays has a key function in characters' discovering a sense of self. Third, it is crucial to the narration of the novel since it is the narrative thread, connecting all the other love stories of Zhu's friends.

Zhu's relationship with Yu Hong starts with a sketch lesson. Yu is a

rich housewife who wants to learn sketching to kill time and Zhu becomes her tutor. Yu Hong and Zhu Wen belong to different social strata: Yu has enough money and time to squander, while Zhu is a poor artist who can barely feed himself. This social gap between the lovers is a classic plot device in romantic narratives throughout literary history. Rather than being an obstacle, the gap brings the lovers closer to each other and makes them more steadfast in love. In the archetypical romantic novel Pride and Prejudice, Darcy has a much higher social standing than Elizabeth; in Dreams of the Red Chamber, Baoyu is from an aristocratic family, ranking higher than Daiyu's family. When Zhu is outside Yu's apartment building, he is very aware of his appearance: "I walked towards it and tidied myself up a little. My hair and my beard are growing too long, which make me look like a bandit" [我走到它跟前，整理了一下我的衣服，我觉得我的头发和胡子都太长，这使我看上去像个传统意义的坏人.] (67). The accentuation of the divide between Zhu and Yu is further illustrated by the description of the interior of Yu's spacious apartment. It is a modern dwelling, decorated with antiques, plants, expensive carpets and a marble floor. Zhu's first impression of Yu is that she is a boring and rich housewife from whom he can make easy money.

However, as the teaching goes on, Zhu notices that Yu is actually fairly smart and artistic. She is keen on learning sketching and has a good

understanding of art. So Zhu starts to treat his tutor job seriously and teaches her the fundamentals of sketching. As they get more acquainted, Zhu's initial impression of Yu Hong disintegrates and the real character of Yu emerges. Yu Hong, despite all the wealth and leisure time she possesses, is unhappy: "I am very depressed. Joy has completely left me and I do not know why. I really admire when people laugh because I am always too gloomy and I have almost forgotten what happiness feels like. Can you tell me what happiness is?" [其实，我有很深的忧郁症，我无法真正快活起来，我不知道我为什么总是不快活，我看到别人笑的时候，都羡慕人家笑得那么好，我总是不够快乐，我已经忘记快乐的滋味了，你能给我讲讲什么是快乐么?] (139). Zhu, a poor artist who still has difficulty getting enough food, certainly cannot understand why a person feels gloomy living an extravagant life that many people covet: "I stared at her, thinking she is actually immersed in happiness. Happiness is as approachable to her as toilet paper is approachable to us. But she still says she is unhappy—that's ridiculous! [我凝视着她，在我看来，她其实天天处在快乐之中，她天天享用着手纸一样的快乐，可她却说她不快乐？这太荒谬了!]" (139).

Here, the identity problem of Yu begins to emerge and her depression is simply a symptom of her deep-rooted identity crisis. By treating herself as a commodity to exchange for a better life, Yu has completely lost herself. At this point, she does not realize what the real problem is, so she tries to

cure her depression by indulging in more lavishing consumption. She has a make-happy plan for herself, but since all her female friends have abandoned her out of jealousy, Zhu becomes her confidant. She has scheduled herself to “go swimming for three hours in Yingdong swimming pool, go to the concert, see a play and two movies, go horse-betting in Shunyi, go to the disco, go for coffee at the authentic American Hard Rock bar” [每周去英东游泳馆游三小时深水泳；每周去听一次音乐会，看一次话剧，两次电影；每周去顺义县的赛马场赌一次赛马；每周去一次迪斯科舞厅，在地道的美国摇滚酒吧”硬石”喝上一次咖啡.] (141) every week, just so she has things to kill her leisure time. Of course, this make-happy plan will not achieve what Yu intends; if anything, she gets more depressed. At the same time, Zhu, because of Yu, gets the chance to go to milieus that are frequently patronized by rich people and catches a glimpse of the luxurious life, so he is enjoying his pastime. Qiu uses the image of “empty-hearted” city dwellers to describe Zhu Wen and Yu Hong: “When we are dancing in a disco called Apollo, I have a stronger feeling that we are two empty-hearted people who have been consumed by the city. I am surrounded by an overwhelming sense of loneliness. Each of us is immersed in its own loneliness, but we are dancing together at the same time. What a wonderful picture!” [当有一天我和她在一家叫做”阿波罗”的舞厅跳舞的时候，我比平时更觉得我们像两个空心人在跳舞，两个被这座城市

越来越抽空的空心人在跳舞，每当到了这一时刻我就被一种前所未有的孤独感所袭染，我和她都沉浸在一种互不干扰的孤独中，并翩翩起舞，这是多么美妙的图景!] (142). As Zhang Xuejin and Zhao Xin assert, “empty-hearted” city dwellers have anesthetized themselves by the ecstasy brought by all the sensual experiences, drugs, dancing and sex” (45).

At this moment, both Zhu and Yu have become the victims of consumer culture. By far, the image of Yu Hong is still very similar to the other materialistic female characters, Kong Lin, Yang Jing, Liang Xiuna, Yang Lan, whom Qiu frowns upon, and she is in an identity crisis that she is not aware of yet. Zhu, on the other hand, has issues with women on top of his “art-for-art’s-sake or art-for-money’s-sake” struggle. He has never been close to women in a non-sexual way; women for him are “exotic plants rooted in a different kind of soil and nourished by another sun” [女人犹如另外一种植物，生活在另外一种土壤之中，被另外的的阳光和雨露所滋润] (144).

Getting to know Zhu and his artist friends, who are poverty-stricken but at the same time devoted and passionate about art, inspires Yu and she finally finds out the cure to her longtime depression: to resume her old profession. In a flashback, Qiu recounts how Yu becomes a housewife. Yu Hong first meets Wang, who later becomes her future husband, when she is a freshman in college majoring in Drama. Wang, a businessman, falls in

love with Yu at first sight and deems her to be the candidate for his wife. Yu does not love Wang, but Wang's perseverance and his good financial standing make Yu decide to quit her job and marry him. Her life as a housewife evolves solely around her husband and she is cut off from her dreams and passions. By surrendering to material wealth, Yu loses her independence and herself, but eventually she realizes that "material wealth cannot solve all the problems" [物质并不能解决所有的问题] (185). She is awakened by Zhu and his friends: "My self has slowly begun to reawaken. […] I have to find out the things that I love because only by dedicating myself to those can I regain happiness. […] Drama is my passion; the time I spend on plays is the time that I feel I am most alive" [我的自我开始慢慢苏醒了….我必须找到我热爱的东西，只有找到了我自己热爱的东西，并完整的投身于其中，我才回快乐….我是热爱戏剧的，只要在热爱戏剧的时候，我就会觉得我在真正活着.](185). Yu Hong's plan now is to establish a studio specializing in French absurd drama and she wants Zhu to join her and help her out; Zhu accepts with delight.

From this moment on, Yu Hong departs from all other female images in Qiu's novel in that she ceases to be one of the "empty-hearted" materialistic women that seek to define who they are by their sexualized bodies, and begins to restore her true sense of self by embracing his passion for life. She starts to reconnect to her sense of self when she works

in the studio and she is energized and empowered by that. Whenever she talks about her plays, she is glowing with pride, upbeat and enthusiastic.

Similar to Jeremiah's recovery by resuming his profession as a pianist, reconnecting with her passion to work with plays is a healing mechanism to Yu Hong as well. With the help of Zhu, Yu Hong's plays receive positive feedback from audiences and she is eager to stage more plays. Yu's passion and determination for her dreams have very much encouraged and inspired Zhu, giving him great hope, so the love between the two is inevitable. In Arthur Adamov's play La Grande et La Petite Manoeuvre, Zhu and Yu play the role of the hero and heroine respectively. The hero is persecuted by various forces and loses his arms and legs, and his girlfriend, the only solace during his ordeal, ultimately betrays him and pushes his wheelchair downstairs. Zhu internalizes the pain so much when he is playing the part that he actually thinks he is betrayed and killed by Yu. Long after the show has ended, Zhu is still very engaged in the role and cannot get himself out of the mood. The play functions significantly in their identity-seeking process and their relationship. Zhu relates his own experiences surviving in the city to that of the hero in the play. Role-playing the character accentuates those feelings and blurs the line between reality and drama. For both Zhu and Yu, life is the play that sets against the background of the city and they have a better understanding of life and

themselves by acting in it. When trying to console Zhu, Yu says:

> You understand Adamov's play and you have discovered yourself by playing his character, right? I am happy for you; I have completed myself through these plays as well. You are enraged, but it is because the play is resonating and you are too engaged in it, is it not? This is wonderful! You will feel better about yourself; you cried today, but surprisingly that gives me more hope. [你懂这些戏，你通过这些戏发现了你自己，对不对? 我真高兴，因为我也通过它在完成我自己，你的愤怒难道不是因为这出戏过于逼真和清晰吗? 这太好了，你会变的更好，你今天流泪了，这却使我感到更大的希望.] (211)

Also, it is through these plays that Zhu Wen and Yu Hong acknowledge their love for each other. Zhu is, for the first time, in love: "I cannot express clearly my strong affection for her, very much like the feeling of a glimpse of land when you have been at sea for a long time" [我不能完全确切的表达出我对她的那种强烈的喜欢，这仿佛是一个孤独的人在大海上航行，却突然看到了陆地.] (234). Contrary to Zhu's "plastic sex" with Molly, which leaves him with shame and regret, sex between Zhu and Yu, driven by love, is a pleasant experience: "This is the perfect sex I have ever experienced, beautiful, gentle, unconditional and uncompromising. It is a contribution, a connection, a rescue and a seeking process that is brand new to me. We

hold each other, kissing and cuddling, like real lovers" [这是我体验到的一次完美的性爱，它是美的，温柔的，它是无条件的，不妥协的．它只是奉献，只是寻求．它是一种结合，一次声援，让我感到了全新的内容，我们紧紧相拥，彼此抚摩亲吻，像真正的恋人那样.] (232-33). This is what Weeks regards as romantic love since it "provides meaning in a meaningless world, the vehicle by which the inner experiences and needs of subjects are mutually recognized and validated, and through which, potentially, both individuals are transformed. And sex has become the vehicle for the expression of that love" (174). It is emotional satisfaction from close contact or from intimacy that makes it a pure relationship. Zhu and Yu's relationship is a nurturing experience for both of them. It is about "love as the passionate vision of the other, the giving of oneself unconditionally and the irruption of desire into ordinary existence which leads to transformation of our being" (Featherstone, Introduction 15).

Unfortunately, the love between Zhu and Yu does not have a happy ending. After rediscovering herself, Yu decides to embrace her new life as an independent woman and terminate her marriage; she divorces her husband. On the last day of the show, a man walks onto the stage and stabs Yu in her heart. It is Yu's husband Wang, who kills her out of rage and humiliation. Yu Hong's own drama ends at its climax.

Qiu's novel is not a spiritually-charged narrative like Highway's, so

the protagonists depend on their love for each other as their paths of survival. According to Otto Rank, the modern person's dependency on the love partner is the result of the loss of spiritual ideologies, and the need for something or somebody to provide an escape from spiritual isolation and meaninglessness (qtd. in Bauman, Mortality, 28). It is through knowing Zhu and his artist friends that Yu gets inspired and reconnects with her passion; similarly, Zhu is more identified with himself and the world by cooperating with Yu. The initial social gap between them is bridged and they come close to each other. The closeness is not so much about the bridging of distance, but about "the emotional excitement and bonding generated when they come together in close proximity" (Weitman 85). Fundamentally, Zhu and Yu are the same kind of people: they are dreamers who are struggling in a material world. Tu Xianfeng contends that Zhu Wen and Yu Hong represent people who strive to pull themselves out of the carnival experience and start to look for love and true identity (64). As Huang Jian terms it, they are the "pioneers and the warriors who try to break away from the overwhelming material desire in the city" (30). Besides, the relationship is based on love and commitment rather than sexual pleasure or material comfort, which fulfills Qiu's attempt to restore a romantic narrative in his novel. Zhu has found peace with himself and has a deep understanding of the play and world: "I think the purpose of the master playwright in creating

a play like this is to inform and guide people out of hopelessness and our performing the play is to excavate the negative images in our mind and thus become rejuvenated" [我想这些戏剧大师们创造出这样的世界也是为了让我们走出这样的世界，而我们去表现这一世界，也是为了更多的从心驱逐出这些景象，从而变成一个完全簇新的人.] (216).

Summary

Qiu's novel takes place in Beijing in the late 1990s, a cultural context that is characterized by a revival of the market economy, tremendous western influence, and the emergence of an urban consumer culture. Beijing's new architectural style is vertical as opposed to the ancient horizontal one and the new identity of Beijing is characterized by a consumer culture that emphasizes both general consumption and cultural consumption. The city dwellers have totally embraced the consumer culture in the sense that possession, recreation, and the ability to consume are worshiped. When Zhu and his artist friends first come to Beijing, they are overwhelmed by the urbanness of the city and their urban experiences are marked by their attraction to the global, clubbing, bar-going, exotic food, and foreign women. Altman asserts that globalization means a homogenization of cultures and it redistributes differences rather than abolish them (21). According to Hall, the differences result in the

fascination with otherness and “the other” is fundamental to the constitution of self because the sense of self or identity does not have a given or stable inner core (Representation 236, 238). The wandering artists are struggling between their artistic pursuit and the materialistic reality, art-for-art’s-sake or art-for-money’s-sake, and their survival very much depends on how they find a balance between the two. Despite the struggle, they all face an impossible home-coming. Qiu’s novel ends with Zhu’s determination to go back home, but given his urban experiences and his ambivalent feelings towards the city and the urban culture, his home-coming journey is not going to be a successful one. He will not be able to find the sense of identification in either home or the city.

Since the ethnicity factor is absent in Qiu’s novel—all the characters are majority Hans—so the means of obtaining meaning in an alienating urban environment is mainly through sexuality. For Zhu and his artist friends, reconnecting with their sense of self is fulfilled through the exploration of their sexuality. The consumer culture has made the social landscape of Beijing a sexualized space. The female images in Qiu’s novel are depicted as materialistic and pragmatic, which echo the images that appear in the works of his peer women writers, like Wei Hui and Mian Mian. While the female writers approach their characters with pride, Qiu expresses contempt and distain towards them. Zhu has several sexual

encounters with women: the African-American girl Molly, Yan Tong, and Yu Hong. It is through his love affair with Yu Hong that both of them rediscover their selfhood and Zhu's relationship with Yu is the author's attempt to restore a narrative of love lost in the cities. Their love for each other is the survival strategy for both of them.

Chapter Two: Tomson's Highway's Kiss of the Fur Queen

This chapter will focus on Highway's novel. I will first talk about the representation of the city and the urban experiences of the brothers and then I will approach the text character-wise and analyze how they survive the urban environment by relying on ethnicity and sexuality.

Weetigo in the City: The Consumer Culture

Unlike Qiu, who foregrounds city topography in his novel, Highway does not describe the exterior of the city in detail. The appearance of the city is not directly presented in Highway's novel, only described vaguely in the background; the impression of the city gradually comes into the readers through the perspective of the Okimasis brothers as their urban experiences increase. In Qiu's novel, the ethnicity factor is absent—all the characters are majority Hans. In contrast, in Highway's novel, the protagonists belong to an ethnic minority, Cree, so ethnicity is an underlying factor that affects their perspectives and their identities. The word "ethnicity" implies a wide spectrum of things, culture, history, language, philosophy, and customs; particularly in Highway's novel, ethnicity is demonstrated through the Cree mythology and the Native rituals and myth. Regarding the nature of mythology, Highway says that Cree thinkers choose to situate mythology exactly at the halfway point

between truth and lie, nonfiction and fiction (Comparing Mythologies 22). He also maintains: “Mythology defines, mythology maps out, the collective subconscious, the collective dream world of races of people, the collective spirit of races of people, the collective spiritual nervous system […] Without this mechanism, […] life would have no meaning” (Comparing Mythology 26).

The two brothers are also subject to the influence of the majority Christian cutlure. When they enter the milieu of the city, the urban culture, dominated by consumerism and Christianity, clashes with their Cree beliefs, precipitating what Sam McKegney terms, “a conspiracy between the forces of Christian religion and capitalist consumerism in the assault on Native cultural identity” (161). The reconfiguration of the brothers’ identities thus lies in how they try to find their true selves amidst the influence of consumerism and Christianity and how they achieve that by relying on the Cree spirituality (Jeremiah) and the sexuality (Gabriel). Traditionally, the mythological figure Trickster is rural, living in the bush, but Highway transports the Trickster to the city to “make the city into a home for Native people” (Hodgson 6). If Beijing to the wandering artists is represented as an enticing and inviting metropolis with infinite possibilities for entertainment and enjoyment, Winnipeg to Jeremiah and Gabriel is a city with lurking dangers and threats, a place where they have to reconnect

with their true selves, albeit through different paths, in order to survive.

The urban experiences of the Okimasis brothers and of the wandering artists differ a great deal due to historical and geographical specificities, but loneliness, alienation, and a sense of rootlessness haunt both groups. When Jeremiah first comes to Winnipeg, he has no friends with whom to hang out and speak Cree, so he has nothing to do except practice playing piano around the clock. He has a basement room on the north side of the city, where an old piano awaits him, thus he never has trouble finishing his daily practice quota. Jeremiah is relieved that he is free to break the rules set by the priests, to speak to girls even, "except that there were no girls to talk to" (102). He is surrounded by white teens who do not speak Cree at all. Solitude has encompassed him on every side: "You [his father] never told us how to spend time alone in the midst of half a million people. Here stars don't shine at night, trees don't speak" (104). During his two years in the city, Jeremiah "regularly considered swallowing his current landlady's entire stock of angina pills" (113). It is the Winnipeg Central Library that saves Jeremiah from killing himself: "For if he hadn't come across, by accident, the record listening booths, he would never have discovered the antidote to the suicide-inducing loneliness of the city Saturdays" (170). Later when Gabriel joins Jeremiah in the city, the two boys and an Aboriginal girl Amanda are very isolated from the entire school.

The lack of community and support accompany the Cree brothers throughout the novel.

Compared to their hometown, where Christianity and the priest are central, consumerism becomes the prevalent culture in the city, which seems to pose danger as well as attraction to the brothers. When Gabriel arrives in Winnipeg, the first thing Jeremiah does is to take him to the Polo Park Shopping Mall. Since Jeremiah has adjusted well to the city life, Gabriel looks shabby and non-sophisticated to him: “Come on, we gotta get you out of those rags. You look like you just crawled out of the bush” (116). So Jeremiah “ushers him into the rituals of urban life” (115) and initiates Gabriel’s transformation from a town boy into a city boy.

Gabriel is overwhelmed by the size of the mall and the abundance of the goods and he virtually stops at every store, buying new clothes for his image makeover. He enjoys his “enlightening” shopping experience:

> at least three miles of stores if he was judging distance right. And the people! You could put fifty Eemanapiteepitats inside this chamber and still have room for a herd of caribou. And such an array of worldly wealth, a paradise on earth. (115)

After living in the city for a while and paying more visits to the mall, Gabriel has changed his appearance dramatically; he has become “a rock star with a tan,” (119) in Jeremiah’s words. Later in their adulthood when

they come to the powwow in Ontario, both brothers are amazed at the modern lifestyle of urban Indians. With its all-encompassing power, consumer culture has changed the values of city dwellers, especially the traditions and cultures of Native people.

Although the mall, epitome of consumerism in the city and charm of urban life, is much favored by the brothers, it is also associated with the evil figure of the Weetigo. After wandering in the mall for a while, they start to hallucinate due to the dazzling light, lethargic air, and their overeating. So they resort to a Cree story to clear their mind, retelling the story of Weesageechak coming down to earth and crawling up the Weetigo's bum hole to kill the cannibal monster. The roles of Trickster and Weetigo converge when the brothers are leaving the mall: "Grey and soulless, the mall loomed behind them, the rear end of a beast that, having gorged itself, expels its detritus" (121). Their leaving the mall is reminiscent of the Trickster leaving the bum hole of the Weetigo after chewing the "Weetigo's entrails to smithereens from the inside out" (120). As Cynthia Sugars observes, the Cree story exults a sense of transgression in the midst of the alienating experience in the commercial confine of the mall (79). Here, consumerism is clearly related to the Weetigo, whose insatiable hunger parallels the temptations of the city's consumer culture. It is metaphorical in that the brothers become Trickster figures and the mall becomes Weetigo,

symbolizing a cultural rape of the indigenous people by the capitalism consumer culture (Sugars 80).

Although the Okimasis brothers embrace their urban experiences, they also, to some extent, have been consumed by the city. Jeremiah's alcoholicism and Gabriel's promiscuity result from consumption and the embodiment of the destructive effect of exterior forces on their Native identity. Polo Park Mall, as a type of Weetigo, as Mckegney asserts, suggests an assault of capitalist consumerism on Native cultural identity and the story of the Trickster Weesageechak eating the entrails of the Weetigo implies the defeat of the evil. In the boys' shopping adventure, they do not enter the mall to destroy themselves, but to implicate themselves in it and thus become more Euro-Canadian (161-62).

The other force in the city is the Christian culture, symbolized by the church. The different responses of the brothers towards Christianity are represented in their different attitudes towards church-going. Jeremiah acquiesces to the preaching of the priest and the bidding of his mother, whereas Gabriel refuses to accept Christianity once and for all, and identifies himself with his own Cree heritage. Their mother asks Gabriel to warn his brother to go to Holy Communion every Sunday, otherwise she will not cook the traditional Cree dish for him. When the brothers are on their own in the city, Jeremiah does follow his mother's orders and goes to

church on Sunday, bringing Gabriel along. Gabriel completely despises this church-going behavior and acts defiantly in the communion service. His reverie takes place during the communion service and he bursts out into laughter: “But the instant the flesh met Gabriel’s, a laugh exploded where his ‘Amen’ should have been. The laugh was so loud—the joke so ludicrous, the sham so extreme—that every statue in the room […] shifted its eyeballs to seek out the source of such a clangour” (181). The church service is symbolic of the cannibalism that devours the lives of the Cree community and the priest is the man-made monster Weetigo who feasts on human flesh.

Similar to Qiu’s Beijing, consumerism exceeds all other cultural forms and becomes the dominant culture of Winnipeg. Gabriel disparages the hypocrisy of the church-goers: “They talk about respect and love and peace and all that jazz, and the minute they’re out of that church, they are just as mean and selfish as they were before” (182). Gabriel advocates the Native Indian religion, but Jeremiah simply dismisses it as pagan and sacrilegious. From the argument between the two brothers, it is clear that “the conspiracy of Christianity and consumerism” has created tension and confusion for the Cree brothers in terms of how they perceive themselves. Each holds onto his own opinion, which contradicts the other: Gabriel is steadfast about his Cree heritage and juxtaposes Christianity against his

Native belief; Jeremiah, in contrast, regards Christianity as the only soul-saver and his Native religion as pagan and heretical. Since the two brothers have conflicting attitudes towards their Native spirituality, they will embark upon different journeys towards finding their true selves. I will divide the rest of the chapter character-wise and try to demonstrate how Jeremiah connects to his sense of self by ethnicity and how Gabriel achieves that by exploring his sexuality.

The Sonata of the Trickster: Pianist Jeremiah

The otherness he experiences in school and his witnessing all the drunken Indians on the street make Jeremiah suspicious of his own Creeness. When the new Aboriginal student Amanda walks into the classroom, Jeremiah is very self-conscious and guarded:

> was it because this young—and undeniably Indian—girl confronted him with his own Indianness, which his weekly bus sightings of the drunks on North Main Street had driven him to deny so utterly that he went for weeks believing his own skin to be as white as parchment? He had worked so hard at transforming himself into a perfect little transplanted European—anything to survive. (123-124)

The Natives have been subjected to the culture of white people and

are forced to relinquish their own cultural heritage. Here, Jeremiah's identity crisis starts to take shape. In one of his class presentations on the cruelty of the ruling of the Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, Jeremiah has meticulously designed her beheading for a laugh-provoking theatrical effect. However, he is confronted by Amanda, accusing him of avoiding the bloody history of North American Indians: "What use is there pretending to be what you are not?" (149). In the same way as Gabriel identifies with his Cree spirituality, the Ojibway Amanda, points out directly that the colonization of North America is as bloody as the French Revolution. The fact that Jeremiah learns to play the piano, a non-indigenous art form, and that he attends residential school have made him more uncertain of his ancestry: "I don't even know if I enjoy being Cree, he knew he shouldn't say. That his embarrassment had descended to a simmering dislike dismayed him. But why shouldn't he hate this place, these cheap goings-on, this conquered race of people?" (174). His doubts eventually prompt him to ask Amanda: "Ever thought you were born on the wrong planet? […] Into the wrong …era? The wrong… […] race?" (257).

After spending three years in the city, the Okimasis brothers find their home no longer a familiar place to them, not only because of the changes taking places on the reserve, but also because their education has made them alien to their own culture. The new things on the reserve are quite

shocking to the brothers: new houses and bungalows line the road; men are installing television antennas on the roofs and unimaginable trucks grace the hometown as well. What makes them feel particularly estranged from their village is that they cannot communicate effectively with their parents. Their parents hope that Jeremiah can return to the reserve after he finishes high school, but Jeremiah still wants to pursue his career as a pianist and to “play the music of Chopin like no Eemanapiteepitatite has ever played it” (189). Since classical music is not the music of his own culture, Jeremiah cannot find the proper word in Cree for “concert pianist.” When the family goes fishing, he stands idly, smoking cigarettes, refusing to offer a helping hand to his father. After finding out the reason from Gabriel that heavy work is bad for Jeremiah’s hands, Abraham begins to feel that his boys are growing away from him: “Visit by visit, word by word, these sons were splintering from their subarctic roots, their Cree beginnings” (193).

They are likely experiencing “reverse cultural shock,” a feeling that describes the sense of unfamiliarity people experience when they return to their home country after residing in a foreign country for a long period of time. The shock refers to the same sense of displacement and alienation when they return home as when they first go to a foreign country. Leaving the rural Cree reserve and migrating to the city have changed both brothers,

and the city seems to have the same function as a foreign country in terms of reshaping people's identity. As the brothers adjust to the urban life, home seems alien to them; they are placed in an "in-between" situation, unable to fully identify with either home or the city. Returning home is part of the plot design in Qiu's novel too, only he leaves it to the reader's imagination since his novel ends with Zhu's determination to leave the city. It is possible that Zhu would have the same experience going back home as the Okimasis brothers for the urban milieu in both novels has reshaped the identities of the protagonists and has made home foreign to them.

Jeremiah's identity crisis continues to escalate and finally paralyzes him after he wins the much coveted trophy in a musical competition. His success in the contest places him in an awkward place: although his talents are acknowledged when he defeats his competitors, he is unlikely to be accepted by the mainstream pianists because of his Cree ancestry and the prejudice white people have. Similarly, he cannot make a living being a pianist on the reserve because people back home do not have the knowledge to appreciate classical music and they do not want to either: "He had tried. Tried to change the meaning of his past, the roots of his hair, the colour of his skin, but he was one of them. What was he to do with Chopin? Open a conservatory on Eemanapiteepitat hill? Whip its residents into the Cree Philharmonic Orchestra?" (215). Unable to fit either in the city

or on the reserve, Jeremiah becomes an alcoholic and gives up his career as a pianist by slicing his thumb with the shard of a broken beer glass. He then becomes a social worker for six years, scraping drunks off the streets, and surrenders himself to the intoxication of alcohol and self-loathing.

At this point, Jeremiah is completely paralyzed by the danger and threats of the city, Christianity and consumerism. As Hodgson observes,

> In fact, temptation enslaves mainstream culture in Kiss of the Fur Queen. As shopping malls supplant churches in the consumer capitalism, greed is the contemporary Weetigo that eats up human souls and spits them out. The dominant culture, presented here as spiritually malnourished, seems intent on filling up its emptiness with all the wrong doings, running after and acquiring new addictions. (6)

Urban culture entails spiritual emptiness and Jeremiah has problems with his own cultural heritage, so he needs to reconnect to his ethnicity to be able to survive in the city. “The past”, writes Hall, “is not only a position from which to speak, but it is also an absolutely necessary resource in what one has to say. There is no way, in my view, in which those elements of ethnicity that depend on understanding the past, understanding one’s roots, can be done without” (19). The Trickster, disguised in various forms, acts as a protector and a guardian, who assists Jeremiah in reconnecting

with his sense of self, reviving and reinvigorating from his long time degradation. Besides the Trickster, the Native dancing ritual powwow and the Son of Ayash myth all become part of the healing regime.

In his preface to Kiss of the Fur Queen, titled “A Note on the Trickster”, Highway explains:

> The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings and events. Foremost among these beings is the “Trickster,” as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. “Weesageechak” in Cree, “Nanabush” in Ojibway, “Raven” in others, “Coyote” in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence o the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit. (n. pag.)

According to Hodgson, Tricksters are mischievous, humorous, and witty figures who teach the Native people by negative examples and playing tricks with them (2). Regarding the comic nature of the Trickster, Gerald Vizenor maintains that the Trickster is a liberator and a healer, a comic sign,

a communal signification and a discourse with imagination; it is being, nothingness and liberation, a loose seam in consciousness (187, 196).

In Highway's novel, the Trickster mainly assumes the form of the Fur Queen, the winner of the beauty pageant of 1951, who is described as a woman with unearthly beauty: "The radiant Miss Pembrook was draped not only with a white satin sash but with a floor-length cape fashioned from the fur of arctic fox, white as day. She had her head crowned with a fox-fur tiara ornamented with a filigree of gold and silver beads…" (9). Later, although appearing in disguises through the realm of mythology or human world, the Fur Queen can always be recognized by the fox-fur tiara, fox-fur cape or the white satin sash. Her first disguise is Jeremiah's piano teacher in Winnipeg, Lola van Beethoven, in her "white fox stoles, her white satin blushing in the aura of the American Beauty rose grasped between their fingers" (99). It is Ms. Beethoven that ushers Jeremiah into the realm of music. The Fur Queen is also the young lady with a fur-lined cape and a constellation of diamonds twinkling, who gives the brothers tickets to the New Year's Eve Gala. This particular event is the incident where Jeremiah recognizes his artistic talent as a pianist and makes up his mind to pursue his career as such: "But, finally, it was the music that captured him [Jeremiah]. He closed his eyes, the better to take pleasure in its beauty" (144). The Fur Queen also takes on the form of different Native women: the

drunken Indian woman ejected from a bar on North Main street, “her coat white, yellowed with age, polyester fur” (105); the long-lost daughter of Mistik Lake, Evelyn Rose McCrae and Madeline Jeanette, with white fur capes on their shoulders, both of whom are raped and killed by white men; and the mannequin in white fox fur as well, who whispers to Jeremiah in the mall.

The most important transformations that the Fur Queen undergoes are the show girl Maggie Sees and Amanda’s grandmother Ann-Adele Ghostrider, who as Sugars puts it, “propel him on a quest for identity and self-acceptance that will enable him to survive the contamination of the modern world” (83). The Fur Queen, through disguises in various forms, tries to set Jeremiah back on the right path. The loss of his father, Gabriel’s rushing off to his dancing career and his long time self-denial have become so overwhelming that Jeremiah is desperately in need of consolation, so alcohol becomes his comfort: “Laughing, drink-crazed Cree were tearing through a case of Five Star whisky, Jeremiah keeping up shot for shot” (229). Completely drunk, Jeremiah goes off to the wilderness and passes out in the snow. If it were not for his uncle Wilpaletch, who finds him and brings him back, Jeremiah would freeze to death as night falls. After a three-day hangover, he is finally awake: “It had been night then. But Jeremiah recalled waking with a pounding head, splayed on the floor, fully

clothed and filthy, and it was day" (229).

Here, the Fur Queen, disguised as the showgirl Maggie Sees, appears in Jeremiah's hallucination and tries to save him and divert him from the wrong path. As a "torch-singing fox with fur so white it hurt the eyes" (231), Maggie admonishes Jeremiah, albeit in a very light-hearted manner, on the importance of Cree spirituality in directing one's life, the lack of which will make life pointless: "Without celebration, without magic to massage your tired, trampled-on old soul, it's all pretty pointless, innit?" (233). What is also of significance is that Maggie Sees, the saver of Jeremiah, is a showgirl who plays the piano, which foreshadows the idea that Jeremiah's talent as a pianist will be conducive to his healing.

The brothers first hear the legend of the Cree shaman Chachagathoo through one of Father Bouchard's sermons where she is condemned as a witch who made communion with Satan and was sent to prison as a punishment by God. Again, the Fur Queen transforms herself into Amanda's grandmother, with her "white whisker "and "deer-hide tiara" (175), and reveals the truth to the Cree brothers at the Powwow. Chachagathoo tries to cure a fellow Indian by exorcising the Weetigo on him only to be stopped by the priest. The man dies and Chachagathoo is accused of practicing witchcraft and sent to jail. Thus the lie that has been around for years and the forbidden name cast upon Chachagathoo have finally been

lifted: she is not the evil woman who possesses bad dream power, but the "last shaman in that part of the world, the last medicine woman, the last woman priest!" (247). Jeremiah finally starts to recognize the validity of his own cultural heritage by this powerful revelation, which is crucial for reconnecting with his sense of self amidst the influences of consumerism and Christianity.

Dancing is important to Native cultures because it bridges the spiritual world and the world of the living. The grace and beauty of a dancer's movement evoke to the balance that Native culture advocates. In his interview with Hodgson, Highway says: "Dance is a metaphor for everything in our culture: for ritual, for art, for religion. Dance is a metaphor for being, so if we cannot dance, we cannot pray" (2). Powwow is an indigenous ritual where Aboriginal people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honor their own cultural heritage. It is first introduced to the readers in the Winnipeg high school days when Amanda invites Jeremiah to join her at the Indian Friendship Center. The rather minor appearance of the event paves the way for a more significant comeback later in the novel. The image of an Indian dancer on the poster is the embodiment and the accentuation of the Cree ethnicity: "Two luxuriant sprays of feathers radiated sun-like from the man's back, one above the other, a rooster crown of something brush-like sprouted from his head, his wrists were

bound in bracelets, his legs and feet in buckskin leggings and moccasins, all replete with floral-patterned beadwork" (161-62).

The grand comeback of the event is the Powwow in Wasaychigan Hill, which is part of Gabriel's endeavor to restore Jeremiah from his longtime degradation: "Pull him from the sewer, that was the answer. The country. A camping trip, to thaw their cold war of thirteen years (239). The dancing crowds have the same images and colors as the dancer appeared in the poster: feather-rimmed suns sprouted on their backs (243). The movements of the dancers, in Gabriel's eyes, are just like the "roiling spine of the mythic lake serpent (243) ridden by the hero Son of Ayash. At the Powwow, Jeremiah meets Amanda's grandmother, who is disappointed that the Crees have lost their dances and songs that have been around for thousands of years due to the influence of Christianity. In Jeremiah's dream, Chachagathoo rises from her grave and performs the same ceremony on Jeremiah: "No. It was the monster gnawing at his innards, devouring him live, that Chachagathoo had come to get, not him" (252). The grimacing face of Chachagathoo overlaps with the laughing face of Amanda as Jeremiah wakes up. The powwow is an important event that signifies the start of Jeremiah's healing process. The Native dancing ritual and the Son of Ayash myth are embodiments of how Jeremiah relies on ethnicity to connect to his sense of self.

Jeremiah's musical talent as a pianist also plays an important role in his healing. Gabriel keeps nudging Jeremiah to practice the piano. Feigning disgust, Jeremiah begins to get reacquainted with his lost friend: "First came his left hand, pounding on its own a steel-hard, unforgiving four-four time, each beat seamlessly connected by triplet sixteenth notes, an accidental toccata" (265). The drunken Jeremiah, after being exorcised by Chachagathoo, has played the piano for the first time in ten years. Eventually, Jeremiah composes a showpiece sonata out of a casual improvisation and cooperates with Gabriel in the musical by being the pianist.

The success of the musical and Gabriel's help inspire the composition of Jeremiah's play, Ulysses Thunderchild, a modern version of the Cree myth Son of Ayash. It is not until the staging of his own play that Jeremiah finally is able to reconnect with his self and his cultural heritage. Jeremiah's adaptation of the story first appears to be too pedantic, lacking the hilarious and mischievous Trickster spirit, whose character is about celebrating the basic of human needs. Jeremiah gradually comprehends the Cree spirit: "the company fell in with the chant, a dance, a Cree rite of sacrifice, swirling like blood around the altar and bouncing off the bass of the piano like, yes, magic" (280). With his brother Gabriel being the choreographer and the director, the staging of the play is another huge

success. As McKegney asserts, “rather than being consumed by past trauma, […] Jeremiah channels his anguish into creative work that will not only aid his personal healing, but will provide the cultural material for a broader Indigenous empowerment” (171).

The Native myth of Son of Ayash is first told by his father upon death. With the priest performing the dirge, surprisingly, the Champion Abraham resorts to the Cree myth to admonish his sons, which symbolizes Abraham’s acknowledgment to his own cultural heritage over the superimposed one. Both Jeremiah and Gabriel are shocked at their father, the most Catholic of men, mentioning the pagan tale as death approaches: “‘The world has become too evil. With these magic weapons, make a new world, […]’” (227). Abraham recites the lines from the story, telling his sons that the world is full of temptation and desire, the evil of which is represented by the monster Weetigo in Cree mythology. In a sense, the brothers living in an alienating city in the south are the heroes, just like the Son of Ayash, who face the evils of consumerism and Christian priests, defeat the devil and survive by relying on Cree belief. The priest is associated with the Weetigo, who “stomped across the ceiling” (224) and came to perform the communion for Abraham. At the same time, the Fur Queen is present, as always, and raises her lips from Abraham’s cheek, echoing the kiss bestowed when presenting the trophy to him at the

beginning of the novel, and takes him away.

By reconnecting to his own ethnicity— the Cree mythology, the Native myth and ritual, as well as his own talents as a pianist—Jeremiah fully recovers from his degradation and fulfills his identity-seeking process by applying it to real life.

The Solo of the God/Goddess: Dancer Gabriel

Gabriel is the one who resists Christianity to his dying breath and identifies with his Cree spirituality. His homosexuality, in my understanding, is deeply historical, resulting from the sexual abuse he has experienced in residential school. Weeks says: “But to say that something is a historical fiction is not to denigrate it. On the contrary, it is simply to recognize that we cannot escape our histories, and that we need means to challenge their apparently iron laws and inexorabilities by constructing narratives of the past in order to imagine the present and the future” (98). Unlike Jeremiah, who internalizes his pain and becomes dispirited, Gabriel is exuberant and lives with his horrible experience. His promiscuity and his unrestrained exploration of his sexuality in the city are ways to break away from Christian doctrine, to protest and revenge what befalls him and ultimately is his means to reconnect to Cree spirituality. Just as Weeks asserts: “oppositional sexual identities, in particular, provide such means and

alternatives, fictions that provide sources of comfort and support, a sense of belonging, a focus for opposition, a strategy for survival and cultural and political challenge" (98). Although Gabriel's homosexuality has a lot to do with his residential school experience, migrating to the city is the definitive factor that makes Gabriel's sexual exploration possible and finally fulfills his identity-seeking journey. Weetigo, the antagonistic figure of the Fur Queen in Cree mythology, accompanies Gabriel's urban journey; the abusive priest, AIDS, and the consumer culture are all associated with the evil Weetigo. Gabriel's sexuality and the urban influences render home-coming physically impossible for him, but upon death, Gabriel is finally able to return joyfully to the spiritual home he longs for.

Since Gabriel's sexuality has a lot to do the history the Aboriginals went through, namely the residential school system, it is necessary to take a look at the historical background.

From 1831 to the 1970s, Indian children were forced to be removed from their parents and required to attend residential schools run by the churches. At first, schools were located near reserves, but later they were located further from the reserves to separate the children from the pagan influence of their parents. Some families withdrew into their traditional territories to keep their children away from the churches, but further changes in the law prohibited these kinds of acts. It then became illegal

around the 1920s for children to be out of school and for parents to withhold their children from attending school. Most parents were not aware of the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse their children had suffered and they were powerless in their attempts to protect their children. The Indian children were refrained from speaking their native languages, accessing their spiritual teachings and performing the rituals. Also, the nurturing and loving family relationship was cut off between children and their family (Jacobs and Williams 126-27). In Fred Kelly's account of his own experience in residential school, he says:

> Immediately upon entry into the school, the staff began to beat the devil out of us. Such was my experience. We were humiliated out of our culture and spirituality. We were told that these ways were of the devil. […] We came to believe that Indian was a dirty world, oftentimes calling each other by that term pejoratively. Many of us were physically beaten, sexually fondled, molested and raped. (24)

Almost two centuries after these horrible events happened to the Aboriginal people, the federal government finally initiated remedial procedures. The start was the Statement of Reconciliation in 1998, including an apology for the physical and sexual abuse in the schools and an establishment of funding to support the healing process. The

court-ordered settlement, Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, implemented as of September 2007, was a further step toward the resolution of the issue. The package includes a common experience payment for every living survivor, an individual assessment for any claimed physical and sexual abuse, a healing endowment, a commemoration fund, and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Kelly 26). The purpose of such a commission is to acknowledge the wrong that was done in suppressing the history, culture and identity of Aboriginal people. For them, the truth of their tragic chapter of history now has a place in the official story of Canada (Kelly 26).

The Okimasis brothers' residential school experiences very much reflect this tragic chapter of history. They are forced to change to English names, put into uniforms, and separated from their cultural heritage: "His Cree must not be heard or he would fail to win the prize: the boy who acquired the greatest number of tokens from other boys by catching them speaking Cree was awarded a toy at month's end" (63). During their off-reserve years in school and later in the city, the Fur Queen is the protective figure for both brothers and the Weetigo is the evil monster that the Fur Queen tries to protect them from. For Gabriel, the Weetigo is associated with all the temptations and dangers surrounding him. It first appears as the abusive priest in residential school and the priest's initial

attempt to rape Gabriel is deterred by the Fur Queen. The photograph of Abraham being kissed by the Fur Queen becomes Gabriel's talisman: "The white fox on her cape will protect you from evil men" (74). At night, the moonlight makes the Fur Queen wink and wards off the approaching priest. The priest replaces the photo and retreats. The second time, after the photo is removed, the priest succeeds in his attempt and thus becomes the Weetigo:

> The man was wheezing, his breath emitting, at regular intervals, spouts of hot air that made Gabriel think of raw meat hung to age but forgotten. […] He didn't dare open his eyes fully for fear the priest would get angry; he simply assumed, after a few seconds of confusion, that this was what happened at schools, merely another reason why he had been brought here, that this was the right of holy men. (77-78)

Jeremiah witnesses his brother being raped by the "dark, hulking figure" and he thinks that "it might have been a bear devouring a honeycomb, or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh" (79). Terry Goldie regards Gabriel's sexual encounter with the priest as an awakening for him:

> Without the intervention of the old homosexual, the young gay man can be left in a quandary of impossible recognition. The awakening is often represented as a question of identification:

> the sexual encounter shows the young homosexual that there is another homosexual. Far more important, however, the encounter shows that a sexual desire which seems invalid or even unthinkable has the potential to find reciprocity with another human being. (210)

Basically, Goldie thinks that Gabriel's sexual encounter with the priest is a positive experience. The rape is serendipitous in that it makes Gabriel aware of his hidden homosexuality and that he is reciprocated by the priest. I disagree with Goldie in regarding the rape as a positive awakening for Gabriel; rather, I think the rape is a horrible incident that alters Gabriel's sexual orientation, which he does not wish for. But instead of staying frustrated and dispirited, Gabriel accepts his sexuality, lives up to it and uses it as means to protest the hypocrisy of priest, to break away from the imposed church doctrine, to discover his true identity and to connect with his Cree spirituality. This particular incident makes Gabriel more adamantly reject the preaching of the priest and Gabriel's unbridled sexual exploration in the city is his revenge. The evidence for my argument is as follows: Father Lafleur is portrayed as a rather disgusting and repulsive figure to Gabriel. In the rape scene, the priest is described as "raw meat hung to age but forgotten" (78). Gabriel is too scared to open his eyes and he assumes that pleasing the priest sexually is one of his duties that he cannot reject.

Qiu describes Zhu and Yu's love scene—after they acknowledge their love for each other—as gentle, soothing and unconditional, which to me indicates that the relationship is an awakening for both of them, but the way Highway portrays it seems to suggest Gabriel's unwillingness and repulsiveness towards the behavior.

Gabriel's ridicule of and resistance to the church and the priest are manifested in several occasions. The first one is when he plays the role of Jesus in school. The biblical story of the Wedding at Cana, when played by Gabriel, merges with the wedding of Jane Kaka's son to Magipom on the reserve. Also, Gabriel is caught singing vulgar Cree songs when he is hanging from the cross. As Sugars asserts, the tales become humanized and humorized when recast into their life and their own community (77). Gabriel transforms the serious biblical story into the cheerful event of a wedding on the reserve, which demonstrates his refusal to internalize Christianity. A similar event happens when he comes back to Eemanapiteepitat for the summer. Gabriel and Jeremiah are performing a mock mass together in the woods. Gabriel is dressed as the priest, "draped in one of his mother's famous quilts, tied in a bulky knot at his neck and dragging on the ground a good two feet behind him" (93). His congregation consists of three rows of sticks broken off at various lengths and his dog, the devout and faithful Kiputz. The Latin words in the mass, Domino, Mea

culpa, are parodied by nonsense English words. Gabriel starts the mass by asking “do the Cree Indians of northern Manitoba know how to play dominoes?” (93). Moreover, Jeremiah, the musician, plays the festive Christmas song “O come, All Ye Faithful” in place of the required Gregorian chant. Then Father Gabriel proceeds to the somber section of the service by lowering his chalice and the pan-sized host and genuflecting, chanting “Me a cowboy, me a cowboy, me a Mexican cowboy” (94). Eventually, the mass comes to an end because the devout Kiputz is distracted by a squirrel and Father Gabriel has to look after his “errant parishioner.” The mock mass is meant for a pastime; the solemnity of the Church service is completely replaced by the frivolity of the parody, which is another example of Gabriel’s contempt towards the priest and his rejection of Christianity.

Gabriel’s parents, on the other hand, are devout believers of Christianity. They are more susceptible to Christian beliefs than to their own Cree spirituality: “The Catholic church saved our people. Without it, we wouldn’t be here today. It is the one true way to talk to God, to thank him. You follow any other religion and you go straight to hell, that’s for goddamn sure” (109). It is their blind faith that prevents Gabriel from telling them about his rape by the priest: “Even if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur” (92). Gabriel decides to keep silent until the day he dies. It is also at that moment that Gabriel realizes that neither his adherence to

his Cree spirituality nor his homosexuality will be accepted by his parents and others on the reserve, so he has to join his brother in the city. Going to the city is meant to be an escape from his devout parents and the church doctrine. The infinite freedom in the city provides him with opportunities to explore his homosexuality, to reconnect with his true self and to embrace his spirituality.

Like Jeremiah, Gabriel is overwhelmed by loneliness and alienation when he first arrives in the city: “What was there for a person like him—no friend, not one acquaintance save Jeremiah, who did nothing but play the piano” (126). Gabriel tells Jeremiah he wants to go back to the reserve because he feels alien to the new environment: “We don’t belong here […]. Two thousand kids and—” (127). But eventually, Gabriel begins to enjoy the freedom of the city: He does not have to hide his sexuality and he gets more opportunities to seek sexual reciprocity. The influence of the church recedes to the background and the power of the consumer culture comes to the forefront. Gabriel gets the chance to embrace his Cree spirituality, to explore his sexuality, and to enjoy what the urban environment offers. Yet despite all the temptations and opportunities, Gabriel is consumed by the city in the end. He is eaten by the Weetigo, which is associated with the consumer culture, his promiscuity, and AIDS.

Regarding sexuality, Weeks contends:

> The dominant (hetero) sexual identities in our culture have some of the qualities of myths: they speak for an assumed naturalness, eternity and truth which belie their historical and contingent nature. The radical, oppositional identities which have arisen in and against the hegemonic ones can be seen as fictions: they offer narratives of individual life, collective memory and imagine alternatives which provide the motivation and inspiration for change. (99)

Gabriel has taken a series of ventures to explore his sexuality. He first starts with the gay bar on North Main Street at the age of fifteen. He slips into the bar by following a mob of white youngsters and has quite an eye-opening experience: “The place was veritable explosion of madness, drinkers two and three deep clustered around entire fleets of tables pouring beer and liquor down their throats as though the world would end at midnight” (130). He gets hit on by several people and drinks far more than his body can take. Completely intoxicated by alcohol, Gabriel finds himself making out with a white man named Wayne whom he just met down the alley.

The urge within a person to search for excitement and pleasure is never-ending. Gabriel, who already regards the bars on North Main as “precarious blood-and-beer-soaked dives” (165), is ready to take his

adventure to the next level. He decides to go to the downtown establishment, Rose, which is “of pedigree” based on word-of-mouth. The fact that he is a brown boy gets him lots of attention from the people when he steps into the bar. The awkwardness disappears when he gets seated at the far end of the bar and starts drinking and talking to people. Gabriel’s experience at Rose is certainly more exciting than his previous ones because after all the drinking and merriment, he finds himself waking up amidst of a pile of naked men: “Everywhere he looked, naked limb met naked limb met naked limb, an unceasing domino effect of human flesh, smell, fluid” (168).

While at the bar, Gabriel catches sight of a two-spirited Indian: “He was the only other Indian in the room, and he was neither male nor female. Or perhaps both. The creature was blessed or cursed, one of God’s more vicious jokes, the soul of a woman trapped in the body of a man. He willed the creature away; he-she should leave, disappear, disintegrate”(168). Two-spiritedness is pervasive in Native societies since neither their languages nor their Trickster and its various forms are gendered. Will Roscoe asserts that “two-spiritedness” emphasizes a gender disruption, assuming that Native homosexuality represents a blending of the female spirit and the male spirit (194).

At this point, Gabriel’s unbridled sexual exploration becomes part of

his urban routine, which eventually leads him to death. His promiscuity is the reincarnated Weetigo that feasts on human flesh: “And the body of the caribou hunter’s son was eaten” (168). The two-spirited Native man is one of the disguises of the protective figure Fur Queen, whom Gabriel fails to notice: “[…] the dancer extracted a threadbare white feather boa from a sleeve as if for Gabriel’s exclusive view” (168).

The infinite freedom of the city also enables Gabriel to develop his talents as a dancer. In the New Year’s Eve Gala, Gabriel is totally fascinated by the dancers’ steps: “Beat by beat, step by step, the dance had seduced and then embraced Gabriel” (144). Then he starts to take dancing classes and uses bodybuilding as a cover whenever Jeremiah asks about that. As his training increases, Gabriel’s dancing improves dramatically and he finally gets the chance to play the leading part in a dancing performance, which turns out to be a huge success. It is in one of his training sessions that Gabriel meets Gregory Newman, the choreographer, who later becomes his gay partner. Newman is a mentor and a teacher to Gabriel and he is very helpful with his dancing career, but again, Newman is associated with the monster Weetigo: “Suddenly, he [Gabriel] felt himself devoured” (200).

Since Jeremiah promises his parents to look after Gabriel in the city, he worries about Gabriel’s choices, particularly, Gabriel’s homosexuality.

Weeks contends that identities “provide a bedrock for our most fundamental being and most prized social belongings. Yet we are often forced to question them, or have them questioned for us, remake and reinvent them, search for new and more satisfying personal ‘homes’, all the time” (86). Rebellious and self-assured, Gabriel determines to live the life he wants and refuses to be told what to do by his brother: “You try too hard. At everything” (207). His unbridled sexual promiscuity is his way of obtaining meaning and to seek his identity.

Even though Gabriel is partner with Newman, he keeps himself rather distant from him, reluctant to share his thoughts with him, and he still keeps sexual relationships with other men. Gabriel fools around with the leather man on the alley: “Behind the clinic, the leather man and Gabriel sequestered themselves” (282). He also has fun with the rock singer Robin Beatty when he is supposed to meet him for business: “Instead, he and Robin Beatty had tripped out of the Garden Baths, skipped across the boulevard, and gone singing, sliding, and dancing through a park aglitter with moonlight and ice” (283). His various casual sexual encounters eventually get him into trouble: he has blemishes on his body that will not heal, he catches flu several times a year, and he has the rare pneumonia that people get only when their immune system is seriously damaged. Gabriel is eventually consumed by AIDS and his sexual dissipation. Even

at the end, Gabriel still tries to keep his illness from his brother, though unsuccessfully: he lies to Jeremiah about his pills when asked and he begs Robin not to tell Jeremiah the result of his medical exam.

Throughout the novel, Gabriel keeps so many things to himself. At the beginning, he cannot tell his parents about his sexual abuse by the priest because he is afraid that they will side with him. He tries to hide from Jeremiah that he takes dancing lessons, that he has a gay partner, and that he is dying of AIDS. He is even not candid with his partner. All of Gabriel's aloofness and self-containment demonstrate that he is still struggling on his identity-seeking journey and he has not made peace with himself despite his drastic sexual explorations. Gabriel's promiscuity leads him to death, which ultimately fulfills his identity-seeking journey since he is able to make peace with himself and returns to the spiritual home that he always longs for.

Gabriel cannot really go back to living on the reserve after all his years in the city in that the influences of urban culture have changed him in such a way that his Cree home seems alien to him. When he goes back to visit his parents, Gabriel finds it hard to communicate with his mother about the ballet classes he has been taking. The nebulous concept of a ballet slipper is beyond his mother: "I haven't got a clue what a *ballee sleeper* is but there sure are funny moccasins you city folk wear" (194). Gabriel is

afraid that people will think of him as a sissy, a girlie-boy if they know about his ballet classes, which is exactly how Jeremiah and his mother react. Although he is shameful and guilty, Gabriel lies to his father that he still prays and says nothing about his sexual encounters in the city: “Supposing this beautiful man could see, in his son’s dark eyes, Wayne’s naked skin flush against his son’s. Supposing this kind old hunter could see the hundred other men with whom his last-born had shared…what?” (190). Home thus becomes, according to Sugars, an alienating space where Gabriel will forever be an outsider (75). It mirrors the power structures of a world in which “the victim is disbelieved and the evil is allowed to flourish” (Shackleton 160).There is no room for Gabriel on the reserve due to his homosexuality and the only way to go back to the spiritual home is upon death via the help of the Fur Queen.

As Gabriel’s health deteriorates, his life is coming to an end. In his last performance, Gabriel plays the role of Migisoo, the caribou hunter who dies of famine. By the end of the play, the monster Weetigo approaches Migisoo and devours him:

> “Come to me, Migisoo,” the flesh devourer hissed through ten loudspeakers, “I’ve been waiting for you.” The voice like water dripping in a tavern.
>
> “Weetigo!” spat Migisoo. “You’ve already taken five children

> form us. Haven't you feasted on enough human flesh while we lie here with nothing but our tongues to chew on? Get away from us, get away, awus!" (294)

Migisoo's being devoured by the Weetigo in the play foreshadows what is about to happen in reality: Gabriel is consumed by AIDS and devoured by the Weetigo. In a later scene, the Fur Queen appears in Gabriel's dreams while he is on his sickbed and he mistakes her for the Weetigo: "An arctic fox appeared, in sequined gown of white satin, gloves to her elbows, wings whirring" (297). She is trying to bring Gabriel to the spiritual home he longs for: "'Gabriel,' said God the Father from behind the singing lady fox,' Gabriel, get out of bed" (297).

These two scenes foreshadows how Gabriel's identity-seeking journey is fulfilled: upon death, the Weetigo is crawling towards him, but the Fur Queen wards off the evil and guides him back to his spiritual home. According to Suzanne Methot, in Cree cosmology, people do not think of death as an end, but as a different way of being and the dead help them to live (2). For Gabriel, death is not a grievous end, but a joyful rebirth. Jeremiah knows that Gabriel is leaving him soon and he blames himself for not taking good care of him. Gabriel says: "There is nothing you could have done about this. What I did, I did on my own. Don't mourn me. Be joyful" (301). It is through death that Gabriel consummates his identity-seeking

journey, reconnects with the Cree spirituality, and makes peace with himself. Upon death, Gabriel clearly identifies with the Cree spirituality he always believed in. As his mind starts to wander, Gabriel conjectures his life after death: whom would they meet when he joins his father and he answers the question himself:

> The Trickster, of course. […] Weesageechak for sure. The clown who bridges humanity and God—a God who laughs, a God who's here, not for guilt, not for suffering, but for a good time. Except, this time, the Trickster representing God as a woman, a goddess in fur. Like in this picture. I've always thought that, ever since we were little kids. I mean, if Native languages have no gender, when why should we? And why, for that matter, should God? (298)

Gabriel's dying wish is to have a sweetgrass ceremony performed and the priest nowhere near his bed. Amanda's grandmother, the Fur Queen in disguise, with her "white ermine cape in a small brown suitcase" (299), is on her way to the hospital to perform the ceremony, while the Weetigo approaches Gabriel "with its tongue lolling, its claws reaching for its groin" (299) with the face of Father Lafleur. The smoke of the grass sets the fire alarm, but Jeremiah stands up defending his brother's wish: "We have a right to conduct our own religious ceremonies, just like everyone

else!" (305). As Joseph Brown and Emily Cousins point out, rituals generate sacred power which can be attained in a cumulative way. "Only then, when these two conditions of purification and expansion have been actualized, may one attain the final stage, in which one's identity is grounded in a union with all that is" (111-12). Amidst the scream of the fire alarms, the ceremony is successfully performed: "Ann-Adele Ghostrider lit a tiny sprig of cedar—after sweetgrass, sage and tobacco, the fourth sacred herb—and one last puff of smoke rose" (305). In the smoke, the Fur Queen appears, taking Gabriel to his spiritual home, the sense of which is sustained by collective memory, ritual performances, and commemorative ceremonies (Shackleton 156-57). The ending where Gabriel is saved by the Fur Queen echoes the scene at the beginning where the two brothers are surrounded by a herd of caribou. Gabriel is destined to survive his adventure in the city and be redeemed in the end. In his childhood, it is Jeremiah who protects him from being hurt and by the end of his life, it is the Fur Queen who ushers Gabriel back to his spiritual home. Upon death, Gabriel's mind begins to wander and he imagines himself to be his father, the Cree champion who wins the trophy and gets the kiss of the Fur Queen. Dream and reality merge into one when from the smoke of the sweetgrass, the Fur Queen descends to Gabriel, taking his hand and guiding him into a different world of being.

Summary

Most of Highway's novel takes place in Winnipeg and Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s. For the brothers, the city of Winnipeg is represented in a much more abstract manner than Beijing to the wandering artists: the landscape and the appearance of the city are absent in Highway's narration. Like Qiu's Beijing, consumer culture is foregrounded and the gigantic shopping mall has become its symbol. Christianity has been replaced by consumer culture in the city; the mall, instead of the Church, becomes the center.

When Jeremiah and Gabriel first come to Winnipeg, they are tormented by loneliness and isolation. Their urban adaptation starts with the image makeover, so the mall becomes their favorite place. The city means opportunities and freedom for the brothers to develop professionally: Jeremiah and Gabriel are on their way to becoming a pianist and a dancer respectively. Just like Zhu, home-coming is an impossible journey for them as well: Jeremiah is trying to keep his hands in good shape for playing the piano so he will not help out his father; Gabriel is embarrassed to say anything about his ballet classes. In Highway's novel the Cree ethnicity is the underlying theme throughout. For the Okimasis brothers, the negotiation process lies in how to survive the homogenizing forces of consumerism and Christianity by making sense of their selves and

(re)connecting to their Cree spirituality. Although Jeremiah and Gabriel have different paths of survival, the Cree ethnicity, to be more exact, the Cree mythological figures Trickster and Weetigo are ubiquitous in their urban everyday life. In this sense, for a spiritually charged text like Highway's, the importance of ethnicity overrides sexuality in terms of identification.

Jeremiah is the one who is always suspicious of his own cultural roots and identifies with Christianity. His artistic talent and his profession as a pianist have placed him in a situation where he cannot be accepted either back home or in the city. He gives up his career after he wins the prestigious award and becomes alcoholic. The revitalization of Jeremiah is achieved via the help of the guardian figure, the Fur Queen and its various disguises. The healing dancing ritual powwow and the Native myth all become part the survival strategy that finally enable Jeremiah to find himself.

For Gabriel, reconnecting with his sense of self is fulfilled through the exploration of his sexuality. Weeks contends that for the past few centuries, at least, sex may have been central to the fixing of the individual's place in the culture (87). He also maintains that sexual identities are historical inventions, which change in complex histories. They are imagined in contingent circumstances (98). Gabriel's abuse by the priest is the

historical contingency that changes his sexual orientation. Instead of bemoaning his fate, Gabriel accepts his sexuality, uses it as a means to show his protest against Church doctrine, and to connect with his Cree spirituality. The city of Winnipeg implies freedom to Gabriel, which he takes full advantage of by unrestrainedly exploring his sexuality. His various sexual encounters make him contract AIDS and eventually lead to his death. Weetigo, the evil monster, is associated with the abusive priest, AIDS, and the consumer culture, which have consumed Gabriel's life. But death is just another way of being, an ultimate way to return to his spiritual home and to fulfill his searching for selfhood. The only home that can be returned to is the spiritual home, a collective memory of cultural heritage, which is fulfilled upon Gabriel's death bed via the help of the Fur Queen.

Conclusion

The purpose of my thesis has been to conduct a comparative study of Qiu's and Highway's novels, which share the similar theme of depicting artists migrating from the country to cities, but differ in their cultural backgrounds—Chinese and Canadian Aboriginal respectively—and to explore how the migration process affects the identities of the artists and how they negotiate their identities in the new urban environment. The departure from the migration theory suggested by these two texts is that the identity problem exists in the internal migration process as well, without border-crossing being involved.

From juxtaposing the two novels, it indicates that geographical difference does not contribute to identity (re)configuration within internal migration process. By this, I mean the issue is not region or country specific; regardless of where internal migration takes place, more developed areas like North America or developing areas like Asia, the migrants have to face the identity issue. The contributing factor, however, is consumer culture, which has become the dominant urban culture in most cities around the globe. Hall asserts that the question of identity arises whenever one is not sure where one belongs or how to place oneself among a variety of behavior styles and the nature of identity is to avoid to fixation (Representation 240). Globalization and global capitalism have shaped the

world cities into a similar mould, so consumer culture rather than geographical difference has become the most influential factor that affects identity (re)formation when people migrate from countryside to cities. As Altman contends, when people are brought within the scope of global capitalism, a consumer culture develops which cuts across borders and cultures, thus globalization involves the simultaneous strengthening and weakening of national and local boundaries (1, 20).

When the migrants first come to the city, they are unable to identify with the urban culture, so feelings of alienation, otherness and displacement are common among newcomers. As the newcomers are more adjusted to the tempo of urban life, their transformations, which happen on two levels, start to take shape. The first level is the exterior, i.e. their looks and images. They all experience the phase of image-makeover—start to dress like city dwellers and imitate their style. But the most significant transformation is the interior one: their values, lifestyles and their perception of self in relation to others have changed. The importance of money is highly elevated in consumer culture, so gratification associated with being rich, and thus being able to consume, becomes the value of the urban dwellers. Abundance exists on the condition that you possess enough material wealth. Thus home seems alien to them as they become more used to the urban life, and they are

caught up in an “in-between” situation, unable to fully identify with either home or the city. This eventually leads to an impossible home-coming for the migrants. Chambers asserts: “For the nomadic experience of language, wandering without a fixed home, dwelling at the crossroads of the world, bearing our sense of being and differences, is no longer the expression of a unique tradition of history, even if it pretends to carry a single name” (4).

To negotiate and maintain their sense of belonging in the complex urban environment, ethnicity and sexuality, among other things, become the two most important tools that the migrants use. If both ethnicity and sexuality are present, i.e. the migrants and the city dwellers belong to different ethnic groups, the importance of ethnicity overrides sexuality in terms of identification. Ethnicity entails more than a sense of grouping, but a broader sense of cultural heritage language, religion, customs, and tradition. Each language prescribes how a certain group of people approaches the world. Since all the other aspects of cultural heritage function and are communicated via the medium of language, ethnicity in its large sense defines how people position themselves in relation to others and how a particular group is differentiated. According to Highway, “the most explicit distinguishing feature between the North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian(e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender” (Kiss of the Fur Queen, n. pag.). The

non-gendered nature of the Cree language determines that the central figure Trickster in the mythology or the Cree culture in general is genderless.

In the absence of the ethnicity factor, however, i.e. the migrants and the city dwellers belong to the same ethnic group, sexuality is the major tool to negotiate the sense of self. Bhattacharyya contends that in the construction of self, sexuality holds a special place because “it is at this arena that the competing impulses of pleasure and constraint are balanced in the artwork of selfhood” (8). So if the larger cultural context is set, sexuality is central to fixing one’s place and obtaining meaning in one’s life.

Notes

[1] The translation of Qiu's novel in this thesis is mine.

[2] Hutong is unique to Beijing. The word Hutong is believed to originate in the Meng language, meaning water well and it means long and narrow street in Mandarin.

古都残梦 [Incomplete Dreams of the Old Capital] <http://www.oldbj.com/bjhutong/bjhutong/hutong-00035.htm>

3 Siheyuan is a residential form dated back to 12th century, but now it is mostly preserved for tourism purposes. It is basically a square-shaped yard, but depending on owner, the size various. For example, if it is the residency for a royal member, it can be quite spacious with different interconnected yards, gardens and ponds; if it just for urban poor, two families may live in one small yard.

老北京的经典建筑—四合院 [The Classic Architectural Form in Old Beijing: *Siheyuan* <http://www.oldbj.com/bjhutong/siheyuan/ siheyuan00012.htm>

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