

Chapter One

The Writing Process in My life

I closely link the creation process of writing with the experience of living in Japan, travelling to other countries and returning to my own country. I will begin this chapter by outlining what I mean by “exilic” in the context of inter-cultural and creative experience. At a conference on ‘ThePoetics of Exile’ in New Zealand in 2003, I responded strongly to the following words:

As home and loss are narrativized, both fact and fiction suggest that the exilic memory, which Rushdie famously compares to shards of broken mirrors, does not simply recapture the past or repudiate explanations but also creates a new one, one that may have, indeed, little in common with historical accounts.... [T]he re-remembered home ensures that the past continues into the present and loss is turned to gain, even as it also suggests that the condition of exile is permanent, irrevocable and universal. (Barat in Hanne, 8)

The creative and life experiences transmitted above struck me as parallel to my own. I identified with the experiences of many of the participants in the conference whose creative lives were profoundly changed by inter-cultural travel, linguistic paradigms, geographic distance and the shifts of time.

The history of my linguistic relationship with Japan is a significant dimension of my creative life as a writer. In 1976 I was a foreign student at Osaka Joshi Gakuen (Osaka Girl's School) for the academic year. Between being a high school girl of fourteen in Osaka and a university student of seventeen in Tokyo I spent two years in Australia finishing high school. During those two years, in 1977, I won first prize in the advanced division for South Australia in the Japanese language speech contest sponsored by the Consulate-General of Japan and the Australia-Japan Foundation. The cycle of going and coming and of "here" and "there" had begun.

At the age of seventeen I was taken again by my family to Japan, ostensibly for the summer holidays that were the winter holidays in Tokyo. Then began a sojourn that lasted sixteen years of my life. That sojourn will now never end for me, because while I was there during those holidays, or maybe even years before then, I fell in love with the poetry of Japan

In 1979 I gained entrance to Sophia University, historically Japan's premier university for the study of foreign languages. As an evolving writer of seventeen years of age, alone in Tokyo, I will never forget hearing that my university aptitude test papers were being marked at Princeton University in America, where I knew F. Scott Fitzgerald had studied and spent part of his life as a young poet. The work of this author was of considerable importance to me as a young girl; I read many English novels to stave off my own homesickness while in Osaka as a Japanese speaking student whose native language was not Japanese and

separated from my biological family.

After taking formal Japanese language instruction and studying a number of courses in literature, I was admitted by special permission from the Dean of Studies to a post-graduate course titled LIT 498: "Reading and Translation Seminar" taught with ancient and modern poetry as study material for translation technique. This post-graduate course, which I took as an under-graduate, was taught by the Columbia University educated bi-lingual (Japanese/English) playwright Dr. Janine Beichman, whose Noh plays have been performed in Tokyo to great critical acclaim. It was under Beichman's mentorship that I began to conceptualise and compose my own poetry in Japanese.

From the beginning of sophomore year until graduation I lived in the former ancient capital city Kamakura. Kamakura is famous in Japan (and internationally famous through the power of translation) as being a contemporary home of writers and artists. Kamakura was also at various periods of history the home of exiles from the ancient capital of Kyoto. Many of these real-life exiles were posthumously immortalised in classical Noh plays. For these years I lived next to a river filled with carp at the foot of the mountain temple where the more contemporary Yasunari Kawabata wrote *The Sound of the Mountain*. Kawabata and the other historical exilic characters to appear in classical Japanese plays also contributed to the evolution of my life as a writer. These real life influences conceptually and spiritually shaped my work and psyche.

In Kamakura I met with painters in collaboration to produce poetry and visual arts exhibitions in Tokyo at the Bamboo Studios in Roppongi. Then, in 1986, one English poem of mine was published in the *Tokyo Journal*. This was the first of my poems to appear printed in Roman letters type-script and the

experience was one of great creative impetus to me. While living in Kamakura I spoke, read and wrote in Japanese every day, in exile from my native language. However, subconsciously, I was accumulating the linguistic skills which were later to lead to my professional experiences as a translator/interpreter for the performances of some of Australia and Japan's greatest theatre artists in such venues as the Japan Focus Festival at the Sydney Opera House in 1988 and the National Theatre of Japan. Such inter-cultural experiences were a progression in conceptualisation for my own literary compositions in a re-interpretative cycle of translate, create, translate; this is discussed in the next chapter: "Translation."

During my under-graduate degree at the International Campus of Sophia University I studied for and graduated from a four-year degree program titled the Bachelor in Comparative Culture. This degree contained academic components of many courses that were to shape and evolve the intercultural facet of my own aesthetics and creation process of poetry. I took courses in drama theory, classical literature from around the world, Japanese, Chinese and Western theatre forms.

In the late eighties my translations and poetry began to appear in such Tokyo anthology publications as the 10th edition of *Sakurajaku*. This edition contained a profile by a Japanese poet written about my life as a writer in Japan. This was the first time for me to be published anywhere, and so my identity as a writer was started in Japan. The edition also included one of my translations of Japanese poetry into English.

In 2005 I was invited to attend the Translation Workshops of the International Writers' Program of the University of Iowa as part of being a writer-in-residence there. At the International Writers' Program in Fall 2005 I

performed my creative work to various audiences, researched and translated, further evolving my bi-cultural identity as a writer, collaborating and conferring with the diverse collection of writers from around the world invited to the program.

Poetry is at the heart of every culture's language, spirit and art. The place of poetry in Japanese literature is powerfully significant, as a medium of expression and a philosophy of life. The sheer volume of imperial anthologies, such as the *Kokinshu*, kept in the National Museums of Kyoto and Tokyo, testify to the place of poetry in Japan. The various imperial anthologies comprised of love poetry by both men and women and praise of the beauty of Buddha's universe survive in translation as evidence of poetry's place in Japan. The preface from the anthology *Kokinshu*, edited by a lover of Komachi, Lord Ki no Tsurayuki (872-945), mentioned elsewhere in this exegesis, is nationally recognised in Japan as being the significant manifesto of what poetry is in that culture.

The seeds of poetry lie in the human heart and grow into leaves of ten thousand words. Many things happen to the people of this world, and all that they think and feel is given expression in description of things they see and hear. When we hear the warbling of the mountain thrush in the blossoms or the voice of the frog in the water, we know every living being has its song.

It is poetry which, without effort, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of the invisible gods and spirits, smooths relations of men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce

warriors. (Translated by Rodd and Henkenius, 35)

Now living in my home country, far away from Tokyo, even if I say that “I never miss Japan now”, to escape from one’s own life experience is not so easy. The evocative scent of pine or cedar incense at a perfume counter recalls the temple in Kamakura near where I used to live. Or I come face to face with the life-size photo of a red-mouthed “*maiko*” (an apprentice geisha) in the window of a travel agency. And so I cross through dreams from here to there and there to here. I piece together the words, the fragments, the forgotten and the remembered symbols of the two diverse cultures in search of a vocabulary to reconcile my thoughts.

The last time I visited Tokyo I found Leonard Cohen’s novel, *The Favourite Game*, in a large collection of Jewish literature and history in a second-hand book store that was near a Japanese university with an international campus. The woman owner of the bookstore told me that a young American Jewish man had sold all of his collection before leaving Japan. The book, found by chance, became the model for *Gifts*. All of my written work is a fusion of fact and fiction based on my own everyday experiences. To describe this process of conceptualisation and creation I would like to use the following narrative of a sensory experience from my own life that later evolved into a poem.

The last time I was in Tokyo I was staying on the fifth floor of an international students’ apartment building overlooking a Shinto shrine surrounded by a rock garden. At night the music would drift up from behind the rooms with paper doors along one wing of the shrine. The music had no set score but was played by instinct, ceremonially, to invoke the spirits. The bamboo flute and some bells were the instruments. The light from distant skyscrapers would

glint on the gold of the roof of the shrine. Once, on the way back from the “Seven Eleven” shop nearby, I saw coming down the street a deranged man carrying nothing but a knife in one hand. He was moving as if his whole body were immersed in deep rushing water. As I watched the man in the half light of the electric street lamps I imagined that he was a man living without love and with a hatred for the world around him. I recorded this image of the desperate man in the notebooks I always carry with me as a writer and later used it as a motif in my poem “The Letters”. “The Letters” plays a symbolic role in the novel *Intangible Gifts*. I started to write this poem in fragments in Tokyo and completed it two years later on the banks of an artificial stream in the gardens of Melbourne University.

The concept and the title of “The Letters” was arrived at by my reading of the Japanese classics. Letters formed a canon of ancient romantic Japanese literature around which a sophisticated cult of rituals and worship of beauty revolved. The colour of the paper and the flowers or reeds they were tied with, the time at which they were delivered and the identity and dress of the deliverers were all symbolic of the depth of attachment of the heart of the sender. In the Introduction to his translation of *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon (965/97-aft. 1010), Ivan Morris writes:

It was an essential part of Heian etiquette for the man to write a love letter (*kinuginu no fumi*) to the lady with whom he had spent the night; it usually included a poem and was attached to a spray of some appropriate flower (*fumitsuke*). The letter had to be sent as soon as the man returned home or, if he was on duty, as soon as he reached his office. The lady was of course expected to send a

prompt reply. If the man failed to send a letter, it normally meant he had no desire to continue the liason. (41)

Two years after writing “The Letters” I read a verse from my poem during a presentation at the Negotiations Conference held in November 2003 at the University of New South Wales. This experience led to a further evolution of the poem that I had not predicted. Someone in the audience asked me “But why did you translate this into Japanese also? Did you do it especially for us today to hear it?” The answer I gave to the question explains the multi-faceted experience of creating literature while in exile from the “other” culture of one’s existence. Often I have walked down the street alone, speaking or singing to myself in the language of the culture I was then separated from. There was nobody to speak in that language with me just then and nobody to hear me sing – I just wanted to hear the sound of the words in my own voice and perhaps to see if I still remembered the words I loved so much. An experience in the Barr Smith Library, under the gold and ivory baroque-style ceiling of the Reading Room, once took me back to Japan. This experience described below, is an example of the process of translation from one language into another while living in what I would describe as a state of exile.

Translating poetry in the library alone, I had to look in the dictionary I carry with me everywhere to find the meaning of every character of a Japanese poem. The world of the language of Japan opened to me and poetry/songs began to rush into my mind and compose themselves. In between the pages, where long ago I had marked the place of some now unfamiliar and forgotten character, there lay a pressed sprig of cherry-blossoms that smelt of a certain Tokyo street and time. After a party at night under the cherry-blossoms in Ueno Park I had

kept the blossoms and dried them between the pages. The Japanese-English dictionary aroused memories that led me to the shelves to find *The Tale of Genji*. I remembered the book having had a certain illustrated cover in another of its published editions. The new edition was now covered in an intense purple, velvety to the touch. The colour seemed to speak to me. As I touched the soft purple cover of the book my thoughts travelled to an old Kyoto; I was rediscovering a lost past. My memories took me to Kyoto's Nijo Palace where Murasaki Shikibu (943-1025?), Sei Shonagon's contemporary, wrote the *The Tale of Genji*, inspired by her own life. The name of the main protagonist in this major Japanese classic is Murasaki. *Genji* (this is the common colloquial name for *The Tale of Genji*) is a multi-stranded love story full of love letters in the form of poetry. This novel was created around the court culture of ancient Japan that used the poetry of love letters as an integral force in the intrigues of romance. Such love letters, in the form of poetry, were curated to become the Japanese National Cultural Treasure anthologies that have survived down the centuries.

Before putting the book about *Genji* back, I knelt down with it in between the shelves to take a last look. My heart jumped; there was my own handwriting in pencil on a scrap of paper I had forgotten to remove before returning the book on an earlier occasion. The handwriting was from another chapter of my life before going back to Japan from Adelaide. In home-sickness for Japan, I had quoted on the scrap of paper:

Were it not for these old romances,

What would we do to beguile our idle hours? – Genji Monogatari,

“*Hotaru*” (in Puette 16)

“*Hotaru*”, the title of this poem in Japanese, from which the quotation was taken, means “firefly”. A vision of a bank of bobbing lights hovering over an iris pond at dusk in Kamakura floated up before my eyes for a second and then was gone.

Still in the library, crouched in between the book-shelves, I stared at my own hand-writing, until the overhead lights had been automatically turned off. I had returned to the place I was before I was irresistibly drawn back to Japan. Had I really been back “there” since writing those words in pencil? Was this the me of then, or the me of now, divided invisibly only by a journey I could not recall across that same sea?

The words of Murasaki Shikibu, the lady of letters, seemed to speak to me in the same voice, across the centuries that had flown by and disappeared as if they had never been at all, like specks of foam on the waves. There, to the eye, for a moment – and then gone. The sensory memories encoded in the ancient poet’s words seemed to call to me and new poetry welled up in my mind like a song that must be sung no matter where one is at the time.

“*Murasaki*” means “purple” in English, but the colour purple in Japan holds a romantic symbolic code that it does not have in the West. *Murasaki* in Japan encodes the colour of the wisteria flower. (Puette 75) Therefore “purple”, although an English translation of “*murasaki*”, does not hold the same depth of nuance that the concept and name of this colour holds in the Japanese language. As a woman’s name “Purple” would be an avant-garde choice in the West, but in Japan it is a name with an ancient tradition now obscured by antiquity.

On the role of letters and translation in the history of Japanese literature I think there is no better place to start than with the scholar Edward Kamen’s textbook on *Genji*. The following passage comes from a chapter significantly

entitled "Mediation and Mediators: Letters, Screens and other Go-Betweens in *The Tale of Genji*":

The dual nature of mediation is not confined to letters. Since *The Tale of Genji* ... [was] not written in English, they make manifest the duality of another mediated form: translation. The translation process bridges the gap between Genji and the person who doesn't read Heian Japanese, and yet the process inevitably veils the original. Thus, though translation joins, it more subtly separates as well. (109)

While reading this I remembered the many letters I wrote home to Australia from Japan as a schoolgirl and thought of whether or not this significant form of written communication would ever have become such a large part of my life if circumstances had not forced me to live in a country that was so foreign to me at the time. What became lost as well as revealed in those letters is also ironically reflected in the rest of the quote which draws attention to the dual symbolism of screens, translation and letters as not only ritualised media of communication, but as potential barriers in their limitations of transmitting feelings and thoughts.

The reverse can also occur. A screen placed between two people indeed serves to separate them. Yet, if a Heian woman and man are forbidden or hesitate to be with one another, then the screen also enables them at least to speak with each other and enjoy each other's apprehensible aura. Even such contact would be impossible if the screen were removed, for one

person would have to flee. Thus, though the screen obviously separates, it more subtly joins as well. A similar dual function is served by the darkness that cloaks night-time assignments in *Genji*. (109)

Letters figure strongly in the exilic life and there is a translation process inherent in interpreting any letter. Kamen, drawing upon Altman, makes the following compelling observation on the role of letters:

For instance, letter writing, when contrasted with silence, is a medium that connects people, bridging a gap between people who may be unable to speak to each other; when contrasted with speech, however, letter writing separates people and makes communication less direct. (109)

My poem "The Letters", which appears in *Intangible Gifts*, was inspired by seeing, at the National Theatre in Tokyo, the many Noh plays about Ono no Komachi that are now classics in Japan. Ono no Komachi was an exiled woman poet who once lived at Nijo Palace. My poem, inspired by Ono no Komachi, exemplifies how my writing has been influenced by Japanese literature.

I have learnt through the barrier of distance to read and write Japanese at a level of fluency I never reached while living in Tokyo for a time-span of sixteen years, where I relied on the power of the spoken word. Through the process of writing letters, I learnt the Chinese characters used for the Japanese words "tear", "sadness", "prayer", off by heart, through repeated usage. I also learnt how to use a very thick character dictionary unused while actually living in Japan.

Below is the verse of my poem “The Letters”, written in Japanese :

The English translation is:

And there was a letter

With a tear fallen

Into the middle of

The fathomless “o”

Of LOVE.

The Roman letter transcription of this

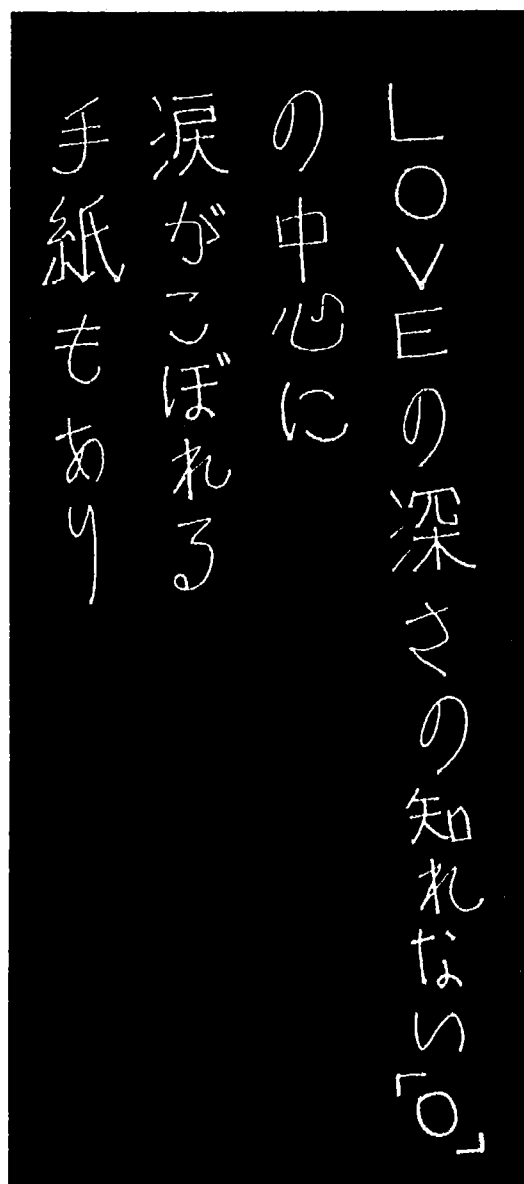
verse is:

LOVE no fukasa no shirenai [O]

No chushin ni

Namida koboreru

Tegami mo ari



This verse is easily translated from Japanese into English and vice versa because it contains no esoteric metaphor or reference that makes inter-cultural transition difficult. There is nothing unlockable indicated by parenthesis. There is no cadence or rhythm or literary device that becomes lost when taken into the metier of either language. The vocabulary is colloquial and contains no obscurities. It is compact and does not convey any abstract or metaphysical concepts. Moreover, the original writer did not have to work with an interpreter or translator or use a

second or third person to proof-read the work to make sure the translated version was linguistically accurate and was as close as possible a reflection of the intended meaning.

Looking in the Japanese dictionary to find the character for the word “deep”, I read the various phrases listed to describe the grammatical usages of “deep”, “depth”, “deeply”, and came across a phrase in Japanese, which if directly translated into English would be, “a depth that cannot be known.” Next to this clause were the adjectives “fathomless” and “bottomless.” “Yes”, I thought – “that is exactly what I mean”. Though I had originally written “fallen deeply into the letter ‘o’ of the word ‘LOVE’ ”, I then chose to re-write the line as: “a tear had fallen into the fathomless ‘O’ of ‘LOVE.’”

When reading the poem aloud for myself, the letter “o” then became a sigh which could be read with numerous inflections of the voice, changing the nuance of the poem each time. I was also moved to read, in the dictionary, that the word “deep” corresponds with so many expressions we use in English, such as “intense”, “strong”, “sincere”, “profound”. When searching for the characters “middle of”, to write “the middle of ‘O’”, I found that “middle of” is written with two characters for “middle” and “heart”, which reminded me immediately of the phrase “at the heart of the matter.” The process of self-translation of concepts from one language into another enabled an evolution of arrangements of words and concepts that both surprised and inspired me. In my writing experience a progressional conceptual association of words and expressions is drawn from the translation process.

In one classic narrative poem, “Fumigara” (below), Komachi’s spirit appears from the after-life, reminiscing on the myriad of love letters she

received. I wrote my own poem, "The Letters", after the style of the rich layers created by the technique of anecdotal "listing" in the following passage:

Well as for being a confused person on the roads of love, there was first of all the poem by the Emperor. Second there were Tsurayuki's jewelled words, but then there were also many letters – poems – one tied to blossoms; one written in the evening, when morning glories had drooped; one written in secrecy; one upon which tears had fallen; one about water leaking from rocks; one regretting the rise of rumours as a pair of mandarin ducks would; one about water flowing in troughs of bamboo; one about a stag longing for his mate; one about the rapids where the Seventh night lovers met; one between husband and wife; (Teele, 47)

For someone who is familiar with Japanese literature and narratives or the Chinese literature from which these classics first evolved, the reference to "the Seventh night" is not a mystery. If one is not familiar with these classical narratives that have become folklore, even a direct translation into English cannot convey the romantic concept of the original work without some accompanying explanation. In my life, however, these narratives were a part of my childhood reading, often translated to me by my parents' friends as they read to me from illustrated Japanese children's books. The memories of these stories later became dimensions of my own formulation of aesthetics and expressions, as I evolved my own creative style that was a blend of at least two cultures.

As I travelled on in life the facets of the cultures I knew merged more and more and then diversified. The sense of mystery that I felt as a

child when I could not understand some strangely beautiful word or expression has never waned; I continue to merge the experience of being in Japan with my work and continue to study Japanese as I translate. It has become more obvious to me over the years that the gap between one's native language and the second language one learns is an ever shifting terrain. Within the binary world of the two languages I read in, new expressions continue to make me inquisitive enough to research the origins of the characters used for the words. The visual origins of the characters evoke descriptions and expressions of my own that enrich my writing in English.

Much of the imagery of the exquisite passage below does not survive translation without the reader having knowledge of the various associations of the place names mentioned:

one with poems added; one written when staying somewhere; one written about longing increasing at Masuda Pond, killing and letting live; one about carp being wrapped and then burned up at Katata; one too obvious to hide, like the great number of nets being pulled in at the Bay of Akogi; (Teele, 47)

Even a reader who has no specific knowledge of Japan can identify with the symbolic metaphors designed to describe the beauty and the desire such love is made of. Through common human experience and the intermediary of translation we can all identify with the emotions of Komachi describing some letters sent to her: "and there are those which I cannot understand. It is really impossible to compare my heart to anything" (47).

Ono no Komachi is the only surviving name of a woman who was a court

lady serving the Emperor or someone close to him in the ninth century in Kyoto. Most commonly she is referred to as “Komachi” and there is a famous street in the heart of Kyoto named “Komachi Dori”, or “Komachi Street” after her. She was renowned as a beauty, a poet and was said to be loved by many men at the court where she lived – the Nijo Palace. It is written in *Komachi Soshi* (Komachi Story), five or six centuries after her life-time, that:

The number of men who saw her or even heard of her, is
said to have been as uncountable as the dense pine needles
on the far side of Tsukuba Mountain. (Teele 213)

While Komachi was still at the palace in a place of power as a beauty and a poet, a courtier, Shi no Shosho, is said to have been told by her that if he came to her chambers for one hundred nights as proof of his love, she would give audience to him. Shi no Shosho, (whose name, when directly translated, would be “The Deep Grass”), is said to have waited the demanded one hundred nights. Each night, as proof, he left a notch on the wooden shaft of a travelling carriage outside Komachi’s quarters. But, on the hundredth night, he died in the deep snow of the waiting place.

In the classic play *Sotoba Komachi*, by the master Noh playwright Kwanami Kiyotsugu, Komachi, remorsefully possessed by Shi no Shosho’s ghost, says:

No, no... Komachi was very beautiful.
Many letters came to her, many messages –
Thick as raindrops out of a black summer sky.
But she sent no answer, not even an empty word.

And now in punishment, she has grown old

She has lived a hundred years –

I love her, I love her. (Waley, 158)

When the emperor at the Palace heard of Komachi's high-handed demand to Shi no Shosho, and of his death, he shunned her, and everyone at the palace followed him in this. Komachi was forced to leave her life as a court lady and became a beggar woman, dying in exile, without title or home. Komachi has become so famous that there are many places in Japan all claiming to be her burial place. Each of these graves has separate legends regarding her fate in exile from the palace in Kyoto.

The story of the unrequited Shi no Shosho, in all its different versions, inspired me to write the CODA in my novel. In this CODA, the spirit of Komachi enters the life of a young foreign woman (Rosanna) in Tokyo. Rosanna's identity as a foreigner gives her a conspicuous visibility that could be considered as a double-edged sword. She becomes the object of the obsessive love of a man she meets only in passing. In the novel he is referred to anonymously as "the tofu man". The nameless identity of the tofu man is designed to magnify the ironically small place he has in Rosanna's mind and heart in comparison to his memories of her. The unwritten background of their relationship is that Rosanna took no notice of the name on the back of the envelopes of his letters and boxes of gifts from Japan. After communicating with Rosanna through the medium of letters only, the man commits suicide at the thought of never being able to be with her in person. The unfulfilled desire of the tofu man, sending Rosanna love letters and stalking her, culminates in his death.

This echoes the story of Shi no Shosho, said by some to have died of love for Komachi.

The letters from the tofu man to Rosanna and the statement she gives to the Tokyo police regarding his death's unusual circumstances, form the structure of one fragmented love story within a cluster of love stories in the novel. This statement, transcribed by the police and released to the media, is written after the style of Komachi's speeches in various plays regarding the death of the unrequited Shi no Shosho.

Komachi is said to have ended her life in exile and obscurity for jilting a man. In the contemporary context, poet, playwright and novelist Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) wrote the play *Sotoba Komachi* (1952), placing Komachi in Grand Central Park, New York. In this work Komachi plays opposite a dead-beat looking young man named POET. In *Intangible Gifts*, the spirit of Komachi is reincarnated in Rosanna, who travels like a Noh spirit between this illusory life and the next, this place and time, to the next.

Today, many generations after the ninth century, the only definite thing that can be said about Komachi is that she was a brilliant woman poet. The *Kokinshu*, the first imperially commissioned anthology compiled around 905, was edited by the literary nobleman Ki no Tsurayuki: one whose name has been linked to Komachi's by romance as well as poetry. It was Tsurayuki who compiled the *Kokinshu*; he was a renowned poet, prose writer and calligrapher. (Bownas and Thwaite, xiii)

The *Kokinshu* is a National Treasure in Japan and is now held in the Kyoto National Museum. Although over one hundred surviving anthologised poems have been attributed to Komachi, the only ones historians can be certain

are hers are the sixteen listed as such in the *Kokinshu*.

An interesting comparison can be made between Komachi and one other woman poet who is said to have lived in exile. In the Chinese translated version of the *Kokinshu* also, Komachi is listed as one of the Six Poetic Geniuses. In both the Chinese and the original version of the anthology, her poetic technique is compared to that of the legendary exiled concubine and poet Princess Soto'ori. It is compelling in this Princess's story that she was a favourite of the Emperor Ingyo, who reigned until 453, but was forced to live outside in an exilic state because of the jealousy of the Empress. Despite her disgrace and sadness, history has made Soto'ori one of the gods of poetry and she is enshrined at a prominent shrine in Japan even today. (Teele, Appendix B)

Komachi is listed in the *Kokinshu* as one of the Six Poetic Geniuses in the company of the legendary Narihira, with whose name she has also been strongly linked in the context of poetry and romance. Narihira himself led an exile's life away from the palace at one time. The work of the exiled Narihira, *The Tales of Ise*, (*Ise Monogatari* is the original title) has become central to the Japanese classics. Both autobiographical and biographical, *The Tales of Ise* is a sequence of independent prose passages setting the scene of and acting as headnotes for Narihira's poems. This work is the culmination of the process of the "poem/song-tale" (*uta-monogatari*) evolving from linked verse composed at the courts. The "poem/song-tales" were literary diaries where poems were imbued with prose contexts. The translator Keene describes *The Tales of Ise* in these words:

The Tales of Ise is basically a collection of verse, by the nobleman and poet Ariwara no Narihira (823-880), but each verse is

preceded by a prose passage indicating the occasion of its composition. It contains 125 chapters, varying in length from a few lines to two or three pages, depending mainly on the number of poems included. Some of the poems are either by contemporaries or even by *Manyōshū* poets but the majority are by Narihira, and the work was apparently edited and enlarged by an unknown compiler not long after his death. Although the hero of most of the episodes is identified in the original only as a man, the work in large part is clearly autobiographical. The arrangement of the chapters is, however, haphazard, and in the excerpts given in the translations an attempt has been made to restore the chronological order. (Keene, 67)

The autobiographical dimension of *The Tales of Ise* places it in the large and influential genre of autobiographical works by the court ladies of the same Heian era. The name of Komachi has been linked with that of the poet Narihira in countless stories and dramatisations. Narihira's identity is a mirrored reflection of Komachi's, in that his life and art were said to be inextricably connected by his real life love stories as well as his own outstanding physical beauty. Narihira's reputation as a romantic hero is unparalleled by any other figure in Japan. His poetry has lived on in the Imperial anthologies to survive even until today.

The Tales of Ise has also shaped *Intangible Gifts*. This genre of autobiographical/ biographical literature exists both in Japan (*The Tale of Genji*) and in the West. Tracing the development of a young artist, this genre is referred to in the West as a *Künstlerroman*, a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman*. The

Künstlerroman represents the growth of an artist into maturity. This genre provides a context for my own novel, and at least in part explains my interest in Leonard Cohen's *The Favourite Game*, which I shall discuss in my third chapter.

During the Heian Period in Japan (794-1192), the women at the imperial court took the genre of the diary/fictional belle letters to a high art. The pinnacle of this genre, *The Pillow Book*, is structured around romantic tell-tales, poetry, intensely visual descriptions, and references to the Buddhist rites and mystical beliefs of the lives of the authors themselves. Examples of this genre are included in the *Diaries of Court Ladies of Old Japan*, translated by Annie Shepley Omori and Kochi Doi and published in 1935. The Imagist Amy Lowell (1874-1925), an early admirer of Japanese literature, writes in the introduction to this volume:

Now the position of women at this time was very different from what it afterwards became in the feudal period. The Chinese called Japan the Queen Country because of the ascendancy which women enjoyed there. They were educated, they were allowed a share of inheritance and they had their own houses. It is an extraordinary and important fact that much of the best literature of Japan has been written by women. (xiv)

This acknowledged canon of romantic Japanese literature, particularly, has had a significant influence on my poetry and on my novel, *Intangible Gifts*. This influence manifests itself both stylistically and in terms of sub-textual elements to my work, as I shall suggest in my next chapter, using translation as a metaphor for the process of turning experiences from my life between cultures into a novel.

Chapter Two

Translation

Translating from Japanese into English involves the interpretative process of transmitting the nuances of a language made of pictorial ideograms (or characters) into phonetic English words. Further complexity results from the intricacy of the structure of the Japanese language, which is made from three different scripts in amalgamation, whereas English is constructed only from roman letters. The three different scripts of the Japanese language are called kanji, hiragana and katakana. Kanji is the script evolved from Chinese characters that sometimes have different interpretations in the Japanese language. Hiragana is the purely Japanese script evolved from Sanskrit. Katakana is the phonetic script evolved by the Japanese for words entering the Japanese language from foreign countries. Even to read the Japanese newspapers one has to be able to read all three of these scripts. In this regard the Japanese and English languages are vastly different. Nevertheless, I believe that the spirit of poetry can facilitate powerful translational thought processes, overcoming the problems of language differences and enabling potent works of art in translation.

I first began to read the literature of ancient Japan through the interpretive filter of English translation. I then began to translate poetry myself as I progressed with learning the Japanese language. The following poem and its translation is an example of the classical poetry that has had such a large impact

on the style and development of my own creative writing. This poem, by Fujiwara no Teika, was written in 1232 and appears in translation in *Japanese Court Poetry*.

Although I heard	Au wa
From the outset that a meeting	Wakare to
Can only mean to part,	Kikinagara
I gave myself to love for you	Akatsuki shirade
Unconscious of the coming dawn.	Hito ni koikeri.

(Miner and Brower 271)

My own interpretation and translation of the original is:

For us to meet
Was for us to part
Though hearing of this
Closing my eyes to the bright moon of dawn
I gave myself up to love of you.

I chose to translate the poem this way because the original work's character for "dawn" is made of the two characters for "bright" and "moon". I felt that the expression "bright moon" in English translation preserved some of the original language's visual essence. Each reader may interpret the original language according to their own responses and translations by each succeeding generation reflect the current language of the time. Transliterations resulting from this evolutionary process create transformed versions of the original works.

Each language presents different challenges to the translator to bridge the dividing cultural and linguistic gaps. From Japanese into English a roman letter

phonetic transcription gives the pronunciation of the original's words, but without looking at the original we cannot know for sure how the original characters appear. In comparison to English, the construction of the Japanese language enables more ambiguities, resulting in more possible interpretations of the same word or phrase. There are different possible meanings for the same character depending on placement in a given sentence, as well as different pronunciations for the same character. Furthermore, it is always possible that the translator will translate the original differently at another time in her or his life, after being influenced by the translations of others or by some other cultural experience or elucidation.

To illustrate the different versions and different lives one poem alone can manifest through the process of translation, I shall use the following masterpiece of Narihira's from the *Kokinshu*.

First translation :

1 Tsuki ya aranu	1 Can it be that there is no moon
2 Haru ya mukashi no	3 And that the spring is not
3 Haru naranu,	2 The spring of old
4 Waga mi hitotsu wa	4 While I alone remain
5 Moto no mi ni shite?	5 The same person?

(Waley, *Uta*, 65)

Second translation:

Is there no moon?
 Is not this spring
 the spring of the past?

My body the one thing remaining
as it originally was...? (Brower and Miner, 193)

Each of these translations of the same poem evokes in me a different response. The first and second translations use language that is much less lyrical than the third translation below.

Third translation:

What is now real?
This moon, this spring, are altered
From their former being
While this alone, my mortal body, remains
As ever changed by love beyond all change.

(Brower and Miner, 193)

My response as a reader of the third translation is that Buddhist philosophy of the impermanence of this world seems perfectly symbolised in the English translation of the original words into an expression such as “mortal body.” The ephemeral nature of passionate love is transmitted perfectly by the nuance of this expression conveying the mortality of all humans and their concerns. All of these translations are written in English and all are of the same original poem, yet the nuances of the different words employed may elicit very diverse reactions and convey different concepts to different readers. This process of reading, comparing, translating and then stylistically developing a certain work has strongly influenced my own writing process.

A fourth translation of Narihira’s masterpiece adds to my point about nuances that flow from different word choices, conveying different meanings and effects.

Fourth translation:

Can it be that the moon has changed?

Can it be that the spring

Is not the spring of old times?

Is it my body alone

That is just the same? (Bownas and Thwaite, 71)

Although this translation uses vocabulary reflecting the sad wonderment of the poet, as seen in the other translations, different words and word orders are used. The effect is of greater urgency.

Although I have provided four examples of translation of the same poem, there have been many versions of this poem by Narihira. The first of my examples of translation is from *The Uta*, (in direct translation “The Song/The Poetry”), translated by Arthur Waley, a twentieth century Japanologist as well as Sinologist who is famous in both cultures. China has had an immense historical influence on Japanese literature, lending powerful insights to Waley in his translations. The second and third translation examples are taken from Miner and Brower’s *Japanese Court Poetry*, incorporating several versions of the original. My own translation of Narihira’s poem would be different again. Acknowledging that my translation might change at a later time, at this moment my translation would be:

No moon?

The old spring

Does not return?

Is it only I

Who have not changed?

In my novel *Intangible Gifts*, my writing process involves filtering expressions through two languages: English and Japanese. I have imagined my character Rosanna writing in the same way. She conceptualises a body of work in her collection of memories written in rice-paper notebooks:

She had shown Mitch her little rice paper books of poetry.

Written with a heart of uncertainty, backwards and forwards from Japan... Rosanna had bought the blank notebooks in a Ginza shop famous for selling things to write or paint with.

Writing letters became the only way in which she told the truth. (*Gifts*, 124)

Travel, translation, and the never-ending collation of notes and articles has influenced my evolution as a writer and shaped the material that informs my creative work. I was living in Japan during the Japanese autumn that was the Australian spring in 1994. While I was in Japan, at that time, I cut and saved from the *Japan Times* English language newspaper an article transcribing a speech from the Nobel Prize winning author Kenzaburo Oe. I had returned to Japan partly to relive my past and also to write some short stories. Those stories later became my first published novel, *The Air of Tokyo*. What I realised, however, is that the relationship between real experience, autobiography, and the creation of art is not straightforward. While I was in Tokyo my cultural education continued through new experiences. From a comparative cultural viewpoint, Oe's speech had a profound effect on me. In his speech Oe said: "I cannot talk about myself otherwise than by saying 'Japan, the Ambiguous and Myself'." Oe's statement was made in the context of his thoughts on cultural identity and literature. Oe spoke about Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), the first Japanese

writer to win the Nobel prize in literature; Yasunari Kawabata delivered the lecture entitled “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself” to the Stockholm audience. Oe described Yasunari Kawabata’s speech as “at once very beautiful and vague”, explaining what he meant by “vague” in this way:

The kind of vagueness that Kawabata adopted deliberately is implied in the title itself of his lecture. It can be transliterated as “myself of beautiful Japan.” The vagueness of the whole title derives from the Japanese particle “no” (literally “of”) linking “Myself” and “Beautiful”. The vagueness of the title leaves room for various interpretations of its implications. It can imply “myself as part of a beautiful Japan”... It can also imply “beautiful Japan and myself.” (Oe 3)

Illustrating the evolutionary influence of writers on one another’s works, Oe claimed that he felt “more spiritual affinity with the Irish poet William Butler Yeats who was awarded a Nobel Prize in literature 71 years ago” than he did with his compatriot Kawabata. He went on to say that he would not presume to rank himself with the poetic genius of Yeats. (Oe 3) But Oe said that he was indebted to Yeats for the title of his trilogy in English: “A Flaming Tree”. He then quoted the following lines from the Yeats’ poem “Vacillation”.

A tree there is that from its topmost bough
Is half all glittering flame and half all green
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew...

(lines 11-13 in Oe, 3)

Reading Oe’s speech was so influential to me as a writer that the memory and associated memories of the enigmatic title “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself” inspired the title of my exegesis: “Japan, the Love Story and Myself.”

Semimaru, who suffered a life of exile in the tenth century. To find poetry of the same theme from cultures as far from each other as Persia and Japan, attests to the common humanity of our emotions and thoughts. Through translation these basic truths reveal each culture to another.

As a final example in this chapter of the power of translation, I include one of the many poems from ancient Japan to use the romantic and singularly physical symbol of hair as a poetic motif. The following poem is number 2578 of the *Ten Thousand Leaves*, an eighth century imperial anthology originating from the palace where both the author of *Genji*, Murasaki Shikibu, and Komachi lived and wrote:

- 1 (My) morning sleep hair
- 2 I will not comb;
- 5 For it has been in contact with
- 3,4 The pillowing hand of my beautiful Lord!

- 1 Asa-ne-kami
- 2 Ware wa kezuraji
- 3 Utsukushiki
- 4 Kimi ga ta-makura
- 5 Fureteshi mono wo.

(Waley, *Uta*, 48)

The numbers at the left side of the poem denote the line order and show changes made in the translation. The syntax of the original poem has been lost, and the word “utsukushiki” (“made beautiful by”) has been completely omitted. I find the phraseology of “for it has been in contact with” too simplistic and clinical in

nuance for the lingering tenderness of the thoughts of the “woman” for whom the poet, Hitomaro, writes. This poem belongs to a genre of poems written by men in the voice and Japanese language’s gender-based vocabulary of women, like a dramatic narrative speech attributed to a female character in a play. I believe the tradition of male writers impersonating women’s voices, by changing gendered language, is another intriguing aspect of the process of interpretive translation. I feel that for one sex to identify so personally with the emotions mirrored in the other sex, adopting the vocabulary of that “other” sex, through the language of poetry, is another significant aspect of the art of translation. My own translation of the above original poem is:

My hair from sleeping this morning,
I will not comb out the beauty you made of it
Making a pillow with your hand.

The imagery of hair has a particular significance within Japanese literature from ancient to modern. Kenneth Rexroth draws attention to Mikata Shami, who, he suggests “may have been Yamada Mikata who flourished in the seventh-eighth century, possibly a contemporary of Hitomaro”. Rexroth observes that “tangled hair” is a romantic metaphor used as early as the seventh century in Japanese poetry, and that this traditional metaphor culminated in Yosano Akiko’s first book of “Midaregami” (tangled hair) poems (115).

Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) is described by Kenneth Rexroth as one of the world’s greatest women poets. Her translation of *Genji* from ancient into modern Japanese is acknowledged as having “great beauty and style” (115) and the breadth of her literary accomplishments as a novelist, essayist and writer of children’s stories and fairytales is much admired. As a poet she is

comparable to Christina Rossetti, Gaspara Stampa, Louise Labe, and Li Ching Chao. She is certainly one of the greatest poets of her time – the most perfect expression of the Art Nouveau sensibility – like Debussy, who should have set her poems to music. (110-111)

The significance of the motif of hair in my own work reveals the influence of both the ancient and avant garde poetry of Japan, with a particular debt to Yosano Akiko. Yosano Akiko's modern collection of poems, translated as *Tangled Hair*, also includes intensely visual symbolic reference to the body. This physical aspect of her work represents a fusion of Western modernism and the classic influence of the ancient poetry of such physical love poets as the exiled Komachi.

As one kind of creative process, translation exemplifies the infinite diversity of creativity, to which a vast spectrum of cultural influences contribute. In my next chapter, I shall focus more specifically on the work of poet, songwriter and novelist Leonard Cohen, whose novel, *The Favourite Game*, has been a particular influence on my own novel, *Intangible Gifts*. For me, Cohen's work is a fine example of contemporary syncretism across a spectrum of influences: Buddhism, haiku minimalism; and musicality from the disparate cultures of Spain and Japan.

Chapter Three

Intangible Gifts and *The Favourite Game* by Leonard Cohen

The Favourite Game is Leonard Cohen's first novel, published in 1963. The novel is a fictional narrative following a young man's growth from boyhood into manhood and his self-realisation as an artist. The story follows the various female loves of the young man, Breavman, and the other relationships that shape his life and psyche. *The Favourite Game*, contains poetry, in part to illustrate the protagonist's growing self-awareness of his evolution as an artist. One of the main themes of the book is Breavman's identity as part of the Jewish diaspora in Canada.

The driving theme of *Intangible Gifts* is the culturally fragmented life of a young woman artist in the two divergent cultures of Australia and Japan, drawing partly on my real-life experiences. The poetry in *Intangible Gifts* is my own acknowledgement of and homage to the evolution of classical Japanese love poetry and its impact on contemporary Western literature. *Intangible Gifts* is one artistic product of my memories as a young Australian becoming an adult in the environment of Japan. It incorporates the styles of the Beat Generation's re-creation of haiku and tanka, influenced by Zen Buddhist aesthetics. Leonard Cohen's "Summer Haiku" is an example of this genre:

Silence

and a deeper silence

when the crickets

hesitate (*Spice-Box*, 77)

As I first read “Summer Haiku” I wondered if it was a coincidence that “Summer Haiku” appears on page 77 of *The Spice-Box of Earth*, published in 1961. Could it be that Cohen is following the tradition of choosing an auspicious page number as determined by Buddhist numerology for this particular composition? The poem appears in *The Spice-Box of Earth* in the format re-produced above – with expanded blanks between the lines suggesting a rhythmic form of silent mystery employed traditionally in Japanese haiku and in the music of the Noh theatre. It is often said in Japan by traditional musicians that the silences between the notes are just as significant to the total composition as the notes themselves. Cohen, as a musician himself, has been influenced by the power of this minimalism.

Cohen’s novel, *The Favourite Game*, is prefaced by a three verse poem. The last verse of this poem resonates with my intentions in creating *Intangible Gifts* and has been a particular source of inspiration for me:

As many nights endure

Without a moon or star,

So will we endure

When one is gone and far. (*Game* and *Spice-Box* 64)

The imagery of many a night enduring without a moon or star elicits memories

for me of the Tanabata Festival, which is held in Japan on the seventh day of the seventh month, in accordance with Buddhist numerology. This festival celebrates the reunion of two lovers separated by cruel fate. The lovers may only unite yearly on the seventh day of the seventh month if stars appear in the sky, and rain does not fall. The scholar Ivan Morris describes the Tanabata Festival in this way:

The Weaver Festival (*Tanabata Matsuri*) is derived from a Chinese legend about the love of the weaver (*chih-nu*) and the Herdsman (*Chi'en niu*), represented by the stars Vega and Altair respectively. Because of her love for the Herdsman, the weaver neglected her work on the clothes for the gods, while the herdsman neglected his cattle. As a punishment the heavenly emperor put the two stars on opposite ends of the milky way, decreeing that they should be allowed to meet only once a year, namely on the Seventh day of the Seventh month. During the Tanabata Festival poems are written in dedication to the two starry lovers, and women pray to the weaver for skill in weaving, sewing, music, poetry, and other arts. (Morris *Pillow Book* 12, 13)

Morris is writing about the era of the Heian Period and so is using the past tense; however, these customs are still observed in contemporary Japan with ceremonies during July every year. Silver and gold decorations on the night of the seventh day of the seventh month can be seen hanging even from the massive government apartment buildings in Tokyo and other cities and towns.

In thinking about sources of inspiration for my own work, it occurred to

me that perhaps I was seeing Japanese associations influenced by my personal experience of living in Japan so long. However, Ira Nadel confirms that Cohen was influenced by personal awareness of Zen and the symbols of Zen Buddhism:

The opening lines of “For a long time/he had no music/he had no scenery,” in the *Energy of Slaves* (120), express this paralysis, tempered only when he encountered Zen Buddhism through the master or Roshi, Joshu Sasaki, a Japanese Zen Buddhist who had left his monastery to come to America in 1962. (Nadel 94)

Since the era of Imagism, the minimalist Japanese poetic forms of tanka and haiku have increasingly influenced modern English literature, notably through the poetry of Cohen’s generation, including the Beat Poets. Tanka evolved down the centuries from a school dedicated to creating an “off-beat” musical syntax, described as unique by the first Western musicians to hear Japanese Noh music and note its fundamental structural differences from western opera. One influence of Cohen’s style on my own work, *Intangible Gifts*, is the recurring use of symbols and motifs that are musically employed in a structural sense. These symbols and motifs are intended to drive the narrative on the scheme of a musical rondo, through repetition, as in Cohen’s *The Favourite Game*. I deliberately sprinkle symbolism through the narrative, like percussion.

Cohen’s title, *The Favourite Game*, for example, is taken from a scene that recurs in the novel as the continuously resurfacing memory of a man growing from childhood into sexual awareness. Breavman and his best friend of childhood and youth, Krantz, play a secret recurring game with Lisa: “They had Lisa, they had the garage, they needed string, red string for the sake of blood”(12). The idea of the “favourite game” is then re-introduced into the

narrative and repeated, using strong words that are variations on the theme:

“Whenever they could they played their great game, the Soldier and the Whore.

They played it in whatever room they could.”(25)

During the writing of *Intangible Gifts*, I often recalled the statement from Cohen that appears on the back cover of the first published edition of *The Favourite Game*:

I was born in Montreal in 1934. I studied at McGill and Columbia Universities. Lived in London as a Lord, pursuing the fair, my accent opening the tightest Georgian palaces where I flourished dark and magnificent as Othello. In Oslo where I existed in a Nazi poster. In Cuba, the only tourist in Havana, perhaps in the world, where I destroyed my beard on the shores of Veradere, burnt it in nostalgia and anger for the Fidel I used to know. In Greece, where my gothic insincerities were purged and my style purified under the influence of empty mountains and a foreign mate who cherished simple English. In Montreal, where I will always return, scene of the steep streets which support the romantic academies of Canadian poesy in which I was trained, seat of my family, old as the Indians, more powerful than the elders of Zion, the last merchants to take blood seriously. I accept money from governments, women, poem sales, and if forced to, from employers. I have no hobbies.

This autobiographical statement reveals much of Cohen’s artistic vision,

expressed in an “off-beat” musical way, and suggests his multi-faceted sense of his own identity. Reading it in a bookshop in Tokyo, I had a prophetic feeling *about The Favourite Game* in relation to my own life. Some years later my principal doctoral supervisor Tom Shapcott asked me: “Do you know the song ‘Suzanne’ by Cohen?” At that point Tom, a poet and musician himself, started to hum the tune of “Suzanne” and I realised that it was a song I had often heard; it was played in my parents’ house in the sixties when I was a child going to sleep and the parties with coloured lights were about to start. So somewhere in my memory, I was already familiar with the music and poetry of Cohen, even as I picked up *The Favourite Game* for the first time in the bookshop in Tokyo.

The impact on my creative work of Cohen’s style, vision and way of thinking about identity has been considerable. I bought *The Favourite Game* and other English books in Tokyo to connect with my own culture’s language. Cohen’s eyes gazed hypnotically from the back cover of the limited edition. I looked into Cohen’s eyes many times after that, until the book went missing in my travels. The circumstances surrounding the limited edition’s disappearance were recreated in *Intangible Gifts*, with Rosanna telling the frustrated Mitch that her poetry had once been ripped to shreds by a jealous lover.

While writing *Intangible Gifts* I recalled Cohen’s words: “In Montreal, where I will always return”. Cohen, still an active artist, lives a cosmopolitan travelling life, while also identifying as part of the Jewish diaspora. But the simple words: “In Montreal, where I will always return” profoundly affected me. I returned to them in the context of a critical article on Cohen written by Jenny L.M. Kerber.

The problem with Lawrence Breavman, I promptly and rather

harshly decide upon turning the final pages of *The Favourite Game* for the first time, is that he cannot let go of anything. In Leonard Cohen's first novel, memories, childhood The Favourite Games, pop songs and a multitude of female love objects are constantly desired by the protagonist in terms sharply defined by permanence. It is striking to note the frequency with which the term "always" is interwoven with Breavman's various desires – the desire to always hurtle past the same scenery on night drives with his friend Krantz (101). The desire that the lute in Henri Roussau's *The Sleeping Gypsy* always remain poised and full of music (61), the desire to keep his lover Shell four hundred miles away where he can write her pretty poems and letters (225) – Breavman's wish to preserve the moments and individuals that surround him is undeniably strong. (53)

Intangible Gifts also contains many references to impermanence and perpetuity in the context of "home", a theme that has been dominant in my own life. The passing of time is a common theme in Japanese literature. The classical Japanese poetry included as examples of translation in this exegesis are characteristic of the prevalent theme of impermanence in Japanese literature influenced by Buddhist thought. My own longing for and thoughts of "home" were reinforced from an early age by reading Japanese poetry on the other side of the world.

As the narrative of a growing artist, *Intangible Gifts*, like *The Favourite Game*, contains references to great artworks and literary works. Both Rosanna and Breavman experience works of visual art and literature as psychological

landmarks, marking the development of their artistic vision. Breavman admires the work of the artist Henri Rousseau (1844-1910), for example. For Rosanna, a certain statue of Venus is important. Rosanna loves looking at herself as a woman and is delineating her own sexual self-image through Venus (*Gifts* 110). Michael Ondaatje, writing about Cohen's work, acknowledges the significance of the realisation of the power of all art forms to a creative person. This is something that I have tried to convey in representing the development of Rosanna's artistic vision in *Intangible Gifts*.

Cohen's mythmaking process is therefore presented naked and blatant to the reader. He is an artist who writes about the fascinating powers that come with art. We are conscious of Cohen existing in a border zone, ferrying real people across into the artistic world... (Ondaatje 12)

The Favourite Game is written in poetic prose while his poetry is prose-like, at least with respect to syntax. Prose and poetry merge in Cohen's work. In *Intangible Gifts* I attempt to emulate this stylistic technique, fusing genres and alluding to the powers of art collectively.

In *Intangible Gifts*, the elements of time and distance appear as the driving factors in the physical world, and the conditional factors by which all loves are controlled, as in the tradition of the Noh plays. *Intangible Gifts* is written as a love story not between two people, but as a story where love hangs in the air, controlling the characters' destinies, as it does in the traditions of ancient Noh theatre. The "schema" of *Intangible Gifts*, is significantly informed by what I call a "mystic elemental theme". This is also central to the work of García Lorca, and arguably it is this aspect of Lorca's work that attracted Cohen

to Lorca also. Cohen writes that Lorca's transcendental vision "taught me that poetry can be pure and profound, and at the same time popular" (Dorman in Hanne, 37). Ira Nadel writes that Cohen

also identified with Lorca's surrealism and his qualified use of dreams as a technique. Cohen understood with Lorca that while such an evasion may be pure, it is often not clear. "We Latins," explains Lorca, "want sharp profiles and visible mystery. Form and sensuality" (*Poet*, xvii). This statement, in Lorca's 1928 lecture "Imagination, Inspiration, Evasion," represents equally well Cohen's aesthetic. His naming his daughter Lorca attests to Lorca's abiding influence not only on Cohen's songs and poems but also on his life. (24)

The narrative of *Intangible Gifts* is structured around the events of Rosanna's life in the multi-cultural environment of Australia and the mono-cultural Japan. The theme of *Intangible Gifts* has an enigmatic similarity to Cohen's *The Favourite Game* in that it crosses into the territory of autobiography without becoming autobiography. In terms of the autobiographical nature of *The Favourite Game*, Ondaatje makes the point that:

One thing that bothered [Cohen] was the reference to his novel *The Favourite Game* as autobiographical. He has long wished for a review that would deal with the book as a work of art rather than as autobiography. But he has come to realize that in Montreal his work will never be considered in an objective way. People are too conscious of who he is and where he came from. (3)

Although I am not a famous person, I feel the same way as Cohen in terms of references to my work being autobiographical. Like Cohen's *The Favourite Game*, my novel merges certain facets of fact with fiction. The protagonist in *Intangible Gifts*, Rosanna, bears one of my real-life middle names. In my real life I found that the name Rosanna elicited a range of both positive and negative reactions in the seventies in Australia, which was then less multi-cultural than now. I had to explain to people that I was not Italian, but that my mother had chosen this name for love of the musicality of the Italian language. The theme of cultural ambiguity is something I responded to in Cohen's work. In my own novel, one of the ways in which cultural ambiguity is suggested is through the name Rosanna.

The title of my novel, *Intangible Gifts*, has multiple meanings. Firstly, the protagonist of the novel is gifted by creativity. How these gifts of hers are seen by the younger would-be lover/house-mate in the story is a driving force in the narrative as it unfolds. Material gifts are also significant in the story. The highly ritualised custom of gift giving in Japan is also frequently alluded to. One of the first of the recurring examples of this is: "Back at the office Sugiyama gave her one of that year's twenty-four carat gold alumni book-marks from his old university" (17). Looking for ways to encapsulate the symbolism of "gifts" in the novel, I originally made a list of potential titles. Here are some of the past potential titles for *Intangible Gifts*, listed in their order of conception, taken from my hand-written notes:

Foreign Gifts / Strange Gifts/ Tangible Gifts/ Gifts and
Burdens/ Totemic Gifts/ First-hand Gifts / Scattered Gifts/
Tokyo-Adelaide-Tokyo/ Brahma Lodge Boy, Tokyo Girl/

The Geisha and the Brahma Lodge Boy/ Far-flung Gifts/
Faraway Gifts/ Exilic Gifts / Opaque Gifts / Iridescent
Gifts /Gifts and The Favourite Games / Red Gifts.

In one scene from *Intangible Gifts* in which Rosanna narrates the defining moments of her life, she tells Mitch about an incident in which a man gave her an opal on an airplane during her teenage years. Rosanna describes the opal to Mitch as a stone with “a flickering flame deep inside it” (79). She tells Mitch how, through the light of the window on the airplane, the opal had glowed an opaque red. The colour red is symbolic in Japan as an erotic colour, but only for the youngest of women. It is used in the design of kimono both in everyday wear, and traditionally on the Noh theatre stage. For this reason, *Intangible Gifts* uses the colour red through the narrative as an extended metaphor for a young woman discovering and experiencing her own sexuality and formulating her own sense of identity. Rosanna wears red shoes on her first date with Mitch. The red shoes are introduced into the book in an extended descriptive passage in which Rosanna mentally compares the “shimmering” red of the shoes to the “hot, wet, red candy” of the toffee-apples of her childhood (57).

In thinking about the structure of *Intangible Gifts*, I find Michael Ondaatje’s description of the structure of *The Favourite Game* relevant to my own work. Ondaatje describes the plot-line of *The Favourite Game* as “non-existent”. *The Favourite Game* is not a formal novel; rather the reader is invited to “look at” various episodes in the life of Breavman. The reader is not guided through these episodes chronologically. Ondaatje says that reader is:

shown segments from scrap-books, home movies, diaries – all of which flash in front of us like ‘those uncertain images that were always flashing in his [Breavman’s] mind.’ (24)

It is this fragmentary and filmic style that Ondaatje describes as “the most fascinating and successful aspect of the book” that also attracted me strongly to *The Favourite Game* and appealed to me enough to attempt to structure *Intangible Gifts* in a similar way.

Cohen’s *The Favourite Game* was originally titled *Beauty at Close Quarters*. It was rewritten at least five times, with the result that, as Ondaatje says, it is “shaved down to an almost poetic form” (23). Following this example I reviewed the visual scenes in *Intangible Gifts* to create images with maximum impact using minimal but striking descriptions. This technique has not only been influenced by my reading of Cohen, but directly by some of the original masters, the ancient and modern Japanese poets. Perhaps the most significant conclusion I can make about the importance of this technique to my work has already been made by Ondaatje in relation to *The Favourite Game*: “As in a poem, the silences and spaces, what is left unsaid, are essential to the mood of the book” (23).

Ondaatje’s insights into Cohen’s style describe what I have tried to emulate in my own way. In my own novel I have tried to achieve what Ondaatje calls “the effectiveness of a long prose poem, with each scene emerging as a potent and enigmatic sketch rather than a full-blown, detailed narrative” (23). I have attempted to create pared down scenes using stark images. What I think of as the “filmic” quality of Cohen’s *The Favourite Game* is described by Ondaatje

as “visual” and “cinematic.” Analysing this style Ondaatje says “Each chapter is a scene.”(1)

The structure of *Intangible Gifts*, as well as my poetry, is similar to that of Cohen’s in *The Favourite Game*. Like Cohen I make use of brevity and concentration. For example, in *The Favourite Game* the great love of the protagonist’s life is introduced into the story by a sentence containing just her name, Shell (128). *Intangible Gifts* similarly contains sentences that are stark, such as the three word sentence: “Touch tells all.” (24) At the climax of *Intangible Gifts*, where Rosanna is giving a statement to the police after the suicide of “the tofu man” who had stalked her, there are sentences that contain only one or two words, such as: “To ashes. A void.”(183)

In the scene in *The Favourite Game* where Breavman meets Shell, there are two paragraphs of what I would describe as “photographic” poetry. Two lines in particular have remained in my mind as exemplary:

because your eyelashes

are the spines of tiny fragile animals. (177)

The intense visual physicality of this poem has partly contributed to my conceptualisation of some of the poetry Rosanna shows the older poet Hiroko Koyanagi in *Intangible Gifts*. In the poem titled “She”, I describe the shadows on the skin of an unnamed woman as being like a number of images, such as shards of broken glass and ripples made by a black swan on a body of water (158).

Poetry plays a strong role in *Intangible Gifts*, as do references to poetry by Rosanna in dialogues with Mitch. The style of poetry I include in *Intangible Gifts* is also written in a “photographic” or imagistic style. In the process of

writing *Intangible Gifts* I composed a great number of fragments that were at first included in the book and then progressively cut. This process of piecing together fragments to compose the work as a whole does not follow the chronological sequence of the events of the life of the protagonist herself. I wrote abbreviated notes as ideas occurred to me for life scenes to illustrate the spirit of the book.

Throughout the composition of *Intangible Gifts*, some words of Graham Greene regarding Carson McCullers were constantly in my mind, guiding me to create oblique inference rather than an overt "message." These words come from Greene's preface to McCullers' *A Clock Without Hands*.

Miss McCullers and perhaps Mr. Faulkner are the only writers since the death of D.H. Lawrence with an original poetic sensibility. I prefer Miss McCullers to Mr. Faulkner because she writes more clearly; I prefer her to D.H. Lawrence because she has no message.

What I have been working towards achieving in *Intangible Gifts* is a powerful impression that is, however, "no message". This cannot be easily analysed. The "poetic sensibility" I have intended to develop in *Intangible Gifts* is created through imagery, symbolism and indirect suggestion. Greene mentions D.H.Lawrence in relation to McCullers in the context of "original poetic sensibility". A reference to Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy* appears in *Intangible Gifts*. I had read this book as a schoolgirl in Japan, reading any English books I could obtain in my longing to return to Australia. The inclusion of Lawrence's title, perhaps in keeping with my interest in indirect inference, suggests a comparison between the repressed life of the virgin in Lawrence's

novella and Rosanna's life at the high school convent. *The Virgin and the Gypsy* is a story of social prejudice and sexual tension, comparable in some ways to *Intangible Gifts*.

In *Intangible Gifts*, the echoes of the memories of the relationship between Japan and Australia in World War Two are reflected in the use of the racial slur "Jap", used by the classmates at the Christian girls' school where Rosanna, along with her peers, formulates her own values to carry into adult life. This and other representative episodes in the book reflect the position of the protagonist in Cohen's *The Favourite Game*. He is the son of a Jewish family being bullied by French Canadians in a social situation fraught with social tensions and rivalries: "The dancers were Catholics, French-Canadian, anti-Semitic, anti-Anglais, belligerent" (*Game 45*).

The creative process of arranging many scenes from many fragments of story required a lot of material to be cut in the writing of *Intangible Gifts*. To preserve the power of minimalism, I pared down the number of words in a number of scenes. Reviewing my early drafts, I could see that I had digressed into sub-plots that would have made powerful and lengthy enough stories in themselves if re-written as separate works. The paring down process seemed to add a quality of allusion to the work. I acknowledge that in this process I have been influenced by the poetry of Japan both directly and indirectly. I was increasingly aware as I wrote and cut for ultimate dramatic effect that writing this novel was a process of translation: a process of translating my vision into words to create images and scenes that fitted together like poetic fragments.

In *Intangible Gifts*, I constructed strictly compacted images. For example the deer antlers that Rosanna had been forbidden to touch were originally

described in this way:

She had been told many times not to touch them. Sharp things were dangerous. To keep them was a bad message to the children. "A message" was something that also could mean something with many meanings or a secret meaning.

However, I eventually came to the conclusion that the secrecy surrounding this fragment of Rosanna's childhood could be magnified through inference rather than inclusive description. The mystery of some nameless characters and the ambiguity of the antlers in Rosanna's memory were strengthened by paring down the description of the antlers from: "They were not just an object and not just a gift from passing strangers who became visitors" to: "They were not just an object and not just a gift from passing visitors".

Youth is most often a formative time in defining self-identity. Ondaatje's description of Cohen's ability to evoke the power of childhood memories reflects what I wanted to achieve in *Intangible Gifts*.

Lawrence Breavman exists best in the company of others.

They are his raw material and he uses and translates them constantly into art. In youth, he uses the child's imagination which turns the banal into the heroic. "There is a way children enter garages, barns, attics, the same way they enter the great halls and family chapels." (Ondaatje, 28)

My own poetic vision has been influenced by the experience of living in Japan. Because of my exposure to Japanese culture during formative years, after living first in Australia, my vision has also been shaped by Western literature that has been influenced by Japan. My experiences of growing to maturity in

disparate cultural environments have inclined me to develop my own aesthetic of a fusion of cultural influences: Japanese literature and poetry and Leonard Cohen's prose and poetry in particular. Cohen and the Beat generation were influenced by the realisation in contemporary western society of Buddhism and other eastern philosophies. They also admired the work of Lorca, which shows Asiatic influence. I too am drawn to Lorca's work, recognising a mystical affinity between the "uta" of ancient Japan and the "cante jondo" or "deep song" that Lorca discusses in *Deep Song and other prose*. Waley describes the "uta" as:

'short songs' in thirty-one syllables. This metre, with its alternating lines of 5,7,5,7,7, has persisted in Japan as the classical uta rhythm from as early as the sixth century A.D. until the present day. Some of the earliest poems to survive take this form... Why so short, people tend to ask, and why particularly thirty one syllables? One theory has it that the rhythm possesses magical power; the poems are spells. Syllables in such a metre first burst from the lips of a miko or shaman in a state of divine trance, so that the rhythm is itself numinous. Certainly such poems have been used as spells, for bringing down a deity,... and to this day are still found embedded in the tougher loam of Tantric Buddhist rites. (*The Uta v*)

In the Spanish "deep songs", spaces of silence create meanings no words can capture. In *Deep Song and other prose*, Lorca quotes the following lines:

If I should happen to die

...I order you,
tie up my hands
with the tress of your black hair.

He describes these lines as “profoundly poetic... with their sad aristocratic eroticism” (38).

The mystical effects of spacing and silences of the *siguiriya* (a form of flamenco music related to the “cante jondo” or “deep song” category) have the quality of musicality that is also characteristic of the *uta*. Work from Lorca’s *Deep Song and other prose* has examples of both his theoretical and creative writing, showing the influence of Asiatic poetry on his work and on the merging of genres of literature and music:

Just as very ancient elements are found in the music of
the *siguiriya* and its daughter genres, in so many poems of
deep song there is an affinity to the oldest eastern verse...”
(38)

Spacings, silences and the visual lay-out of the poetry of “deep songs”, I would argue, strongly influenced the relationship between Cohen’s poetry and prose. This merging of genres has also strongly influenced my conceptualisation and style of writing, including the visual lay-out of the poetry in *Intangible Gifts*.

Symbols, likewise, cross cultural boundaries. The romantic symbolism of hair, for example, appears in the poetry of Lorca and the modern and ancient poetry of Japan. In my own work the symbolism of hair plays a role in suggesting the nature of relationships between characters and also in suggesting the psychology of individual characters. For example, in *Intangible Gifts*, the idyllic beauty of the

Japanese doll left reluctantly behind at Hisako's house represents Rosanna's growing awareness of the distance between herself and her own lost first-youth spent in Japan. Later in the book Rosanna's memory of another Japanese doll found in Italy alludes to her sense of exile from Japan. In the chapter "The Gold Chain", on the momentous day when Rosanna goes to meet a Japanese business tycoon, a racially ambiguous portrait of Rosanna emerges and there is a suggestion of reconciliation between two widely different cultural ideals of beauty:

On the morning of the appointment she arranged to have an early morning call. Two days beforehand, at a salon in Chinatown called "Geisha", she had the longest tendrils of her hair dyed blonde. "A champagne cognac diamond blonde really." (*Gifts* 16)

There is an autobiographical reason why I chose the image of the bronze champagne cognac diamond. Shortly after my return home to live in Australia again, I had heard a jeweller describing such a diamond as being found only in a certain area of the red desert country of Australia. This remains a profound memory for me of a sensory reconnection with the beauty and uniqueness of my home country.

In *Intangible Gifts*, hair is used as a symbol of beauty and as a psychological symbol, linking characters and providing insights into Rosanna, by association. For example, the teenage girl for whom Rosanna interprets at the psychiatric hospital is disturbed by her own displacement in her surroundings in Australia, Rosanna identifies with the girl through the dimensions of the experiences of her own youth spent in Tokyo. As the girl patient enters the room to be diagnosed, her hair is described in a starkly visual image, not only to

convey her beauty but to suggest her fear and disorientation:

Her skin was as white as the breast of a bird in a river brimming with rain.

In the room of plastic chairs, no mirrors and no clocks of any kind, her

long hair shone as if it would melt under the fluorescent tubes... (*Gifts* 34)

The style of prose poetry in this particular passage echoes both the ancient (Heian) and avant garde elements in the work of the modern woman poet Yosano Akiko, mentioned above in the 'Translation' chapter of this exegesis (44). A common element is the use of the imagery of hair as a romantic metaphor.

In *Intangible Gifts*, I have constructed a thread of erotic symbolism through the imagery of hair. Metaphor has been used to evoke the deep sensuality of the sight, touch and smell of the various kinds of body hair in a complex spectrum of imagery. The intensely intimate room-mate/same-sex relationship between Hana and Rosanna is shown in the visual references to the beautiful and, to Rosanna, haunting body hair of Hana:

The hair over her pussy was glossy black, and was cut very short, so that it clung to the skin as if it were a baby's scalp. (*Gifts* 45)

At the college where Rosanna stays for some time:

She picked up the shaving brush with two fingers. It was made of soft black and white bristles from some kind of animal. She ran the brush lightly up her arm, and then circled it slowly around her nipples, and her navel. Then without making a sound she replaced it in its silver holder. (*Gifts* 48)

Hair is used to symbolise the repressed adolescent sexuality of Rosanna and to reveal the nature of her relationship with her mother in the chapter "Brahma Lodge and a String of Pearls". Rosanna knows the crucial part hair plays in the

self-image of an adolescent girl. She says to Mitch:

Vanity is a sin. My mother once said to me that if I didn't stop looking at myself in a certain mirror in our house, she would cut my hair off while I was asleep. I was sixteen years old when she said that. (*Gifts* 110)

Furthermore, in a scene where Rosanna has become fully aware of her own sexuality, hair is described in a sensual way, with erotic undertones:

Rosanna liked sitting at the dressing table in this bedroom. She sat on the satin stool, naked, and watched her breasts and her stomach move in the shadows, as she stroked her hair with an old silver backed brush. (*Gifts* 111)

Hair is also central in conveying Rosanna's oblique confession of the nature of a relationship in her much younger past:

He had asked why she bothered to burn old love letters – what was the point of it? If she really wanted to exorcise “that” man from her life she would have burnt the piece of his hair as well as the other stuff. “No, throwing the hair into the bin was done on purpose. I hadn't wanted the smoke from an unwanted sacrifice of hair to permeate my room, to go into my lungs or to run into my blood. Throwing it away is more meaningful than burning it. He once said to me, ‘I hope your heart breaks and runs down the Stairway to Heaven.’ I never wanted a lock of his hair.” (*Gifts* 137)

In the work of the poets and writers who have influenced *Intangible Gifts*, the spiritual role of hair as a memory token of the loved one appears again and again. Hair is a constant romantic symbol in the love stories of Japan and other cultures. I drew upon this symbolism, particularly as it appears in Japanese and

also Spanish literature. I used the symbolism and connotations of hair to illuminate characters and relationships between characters in *Intangible Intangible Gifts*. Throughout my novel, hair is used as a symbol, an erotic metaphor, part of a complex spectrum of esoteric imagery and as a kind of poetic punctuation (equivalent to musical percussion).

I hope that my work will be seen in the context of the traditions of the great poets and writers to whom I am indebted. I particularly align myself with the Japanese tradition of The Pillow Book, beginning with the work of Sei Shonagon, mentioned in the first chapter of this exegesis. Her *Makura no soshi (Pillow book)*, written around 1010, is still highly regarded in Japan for its pure and compressed language and I responded strongly, as a student in Japan, to its poetic passages. I also find inspiration in the contemporary work of Leonard Cohen. In the course of writing my novel, I wrote a great deal of poetry, with the intention of including poems in my prose work, as Cohen did in *The Favourite Game*. In *Intangible Gifts* a body of poetry is shown by Rosanna to a famous, older woman poet at the Renoir tea-shop. In this way, I introduce poetry into the novel as if it only consists of a few sheets of paper. In the end I decided to leave many of the poems themselves out of the novel. As I wrote the last draft of the novel I became more and more conscious of the poetic potential of prose: something that I also found in Cohen. I also became conscious of the dramatic power of Cohen's fragmented style and the concise engineering of his images. In the end, I concentrated more on a fusion of poetry and prose. In the spirit of poetry and song, I wish to conclude this chapter with a favourite poem, "She", cut from one of my drafts.

She,
with skin like spun sugar
too thick to eat
without an old silver spoon.

With nipples
like maraschino cherries.

She,
with a navel like Mars of the East.
Nipples like marshmallows in hot milk laced with brandy from Venice.

Conclusion

I now live and write in Australia. I left Australia to visit Japan for what I thought would be summer holidays, but which became a long sojourn in the first half of my life. Now back in Australia, I can see that, in keeping with Australia's democratic ideals, this country offers the ideal cosmopolitan environment, not only for the artist in all of us, but for people of all cultural backgrounds. I often read the romances from the Kyoto of the vanished Heian Era. Yet I now view the songs in translation from the perspective of an adult woman, rather than the young girl who was so hypnotised by their beauty that she remained on the other side of the world for sixteen years.

The kaleidoscopic quality of multicultural Australia, in contrast with a more politically dogmatic mono-cultural Japan, can provide not only a good environment for an artist to live in, but a place where no-one needs to compromise their individuality to fit in. How can I explain the joy of knowing that I belong here?

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