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Immigration, Identity Loss, and Collective
Memory in Asian American Poetry: A
Study of *Dance Dance Revolution* by Cathy
Park Hong

Laura González López



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TUTOR: Dr. John Glenmore Style

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study a contemporary collection of poems by Cathy Park Hong, an Asian American author. It begins with biographical information about the author, some Asian American history, and the literary characteristics of the Asian American literary movement. The study shows how Cathy Park Hong's work follows the characteristics of Asian American literature, and deals with prototypical topics such as immigration, identity, colonialization, loss, and trauma, among others. In addition, this collection of poems is unconventional due to its hybridity between poetry and narrative. This study explores the inner structure of the collection of poems and specific literary characteristics such as plot, time, space, and the development of the two main characters. Park's language is analysed to show how she breaks the boundaries of language and meaning by mixing several languages in the poems and creating a new language that invites the reader to reread and elaborate on different interpretations of the poems. Finally, this paper explains how the fictional place where the storyline takes place was created by Cathy Park Hong, in order to portray the history and stereotypes of Asian people living in America and to explain historical facts about Korean culture and history.

Keywords: Asian American poetry, contemporary poetry, literary hybridity, immigration, identity.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the degree, I have been studying and dealing with English poetry in several courses. I have always enjoyed reading poetry, when I saw a topic related to contemporary poetry, I knew it would be a delightful challenge to work with because I was not used to contemporary poetry and I wanted to learn more about it.

At first, it was hard for me to look for an author that called my attention, but once I discovered *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006) by Cathy Park Hong, I immediately knew I wanted to deal with her collection of poems due to several reasons. First, it is linked to Asian American literature. Second, the poems explain a plot through the point of view of the main character. Third, they are placed in a utopian fictional place created by the author. Hence, the purpose of my TFG is to see whether Cathy Park Hong fits into the Asian American literary movement, to discover which is the message she is trying to convey in her poems, and to see if she is stating facts or asking people to take action after reading her book. To do so, I have mainly focused on the content, history and literary background of the poems.

I have divided my TFG into four parts: the theoretical framework, where I provide information about Cathy Park Hong, Asian American history, and literary characteristics; a general description of *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006), where I describe the time, the space, the main characters, and the historical events the book deals with; the study of the poems, in which I have discussed seven poems and the main topics of the whole collection of poems; and finally, the conclusions.

2. Methodology

The methodology I used to study Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006) is the following: I read the collection of poems before looking for information about the author and the literary movement she belongs to. Once I read the book, I looked for information about Cathy Park Hong, and I listened to two podcasts in which she was interviewed. Afterward, I did some research on Asian American history and the literary characteristics that made up its literary movement.

Once I had the theoretical framework done, I started with the study of the collection of poems. I reread the collection of poems, wrote an explanation of the plot and a description of the time and space, and did an analysis of the main characters of the book. Then, I provided some information about the historical events mentioned in the collection as to give some context to the reader. In the following section, I explained the general structure of the whole book and provided a brief description of the main events that happen in each section. On the other hand, I also stated some information related to the complexity of the language used in the book.

In order to study some of the poems in deep, I discussed and commented on seven poems that I consider to be the most significant ones in the collection of poems due to the topics they deal with and the content they explain.

Finally, I gathered most of the important topics the author portrays in the poems to link the theory and the practice and see whether the collection of poems represents the characteristics of the Asian American literary movement.

3. Background of the Collection of Poems

3.1. Cathy Park Hong Biography

Cathy Park Hong was born on August 7, 1976, and raised by her Korean parents in Los Angeles, California. Currently, she works as a poetry editor in *The New Republic* and teaches a poetry program at Rutgers University-Newark MFA in New Jersey (Cathy Park Hong, n.d.). She has published three collections of poems: *Translating Mo'um* (2002), *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006), and *Engine Empire: Poems* (2012), and an essay called *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020), in which she expresses her feelings about being raised in America as the daughter of Asian immigrants (Goodreads, n.d.).

Park Hong has received several awards like the Windham-Campbell Prize, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Her poetry has been published in some American journals such as *A Public Space*, *Boston Review*, and *The Nation*. The collection of poems *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006) won a Barnard Women Poets Prize in 2006 (National Book Foundation, n.d.), and *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. For it, she was recognized by TIME magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People of 2021 list (Cathy Park Hong, n.d.).

About her poetry, she has said that she is not able to write and talk about herself in poetry; that is why she uses different characters in her poetry collections. She considers herself to be a writer of fiction through poetry. Currently, she has stopped writing poetry because she wanted to try prose to express better her own identity. During the period in which she wrote poetry, she said that she portrayed her thoughts during a time in which she was confused. So, she wrote poetry to discuss her inner problems with the reader. Rather than giving a moral, she wants her readers to feel and experience something through her

poems. She considers herself to be a complex poetry writer, she is aware that people might not understand what she is trying to say due to the mixture of languages and concepts that she portrays. Despite this, she enjoys seeing people discussing and talking about the different interpretations her poems can have. Her wish is that people take action after reading her poetry (Rachel Zucker, n.d.).

As for her prose and her essays, she feels that, in this field, she can express herself and expand the feeling of how it feels to be a Korean American. She does not want to create general truths about the topic; instead, she wants other writers to express how they feel to create literature that gives people information about their identity (Jordan Kisner, 2021).

One day she would like to become a role model for Asian American people to mobilize them and make them feel less alone and invisible in society. She would like to live in a community where people's identities could be validated, strong, and well defined (Jordan Kisner, 2021).

Finally, on a podcast, she highlighted the origins of America saying: "The foundation of this nation is based on slavery" (Jordan Kisner, 2021, 40' 07''), arguing that most white Americans are not aware of the origins of their nation and because most of them are ignorant about it, they cannot accept other ethnic groups in the country. In addition, she thinks that because of that, American society cannot move forwards and improve (Jordan Kisner, 2021).

3.2. Asian American Literature

3.2.1 History, Racism, and Stereotypes

At the beginning of Asian American immigrants' history, Americans thought that Asian immigrants were not real, that is to say, they thought they were going to be temporary immigrants in America. The first Asian people to get to America was due to the California

Gold Rush, and later, due to the construction of the Transcontinental railroad, Asian immigrants were seeking fortune and new job opportunities just as many other immigrants that moved to America (CBS Sunday Morning, 2021).

The first two Asian groups that emigrated to America were the Chinese and the Japanese, but both groups differed in how they adapted themselves to society. While the Chinese became integrated into the urban society, Japanese people integrated into the agricultural sector. Both groups suffered racism and socioeconomic discrimination and were known as the *Oriental*s. At that time, most of the immigrants were European, and as Asian immigrants did not fit in their vision of how immigrants were, they decided to give them that name (Ling & Austin, 1).

In 1870, during the construction of the transcontinental railroad, around 10,000 and 20,000 Chinese people joined the Central Pacific Union to clear the way for building the railroad. Their working conditions were tough as they worked from 10 to 12 hours for six days each week. Also, they worked on gaps and tunnels in the Sierra Nevada mountains, the most dangerous areas of the railroad. Chinese people did the most dangerous parts of the construction, for example, using dynamite to close mountain tunnels. Meanwhile the building of the railroad happened, the hate towards Chinese people increased, and the places where they lived, called Chinatowns, were seen as places of “prostitution, gambling, and opium” (Muñoz, 2019). Hence, the government decided to reduce the arrival of Chinese immigrants (Muñoz, 2019). Later, due to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Chinese people could not achieve the citizenship in America while the Japanese were able to immigrate until 1924, when the National Origins Act took place. This act only allowed the arrival of 150,000 immigrants annually and benefited immigrants from Britain, Ireland, and North Europe, while Asian immigrants were almost excluded (U-S-History, n.d.).

After World War II, the Chinese achieved better relationships with the American due to their cooperation in the war while the Japanese deteriorated their relationships with the American thanks to their alliance with Germany. As a consequence of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, from 1942 until 1945, around 120,000 Japanese immigrants were forced to leave their homes to be incarcerated in detention camps (CBS Sunday Morning, 2021). All the events mentioned before raised several prejudices and acts of discrimination not only against Chinese and Japanese people, but also against all the people who came from Asia.

The focus of Asian American History on the Chinese and Japanese populations provoked that other Asian groups like Filipino Americans or Korean Americans have remained almost forgotten in history (U-S-History, n.d.).

Most Asian American immigrants arrived after the Naturalization Act of 1965, which was an attempt to reunite the families of immigrant people in America and to allow immigrant families to redo their lives in America (History, 2019). Asian immigration increased highly after the Act; apart from Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Philippine and Korean immigrants started to establish themselves in America, more concretely in Hawaii. Philippine immigrants consisted of professionals and women while Korean people emigrated due to the Second World War and the consequences of the Korean War (Muñoz, 2019).

The Asian American population has always remained almost invisible in the history of America, and they have been the so-called *scapegoated*; blamed for things that they have not taken part of, in due to the historical events in which they have been involved in. Also, they are seen as a “high-achieving racial minority that has assimilated well into the American society” (Abrams, Zara 2019). According to the Civil and Human Rights News (2018), in 1966, the New York Times decided to call them the *model minority*; this is

linked to the prejudice that Asian American population is hardworking, intelligent, and obedient. This expression might seem to have a good connotation, but it has always been used as a weapon towards them as with the use of the word *minority* they are reminding them that they will never be like white American people; they will be always under their power.

Furthermore, the media has never put much interest in racist acts towards Asian American citizens. An example is the murder of Vincent Chin, in 1980, a Chinese American citizen killed by a father and his son. At first, the news did not make it in the media; but the sentence provoked the anger of Asian American citizens as it obliged them to pay 3,000 dollars each three years without being imprisoned. Moreover, the judge said: “This is not the kind of people I sent to jail” (CBS Sunday Morning, 2021, 6’ 45’’) which caused demonstrations asking for judicial equality for the Asian American people (CBS Sunday Morning, 2021).

3.2.3 Literary Characteristics

All the events mentioned before consolidated a new type of literature: the Asian American Literature. Their objective is to explain their past, the history, and the culture of this big ethnic group of immigrants that had to leave their homelands in search of better life opportunities. The most relevant pieces of literature come from four different groups of Asian American immigrants: Chinese American Literature, Filipino American literature, Japanese American literature, and Korean American literature (Ling & Austin, pp.202-203).

- The Chinese American literature: at first, it was written in Chinese. They created folk rhymes to explain their experience working on the building of the railroad; portraying how hard and dangerous it was, and how Americans mistreated them. Later, in 1865, anonymous English texts appeared explaining how Chinatowns

looked like, and the racist practices they suffered. During the 60s and the 70s, due to the Civil Rights Movement, new types of Chinese American literature appeared to give importance to Chinese folklore and Chinese American history. Female authors explained the pros and cons of the Chinese culture, traits, and values to consider whether they needed to change and improve them to fit in the new homeland (Ling & Austin, pp.202-203).

- The Filipino American literature: focuses more on the experience of the individual who came from social and political conflict; the characteristic of their literature is the mixture of different cultures due to the hybrid culture they were experiencing in America. There are two generations of Filipino American writers: those born during World War II and the Post-War generation (Ling & Austin, pp.292-293).
 - The elder group dealt with the experience of being an immigrant worker group and the problems they had to redo their lives in a new land. Instead of writing memoirs, they created autobiographies and fictional novels that talked about themselves and criticized the social and political context of the period (Ling & Austin, pp.292-293).
 - The Post-War generation used traditional legends, folklore, and religious themes to talk about contemporary times and historical events. Some of the authors from this period were not immigrants but sons and daughters of immigrants. They write about their hybrid identity; being an American with an Asian heritage. Some of the main topics from this generation are poverty, oppression, and political unrest. Later works from the twentieth century deal with topics like finding your identity in a constantly changing American society (Ling & Austin, pp.292-293).

- Japanese American Literature: The first pieces of Japanese American literature, during World War II, talked about the past and the Japanese culture and society. The authors tried to explain their homeland to Americans. In poetry, they used to compare their homelands' landscape with their new surroundings. From the 30s until the 80s, two different groups appeared: the Nisei, and the Sansei generations. Both generations were children of Asian immigrants but with slightly different focuses in their texts (Ling & Austin, pp.432-434):
 - The Nisei generation: the authors of this period focused on the immigrant experience through their parents' perspective, and how were the lives of Asian American families. In the 60s and the 70s, during the Civil Rights Movement, authors talk about multiculturalism and bicultural identities. After the war, the Nisei generation grows and changes its focus; they talk about the tensions and objections from their parents while trying to discover and fit into the American society (Ling & Austin, pp.432-434).
 - The Sansei generation: appeared in the 70s and the 80s. Authors explored similar topics as the Nisei but in a slightly different way. Most of them did not feel connected with their culture and traditions, so they focused on multiculturalism. They tried to reconnect with their cultural roots bearing in mind that they were more influenced by the American culture than by their family culture and tried to look for their own identity (Ling & Austin, pp.432-434).
- Korean American literature: focuses mainly on the experience of being an immigrant and the process of readapting themselves in a new society and culture. In 1965 the immigration of South Korean people increased and influenced the literature of the period explaining the relationships between the American and the

Korean communities (Ling & Austin, pp.490-492). There are three different periods:

- The Early period: the novels from this period talked about the experience of being an immigrant, and the authors also described the Korean history and culture (Ling & Austin, pp.490-492).
- Modern literature: in the 80s female authors started to gain recognition, they dealt with topics like language, memory, and identity. During this period, Korean women start reflecting on being immigrants but from the point of view of being a woman. Hence, they give importance to the female gender (Ling & Austin, pp.490-492).
- The Young Peoples' literature: in this period, books for children and teenagers expanded, and the texts talked about the immigrant experience from the point of view of children or through folk tales to inform younger generations about their culture and history (Ling & Austin, pp.490-492).

4. Dance Dance Revolution

4.1. Plot

Dance Dance Revolution (2006) can be considered unconventional because, through the poems, the reader gets to know the life story of two people: The Historian and the Guide; the main protagonists of Park Hong's poems. Both characters explore the Desert: a utopian place, which as we move towards the end, it seems more a dystopia. The Historian explains us what to expect from The Dessert in the second section of the book called *Foreword*; it warns us about the language that is spoken there, which he describes as: "an amalgam of some three hundred languages and dialects imported into this city" (Hong,

19). He explains the reader that he had been recording his conversations with the Guide, and he will try to reproduce them and provide clarification if needed.

The Desert's economic stability depends on the tourism. Lately, it has been highly reduced due to the conflict with the people from New Town who are planning a rebellion against the Desert. In the section called *New Town*, Hong explains that the population there are former employees from the Desert that are "officials exile natives" (Hong, 80), which means that they were natives of the area before the Desert was built.

The Historian decided to visit the Desert because his father and the Guide were part of the Kwangju Uprising in 1980. She used to give radio speeches and guide people during the protests, and along the Historian's father, both fought for democracy in their country. After he was almost killed during a bombing, he went on exile to Sierra Leone and started a new life where he built his own family and avoided talking about his past in Kwangju and the Guide. Despite this, when the Historian finds out that the Guide was his father's first love, he decides to visit the Desert to meet her and learn more about the past of his father in Kwangju.

Once he gets to the Desert, he meets the Guide; the woman who will guide him throughout the Desert. At first, he does not know that she is the person he had been looking for until she explains him about her life before the Desert.

4.1.1 Time and Space

In terms of time, it is not clear when the Historian visits the Desert. He does not state when he goes there, although the whole story takes place after 2016 because in the section *Chronology of the Desert Guide*, we see that the Guide starts working in the St. Petersburg Hotel – the hotel in which the Historian will be staying in during his visit – at that time. The book was published in 2007, and it makes the reader think that she placed this whole

utopia in the immediate future. Even though the book is placed around 2016, the poems move backward and forwards into the Guide's past, present, and future.

The book starts when the Historian arrives in the Desert. There, he meets the Guide, and she provides him with some descriptions of the hotel the Historian is staying in. Then, we get immersed in the Guide's past: first, she talks about her childhood in the 60s and her father and grandfather's participation in the Korean War. Second, she explains her education years until she gets to college. Then, we go back to the Desert where the Guide does a detailed description of all the places that make up the Desert. Again, we move back to her past, during the years of the Kwangju Uprising. Finally, the book ends back in the Desert, where both the Historian and the Guide try to contemplate the past to rearrange the future of the Desert and New Town.

As for the space, this collection of poems takes place in four settings: the Desert, New Town, South Korea – more specifically Kwangju – and Sierra Leone. In the introduction the Historian does about the Desert, he describes it as “the planned city of renewed wonders, city of state-of-the-art hotels modelled after the world's greatest cities” (Hong, 20). The Desert seems to be similar to Las Vegas, it is not said where it is placed, but we infer from the name of the city that, some time ago, it was a Desert. In it, several cultures and cities are represented and mixed, which seems to be the biggest tourist attraction of the city.

New Town is the town where exiled natives from the Desert live. Every time a worker from the Desert decides to abandon the Desert, they move to New Town. There is a section of the book that tries to describe how it looks like; its architecture seems to be simple, dark, and tough. The Historian explains that they live in “apartments made of poured concrete...but the windows are narrow, allowing only a fleck of light” (Hong, 80). The image that comes to the reader's mind is as if they were living in trenches hidden

from the people of the Desert. And about the borders of New Town, the Historian explains that every day the Desert moves one inch towards them, “the natives do not notice until suddenly a clothesline is over so that they must retie the clothesline” (Hong, 80) they did not notice it yet, but eventually, the Desert will be over them to invade their territory.

As for Sierra Leone and Kwangju, both places belong to the past of the main protagonists. Kwangju is the city where the Guide and the Historian’s father spend most of their teenage years, and she describes it in the section of poems called *Kwangju*. This section talks about the Guide during the days of the revolution. Rather than a description of Kwangju, she describes how bloody and traumatic were the protests for her.

Finally, Sierra Leone is where the Historian was born. His father decided to go there after the Kwangju Uprising because he decided to become a physician for Doctors Without Borders. He does not describe it because his father did not allow him to go out as there were rumours of an upcoming Civil War. When the civil war started, the Historian’s father decided to send him to board schools in London, Hong Kong, and Connecticut. In one of his memories from the book, he explains that he cannot describe Sierra Leone because, while being there, he could not go outside his house. Hence, most of the descriptions are about indoor places, as if he were trapped by his safety.

4.2. Characters

4.2.1. The Historian

The Historian is the narrator of all the poems from the collection. As mentioned before, he recorded all the conversations he had with the Guide, and he tried to reproduce them most accurately. Because he admits having some problems understanding everything that the Guide told him, we cannot consider him a trustworthy narrator, in fact, in the section *Foreword* he says that some of the poems are incomplete and have blank spaces

due to “technical glitches” (Hong, 20). His age is not mentioned, and his mother died when he was three years old. We get to know more about him in the different sections called *Excerpt from the Historian memoir*. In these sections, he explains some of his childhood memories in Sierra Leone and in the broad schools he attended. His relationship with his father seems to have been always cold; his father tried to give him the best life he could, but due to his past in Kwangju and the Civil War in Sierra Leone, he seems desperate to keep the Historian safe and help others. On the other hand, his relationship with his father seems to have created some problems with the Historian’s own identity. His father was Korean, he was born in Sierra Leone, his mother was a Midwestern woman, and when he turned ten, he was sent abroad to several schools and a military school. All these factors provoked him to be lost about his identity and made him question if he belonged to a specific place or culture. He decides to visit the Desert because he is curious about his father’s past and needs to know more about his family roots as they had always tried to hide him the truth. In some way, he is trying to rebuild his father’s past to find his own identity. In short, the Historian represents the younger generations, those who are children of immigrant people and that had to grow up in a hybrid culture, in this case, the Historian had to coexist with several different cultures, and, eventually, had the urge to feel connected to his family past.

4.2.2 The Guide

The Guide was born in a small village near Kwangju. Her mother died when she was just a child, and she studied political science and English at university where she fell in love with her friend Kim Yoon-Sah. Both of them participated in the Kwangju Uprising together in the 80s, but after a bombing, she thought Sah was dead, so she decided to abandon Kwangju alone and move to the Desert after working for some time in a colony. First, she became a housekeeper in the Paris Hotel; then, she achieved a new job as a

guide for the tourists in the St. Petersburg Hotel, where she became a senior guide and started learning so many languages that she ended up talking a mixture of all of them. She does not have any children; she was married once but got divorced. From her conversations with the Historian, we can see that she is a straightforward and open person, not afraid of talking about her past with the Historian, in fact, she seems to be willing to expose her life to the Historian, not like his father. At first, she explains to the Historian that she decided to exile to the Desert because she knew English and there, she could achieve a job and a peaceful life. But, due to the touristic decline and the conflicts with New Town, she feels that her past is being repeated. In some of the first poems of the book, she agrees with the officials of the Desert and thinks that the rebellion is just upsetting the visitors of the Desert. She also helps the Desert officials spying on the intruders from New Town, but once she recalls her past with the Historian, she becomes ashamed about what she has been doing so far. The Guide would represent the elder generations of immigrant people, those who had to leave their homelands to redo their lives in safer places where they had to adapt to a new culture, language, and identity.

4.2.3. Sah and the Historian's Father

Sah is the Guide's best friend, her teacher introduced them in class, and, since then, they were always together. Most of the Guide's memories are linked to him, and she confesses that he was her first true love. They both seemed to have the same way of thinking, and they both fought together in the Kwangju Uprising. A curious fact about him is that he is that not until the end of the book, we realize that Sah was the Historian's father. If we pay attention to the small details, even though the characters do not say it, the Historian always talks about how his father took his pills every morning, and the Guide explains that Sah was epileptic. It might be because the Historian does not explain to the Guide why he

decided to visit the Desert, he only asks her about her past, and she decides to explain it to him.

4.3. Historical Events of the Book

4.3.1. The Korean War

As for the background of the collection of poems; there are two historical events affect the Guide's life. As stated before, the father and the grandfather of the Guide helped the American army during the Korean War; both of them were under the orders of the American army. The Korean War lasted for three years and took place from 1950 to 1953 when in June of 1950 North Korea along with the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China decided to invade South Korea. The South received help from the United Nations but mainly from the United States. In 1950 the war started with the invasion of Pusan; the Soviet Union provided weapons while the Republic of China offered their soldiers, and on June 25, they went towards Seoul to invade the city. The South Korean army called ROK, resisted the attack, and the UN decided to provide them with military help from the United States. The North and the South attacked each other for several months moving onwards and backward through the territory. In June 1951, both armies lost lots of soldiers and decided that peace could not be achieved through a military victory, and negotiations started. The war ended on July 27, when both sides decided to sign the Military Armistice Commission; 7,862 Korean soldiers and 3,597 U.S. soldiers were able to return to the South, while 75,823 communist soldiers returned to the North. Finally, as both sides could not achieve an agreement on the political future of Korea, they decided to divide the peninsula in two, North Korea as a communist and a dictatorial country and South Korea as a capitalist and democratic country (Millett, 2021).

Despite that the American army were helping South Korea, they did not have a good reputation among Korean people, as the American took advantage of their power and

mistreated Korean citizens. The Guide's family decided to help the American army to achieve a better quality of life, without caring about the hate their neighbours would have towards them. This will be explained in the discussion of the poems.

4.1.2. The Kwangju Uprising

The Kwangju Uprising is the second historical event that affected the Guide in her life. In this instance, she experiences the same feelings her father and grandfather suffered during war, which made her build her own identity and adopt her values towards rebellion. The Kwangju Uprising started in May 1980 in Kwangju, a southern city from South Korea. It was a mass protest against the military government that lasted for nine days. The objective was to achieve a democratic reform in the government of Park Chung-Hee who for 18 years created an oppressive government that led the citizens to do massive demonstrations of students against him. Park controlled the press, the universities, and the personal freedom of the South Korean citizens. They felt they were living in a dictatorship rather than in a democratic country. Willing to stop this situation, labour activist, students and opposition leaders wanted to have democratic elections and started doing demonstrations in the city of Kwangju. In May 18 of 1980, a group of 600 students did a protest at Chonnam National University but were repressed by the government forces. Since the Korean War, United States had been maintaining control over the Korean forces and the U.S. troops decided to help the government to repress the demonstrations. Citizens armed themselves and fought for six days to liberate the city of Kwangju from the Government of Park Chung-Hee. In the end, around 2,000 citizens and students were murdered by the government forces. Despite the uprising was a failure, in the late 1980s there was a presidential election that brought Kim Young-Sam to the government. He was the first president who was democratically elected in South Korea (Han, 2021).

5. Book Structure and Language

5.1. Organization of the Poems

This collection of poems is divided into eight different sections in which Cathy Park Hong brings up several topics:

- *I. Strolling through the hotel:* eight poems that describe the St. Petersburg Hotel in which the Historian is staying during his visit. In this section, the Guide describes the services they offer and the most important places of the hotel: the arboretum, the fountain, the washrooms, and the dome.
- *II. Stirring of childhood that begin with:* in this section of poems, the Guide talks about her childhood by describing her family. First, she talks about her mother, and then there are two poems in which she criticises her grandfather and father.
- *III. Education during the year of falling hair:* in this section, the Guide explains how her ideology changed because of her teacher. On the four poems that make up this section, she talks about how her relationship with her father deteriorated, how she did not fit in her village (due to her family's reputation), and how her teacher adopted her, made her a prole, and explained to her how they should hide their ideology in front of others.
- *IV. Visions of pamphlet gods:* this section of four poems deals with the teenage years of the Guide, when she met Sah (her best friend), and her personal growth in the university.
- *V. Intermission: Portrait of the Desert:* in this section, six poems describe different aspects of the dessert: how immigrants get there to achieve jobs, how was the Desert built, which is the job of a guide, how it feels to be an exiled immigrant and how was the construction process of the Desert. Finally, the last poem describes New Town.

- *VI. Resuming the Desert tour: toward the outskirts, toward the bridge:* this section has 11 poems in which the Guide explains more about the culture of the Desert through the music of the streets. Also, in the last poems, they move towards the bridge that connects with New Town, and the Guide warns the Historian not to go there because he could be seen as an insurgent.
- *VII. Kwangju:* in this section of four poems, the Guide explains the Historian her experience in the Kwangju Uprising as a radio interlocutor who guided people during the days of the revolution.
- *VIII. Dance Dance:* this section has four poems in which the Guide explains to the Historian what is going to happen in the Desert and asks him to leave or stay with her to help with the revolution against the people of the Desert.

5.2. Language and Fluidity

What makes this collection of poems hard to read or understand is the fact that the Guide, does not speak English at all. According to Cathy Park Hong, people from the Desert speak “an invented dialect [...] in an invented city” (The Loft Literary Center, 2014, 14’, 32’’). The Guide speaks a mixture of all the languages that she had learned in the Desert since she got there. She is used to talk in this dialect because it has always helped her to communicate with all the tourists she has guided. The Historian also explains that “the language, while borrowing the inner structures of English grammar, also borrows from existing and extinct English dialects [...] Fluency is a matter of opinion” (Hong, 19). Hence, the lingua franca is English, but it has suffered so many changes that people from the Desert cannot decide whether they are speaking English or a new language. Also, for the population of the Desert, there are no problems regarding fluency among them, although at the beginning of the book, the Historian warns that there might be problems in the literal transcription of the poems due to communicative misunderstandings.

6. Study and Discussion of the Poems

6.1. Roles

This is the first poem in the collection of poems; it is important to comment because it is the first time the reader contacts the language of the Desert. The first stanza of the poem is full of references to lights or precious stones like opal and “neon hibiscus bloom beacons” (Hong, 25), it gives the reader the image that the Desert is full of lights and colours just as Las Vegas is, in addition, the Guide talks about a ““Tan Lotion Tanya” billboard...” (Hong, 25), which probably is one of the first things visitors notice about the Desert because of its brightness.

Throughout the poem, the Guide describes her skills as a guide. First, she compares herself with Virgil saying that “I’s taka over as talky Virgil” (Hong, 25) meaning that she has the same oral skills Virgil had guiding Dante through the *Inferno* in Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy* (1321) (Britannica, 2021). Second, to improve her skills as a guide in the Desert, she has trained her “talk box”, a synecdoche to the word “mouth”, as if her mouth were a device for her job. To train her mouth, she and the people living in the Desert have learned several languages to adjust themselves to the visitors. The Guide speaks “Hang-guk y Finnish, good bit o Latin / y Spanish...” (Hong, 25) but as we read other poems, it can be seen that other languages expand her vocabulary. Due to this mixture of languages, she explains to the Historian that “Desert Creole en evachanging dipdong / ‘pendable on mine mood” (Hong, 25), meaning that the language is in constant change and depends on her daily mood, which leads the reader to think that this strange language lacks consistency and standardisation.

On the other hand, this poem also gives the reader some notions about how the Desert was built. While the Guide explains how she guides American visitors, she explains the following: “gud ripping done to erect Polis, / we exploit gaggle o aborigini to back tundra

country...” (Hong, 26). To build the Desert, they had to export (exploit) the animals that lived there before (gaggle o aborigini) and sent them to a “tundra country” which is “a black mucky soil with a permanently frozen subsoil” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Then, the Guide adds the following: “Bannitus! But betta to scrape dat fact / unda history rug” (Hong, 26). It can be inferred that the people who created the Desert did not respect what was already there and decided to take control of the area banishing everything, in other words, they colonized it, and then, people decided to avoid talking about it as surely it would give a bad impression of the Desert.

In the last stanza, the Guide reflects on the creation of the Desert and judges them strictly by alluding to Cicero’s oratory and using one of his sentences from his work *Catilinam* (63 BC): “O tempora, o mores” (Hong, 26), which was translated into English by C. D. Yonge in 1856 as “Shame on this age and on its lost principles”.

Finally, the Guide explains briefly to the Historian how she ended in the Desert:

“O tempora, O mores! I usta move
round like Innuite lookim for sea pelt... now
I’mma double migrant. Ceded from Koryo, ceded from
‘Merikka, ceded y ceded until now I seizem
dis sizable Mouthpiece role... now les’ drive to interior.” (Hong, 26)

In the second line, she compares herself with the Inuit people from the Arctic, who hunted caribou furs to make clothes and survive the extreme cold (Jessen Karla, 2022). Hence, the Guide conveys that she had to emigrate to survive. Then, she says that she is a double migrant; first, she had to leave Koryo¹ and then America until she could find a place to achieve a decent life (sizable) as a guide.

¹ Koryo was the name of a dynasty that ruled the Korean peninsula from 935 to 1392 CE, a rich period for the History of Korea in terms of culture, the word Korea is derived from Koryo. (Britannica, 2010)

In this stanza, there is an alliteration of the phoneme /s/ in “ceded y ceded until now I seizem / dis sizable Mouthpiece role” (Hong, 26), and when reading the line, the smoothness of the sentence makes the reader feel that she has reached to a quiet place to live, but the ellipses at the end of the line create some tension as if the Guide was trying to convince herself about what she was saying.

In terms of language, there are some phonetic changes in the spelling and pronunciation of words like “taka ova” instead of “taken over”, “sum”, instead of “some”, and “Paree ova dere” instead of “Paris over there”. Also, there is a synecdoche for the word mouth: “talk box” when referring to it as a tool for her job, “talk holes” when she talks about how Americans reacted to tourist attractions, and “mouthpiece role” when talking about her life in the Desert.

She alters her speech to imitate some accents like Finish when she explains how her boss hired her and uses a rough accent reducing sentence structures, eluding connectors, and auxiliaries: “No! Too many guides / [...] Godammuntm, ja okay, guide me!” (Hong, 26). She also imitates the American speech when she states ““Merikken dumplings unhinge dim / talk holes y ejaculate *oooh* y hot-*diggity*, / dis is de *shee-it*” (Hong, 26). In this imitation, she is mocking them because she refers to them as dumb people.

Finally, there is no end rhyme or a clear rhythmic pattern; the length of the lines is determined by the length of the sentences. Despite that, the poem is full of figurative and poetic language.

6.2. *The Lineage of Yes-Men*

In this poem, the Guide explains the Historian the past of his father and grandfather. The Guide disapproves her family past and tells the Historian that “I’s come from ‘eritage o peddlas y traitors” (Hong, 43), she thinks that about them because both, her father and grandfather, helped their enemies and took advantage of them. First, the Guide explains

that they were *peddlas*; they sold Makkoli², and apart from that, she says that her father “sole Makkoli to whitey GIs din guidim to widows fo bounce” (Hong, 43). The GIs is the name of the American soldiers from the Second World War (Nix, 2018). Before it started, America was an ally of South Korea against North Korea. Once the Korean War ended and the Second World War started, South Korea was full of American soldiers, and the Guide’s father took advantage of that situation by offering the soldiers to have sex with the widows of the village. Her grandfather also took advantage of the situation; the Guide explains that “Me grandfadder sole Makkoli wine to Hapanese colonist/ din he guidim to insurrectas...” (Hong, 43). Her grandfather decided to help the Japanese army, who tried to invade Korea during World War II, guiding their troops to Korean people.

In the following stanzas of the poem, the Guide explains their deaths. She says that his grandfather was killed by the people of the village, who pelt him ground stones until his death when they discovered him. “Villagers callim yellow, callim chihuahua *ssaeki*, a dies irae/ fo yesman—he yessed his way to gravestone” (Hong, 43). They used the word yellow to refer to him as if he was Japanese; they called him chihuahua *ssaeki* because people saw him as a pet of the enemy and a bastard, which is the translation of the Korean word *ssaeki* to English (Yeoh, 2022). Finally, *dies irae* refers to the day of wrath in Latin (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), the day in which he pays for all the decisions he has taken. He does not seem to feel remorse about what he did, and he accepts his fate.

In contrast, the Guide’s father seems ashamed about his actions when the Guide explains: “He like mine grandfadder yessed y yessed, nodded til no lift him fes up” (Hong, 43). After everything he did, he could not put his face up, and he told the Guide: “*Ttallim, you say no, no, no, you say only no.*” (Hong, 43). Unlike his grandfather, his father admits his errors and tries to avoid the Guide to be as them.

² “Unfiltered Korean rice wine with a cloudy, milky appearance.” (Imatome-Yun, 2021)

In the last stanza of the poem, the Guide says: “I join movement to fightim me yesman lineage.../[...] I fight mine legacy, mine curse dat pulsed en me aorta to say no” (Hong, 44), she is determined to avoid being the same as her family, she feels that her roots are cursed and from that moment, she decided to take her own decisions.

This poem is closer to prose than to poetry. It does not have end-rhymes, and the length of the lines is fixed by grammar because most of the lines are sentences that end with a full stop or a comma. In terms of language, there are instances of German like “mine old”, Latin as in “dies irae”, Swedish as in “fadder”, or Korean when she uses the word “ssaeki”.

To economize language most of the conjunctions or prepositions are in Spanish like in “jars y jaundice” or “jaundice widows en mine old village”. On several occasions, she changes the spelling of words to shorten her speech; some examples are: “din” for “then”, “afta” for “after” and “fes” for “face”. She also shortens most of the sentences by erasing the pronouns as in “guidim” instead of saying “guide them”, and sometimes she does not inflect verbs for past. Instead, she uses the present perfect as in “I’s come” or forgets to say the auxiliary verb as in “He like mine grandfadder”.

6.3. *Windowless House*

This poem explains a student’s trip the Guide did with her teacher. In it, it can be seen that the Guide has grown up and she is starting to discover her ideals and identity through her teacher.

In the first stanza of the poem, the Guide explains that she is visiting the Namsan mountain. She describes this mountain as the “dreaded Namsan mountain” (Hong, 56) but says that while going there they were “gamboling past gen y fields whim farmers” (Hong, 56). There is a juxtaposition of images between the dreaded mountain seen as a scary place but surrounded by fen and fields which make it visually beautiful.

In the second stanza, the Guide talks about a book that she has been reading in secret, it says that it is a translation of a Marx's book done by a "semi-illiterate Korean. A true prole. Many misspellings" (Hong, 56). She might be reading *The Communist Manifesto* (1948), but the fact that she describes the translator as a semi-illiterate who does misspellings makes the reader think that she considers that communist people were people unable to have further education. In the following line of the poem, she says "I's a Proles ideologist cos mine teacha" (Hong, 56), now that the Guide lives with her teacher, it seems that she is getting familiar with her teacher's ideology while trying to build her own identity.

In the third stanza, the teacher warns the Guide what could happen to her if someone sees her with the book "If you're caught with that book, they take you / to the windowless house and stab screwdrivers under your nails" (Hong, 56) and explains that the trip to the Namsan mountain was to see the "windowless house fo eyeball's load / o 'Merriken puppet plis boi patos" (Hong, 56). Her teacher wanted the Guide to be aware that their ideology was frowned upon and that they had to hide it from the government.

Moving on, the windowless house is a simile for a prison, the Guide describes it as a "Western-style house where be windows / it be pour concrete" (Hong, 57), there are no windows, and using the term windowless instead of prison, gives the reader the image of a claustrophobic place in a remote mountain.

In the last stanza of the poem, they arrive at what was supposed to be the windowless house, but they discover that they were wrong and they got to a "butcha's house, not plis boi pato's house. / Dim slaughterim pigs ..." (Hong, 57). They arrived at the house of someone who slaughtered pigs there, despite that, the Guide explains that Namsan was still a forest in which people were tortured by the government police and in there "de trees rattling not from wind / but cries o mercy" (Hong, 57). The poem end with a parallelism

between the sounds of the wind in the forest and the sounds of people begging for their lives and how both, from the distance, can be misled.

The Namsan Mountain is currently one of the most emblematic places in South Korea, but despite there is not much information about its past, it was used by the KCIA (Korean Intelligence Agency) along with the CIA as a place to torture people who were against the dictatorship of the president Park Chung Hee (Zhakupova, Ayanay, n.d.).

In terms of language, this poem is not very complex. Again, in most of the cases in which language is altered is for the Guide to economize the language, some examples are the use of “cos” instead of “because”, “mo cautious din me” instead of “more cautious than me”, “she ses” instead of “she says”, among others. It is worth noting that in this poem, the Guide uses the Spanish word “finalmente” as a way to create tension in the sixth stanza when they are about to enter the windowless house:

“We hang loose in de brushes ... I’se sweatim lika madmon
but mine teacha sif pale y dropless.
So bored I’se fallim sleep. Finalmente, door
creacks opens ...” (Hong, 57)

Sometimes, she uses language not only to economize the language but also as a way to express a wider range of feelings and emotions.

Finally, as in the anterior poem, there is no end rhyme or rhythm, and the length of the lines is determined by the length of the sentences. Again, the poem is closer to prose than to poetry.

6.4. *Tide Pool*

This poem goes back to the childhood of the Guide and explains a memory of an afternoon she spent with her best friend Sah. The first stanza places the reader in a peaceful afternoon in the sea where the Guide and Sah are in a boat leaning over it to see the fishes around them. The image given is beautiful and quiet at the same time and seems to be a happy moment in the life of the Guide, who at a young age, had to overcome lots of difficulties due to her family.

In the third stanza, Sah guides her to a tide pool, the part of the beach where water stagnates in the rocks, and people usually go to catch crabs, molluscs, or sea urchins among others. There, the Guide and Sah “squint a’ de homestad o gamified fish, / indigo prickle urchins, yeller kiwi sea worms” (Hong, 63), she talks about the tide pool as the home of those animals and describes all the colours she could spot, which gives the reader a vivid and familiar image of the scene.

In the third stanza, the story the Guide explains seems to have a climax. The Guide decides to take all the animals she can reach from the tide pool to add them to her bucket arguing: “I wanted mine own ultra mare tank” (Hong, 63), she wanted to create a tank in her house, but Sah decided not to touch them and set them free.

Finally, the Guide explains what happened to her collection of animals as follows:

“Two days hence, wadder in mine bucket ink rancid black,

hermit crab crawl out its shell floatim up,

sea worm fade fog white, floatim up,

allim die, a dead sea smell

de rank spongim me home.” (Hong, 63)

The conditions of the tank were not appropriate for the sea animals, and all of them died. The poem closes with a moral and a reflection about people who must immigrate that, due to deplorable living conditions, cannot survive.

We could consider this a didactic poem; the sea and the sea animals are used as an extended metaphor throughout the whole poem to teach the reader a moral about immigration and homesickness. In addition, the character of the Guide also suffers a development in her own identity when she learns through her actions what it means to take away someone's home.

In terms of language, this poem, in contrast to the previous ones, is in English. Despite that, words are modified because of the Guide's language: "motion o silva" instead of "motion of silver" or "leaned ova boat's" instead of "leaned over the boat's".

Due to the extended metaphor of the sea, the poem is full of hyponyms of the hypernym sea, which immerses the reader into the sea atmosphere. The poem is full of figurative language, but it lacks end rhyme and rhythm. Despite that, the reader experiences a synaesthetic³ journey through the sea; the Guide provides the reader with images "We flashlight motion o silva fish" (Hong, 63), colours "gamified fish, / indigo prickle urchins" (Hong, 63), movements "glinting into mouth silva auroras, / a shadow flashing o form" (Hong, 63) and textures "oil wet abalone grip onto moss stone..." (Hong, 63).

6.5. Toast in the Groove of Proposals

This poem belongs to the fifth section of the book called *Resuming the Desert Tour: Toward the Outskirts, Toward the Bridge*; the section that describes the culture of the Desert. Specifically, this poem talks about how the Desert celebrates multiculturalism and the marriage between people from different racial groups.

³ "Combining simultaneously ideas of colour, shape, texture, and movement" (T. Probyn, 34)

The poem presents the wedding of three different couples. In the first stanza, the Guide first describes the priest of the Desert. He is a “brandied man en rabbinical cape” (Hong, 92), a Jewish priest blended with brandy; the reader can assume that he might be an alcoholic. In this same stanza, the first marriage described by the Guide is the union between a “Brahmin papoose” (Park Hong, 92) and a “bine faire Waspian” (Hong, 92). The gender of the couple remains unknown. A Waspian person is someone who belongs to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) and a Brahmin is a member of a high social and well-educated group of people from the north of the USA (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In this case, the Guide adds that he or she is a papoose; according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), papoose means to be an indigenous child born in North America. The reader might infer that the Waspian could be the groom because of the pronoun “him” in the line “en ‘im wingtip feet” (Hong, 92), but the language the Guide uses is sometimes confusing, thus, this assumption is not confirmed. In the second stanza, the poem explains the marital union between an Ontarian man (a Canadian person born in Ontario) and a Tibetan woman. We can assume that the Ontarian might be a man because the Guide compares him to a husky, a big black-and-white dog; usually, dogs are associated with manhood. On the other hand, the Tibetan is compared to a teacup; it could be associated with a woman because of its fragility and small size. Despite the reader making this association, the Guide does not provide the gender of this couple.

The third couple presented in the poem is the union between a “Cameroon groom kissim ‘e gallic Gamine’s cheek” (Hong, 92), that is to say, a Cameroon man marrying a French woman. The peculiarity between this couple is that the French woman is a “Gamine”; according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), a gamine is a young girl who is usually small, playful, and mischievous. This couple might remind the reader of

the couple that Vladimir Nabokov presents in his book *Lolita* (1995), an older man who has a relationship with a twelve-year-old girl.

The last stanza of the poem is full of celebration and inclusiveness. The stanza instances the reader to celebrate with them these peculiar marriages and explains the people present in the ceremony: gay people “gay sashayim crowd” (Hong, 92), supporters of the celebration “chatty flackmen” (Hong, 92), taxi drivers “pre-nup hackmen” (Hong, 92), animals “pachyderms who trundle” (Hong, 92) and even people who are against the celebration “madders who nag fo proposal” (Hong, 92).

The language used in this poem is hard to understand because it is full of allusions to other cultures that – if the reader is not familiar with them – might create confusion. With all these allusions, the poem explores the topic of multiculturalism.

On the other hand, this poem seems like an anthem to the Desert and has certain musicality due to the repetition of the last two lines in every stanza: “les' toast to bountiful gene pool, / to intramarry couple breedim beige population!” (Hong, 92) and the repetition of “clap away” and “bine fort” in the last stanza.

In short, the Desert seems an inclusive place for every kind of couple, and they celebrate the so-called “beige population”. A population made through the mixture of different cultures, religions, and ethnic groups that speak a language belonging to the people from the Desert; they are building a new society, a utopian society.

6.6. *The Voice*

This poem is placed in Kwangju during the Kwangju Uprising. Both the Guide and Sah were part of the demonstrations against the government of Park Chung-Hee. This poem explains the Guide’s experience as the guide of the students’ demonstrations.

The poem starts with a strong statement “... Dim call me voice o Kwangju, / uprising’s danseur principal ...” (Hong, 104); she was one of the leaders of the students’

demonstrations and she guided them, but in the following lines she explains that people “shun mine presence...” (Park Hong, 104); it might be due to the fact that she was a woman and most of the demonstrations were led by man. In the following two stanzas she explains how frustrated and undervalued she felt. In addition, she was attacked by the crowd “rocks intended fo plis boi patos, balfastards, trown a'me!” (Hong, 104), after that traumatic experience she decided to hide in her father’s house.

During the days she was hidden, she explains how people were cruelly killed by the government army in the following lines:

“... Bine day tree o aataclap, heads lop off,
bung it up union leadas 'rrested, bayoneted,
teacha celled fo espyim, pulp students
slung into trucks lika spud sacks ... no leaders” (Hong, 104)

During the days that lasted the Kwangju Uprising lasted, heads were cut off (lop off), leaders were arrested and killed (bayoneted), her teacher was arrested, and the students’ dead bodies were thrown into trucks as if they were wastes. After that, her friend Sah asks her to come back and help them with the demonstrations. The Guide, frightened, begs him not to go back “I’s don want to / fes n’won...” (Hong, 105), she did not want to see no one and be attacked again. Alternatively, Sah takes a radio and pirates it so her voice can be heard in the streets through the radios while hiding in a closet from the school basement.

In one of the stanzas, she highlights what other citizens did to help them; the World War II veterans used their rifles against the tanks, coal miners gave their explosives and

housewives gave refugee and *ttok-guk*⁴ to insurgents. In addition, the following stanza of the poem focuses on the participation of prostitutes in the donation of blood for the injured people⁵. When the Guide asks them to go to donate blood, doctors rejected their blood; prostitutes wanted them to leave their prejudices behind and shouted, “Our blood is clean too!” (Hong, 105) asking for some respect and recognition.

In the following stanzas, the Guide explains that the paratroops discovered their hideout and they had to rush out from there trying to evade the pepper gas bombs the paratroops were throwing at them. The Guide thought that Sah was behind her the whole time and to avoid being caught, she threw a kerosene bomb. That was the last time she saw Sah, and the last lines of the poem the reader can feel how traumatized the Guide is: “will it [the bomb] hit its target is Sah out / is fSah out is he / y replay.” (Hong, 107). By shortening the lines, Park Hong tries to portray the anxiety the Guide feels when thinking about that traumatic period in her life.

As the anterior poem, this poem is in English, but again, words are modified by the Guide due to the language she speaks in the Desert. It is remarkable the way the Guide addresses prostitutes with the word “streetwalkas” as a signal of respect towards them, as sometimes, the word prostitute is used as a derogatory word against women.

Finally, the poem lacks end rhyme and rhythm but the structure of the poem changes depending on the situation that is explained. The first half of the poem in which the Guide describes the first days of the uprising, the stanzas have from four to five lines while the stanzas in which the Guide and Sah run out of the school basement have two or three lines

⁴ A traditional Korean dish that consists of a rice cake inside a bowl with soup (Ladner, Mimsie, 2018)

⁵ During the Kwangju Uprising, prostitutes joined the campaign for blood donations and helped the nurses to clean and bind the injured people (Kyung-Woon, Jeon, n.d.)

and the length of the lines highly reduced, that is to say, that long stanzas are more descriptive while short stanzas focus on the main character's fast actions.

6.7. *The Refinery of Voices and Vices*

It is the last poem of *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006) and the outcome of the conflict between the Desert and New Town. As explained before, people from New Town were former native employees from the Desert that decided to abandon it but want to recover their land. In this last poem, the Guide explains how the revolution had been planned to the Historian.

At this point of the story, she is waiting for the people from New Town to attack the Desert – rebellion is coming – and instances the Historian to leave the Desert or to stay with them: “sabotage is pending / soon ye scat now / or ye be...” (Hong, 118).

To attack the Desert, they have been impersonating guides, hiding mines, and sleeping in sacks for several nights. Now they are going getting closer to the Desert, and they have loudened their voice: “humming will louden” (Hong, 118).

In the fifth stanza, the Guide refers to the attack as a “sly darting dance, no delightful / marches fo mo dreadful measures” (Hong, 118), they are tired of the measures imposed by the Desert, and there will not be an alliance between them, they are determined to attack.

In the following stanzas, the Guide explains to the Historian how she has been collaborating in the rebellion: “I’s unpeel mine insides fo one clean note / tru all de marshy crowd sound” (Hong, 118). She trusts the rebellion, and she has been recruiting people from the Desert to join them. During those nights, several guides decided to join the cause and went to New Town while the guards were sleeping and tourists drinking: “but b’night

a fusion / [...] dartim past bridge whiles/ guards be asleep, whiles tourists / be trippim...”
(Hong, 118).

The Guide then explains that the guides from the Desert have always been ignored and tells the Historian that because they have a “drain y damp o quality o life” (Hong, 118), meaning poor living conditions, they decided to cross the bridge.

Furthermore, the Guide makes a reflection on this change in her life and says:

“o desert, sweep unda bridge, dim guides sweep,
unda storyline, sweep unda you,
soaking into tureen lotted plot...” (Hong, 118)

This quote explains how they have decided to change their side in the rebellion, and compares the Desert to a tureen – a deep and wide recipient to keep food – arguing that usually, history underestimates and invisible the most vulnerable groups in wars, rebellions, colonisations, etc. Also, when the Guide says they “sweep unda you (the Historian)”, she tries to convey how ignorant people can be in front of these situations.

Then, in the ninth stanza, the Guide also reflects on her language and past. She blames the Historian for making her remember Sah: “Sah I’s left y Sah you’ve brung beck,” (Hong, 118); and for bringing her back the phoneme /e/: “‘e’s allatime dead to me, ‘e’s yours / caesuras slicing mine dialect” (Hong, 118), she tries to express her wish to use and speak language freely, she is against rules imposed on language: “Dim measure me skull, I say stop measuring my skull” (Hong, 118).

The reason she blames the Historian to bring the /e/ back is because the first poems are more complex in terms of language because the Guide is speaking the tongue of the Desert, but, as we move towards the middle and the end of the book, the language

becomes easier and closer to English. Probably, the Historian could not understand her and the Guide shifted the language to English to make easier their communication.

Finally, in the last stanza of the poem, the Guide expresses her wish for freedom:

“Might I brush out dragonfly wings
from mine wig.
If de world is our disco ball,
might I have dim dance.” (Hong, 118)

The dragonfly's wings are a clear representation of freedom, she wishes to be able to “fly” without any restrictions, but at the same time, she is determined to do anything to achieve her dream. The last line of the poem is an invitation to the Historian to join her fight and to the reader to reflect on all the matters she has conveyed throughout the collection of poems.

As well as the previous poems, this poem lacks end rhyme and rhythm. However, five stanzas have parallel structure and makes the poem achieve musicality. The second, third, fourth, fifth, and seventh stanzas enumerate several actions, and the reader can feel the Guide’s rush and acceleration towards the upcoming revolution they have planned: “... bombing the imposting, / miming the guides, potting more mines,” (Hong, 118)

6.8. Main Topics and Issues

In this collection of poems, the predominant topics are identity and immigration. The identity of the Guide is destroyed and redeveloped on several occasions. First, when she reflects on the deplorable acts of her father and grandfather, and then when her teacher influences her to rebuild her identity when she becomes a communist. During the Kwangju Uprising, she fights for her rights and identity until everything is destroyed

when she needs to migrate to the Desert to survive and start from scratch again. Meanwhile, the Historian tries to reconstruct and build his own identity by exploring his father's past, just as the Sansei generation did during the 70s.

Some of the subtopics related to identity and immigration dealt with in the poems are:

- Parenthood and childhood are dealt with in *The Lineage of Yes-Men*.
- The consequences of war on identity are dealt with in the characters of the book.
- Loss and trauma are dealt with in the Guide's experience in Kwangju and the Historian's father obsession with keeping him safe and avoiding the past.
- Solitude is dealt through the Guide and the Historian. When they find each other, they are able to rebuild their identities by contrasting their experiences.

In addition, the collection of poems is full of quotes in which the author tries to portray the feeling of being an immigrant. Some examples are: "The sensation of feeling deserted after / facing too many choices" (Hong, 93) and "Some-time, I'se feel lika fish en wadder ballon, / fightim rubber confines, thrashim tail 'gainst strechy walls ..." (Hong, 96).

Cathy Park Hong portrays the topic of language as a tool of survival and as a way of freedom. The Guide's language has helped her to survive and redo her life in the Desert; just as her grandfather and father did when they used English to communicate with the GIs. On the other hand, the Guide thinks that freedom is achieved when no one establishes rules and any language is more powerful than any other.

Dance and music are also relevant topics in the poems. On several occasions, Dance is used as a synonym for revolution and the Guide's voice as the music. In the poem *The Voice*, the Guide is the leader of a demonstration: "uprising's danseur principal..." (Hong, 104), and in the last poem, dance is used as an invitation for the Historian and the reader to participate in the Desert's revolution: "If the world is our disco ball, / might I have dim

dance.” (Hong, 119). Hence, dance is portrayed as the union of several people moving and fighting for the same cause.

Finally, she also explores the topic of colonialism. The Desert's creation remembers us to the creation of America, and the colonization of the people who already lived there. In the poem *Almanac the Guide* explains that before the Desert was built, there were people already living there and says: “She warned the adventurer / there were adventurers before him,” (Hong, 72). Also, there is not much information about the early days of the Desert, but the reader only knows that people from New Town were natives that decided to abandon the Desert and “crave for time to stand still” (Hong, 21); probably, the colonizers who created the Desert mistreated the native people from the area.

Because Cathy Park Hong does not explicitly explain why people from New Town decide to abandon the Desert and the origin of the Desert makes the reader think about the concept of colonialization. Cathy Park Hong does not criticise a specific community, country, or ethnic group; she is just reflecting on the human actions done during wars, invasions, and the consequences of colonialization. Furthermore, setting the reader in an unknown place is a nifty strategy she uses to raise awareness about the importance of knowing the history of our communities and avoid being ignorant and selfish toward people from different cultures that need to move to a new country. This topic also opens the door to multiculturalism. If communities were more open to other cultures, the social acceptance of multiculturalism would highly increase.

7. Conclusions

After reading *Dance Dance Revolution* (2006), I have gathered enough information to state the following conclusions. First, I can confirm that this collection of poems is a hybrid between poetry and narrative. Even though the structure of the book consists of

several poems that are full of figurative language, the book has several narrative characteristics. Behind the poems, there is a plot developed throughout the collection of poems, also the main protagonist, the Guide, suffers an inner development while moving back and forwards her past. There is also a narrator, the Historian, which explains the Guide's story through her point of view in first person POV. Finally, the Desert turns from a utopian place into a dystopia once the reader knows about the Desert's conflict with New Town. As for the structure of the collection of poems, it has an introduction; the arrival of the Historian to the Desert, a conflict; New Town against the Desert, and the resolution; the Guide's participation in the revolution inviting the Historian to join them.

Probably, this hybridity is because, as mentioned before, Cathy Park Hong does not like to write about herself and put her voice in the poems. Instead, she uses fictional characters and places to portray her worries to discuss them with the reader. More than asking the reader to take action, she wants them to reflect with her on the topics she portrays and asks them to share their opinions and interpretations. That is way her use of the language is witty; only with one reading it is difficult to understand the poems and forces the reader to reread and decode the meaning of each line.

Finally, Cathy Park Hong is a clear representative of Asian American literature. She explores most of the typical topics of her literary movement giving voice to Asian American and Korean history. She raises awareness about their roots and culture, to avoid being forgotten in the American history, and encourages other Asian American authors to share their opinions on the topic to expand the collective history of Asian people.

Dance Dance Revolution (2006) structure of the plot and topics reminds me to the Modern literature movement from the Korean American literature because the author of the collection of poems is a woman and, as stated before, she reflects on the experience of

being an immigrant. To do so, she deals with the topics of language, memory, and identity but from the point of view of a woman.

To conclude, any ethnic group that has gone through the experience of being an immigrant can feel identified with this collection of poems, and, for those who have not gone through this experience, these poems achieve to open the reader's mind to learn how does it feel going through this process of readaptation.

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Appendix A

Poem 1: Roles

... Opal o opus,
behole, neon hibiscus bloom beacons!
“Tan Lotion Tanya” billboard... she
your lucent Virgil, den I’s taka ova
as talky Virgil... want some tea? Some pelehoo?

Mine vocation your vacation!

... I train mine talk box to talk yep-puh, as you
‘Merikkens say “prudy”, no goods only phrases,
betta de phrase, “prudier” de experience,

twenty t’ousand guides here but I’m #1 ...
once, Helsinkian arrive, I’s say “I guide I guide”
but Helsinkian yap “No! Too many guides!” den I sleep outside
‘im door, ‘im wake, I say calmly “I guide”
Y Helsinian say “Goddammunt, ja okay, guide me!”

... a million lightbulbs en Desert wit cleanest latrines
en our strobe lit lobbies since desert non sin ... each
hotel de McCosm o any city... Bangkok ova here,
Paree ova dere...

I speak sum Hang-guk y Finnish, good bit o Latin
y Spanish ... sum toto Desert Creole en evachanging dipdong
‘pendable on mine mood... ibid...

... Many 'Merikken dumplings unhinge dim
talk holes y ejaculate oooh y hot-diggity,
dis is de shee-it... but gut ripping done to erect Polis,
we exploit gaggle o aborigini to back tundra country ...
Bannitus! But betta to scrape dat fact
unda history rug, so shh...

O tempora, O mores! I usta move
round like Inuit lookim for sea pelt... now
I'mma double migrant. Ceded from Koryo, ceded from
'Merikka, ceded y ceded until now I seizem
dis sizable Mouthpiece role... now les' drive to interior.

Appendix B

Poem 2: The Lineage of Yes-Men

Nut'ing but brine jars y jaundice widows en mine old village.
It's come from 'eritage o peddlas y traitors,
whom kneel y quaff a lyre spoon-me-spondas. Mine fadder
sole Makkoli wine to whitey GIs din guidim to widows fo bounce.
Me grandfadder sole Makkoli wine to Hapanese colonists din he guidim to insurrectas...
sticka hop? Some pelehoo?

Afta war, villa men pelt mine grandfadder wit ground stones.
He stand in de cold tillim fingas frost jawed, until blewblack.
Villagers callim yellow, callim chihuahua *ssaeki*, a dies irae
fo yesman - he yessed his way to gravestone.

Din mine fadder sole Makkoli - he a 'Merikken GI chihuahua.
Some populli tink GIs heroes wit dim strafing "Pinko chink"
but eh! Those Jees like regula pirates, search for booty y pillage.
He took Jees to war widows tho widows too dry woeing tears
for Eros. He like mine grandfadder yessed y yessed, nodded
til no lift him fes up. In his deathbed...sayim to me,
Ttallim, you say no, no, no, you say only no. Him fes
waterlog de liquor y when him die, he retched white.
I join movement to fightim me yesman lineage...
Listen to *achim* song... woodcut fists lignified
de crowd... I fight mine legacy, mine curse
dat pulsed en me aorta to say no...

Appendix C

Poem 3: Windowless House

En spitty noon Satriday, we trudged dreaded
Namsan mountain, gamboling past fen y fields whim farmers
en straw chapos picked grinpepas, y past perma
haired ajama who sole fizzy sodas
imported de U.S. o A....
I's clutched a sekrendry source o Marx translated
bine semi-illiterate Korean. A true prole, Many misspellings.

I's a Proles idealologist cos mine teacha.

But she mo cautious din me...

She trillt: *If you're caught with that book, they take you
to the window less house and stab screwdrivers under your nails.*

She maki gesture o dim hypodermically

sticking screwdriva down mine

po' nail. She fright me cos us *on our way*

to windowless house!

... fieldtrip to windowless house fo eyeball's load

o 'Merikken puppet plis boi patos'.

This needs to be burned in your memory, she ses....

Cicadas burn en mine ear like *zhung, zhung.*

A hot hot day. Afta tree mile, we get to

de only Western-style house en villa.

Western-style house where be windows

it be pour concrete....

We hang loose in de bushes... I'se sweatim lika madmon

but mine teacha sif pale y dropless.

So bored I'se fallim sleep. Finalmente, door

creaks opens...

y rush o rusty wadder flood out de door.

Me teacha breathes. *It's true.* She sayim, *It's true.*

A mon hosing blood out de door....

... Later, we find out windowless house
be butcha's house, not plis boi pato's house.
Dim slaughterim pigs ... but still Namsan
plis boi camp, de whole forest used as engine
to pulp spirit o suspects wit pliers
y batons, de trees rattling not from wind
but cries o mercy.

Appendix D

Poem 4: Tide Pool

O umbilical blue sea's bob y warble,
en summa's eve, Sah y me scoota'd barnacle
boat off de shores, leaned ova boat's
salt crack rim to lamplight de sea.
We flashlight motion o silva fish swarm,
small as earwigs, fish scittilating en sync,
glinting into mouthing silva auroras,
a shadow flashing o form,
at dawn, Sah bring me ta tide pool...
We's squint a' de homestead o gemified fish,
indigo prickle urchins, yellor kiwi sea worms,

flesh tone hermit crabs scrunched into coil shell,
oil wet abalone grip onto moss stone...
Mine greedy fingas pry dim all off,
dump en mine bucket ... Sah ses leavim be,
but I wanted mine own ultra mare tank,
so I'se collectim en mine seawadder bucket...
Two days hence, wadder in mine bucket ink rancid black,
hermit crab crawl out its shell floatim up,
sea worm fade fog white, floatim up,
allim die, a dead sea smell
de rank spongim me home.

Appendix E

Poem 5: Toast in the Groove of Proposals

Lo, brandied man en rabbinical cape
dab rosy musk en goy's gossamy nape,
y brassy Brahmin papoosed in sari's saffron sheet
swoon bine faire Waspian en 'im wingtip feet,
les' toast to bountiful gene pool,
to intramarry couple breedim beige population!

Lo, union o husky Ontarian y teacup size Tibetan,
wreath en honeysuckle y dew-studded bracken,
lo, union o Cameroon groom kissim 'e gallic Gamine's cheek
en miscegenatin' amour dim seem to reek
les' toast to bountiful gene pool,
to intramarry couple breedim beige population!
Clap away, Greek chorus o gay sashayim crowd,
clap away, chatty flackmen y pre-nup hackmen,
bine fort, ruby-lined pachyderms who trundle here proud,
bine fort, madders who nag fo proposal enactment,
les' toast to bountiful gene pool,
to intramarry couple breedim beige population!

Appendix F

Poem 6: The Voice

... Dim call me voice o Kwangju,
uprising's danseur principal ... but samsy, es funny,
I's voice o Kwangju since dim multitudes
who cryim fo acceptance shun mine presence...
...I's lose me wig en passion o rally,
mine ball head nekked, mine oysta eyes

filla-up wit wadder, stompim podium,

spout ricanery to rally crowd...

...but crowd dim boo me, t'row rocks a'me,

rocks intended fo plis boi patos, balfastards, trown a'me!

So I's paddles tru clog, aways from Sah, run

y hide en me dead fadder's house, hid like

I's hidim now en Desert...

*

... Bine day tree o aataclap, heads lop off,

bung it up union leadas 'rrested, bayoneted,

teacha celled fo espyim, pulp students

slung into trucks lika spud sacks ... no leaders

left... Sah ask please come back,

we's need direction...

I slink back, no heraldic air....

... No trumpetim angel me am from 'im visionaire....

Bitta I's am, not wantim to fes n'won....

Sotto voice I's ses to Sah, I's don want to

fes n'won....

...Sah ses kay, you'll fes n'won b'gib dim

ye voice... pirated a notch en radio

fo me.. aways from batons, de scourgim

eyes...en me amprage

hole, I's shotput mine

nihilent gallicry....

Mine voice chattel tru amps, transista radios,
clock radios, furred mine voice tru batta'd Kwangju
streets, while mine scolded ball head
cloaked deep en broom sweepa closet wit mike...

...Hearim me voice en radio, ma che si,

pot-belly war veterans sling up

WWII carbine rifle gainst sifa tanks... Coal miners

donated dim detonatas... Housewives fed scabbard insurrectas

wit hot bowls o *ttok-guk*....

...Steetwalkas hear me y march to hospital

to donate blood... haggard doctas say no!

to torn-stock streetwalkas who kem to donate

she blood but dey yell, "Our blood is clean too!"

while beatim dim chest...

Paratroopa clip off amp wires

but Mr. Cha come y rewire

amp back... mine decibel swatted away dragonflies

swarmim round shredded bodies... cut tru smoke

y copsal stink, clear eyesights

sored from peppa gas... lorn in lore o love...

b'all ended... paratroopas find where we be,
surround de school basement... try to smoke
us out into rancid air... I's first to
sneak out back way... paratroopas rushed into school...

while I's rush away, t'inkim Sah behind me...

I's plunged inta frail ragged mob,
who gib me a kerosene bomb to hit de school...

... Shroud o gnats in late aftanoon sun,

shroud o mob

A frail body o toweled mob

bull-dozed one afta mob

into mob into frail body o

toweled mob dove sta memora

I trew

... a kerosene bomb, it twine en air

a kerosene bomb roll, it twi en air,

did not soar as I's plan but

float but before plummet before

spume gown o powda

I replay dat arc intra air, tortuously

twist as I's look befo fleeing,

will it hit its target is Sah out

is Sah out is he

y replay.

Appendix G

Poem 7: *The Refinery of Voices and Vices*

... D'yea sees it, yonda ova bridge,

d'yea sees de smoke curdlim air ova slag

limestone tureen...

... All's I do is wait, dim 'ready

planned a blast coronal, clotting toget'a,

sabotage is pending, soon ye scat now o ye be...

... bombing de impostring,

miming guides plotting, potting more mines,

hatching en gunny sack houses, anecdote

will come a momentum ...

... rushing, rushing onward

salvi facti sunt humming will louden,

heighten, wit durable actions...

... a silence to crave, not dis babel,

a sly unrest, a sly darting dance, no delightful

marches fo mo dreadful measures

I's unpeel mine insides fo one clean note

tru all de marshy crowd sounds, tru all de trademark

cowed libel, I's unpeel mefelf lika pin-hole
neck sweater...

... guides sidelimned, but b'night a fusion,
trickling back, dartim past bridge whiles
guards be asleep, whiles tourists
be tipplim...

...drain y damp o quality o life,
o desert, sweep unda bridge, dim guides sweep
unda storyline, sweep unda you,
soaking into tureen lotted plot...

...I's sum o all I's rued, sumo me accents
y twill mine worn, travels mine tilled, deaths mine endured,
Sah I's left y Sah you've brung beck,
'e's allatime dead to me, 'e's yours yours,
caesuras slicing mine dialect,
Dim measure me skull, I say stop measuring my skull...

... Summon mine last sieved blood
invocation det roused tousands not fluke
o me guided flute which led you
to dis mine pocked river, sum me might
so I's be righted...

Might I brush out dragonfly wings
from mine wig.

If de world is our disco ball,
might I have dim dance.