YOKOHAMA, CALIFORNIA

TOSHIO MORI

INTRODUCTION BY XIAOJING ZHOU

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With a new introduction by
Xiaojing Zhou

Introduction to the original edition by
William Saroyan

Introduction to the 1985 edition by
Lawson Fusao Inada

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FRONTISPIECE: Toshio Mori in his study, working on a story. Mid-forties.
PAGE XXXVIII: Toshio working in the garden in the late forties. The San Leandro hills and the Mori nursery are in the background.

To the Memory of My Mother

Yoshi Takaki Mori

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2015 EDITION

Published in 1949, seven years after its intended publication date, *Yokohama, California* is a quintessentially Japanese American book, a book from Asian America, and an American classic. Lawson Fusao Inada, in "Standing on Seventh Street," his introduction to the 1985 edition, calls it "the first real Japanese-American book" (xvii). William Saroyan, in his introduction to the original edition, recognizes Mori as "probably one of the most important new writers in the country at the moment," referring to him as "the first real Japanese-American writer" who "writes about the Japanese of California" (xxxvi). But Inada notes that this book, Mori's signature work, "is . . . the one people ignored and rejected" (xvii). The mass incarceration of more than 110,000 American citizens and immigrants of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast during World War II redefined the identity of Japanese Americans as "enemy aliens," removing "the 'American' from Japanese American," observes Inada. "By 1949, as Toshio had become less than an author, the book had become less than literature—it was not to be read so much as inspected. . . . By its very nature, it was destined for obscurity" (xxviii). Hence the book had to wait almost four decades to be discovered and reclaimed by a younger generation of Asian Americans in the 1980s.

Since its republication in 1985, and especially since the 1990s, *Yokohama, California* has received growing critical attention. Several critics rightly note the influence of Sherwood Anderson on Mori, drawing parallels between *Yokohama, California* and Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio: A Group of Tales of Ohio Small-Town Life* (1919). These collections of short stories are similar in their place-based narrative structures as short story cycles, in which each individual story stands alone while also being part of a series, incorporating elements and details, including recurrent thematic concerns and characters, that flesh out the places and people they portray. But the community and its people in Mori's collection cannot be reduced to depictions of just another small town in the United States. *Yokohama, California* breaks new ground in Asian American literature, and in American literature generally. It anticipates the emergence of minority or ethnic American literature, and of diasporic writings. By juxtaposing in his title the names of a city and a state on opposite sides of the Pacific—Yokohama, the capital city of Kanagawa Prefecture on Tokyo Bay, and California—Mori displaces both locations such that neither can be confined within a single nation-space. In other words, Yokohama, California, is Japanese America, a new American neighborhood and community.

It is the kind of community where Mori and his parents lived. Mori was born in 1910 in Oakland, California, to Hidekichi and Yoshi Mori, immigrants from Hiroshima. The Mori family ran a bathhouse in Oakland for the local Japanese American community before moving in 1915 to San Leandro, where they (like some of the families in the stories) operated a nursery. As Issei, first-generation immigrants from Japan, Mori's parents, like several of his characters, were barred from U.S. citizenship by law in the 1920s, during which some of the stories are set, and throughout the 1930s and 1940s, when the stories were written. Although Mori makes no overt references to the discriminatory laws against Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, his portrayals of the characters and their community at once allude to and

defy racial exclusion, while cherishing, celebrating, and redefining what was deemed undesirable or even threatening by white America.

As the title *Yokohama, California* indicates, claiming belonging in America while refusing to ignore ethnic difference is a major theme in this cycle. The opening story, "Tomorrow Is Coming, Children," sets the historical framework for interpreting the stories. In fact, this and another story, "Slant-Eyed Americans," were added in 1949 to the original collection of twenty stories accepted for publication in 1941. The other stories in the cycle were written before the mass expulsion and incarceration of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans from West Coast communities like Yokohama, California, between 1942 and 1945. Unlike the rest of the stories, "Tomorrow" is set in a camp. In fact, this story was first published in *Trek*, the magazine of the Topaz camp in Utah, where Mori's family was confined along with 8,130 other inmates. Placing "Tomorrow" at the beginning of the cycle highlights the racial injustice of the mass incarceration camps and enhances the significance of the characters' humanity, even though the narrator does not explicitly condemn the camps. Significantly, the narrator, Grandma, an Issei, tells the story of her immigrant experience to her American-born grandchildren, Annabelle and Johnny, who, like their parents, are sent to the camp with their grandma, an "alien resident" by law, despite their U.S. citizenship. Grandma's narrative reveals that long before World War II, Japanese immigrants were exiles in their new home in San Francisco, "the city with many strange faces and music" (3) and "the golden city of dreams" (4). As Grandma says, "The city of my dreams began to frighten me. Rocks were thrown at the house and the windows smashed to bits. Loud cries and laughter followed each attack, and I cowered in the corner waiting for the end" (5). By relating this incident of racial violence against Japanese immigrants to her grandchildren in the camp, Grandma indirectly situates the mass incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry in the context of racial discrimination, thus undermining the official

rhetoric of wartime "relocation" that elides the racial injustice of the camps. Moreover, though forbidden by law to be naturalized for U.S. citizenship, Grandma emphasizes: "I stayed in America; I belong here" (7). Asserting belonging against racial exclusion and cultural assimilation also underlies Mori's portrayals of various other characters, especially female characters.

It is significant that Mori gives voice to women's perspectives in "Tomorrow" and other stories, allowing women to narrate personal memories as part of the Japanese American experience, to assert their self-determination, and to enact their agency in becoming Japanese American, as well as in building their community. As the storyteller in "Tomorrow," Grandma participates in the production of knowledge and the making of history, roles usually considered the domain of men in patriarchal societies and communities. Furthermore, women's perspectives serve as a counterpoint to the dominant view often represented by men. For example, Grandma's description of her arrival in San Francisco reveals the impact of the normative American identity embodied by whites and Eurocentric culture on Issei men like Grandpa. At the sight of his wife stepping off the boat in her best kimono, Grandpa "shook his head." As Grandma observes, her husband "hauled me around as if he were ashamed of me. I could not understand" (5). That night her husband told her never to wear "this thing again." And he added, "You look like a foreigner. . . . You must dress like an American. You belong here" (5). This incident raises questions about how to belong in America, and how to become Japanese American.

The answers to these questions are embedded in stories throughout the cycle. Another grandma, in "The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts," demonstrates what it means to claim belonging and to be Japanese American. Countering the stereotypes of the quiet, fragile, subordinate "Oriental" woman, this woman from Japan "worked side by side with her man for forty years" in the fields, in addition to raising six children, "caring for the grandchildren, . . . running the household" (9). Everybody in

the neighborhood calls her "Mama," but she is much more than simply a mother figure. She lives a thoroughly bilingual and multicultural life. She is "the best cook" in making either "Oriental dishes or American dishes" (10). And "her magazines and books [are] in Japanese and English" (10). In addition, her house on Seventh Street is a place of hospitality, nurturing, and inspiration for young Japanese Americans like the narrator, who can "dash in and out when my spirit wanes, when hell is loose" for the sustenance of her "swell" doughnuts, her lively spirit, and her zest for life. Visiting her is "an event of necessity and growth" (10). Issei women like her and the grandmother in "Tomorrow" are not only pillars of the family and the community; they also play an important role in the coming-of-age development of younger Japanese Americans like this narrator, providing an alternative to the dominant assimilative ideals embodied by white Americans.

Mori's authorial strategy of employing gendered perspectives through narrative voices offers multiple, sometimes opposing or competing, points of view, creating tension within or between stories, and giving complexity and depth to the characters. The mother in "My Mother Stands on Her Head," for example, insists on buying groceries from Ishimoto-san, the food peddler whose old grocery shop on Seventh Street has been displaced by a Safeway supermarket, even though she has to pay much more for what she could get at the big chain store. Against the advice of her husband and her sons, who tell her again and again that she should buy from Safeway like most of their neighbors, the mother refuses to "drop" Ishimoto-san, out of her sense of responsibility for a member of the community (21). Even when women seem to have everything in common, they turn out to be vastly different from one another in stories like "Three Japanese Mothers." Although the three women all come from "a tiny village of Hiroshima prefecture some thirty years ago," settle down in the same community in California, and are entrepreneurs with their husbands in establishing businesses in the city flower market, the narrator portrays them as unique individuals, inviting the reader to "see how they differ and

are human" (65). None of Mori's characters of Japanese ancestry are types; they are distinct individuals, resisting the homogenizing and othering gaze of white America.

Opposing perspectives are represented by characters in unexpected ways in stories such as "The All-American Girl," "Slant-Eyed Americans," and "Tomorrow and Today." In the first of these, the ideal female beauty adored from a distance by two teenage brothers is a Japanese American girl whom they refer to as "the All-American Girl" because of her looks and the way she carries herself. She is unmistakably Japanese *and* all-American. Seeing her through the admiring gaze of the Japanese American boys belies the notion of innate racial attributes that were in part used to justify the mass removal and imprisonment of people of Japanese ancestry. From a different angle, "Slant-Eyed Americans" evokes and intervenes in the racialization of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans as "enemy aliens" (104). The characters' eagerness to demonstrate that "we are Americans in thought and action" (106), and the fact that the narrator's brother in the U.S. Army is "ready to lay down his life for America and for his gardens" (107), may seem too conciliatory to the dominant ideology of nationalism and patriotism that overlooks racism. But the ambivalent ending of the story adds more dimension to the characters. When the mother's friend says to the brother as he departs for war, "Give your best to America. Our people's honor depend [*sic*] on you Nisei soldiers" (109), the brother does not respond enthusiastically. He "nodded and then glanced at Mother." Once he boarded the train, the family "lost him." The narrator further observes: "When the train began to move my mother cried, 'Why doesn't he pull up the shades and look out? Others are doing it.'" The family standing on the platform "watched until the last of the train was lost in the night of darkness" (109). While Mori allows the reader to ponder the reasons for the brother's quietness and failure to pull up the shade to look out at his family and let them see him, these details also evoke the trains that were to transport the family, along with countless other families of Japanese Amer-

ican soldiers, to be confined in camps behind barbed wire fences, watched by military guards. The foreboding darkness of the night seems to imply what was to become of Japanese American families and communities.

However, rather than ending the cycle with "Slant-Eyed Americans," which, as some critics have pointed out, anticipates the disintegration of Japanese American communities like Yokohama, California, the cycle ends with a story about hope, "Tomorrow and Today." In contrast to the ideal female beauty in "The All-American Girl," the ideal male image beloved by the Japanese American woman, Hatsuye, is a white American and a Hollywood superstar: Clark Gable. For Hatsuye, watching films starring Gable is like looking beyond the present "into the future that is dim, unknown, and at least hopeful" (134). Her present, her "today," is her "tomorrow," a future that holds hope for her hopeless present (134). If her plain appearance were not obstacle enough to realizing her hope for living a life as a lover of Gable, then the legal prohibition against miscegenation clearly makes hers a forbidden love. "Naturally, she does not expect to meet or speak to Clark Gable, she would not hope or even want that" (135). But "she is hopeful in spite of the fact that she is hopeless. That is something. And when she has but a dim hope of [the] future or of Clark Gable, she is still in possession of something alive to work with and that is something" (135). Hatsuye's infatuation with the image of a screen idol may reflect the gendered and racialized social structure of her time, yet, as a woman of Japanese ancestry, she transgresses racial boundaries in her love for that which is forbidden and inaccessible. The story ends by asserting that what is important about Hatsuye is her hope for the impossible, even though her tomorrow "will not be" (136). Hoping against a hopeless situation, imagining beyond the present reality is a theme in several of Mori's stories, such as "The Seventh Street Philosopher" and "Akira Yano," in which the main characters strive against the odds to become more than what their racial identity, social conditions, and personal circumstances seem to allow.

The apparently impossible tomorrow in "Tomorrow and Today" evokes the tomorrow in the opening story, "Tomorrow Is Coming, Children." Although these tomorrows differ in fundamental ways, they both raise questions about how to bring about a better tomorrow. In this way, Mori's stories foreground the possibilities of the future, where the politics of change reside. Grandma's transgressive feelings and claims are not unlike Hatsuye's. Even though she was frightened by the racial violence against people like her in San Francisco, she defies the message underlying the violence that is intended to drive her family and people out of the city and the country: "Ah, San Francisco, my dream city. My San Francisco is everywhere. . . . I like the tall buildings, the bridges, the parks and the roar of the city traffic. They are of me and I feel like humming" (7). This emotionally charged claim anticipates a possible better tomorrow to come. When Grandma says to her grandchildren, "This is your world" (8), she is asking them not to accept the implications of the camp. If the present contains within it the possibilities of a better tomorrow, as Grandma suggests, then to declare "Tomorrow Is Coming" does not imply passively waiting for it to arrive. It suggests living in such a way as to make that better tomorrow a more likely reality.

Toshio Mori realized the tomorrow of his hopes by refusing to allow himself to be defined solely by the nursery business he inherited from his family. He rejected the social environment in which one's racial identity often made one's aspirations impossible to fulfill. He hoped, imagined, and wrote against what seemed a hopeless present, refusing to accept failure despite countless rejections. This reprint of *Yokohama, California* is a reenactment of the hope and faith Mori never surrendered.

XIAOJING ZHOU
University of the Pacific
July 2014

STANDING ON SEVENTH STREET

An Introduction to the 1985 Edition

I. THE BOOK

This is the book—the first real Japanese-American book. This is the book—the one people ignored and rejected. This is the book—the one that "was postponed." This is the book—by "the first real Japanese-American writer." This is the book—a monument, a classic of literature.

This is more than a book. This is legacy, tradition. This is the enduring strength, the embodiment of a people. This is the spirit, the soul. This is the community, the identity. This is the pride, the joy, the love.

This is *Yokohama, California*. This *is* Japanese America.

II. MOVING LITERATURE

Yokohama, California is a moving book, a heartfelt book of enjoyment and emotion. There is power in the pages; there is courage, conviction. There is also a tremendous sense of humor—the joy of the human condition. It is the most human of qualities to laugh, to be able to laugh, to recognize the wisdom of humor, the humor of wisdom.

It might be said that this book is in the time-honored *shibai* tradition of folk drama and humorous skits. Not all the stories are meant to be funny, but in many of them the humorous characters and situations are the very source of wisdom and depth. Stories like "The Trees" or "The Eggs of the World" are funny because, unfortunately, the people don't seem to be capable of understanding each other. They talk but they don't listen; they can't communicate. Readers will laugh with recognition; these are learning situations; they happen all the time.

Toshio Mori is an exemplary teacher, and a writer of great compassion. There is not a mean bone in all of *Yokohama, California*. His is the gentle humor of respect, not the cynical laughter of ridicule. As Nisei writer Hisaye Yamamoto noted in her Introduction to Mori's other collection of stories, *The Chauvinist*,* there is a "Zen flavor" to the man's work. This makes good sense, and it shows; it might be said that Toshio Mori came from "laughing stock." The humor is there, but it runs deep.

One of the funniest and most moving stories is "The Seventh Street Philosopher," featuring Motoji Tsunoda, an old bachelor, a laundryman who considers himself a philosopher in "the tradition and the blood flow of Shakyamuni, St. Shinran, Akegarasu, and Motoji Tsunoda. He is not joking when he says this." He takes himself seriously, too seriously, perhaps, and is always ready to lecture to anyone who will or won't listen. His favorite topic?—"What is there for the individual to do today?" He becomes a pathetic, ridiculous figure when only eleven people ("counting the two babies") show up in a rented auditorium to hear him speak; he is laughable; he drones on and on as the people yawn and snore. Motoji Tsunoda is ridiculous—like the idea of one hand clapping in a forest. However, as depicted by Mori, there is more to the man than appearances; there was "something worth while for everyone to hear and see, not just for

* Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1979.

the eleven persons in the auditorium but for the people of the earth." And the "laugh" is actually on everyone else; the "joke" is on those who "missed the boat," who did not have the sense, or grace, to attend. Motoji Tsunoda was a man of "courage and bravery."

There is a very expensive lesson to be learned here. It might have been funny to some that Toshio Mori, the nurseryman down the street, spent all of his spare time, spent his entire life, actually, trying to be, of all things, a legitimate American writer. He considered himself to be a writer, but his writing career was pathetic, a noncareer; his own people ignored, rejected the art that he produced. No matter that *Yokohama, California* was a "first"; it might as well have been a "last." No one took him seriously; he died as he lived—in obscurity. He gave of himself as a committed artist; all through the camps and after he continued to produce his literature. His literature is Japanese-American; he was committed to his people, he lived up to his people, he saw his people as the stuff of great art. He took the responsibility of founding and maintaining the tradition of Japanese-American literature. Toshio Mori did not fail; others failed him. *Yokohama, California* is the start, the heart. It has endured. It has the power—as never before, or after. Now where is the laughter?

There is a related lesson in "My Mother Stands on Her Head." In this story, Ishimoto-san, an old-time food peddler, hardly appears in person. His is a strong, felt presence, nevertheless, and the action revolves around him, and the resultant reactions of others. Ishimoto-san makes sales door-to-door; he delivers. He used to be a community necessity. Now, he has trouble competing with Safeway, making ends meet. The mother of the story, to the consternation of her price-minded family, continues to give him her business. The family protests about being gypped, so the mother confronts him about it.

What Ishimoto-san does next is very simple, direct, natural, funny, and disarming: he laughs, "'Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho,'" then proceeds to give the mother "two bean cakes and a big head of

cabbage," for free. Before long, "Ishimoto-san began coming as before."

This little story is as large as life; it is another Mori masterpiece, a literary masterpiece as brilliant as it is subtle: it has the wisdom of a parable. This is no mere story about money, the nickel-and-dime of life; this is a lesson in humanity, an example of moral obligation, of mutual responsibility, mutual trust: the bargain of life works both ways. In the old days of community support, community values, the people used to say: "I *give* him my *trade*." The trade-off was worth its weight in gold; it meant personal service, personal delivery, personal trust, personal dignity, the give-and-take of true community: commerce, compassion, understanding, harmony. No wonder "Ishimoto-san began coming as before." Thanks to the efforts of both the mother and Ishimoto-san, and the unspoken understanding of the family, the community will continue to survive, intact. The community is the core. It can adapt.

The relevance of this story to now is obvious: What to do with this book? What is it worth?

From the "new age" perspective, *Yokohama, California* might be considered sentimental—all the old folks, kids, families visiting one another unannounced, and people sitting on porches, talking around kitchen tables, are rather unfashionable now. There is a difference, however, between tear-jerking and the natural flow of things. This is a book of *strong* sentiment, certainly, for it is *moving* literature. This is what it is to be alive: the very strength of humanity.

There is, certainly, a burnished glow to the book which simply reflects the actual atmosphere of the time, the way the people felt, saw, and lived. Not that the book is gilded with goodness from cover to cover; on the contrary, the people and incidents portrayed are very real, with more aspirations than outright successes. But there are no failures, no real losers and victims. This was, after all, a time of hope and optimism, of established communities, of flourishing culture, of the new generation getting on

with America. This was a time of pride and accomplishment. The people quite obviously believed in themselves, in what they could do, were doing, in America.

This sense of pride, of tradition, of continuing and extending the tradition is the whole point of "Nodas in America." (As a matter of fact, this might be said to be the whole point of the book.) Thus, at the close of the story, a child has been born:

> "This is Annabelle," Mama Noda said, holding up the baby.
> "George's baby. She's *sansei,* you know."
> "Third generation," I agreed.
> "Pretty soon fourth generation," she said, smiling.
> "*Shisei,*" I said, nodding my head; and we went into the living room.

This is the lineage. It counts. It means something, everything: the tradition, the heritage: Japanese America.

And if the people get sentimental about who they are, so be it—it's in the blood. Some folks are just prone to sentimentality; some folks get all stirred—up by singing songs like "Auld Lang Syne," "Danny Boy," and "Lift Every Voice and Sing." They take pride in who they are, in their "sentimental" people. Some folks have been known to cry about the passing of the buffalo. Or, as Big Joe Turner sings about the passing of his community in Kansas City: "I dreamed last night I was standing on Eighteenth and Vine; / Shook hands with Piney Brown—well, I just couldn't keep from crying." The story, "Lil' Yokohama," is a shining example of the atmosphere, the time: "In Lil' Yokohama, as the youngsters call our community, we have twenty-four hours every day . . . and morning, noon, and night roll on regularly just as in Boston, Cincinnati, Birmingham, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Emeryville."

The story is not only an overview of "Yokohama" but of Japanese America—the interrelated communities. That's the way the people saw things—there just happened to be a bunch of other folks around. The "great Northern California game is under way":

> It was a splendid day to be out. The sun is warm, and in the stands the clerks, the grocers, the dentists, the doctors, the florists, the lawnmower-pushers, the housekeepers, the wives, the old men sun themselves and crack peanuts. Everybody in Lil' Yokohama is out. Papa Hatanaka, the father of baseball among California Japanese, is sitting in the stands behind the backstop, in the customary white shirt—coatless, hatless, brown as chocolate and perspiring: great voice, great physique, great lover of baseball.

The story continues to detail the events of the rest of the week, after the game. (Interestingly enough, even in those days of the color barrier, Toshio the ballplayer was granted a tryout by the Chicago Cubs.) There is young Ray Tatemoto being seen off at the train station, "leaving for New York, for the big city to study journalism at Columbia. Everybody says he is taking a chance going so far away from home and his folks." A chance it is, and the chances are he will never be hired to write for a "regular American" paper. No matter, for the Japanese-American journalistic tradition is flourishing, including the first bilingual newspaper in America.

The overview concludes in a revery of music and sunlight, old folks on porches reading papers like the *Mainichi News,* and kids coming home from a variety of schools, learning, participating in the ways of the land: "The day is here and is Lil' Yokohama's day." This was the time known to every Japanese American as "before the war." If anything, with the destruction of communities, the story has become even more sentimental. Young Japanese Americans might even regard a story like this with nostalgia—for the future.

"The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts" might very well be considered the most sentimental story in the book. Actually, this might not even be considered a story at all: it is static, uneventful, with no real plot progression, no character development, no real conflict. In actuality, this work of fiction belongs in its own category: *tribute.* And conventional literary terminology is limited

in application. Thus, to say that the story is sentimental is not appropriate, is not the entire story. Rather, it might be said the story captures and conveys those qualities known as *yasashi*—a known, a given, but practically untranslatable. To say that a person, a story, is *yasashi,* is considerable. These terms come to mind: humility, respect, sweetness, devotion, caring, generosity, kindness, and warmth the very essence of strength and wisdom. The best of humanity.

This woman, then, is a source of sustenance and food for thought. She is a way of being, seeing ("'You will be glad later for everything you have done with all your might.'"), a philosophy, a way of life. No wonder Toshio devotes such time and care to this portrait, this tribute to an anonymous woman on Seventh Street: no wonder he wants to share his sense of this Mama, this grandmother, with the rest of the world: this is the mother of Japanese America. This is no mere story: this is an anthem.

The years have passed since then. "Yokohama" is no more; the woman in the story was surely put into the camps, starting with the Tanforan Race Track. It is no accident that when *Yokohama, California* finally was published, in 1949, the dedication read:

To the Memory of My Mother
Yoshi Takaki Mori

III. STYLE AS SUBSTANCE

Yokohama, California readily qualifies for greatness on literary merit alone. It meets all the standards. It has originality, excellence. It is a work of art. Toshio took himself seriously, as a serious writer, a man of letters working to develop his art, his craft, and his work must be regarded accordingly.

Thus, while his humble beginnings are the stuff of legend, it is the work that really matters. No matter that he had only a high school education—he educated himself, he read incessantly or as time from his jobs allowed, he haunted bookstores and libraries, and most of what he wrote he wrote after hours, at night.

No matter, either, that he was an Oriental, an unheard of animal in the Occidental world of mainstream American literature. But whoever heard of a Japanese American fiction writer? And, who could take one seriously? That would mean that the man and his people were just as good as anybody else. Toshio Mori as good as Sinclair Lewis? Ridiculous.

This was back in the days when "colored" entertainers weren't considered legitimate artists. (The most famous and highly regarded "colored" writer of the time had to be Pearl S. Buck, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938.) Toshio had to know the odds; he had a "Chinaman's chance" of making it as a writer particularly if he did not deliver what the public might have thought it wanted: Orientalia, exotica . . . He had his own vision, his own potential, and he meant to do something with it.

He studied French writers, Russian writers, and like most of his American contemporaries, he was an admirer of Sherwood Anderson. As critic Malcolm Cowley states in his introduction to Anderson's collection of stories, *Winesburg, Ohio:* Anderson is "the only story teller of his generation who left his mark on the style and vision of the generation that followed. Hemingway, Faulkner, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Caldwell, Saroyan, Henry Miller. . . ."

Toshio's name deserves to be on that list, and why his works are not included in standard collections of American literature says more about American values than the value of Toshio Mori. Toshio acknowledges Anderson in the very title of his own book—a gesture of respect, of tradition—and though he also utilizes Anderson's concept of a centralized location, Anderson's work serves mainly as a point of departure.

For one thing, Anderson's book, originally titled *The Book of the Grotesque,* and portraying, in Cowley's terms, "emotional cripples," is very much its own work—as "Yokohama" is very much its own entity and community, characterized by warmth and humor. Toshio's book is no mere mirror image, but an individual work with its own spirit and feeling. The story "Akira Yano" establishes

the distance between Anderson and Mori. Akira is an aspiring, self-deluded writer very much in the Anderson vein; he produces, it seems, imitation Anderson. Thus, the narrator says, in a gentle way, "Akira Yano was miserable and I think his prose too, was miserable."

What really distinguishes Mori from Anderson, or from any other writer for that matter, is the writing itself. No other writer writes like Mori. He achieved what few writers ever achieve—the *mezurashi*—"the highly unusual"—an individual style. He developed his own voice, his own way with words; he became a master craftsman; he is an authentic original.

To test the Mori style as style, to judge its effectiveness, it would be quite simple to take any story and remove its Japanese names and terms, rendering it "generic." The story would lose something but it would still be an effective work of literature, with the style being seen for what it is: solid, functional. The stories seem to tell themselves—the mark of a master. The stories seem to grow from the inside out, naturally, organically, from seed to flower. There is subtlety, understatement and, when appropriate, long, stately passages flow and soar into music. Mori's style delivers. It is more innate than ornate. No flab, no waste. It is not style for style itself.

Yet style and substance are inextricable in Mori's work. Thus, to render a story "generic" is to remove an elemental essence. Japanese America is no mere flavor; it is a way of life, a lifestyle, a way of being, experiencing, perceiving, a holistic structure. In effect, Toshio Mori, the American writer, the stylist in English, developed and employed a Japanese-American typewriter.

No wonder, then, that there are no white people in all of *Yokohama, California*. Except for the possible exception of an on-stage blonde in the story, "Toshio Mori," everyone else is or could very well be Japanese American. This is not "reverse-racism"—for whites like Dewey, Lincoln, Emerson are mentioned in the same breath as Noguchi, Akegarasu, and Shakyamuni. The point is, this is a Japanese-American community—the people do not define

themselves as nonwhite, nor do they need to rely on whites. Whites are just there, like street names, like racism—they come with the territory. Japaneseness is also taken for granted. It is no big revelation that "The All-American Girl" ("'One of those frail beauties who makes history.'") goes by the name of Ayako Saito. Yokohama, California; Japanese, America—all that is regarded as fitting and natural.

This leads to what might be considered Toshio's most remarkable achievement. It is so remarkable as to be unnoticeable. Most everyone of Toshio's generation was accused of having an accent. This came from being bilingual, from learning the home language first. For Toshio, this represented more *access* than handicap, for it enabled him to experience the greater world and to convey it through his stories. Surely, in many of the stories, the characters, especially the elders, are actually speaking Japanese, but Toshio has captured the nuances in plain and regular English.

This is not the stuff of stereotypes, of bogus dialects and translations. Instead, the reader is allowed to experience the people and situations directly, immediately. In effect, Toshio allows each reader to *be* a Japanese American and to experience that life, from the inside out.

IV. HISTORY AS STRATEGY

The rest is history. The publishing history of *Yokohama, California* is a story in itself; it spans the times. It is both landmark and watershed, representative of key periods in Japanese-American, American history: before the war, the camps, after the war, and now, whatever this period might be called, when there is talk of redress and reparations, when a publisher like the University of Washington Press has an entire line of important Asian-American works.

It's all right here in the book: 1942, 1949, 1985 . . . The book was written in the late 1930s and early 1940s although some of the stories might take place in the 1920s or earlier. The book was

accepted for publication in 1941, slated to be issued in 1942, finally appeared in 1949, and went out of print.

The history is right here in these very pages, like rings of a tree: Saroyan's initial Introduction, his update, the dedication (Toshio's mother survived the camps), and two stories that are an obvious addition to an already intact manuscript. There are two versions of the book, then—the "original" and the "additional." The Caxton Printers apparently did the adding. Why?

The first additional story, "Tomorrow Is Coming, Children," also happens to be the leadoff story, the one that sets the tone for the book. It has a job to do, and it tries—it tries to introduce Japanese America, it tries to explain Japanese America as American. This approach was not necessary before the war, but someone deemed it crucial in 1949. Why?

It doesn't take much knowledge of history to come up with answers. For instance, what Saroyan said in his initial Introduction had an entirely different ring in 1949: "He is a young Japanese, born somewhere in California, and the first real Japanese-American writer. He writes about the Japanese of California. . . ." Despite the fact that Saroyan also said that "Toshio Mori is probably one of the most important new writers in the country at the moment," that didn't mean the same, or much, in 1949.

"A Jap's a Jap!"—that had been in all the papers. Everybody knew that. And, while before the war, people might have been moderately interested in a book by a Japanese American, an Oriental, a Nisei, even a Jap (the term was nothing new), by 1949, all this was something else indeed. It was as if, in the interim, Toshio, the "new writer," had become many different things—all variations of Jap. For instance, not even Nisei was a simple, domestic term; rather, with the outbreak of war, the government treated both Nisei and Issei as "enemy aliens" (like Toshio's mother who had been denied the rights to American citizenship). A Jap's a Jap, so the government, in effect, put the Constitution on hold, removed the "American" from Japanese American, and sent everybody to camp. (Toshio's brother was in the American

Army before the war, so he stayed in the Army and suffered a debilitating injury in Europe—while his family was in the camps.)

In the camps, Toshio became, among other things, a government ward, an evacuee, an internee, a relocatee, a resident of Topaz Camp, Millard County, Utah. By 1949, he was simply a former this and that—of assembly centers, of evacuation camps, of concentration camps, of whatever, all under the jurisdiction of the War Relocation Authority, Department of the Interior—and there were some things that would be there forever: "When did you stop being a Jap?"

By 1949, as Toshio had become less than an author, the book had become less than literature—it was not to be read so much as inspected. It had been tarnished, not burnished, by time, and was lucky to have snuck into print the way it did. By its very nature, it was destined for obscurity; it had to be one of the most unwanted books in history. (Is it any wonder that Japanese America did not welcome this prose with its unprosaic subject matter and unprosaic title?)

The inclusion and placement of "Tomorrow Is Coming, Children," then, can be seen as Caxton's attempt to soften history, to start with bygones and get into the book in a positive way; the nondiscerning reader might even think that the bulk of the book takes place *after* the war, with the people having made a remarkable recovery. This story, however, does not fit, does not work. It belongs in another collection, in its own context, post-"Yokohama," for it was written in the camps, for a camp audience (including, of course, camp administration), and it was published not once but twice, in the same issue of the Topaz Camp magazine, *Trek,* in 1943—in English, and in Japanese translation. It's the featured piece (Toshio was not an editor of this issue), with illustrations.

Explanations, justifications, were the order of the day in camp; thus, the grandma of this story attempts to explain history to her grandkids, Annabelle and Johnny. She talks about leaving Japan, living in California, and how war has given her this "opportu-

nity" to be in camp. She may not legally be a citizen but she feels very American—after all these kids and years—"I belong here." Besides, as she puts it, "Ah, San Francisco, my dream city. My San Francisco is everywhere."

Johnny doesn't comprehend these philosophical platitudes. He doesn't quite understand why war has gotten them into camp, instead of being back home "attending school with your neighborhood friends." He has difficulty with the "good points" of war, the "lessons," the "positive." Perhaps it's a bit like espousing American democracy behind barbed wire. So she sends the kids off to bed.

Now, on the surface, this seems to preach a pro-American message of perseverance. Sure enough, it's there, and should have satisfied the authorities (even though they may have wondered a bit about the translation). The *type* of perseverance being taught, however, is another matter. Grandma is not advocating amnesia, she is not saying "forget it," or "let bygones be bygones." As a matter of fact, all her reminiscence has a double edge to it, and the ironies had to be bouncing off the barracks, in two languages, for grandma, without saying it, is really saying: "*Remember.*" Remember your uncle fighting overseas; remember this camp; remember me. Grandma is actually teaching history, interpretation, survival tactics, strategy—in the guise of a bedtime story. Pro–Japanese American, or pro-American, is not necessarily pro-white, or anti-Japanese. Another "sentimental" piece by Toshio Mori.

The other additional story goes by the name of "Slant-Eyed Americans." There are no "slant-eyes" in the rest of the collection, but here there are also "Nisei," "enemy aliens," "Japanese faces," "American," "American way of life," "true American," "Caucasian American," and "American citizen." (In the story "The Brothers," the term "American" is used to designate "generic" white, whereas "Japanese" is used to denote Japanese American.) This story, though not the end of the collection, signals the end of the community of "Yokohama." Yet it is not necessarily a Pearl Harbor story; rather, it is about community strength and family devo-

tion. The younger son is home on leave from the Army: "Keep up the fire, that was his company's motto. It was evident that he was a soldier. He had gone beyond life and death matter, where the true soldiers of war or peace must travel, and had returned." The story ends on an ominous note as the family sees him off to war: "We stood and watched until the last of the train was lost in the night of darkness." Before long, the family, too, will be gone from "Yokohama." The community will be no more.

V. MORI TERRITORY

Mori territory is a world of freedom—freedom to be, to do, to try. Thus, the concluding story in the collection is about a plain woman who admires Clark Gable:

> When one has been around the neighborhood a while, the routine is familiar and is not emphasized. It appears dull and colorless. But in this routine there is the breath-taking suspense that is alive and enormous, although the outcome and prospect of it is a pretty obvious thing. Although her hope may be unfilled there is no reason why she cannot be a lover of Clark Gable.

This is the essence of Mori wisdom—to go for it, to go for broke, to believe. As the Mama of the doughnuts tells her grandchildren: "'I say to them, play, play hard, go out there and play hard. You will be glad later for everything you have done with all your might.'" In so doing, a person enlarges and determines one's own life. This is the perspective of a self-sufficient, self-determining community.

Yokohama, California is full of such examples—of people attempting, doing, acting; of committed people; of people making stands. The people live and embody a philosophy. There is more to this book than an old, anonymous woman, doughnuts, an old laundryman, an old grocer, a lonely writer, florists, clerks, would-be writers, would-be financiers, kids playing, men work-

ing, mothers worrying, eggs, laughing faces, trees, pompons, movies with Clark Gable . . . Mori territory is inclusive, incorporating—everywhere.

It is interesting to look at the Saroyan Introduction in this light. The Introduction, by now, is a permanent part of *Yokohama, California,* and it might be said that Saroyan has assumed residency—as a Moriesque character, "The Fresno Philosopher." The Introduction is no mere Introduction; it is Saroyan doing a Saroyan. It is full of poses, postures, gestures, pronouncements. It has darks, lights, louds, softs, starting with the long title and the tone of the first sentence: "Of the thousands of unpublished writers in America . . ." It has the feel of a sermon, a lecture. It reveals a great deal, intentionally and not, about Saroyan.

It is a very curious piece—original, worthy of inclusion—but at the same time it is somewhat of a nonintroduction. It has sides to it; it reveals much. Saroyan is obviously being truthful about Mori (he admired Toshio's work; he sought him out; the men became friends; they had much in common—two California ethnic writers of modest beginnings), and though he has an introductory strategy, he doesn't stick to it. Instead, he succumbs to, resorts to, the inappropriate: overabundant Saroyanness; *sayonara,* Mori.

Consider this: Saroyan has arranged to introduce Toshio to a big-time book reviewer. This reviewer also has connections to a "New York publishing house," as does Saroyan. Saroyan is optimistic about Toshio's chances; after all, Saroyan, just two years Toshio's senior, had become an overnight sensation with the publication of a single book. While Toshio waits in the reception room, Saroyan goes in first: "I've got a writer I want you to meet. He'd flunk English, but he's a natural. He can't help it—but he's got to become more lucid. He's Japanese, writes about Japanese, but his characters are people first. I'll tell you—I don't know what's happened to me since I last saw you. I feel as if I've forfeited something. I mean, with all this recognition, or because of the acknowledgment, there's still a loneliness, but even that's

not the same. I mean, I don't mean to confuse you, but it *is* confusing—all sorts of troubles, either way. By the way, here's his book."

The point is, Saroyan would probably never have introduced a "regular" writer this way—by "playing teacher." But Saroyan feels obliged to go public about this, because he is leading up to his concept of the "natural born writer"—one who "can't help" doing things on purpose by accident: "naturally." This implies the "primitive," as if Toshio is not a deliberate artist, and a highly sophisticated and innovative one at that. As it is, Toshio is presented as a limited, subliterary writer who must become more "lucid," whatever that may mean.

Saroyan, the unlettered ethnic, may very well have been subjected to this very same treatment. It is very easy to imagine this scenario: "Bill, you've got the goods, you're a natural but for god's sake we're going to have to do something about mechanics, aren't we. And, while we're at it, we'll help you become more lucid." The scenario continues: "Bill, even though you've got Armenians in your stories, well by god we think of them as people first—and the readers love 'em." Thus, Saroyan feels obliged to say that Toshio's characters "are Japanese only after you know they are men and women alive."

This is, of course, the old melting pot idea. In the guise of Americanization and universality, this was not so much acceptance but denial, domestication, and some folks were not about to melt down. A book like *Yokohama, California* is its best defense, its own integrity, and so be it if the characters are even *too* Japanese, this is its very strength.

No matter. Saroyan was simply reflecting the times; he was a free man. He didn't have to do anything; he could have ignored, abandoned Toshio, the way everyone else did. No matter, either, that in his 1948 update, Saroyan only said that the book "was postponed." He must have had his reasons, and Toshio's best interests in mind. Saroyan was a fine writer and a true friend; it is no accident that he contributed commentary to the first Japa-

nese-American book of poetry. As Toshio might have said: "Anyone can do an introduction, but there is only one Saroyan."

There is only one Toshio Mori. There is only one *Yokohama, California*. We stand on Seventh Street. "I promise the reader a real experience in reading."

LAWSON FUSAO INADA
Ashland, Oregon
30 January 1985

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

An Informal Introduction to the Short Stories of the New American Writer from California, Toshio Mori

Of the thousands of unpublished writers in America there are probably no more than three who cannot write better English than Toshio Mori. His stories are full of grammatical errors. His use of English, especially when he is most eager to say something good, is very bad. Any high-school teacher of English would flunk him in grammar and punctuation.

In spite of all this, Toshio Mori is probably one of the most important new writers in the country at the moment.

He is a natural-born writer. At his best a natural-born writer *does not* write with language. At his best a writer who is not a natural-born writer *does* write with language; he has no alternative. A natural-born writer can't help saying something worth hearing. Any other writer has to try very hard to do so.

It will be better for him when Toshio Mori learns to be more lucid, but what he has already is what other writers try for years to get, and sometimes never do. I mean the Eye. He can see. He can see *through* the material image to the real thing; through a human being to the strange, comical, melancholy truth that changes a

fool to a great solemn hero. With the Eye he has also the Heart. The fine heart of the true writer. He has understanding, sympathy, generosity, and kindliness.

He is a young Japanese, born somewhere in California, and the first real Japanese-American writer. He writes about the Japanese of California. If someone else tried to tell you about them, you would never know them. Even if another young Japanese without Mori's Eye and Heart told about them, they wouldn't be what they are in Mori's little stories. They would be Japanese; in Mori's stories they are Japanese only after you know they are men and women alive.

I regard Toshio Mori as an important American writer. If he is never published by a New York publishing house, he will still be an important writer, but I feel sure it will not be long until he is published by a New York publishing house.

Writers are never discovered. They work hard for years, in loneliness nobody should misunderstand, and then finally somebody publishes one of their stories and the biggest change in the world begins to take place: the unpublished writer begins to forfeit the loneliness he has known, and which has nourished him, for the recognition he has, in loneliness, been working for. Except for the loneliness, he cannot ever have the recognition; except for the labor, he cannot have the ease, the smiling acknowledgment of the acknowledgment of his arrival. This loneliness is the same that all people know whose loneliness is not personal, the loneliness which is the most solemn part of all people, and the most comical. When this exchange begins to take place, the time is a tough one for the writer, even though pleasant.

I do not wish to be regarded as the discoverer of this young writer. I am delighted about his appearance, his arrival from the Japanese of California, but I am also a little embarrassed about writing these few words as an introduction to his work. I am embarrassed because I know how sincere and great his appreciation will be. The worst is yet to come for him. Two things can happen: he can succeed terribly and have new troubles of all kinds,

between himself and the world and his writing; or he can make a beginning and not succeed and have other troubles of all kinds. In either event I know he will go on writing. If he succeeds, he will wonder about his writing, if it is truly what it should be; if he fails, he will wonder about it for other reasons, and have other kinds of troubles. Nothing can happen one way or another but it will make trouble, so that part of it is no matter. Mori's first story was published by *The Coast,* of San Francisco. I believe Christopher Rand uncovered the story, liked it, and helped edit it. It was called "The Brothers" and is in this little book.

Nobody can ever tell a writer what to do about his writing to make it better than it is. All I can do is hope that Toshio Mori will grow more lucid and at the same time not lose any of the things he has which belong to him alone. In the meantime his work in this book is young, fresh, innocent, somber, and full of comedy.

Note: The foregoing lines were written in San Francisco six or seven years ago. Publication of Toshio Mori's first book was postponed, but here it is at last, as fresh as ever. I promise the reader a real experience in reading.

WILLIAM SAROYAN
New York
October 1948