

Toshio Mori. *Yokohama, California*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985) xxvii, 166 pp., \$7.95 paper.

The reprinting of this book makes accessible to a new generation of readers the pioneering short fiction of the man William Saroyan called “the first real Japanese-American writer” (Introduction to first edition). First announced by the Caxton Printers for publication in 1942 and finally published in 1949, *Yokohama, California* suffered a vexed debut and a short life of obscurity and neglect. Given but scant notice by reviewers, Mori’s slim collection was received even by his ethnic peers more out of loyal curiosity than any shock of recognition. A unique record of Japanese American life in Northern California in the decades just before World War II, the book became one of the lost volumes of American literature.

Mori is not, in the usual sense, a rhetorical writer. He is far from his best when discursive, and though his readers know that his characters must of necessity exist in the larger world of social, political, and historical forces, they become aware that Mori’s concern is with illumination of the inner life of community, family, and self—the cultural matrix that is “Lil’ Yokohama.” Only two of these pieces post-date Pearl Harbor, and, bearing as they do the weight of history and selfconsciousness, “Slant-Eyed Americans” and “Tomorrow Is Coming, Children” serve to remind us that Mori’s true achievement is in the crafting of the mood piece, the vignette, the spare parable of the otherwise unexamined life: “The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts,” “The Seventh Street Philosopher,” “The Finance Over at Doi’s.” Mori’s gift is to write in such a way as to discover, polish, and redeem the simple and seemingly insignificant in Japanese American life.

Especially redeemed by Mori’s spare and simple prose are the private-yet-public interactions of family and individual with each other and with the community itself, as in “My Mother Stands on Her Head,” where Ishimoto-san’s Model-A grocery business challenges the family budget, and “Say It With Flowers,” in which a young clerk in a flower shop struggles to reconcile ethical awareness and the “business sense.” Similarly preserved for us in Mori’s prose are the intense, unvoiced generational struggle of “The Chessmen,” the zenlike eccentricities of “He Who Has a Laughing Face,” and the celebration of selfdiscovery and growth in “The Six Rows of Pom Pons” and “Toshio Mori.”

Mori’s fiction gives voice and life to the inarticulate, repressed, and enigmatic, those who communicate in gestures, whispers, and gnomic speech. In doing so it evokes (as others have observed) the memory of *Winesburg, Ohio*; the Seventh Street Philosopher, for example, is reminiscent of Anderson’s Dr. Parcival and Dr. Reedy. Yet Mori’s supplicants before life resist despair, enduring their troubles with stubbornness, humor, and pride. Mori’s characters at times live quirky lives, but seldom become grotesques. And even as it restricts and limits,

his Japanese American community nurtures and protects. Mori's ethos is one of knowing compassion: each human self must make its own discoveries, acknowledge its own limits in time and place, live through its own pain, and define its own joy. He reveals to us the dance of our living, "the dancing of emotions before our eyes and inside of us, the dance that is still but is the roar and the force capable of stirring the earth and the people" ("Swell Doughnuts").

The 1985 *Yokohama, California* includes two photographs of Mori and an added introduction by Lawson Inada. Along with *The Chauvinist and Other Stories* (Los Angeles, 1979), it validates both Mori's devotion to craft and a rich phase in the life of his people.

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Alan Takeo Moriyama. *Imingaisha: Japanese Emigration Companies and Hawaii 1894-1908*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985) xix, 260 pp., \$19.95.

When the sugar cane plantation owners in Hawaii realized how effective the immigrant Japanese workers were, the planters were faced with a decision. If they continued to bring in more workers, Hawaii could eventually have more Japanese living there than any other ethnic group. But if the planters did not bring in more Japanese, the production—and profits—might decline. Hence a decision was made to continue bringing in more laborers from Japan. The ethnic balance of Hawaii was changed. "In sum the planters chose to place the economic welfare of the plantations ahead of all other considerations."

This is one of the points made in *Imingaisha* which traces the development and impact of the role emigration companies played in the history of Hawaii and in the history of Japan. Moriyama, an associate professor of international relations at Yokohama National University, has made a significant contribution. Using records and archives from emigration companies in Japan, Japanese government agencies, U.S. government and Hawaiian Kingdom, the author offers considerable details and insights on the emigration process from 1894 to 1908.

At that time, Japan encouraged tenant farmers, laborers, and fishermen to migrate, because these workers would send money back home. Besides, sending them abroad would help relieve unemployment in Japan. Other nations also sought workers from Japan, China, Portugal, Austria, Norway, Germany, the U.S., Italy, Poland, Malaya, and even Siberia. So too did Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Peru, India, Canada, and Brazil. From 1868 to 1941, 776,000 Japanese emigrated. Between