Masks, Origins, and Copies in Chang-Rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*

by Sunli Kim
"While the settlement of our State is of the first importance, the character of those who shall become settlers is worthy of scarcely less consideration. To my mind it is clear, that the settlement among us of an inferior race is to be discouraged, by every legitimate means. Asia, with her numberless millions, sends to our shores the dregs of her population. Large numbers of this class are already here; and, unless we do something early to check their immigration, the question, which of the two tides of immigration, meeting upon the shores of the Pacific, shall be turned back, will be forced upon our consideration, when far more difficult than now of disposal. There can be no doubt but that the presence of numbers among us of a degraded and distinct people must exercise a deleterious influence upon the superior race, and, to a certain extent, repel desirable immigration. It will afford me great pleasure to concur with the Legislature in any constitutional action, having for its object the repression of the immigration of the Asiatic races."

_Leland Stanford, 1862._
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Introduction

“The very process of constructing a narrative for oneself – of telling a story – imposes a certain linearity and coherence that is never entirely there. But that is the lesson, perhaps, especially for us immigrants and migrants: i.e., that home, community and identity all fall somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities and friendships.” Chandra Talpade Mohanty.

Historical Context and Critical Reception

The United States touts itself as a nation built by immigrants and migrants, though the patterns, restrictions, and allowances for which peoples are allowed to enter are fiercely guarded and enforced. The aftermath of the Cold War’s ideological and tangible battles pushed the restructuring of global capitalism. Coupled with edits to existing immigration laws, factors eased a wave of migration from Asia to, among other nations, the Americas. The 1965 Amendments to the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, lifted immigration quotas based on various ethnic groups, allowing for an influx of immigration from many Asian countries. And for many years, literature surrounding the immigrant has reflected imagined origins and future settlements as the in-betweens of one ethnic identity and American-ness: the “diaspora” is created to cope with the absent sense of belonging. So many stories must be fabricated to make up for the lived

1 “The restructuring of global capitalism in the last three decades has generated a surge in migration from Asia (Castles 1998). Although Asians have established elaborate migration networks that span virtually
2 “…ethnonational self-definition, which ties the immigrant subject to a specific (if sometimes only imagined) national homeland rather than to a collective ethnic or racialized American history is deeply embedded in the discourse of diaspora” (Anderson and Lee 9). According to Wanni and Anderson, this
experiences that never meet the expectations of a promised land. Sometimes, because of the rarity of the stories, or because of the pressure the stories are under to represent, the relevance of one story is blown out of proportion. Authenticity of voice is the desired norm, but it is at odds with a culture that enforces assimilation. And usually, such stories are held against a certain ideal to be achieved - a norm must be reached in order for the narrator to be recognized. Perhaps these stories become fantasies because there is nothing “normal” about the immigrant nation, as much as it’s waved as the United States experience. Is there a singular experience? Or can a story fend off such a perception?

*Native Speaker,* by Chang Rae Lee, appeared on shelves in 1995 - only three years after the Los Angeles Riots brought forth scrutiny, curiosity, and visibility to the formerly insular Korean immigrant population in America. The policing practices of the Los Angeles Police Department wreaked havoc on livelihoods and the dignities of Black and Korean community members. They also complicated future generations of inter-race relations. Lee references the event in the novel, when Henry Park describes his mother’s fear:

> I remember thinking of her, *What’s she afraid of,* what could be so bad that we had to be that careful of what people thought of us...we silent partners of the bordering WASPs and Jews, never rubbing them except with a smile, as if everything with us were always all right...That we believed in anything American, in impressing Americans, in making money, polishing apples in the dead of night, perfectly pressed pants, perfect credit, being perfect, shooting black people, watching our stores and offices burn down to the ground.
> (Lee 53)

On the news, the community became a group of gun-touting defenders of businesses. They stand on building tops in a burning, apocalyptic Los Angeles background. Defenders of their material goods. A front against the riotous Black folk. But Korean immigrants, in interviews and collections of stories, speak of being forced to confront their entrances to American perception, and a realization that they lived under a government that did not protect all equally.

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imagined sense of diaspora is, as historian Robert Cohen understands, a “nostalgic trope” that connects to a sense of banishment and exile.
The fact that *Native Speaker* won the 1995 Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award raises a slew of crucial questions regarding how, beyond people and writers, *texts* migrate – who are the anticipated readers, and what audience partakes in the text? What brought forth the sudden relevancy of *Native Speaker*? The novel landed on multiple compilations of “to-read” lists of immigrant novels. Many news stories have sought Chang-Rae Lee for interviews and personal experience. How much, the questions ask, do the novel and its characters owe to Lee’s life experiences as an immigrant in the 1960s? Lee wonders to what cost he has assimilated.³

There is agency in writing a story. The writer can recreate a past event. As Mohanty describes in the opening quote, fiction has the power to imagine what has not yet been. While some question the integrity of such powers, Mohanty suggests another lesson to be learned, for people who are, individually and in communities, often considered different. The process of constructing a personal narrative creates a coherence that may not exist in the first place, but is crucial to survival – the only thing left is to wonder who’s listening. It is in the tension between “authenticity” and assimilation, as well as in the sense of collective trauma that follows an ethnoamerican immigrant identity, that I ground my interpretations of *Native Speaker*. And as I sat down in the English department bathroom one day and stared at fliers that said, “Study: Native Speakers Only,” I am well aware of who Henry Park, the protagonist of *Native Speaker*, must convince of his complete mastery of the master’s tools. And of the cost.

**The Beginning**

The beginning of a story is not necessarily its origin. And so it is for the story of Henry Park in *Native Speaker*, by Chang Rae Lee. He begins his narrative with an identity crisis, a plea

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³ A NY Times article cites Lee as follows: “Indeed, he said, his very fear of inadequacy with the language and the culture drove him to master English in its most challenging form, literature.”
to the reader. Henry has been, and I intentionally use such passive verb tense, reduced to a list of words by his own wife. And now he must push back and produce - but the result is a surprising attempt at healing and patching that defies the odds of the painful experiences.

The story becomes a series of “masks” the reader must peel through. However, the only part of his language that frees itself from these burdens and creates “new” language is when he narrates a very traumatic moment. I posit that the accidental, traumatic death of Mitt Park, Henry Park’s mixed-race son, is actually the true origin of the solution to the “identity” crises of Henry Park in Native Speaker. And the narrator version of Henry Park delivers that story to the reader to make a point: the traumatic instance is when Henry is most vulnerable in his narrative.

Much of the literature and reviews on the novel speak on literary manifestations of the struggle surrounding assimilation and the implied power structures between Henry Park, protagonist, and the whiteness that surrounds him as he navigates life as a second-generation immigrant. Henry’s relationship with his immigrant father and with Henry’s wife, Lelia, are often core explorations of the text in many existing literary criticisms. There is much to be said about the intricate relationships between the title’s announcement, native speaker, and what that ability with the English language entails for citizenship, but that is not what I focus on. In my thesis, I choose to explore the insertion of a memory of Henry’s son’s death, and the insight it provides to the narrative and to Henry’s perception of belonging and control. I realign the conversation to investigate how a traumatic moment might be a lesion that suggests an “origin” to Henry Park’s story and identity, but its inclusion is successful in healing and is crucial to the story because it carries Henry’s agency as a narrator. I use trauma as an entry point because the text to me, carries numerous wounds and openings that point to the tensions between desire for belonging and for success. Otherwise, Native Speaker just presents a confusing power struggle
for control over narration of story. But there is a complicating factor to the use of trauma: although it is an “origin” point for the narrative Henry writes, it comes in the form of a copy. I argue, however, that such a form is precisely what gives Henry the agency to finish the rest of the narrative that makes *Native Speaker*.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I juggle with conversations surrounding identity. I focus on an idea of identity as produced rather than given via readings of “copies” and their significance in the novel. In my analysis, I derive from a key point made in Stuart Hall’s *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* regarding enunciation, or the idea that “who speaks and who is spoken of are never identical, never exactly in the same place” (Hall 222). There is a split between the character version of Henry Park and the first-person narrator who observes and tells the story of Henry Park. He is also Henry at a chronologically later point in time. In other words, the person who speaks – Henry, narrator – is not the same as one who is spoken of – Henry, character. One version of Henry can also be read as a “copy” of another – the narrator is, through writing a story, reproducing the character. Such a split becomes a root source for tensions that arise in the narrative. There is a conflict in control over events of the story. The split is further complicated by the fact that in content, the story deals with how Henry navigates assimilation and what one critic calls “inscrutable” whiteness. The language points out how “agency,” or extent to which character, narrator, or outside force can control the narrative, is tied to how Park conceives of his own identity via language proficiency. Close readings of parts of the novel reveal and comment on the function of the relationships between tension and agency. And in the way Henry opens his narrative, it is clear that the “I” in the narration is fixated on its own creation, definition, and conception.

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4 Tim Engles, in addition to many other literary critics, often read *Native Speaker* with regards to the relationship between Lelia and Henry and the resulting dialogue on noticeable “alienness” of Henry and the non-noticeable whiteness or native part of Lelia.
Furthermore, all of this copy-making automatically evokes the question of origins. Does Henry need an origin for an identity production process to begin? How will such an origin surface in a narrative that announces its preference for copies? Thus, Walkowitz’s essay on Kazuo Ishiguro and transnational literatures come into play. The comparison in Walkowitz’s work between the select circulation of translated works and the search for the “unique” and “human” by clone characters in *Never Let Me Go*, by Kazuo Ishiguro, serves as lens through which to approach the theme of metaphorical and literal masks and copies that arise in *Native Speaker*. Eventually, I argue that the language Park uses favors the idea of copies versus the “original.” It counter-intuitively suggests that agency exists in the form of the copy, not in the origin or through originality. Such an idea is possible because each copy should be thought of as *unique*. Walkowitz investigates such implications for the way art and literature are circulated and produced, and Ishiguro’s text argues for the “humanity” of the clones to be recognized – in other words, a copy in form or in genetics does not strip the result or person of uniqueness or originality, nor are the two parts necessary for one to be “human” enough for the world. Overall, the essay argues for value to be seen in the copy, and Henry Park, in the beginning pages of the novel, believes the same.

Masks and copy-making in *Native Speaker* therefore are not weakening transformations of Henry’s self and identity, but instead are empowering agents through which Henry can accomplish production of self and heal from a traumatic moment in his life. But why are the two linked? In the second chapter, I begin a close-reading of the specific traumatic moment, and argue that the traumatic moment is necessary for a production to begin, and that the process of healing and of agency in narration are intertwined. In summary, Mitt Park, Henry’s mixed-race son, is killed in an accident. His playmates pile on top of him and suffocate him. Henry, his wife
Lelia, and Henry’s father all witness the fatal moment. But what is the significance of this traumatic moment?

In order to answer this question, I dwell on a reading of *Native Speaker* based off of Derrida, in *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. I am drawn to this particular text as a secondary source because of Derrida’s foundations in post-structuralism, which regards language as a similar form to how Stuart Hall and Fanon consider identity production. Language splits into signifiers and signifieds and each reproduction of a sign places it in a different context, creating a paradox that sums up the conflict in the idea of a unique copy. “The structure [of language],” Derrida writes, “appears in the experience of the injury, the offense, vengeance, and the lesion” (26). Such a claim rings true with the narration of Mitt Park’s death. The language is fraught with loaded words that allude to Christ, rebirth, novelty, newness, and recreation – an undeniable manifestation of Derrida’s observation regarding “lesion.” I link this all to trauma because the word’s Greek roots and original definitions are, according to Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*, of splitting, of wounds, and thus of lesions. So, the significance of the traumatic moment in *Native Speaker* is that it brings to light the importance of the copy-making. It uncovers, so to speak, the origin of the structure that helps identify the narrative form and structure that brings agency to Henry’s story and identity.

To further clarify: if the text suggests there is an origin, or a point in the narrative that is a beginning, what allows it to also carry language that suggests and states that Henry prefers the use of copies? By playing into the idea of a unique copy, even the traumatic passage ultimately carries the paradox. It was an original moment, but it is being investigated through a copy, a

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5 Caruth notes this point in *Unclaimed Experience* when she introduces Freudian explorations of trauma and his interpretations of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, in which the hero, Tancred, wounds his disguised beloved, and repeatedly injures her because of her reappearances. Caruth, however, fixates on the voice that emerges from the wound to notify Tancred of his follies – this concept I also use to uncover what “voices” emerge from the wound of *Native Speaker*.
rewritten experience channeled through the narrator, Henry Park. Thus, it ends up being an empowering moment for Henry. Perhaps, the paradox is the only space through which Henry can posit some sort of linearity in his narrative.
CHAPTER 1: COPIES AND MASKS

“The day my wife left she gave me a list of who I was” (Lee 1). From its first sentence, the language of *Native Speaker* foreshadows Henry Park’s internal struggles to come. He makes the reader’s journey of interpretation just as murky as he finds it difficult to fathom his own identity.

Because the novel is written in first person – clearly emphasized by the presence of the “I” in its opening sentence – the reader’s initial assumption is that the first-person narrator has complete control over the story. If the narrative is written from the perspective of protagonist Henry Park in hindsight, then we assume that he is in full control of how we perceive the story. Usually, this translates into a problem\(^6\) regarding whether or not the narrator is manipulating such control by being unreliable or “untruthful” about the story to the reader. However, in *Native Speaker*, the first-person narration is root of a different type of puzzle, which actively involves not just the reader, but also, the teller of the story. Because it is written in first person and the first sentence addresses a state of being, (“who I was”), I as a reader would assume that the story is going to be about this first-person narrator’s identity. So my initial conclusion is that this first-person narrator is fully in charge of his own identity. But, in *Native Speaker*, and in a more complete reading of this sentence, such a conclusion is incomplete.

Whether or not Park is in total control of the narration of his identity is the greater question due to different aspects of the sentence. The use of first-person in the beginning sentence suggests a different function than to posit agency or control. For example, this sentence

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\(^6\) “In specific circumstances a narrator will lose credibility because s/he violates valid social norms in word or deed. Such an *unreliable narrator*… may give a distorted picture of (fictional) reality as a result of being obsessed by certain ideas…” (Fludernik 27).
tells the reader that the first-person narrator’s identity was *handed to him*, which is in complete contrast to what the form suggests, as we’ve established with the expectations carried by reading first-person narration. The I is receiving the action; the I is being defined by a list. “Who I was” belongs, in the actions of this sentence, not to Henry Park, but to his wife’s written list, which contains, among other unflattering words, “illegal alien, emotional alien…Yellow Peril: Neo-American…and spy” (Lee 5). Thus, immediately, the reader is placed at a crossroads in terms of interpreting the amount of agency this narrator, the “I” of this first sentence, actually has. In *Native Speaker*, the crisis of reading a first-person account is no longer the question of reliability, but more a question of narrative and language control, which translates, in the larger scheme of the narrative, to control over the character’s identity. Instead of tying the narrator’s reliability to his perceived credibility, the first line establishes how this story’s narrative control is intimately tied to how Henry Park conceives of his own identity, or of his role as a main character in his own story.

There is yet another layer of complication added to this sentence. The past tense highlights a separation between the “I” as a narrator, and “I” as a character. In other words, the beginning of this novel exists in hindsight; the narrator presents the scene to the reader as an isolated event in the past. A particular day when his wife leaves him and leaves him with a list that supposedly defines his character. The questions that arise from this separation are… how is this narrator different from the character version his wife leaves in that moment? What knowledge does he gain in the time between that moment and the moment he begins this narrative? Thus the tense of the sentence and the separation of the character and narrator suggest that an amount of control is still exerted by the narrator I. “The truth, finally, is who can tell it” (7), Henry Park remarks at the end of the introductory chapter. Even though the sentence’s
circumstances and subject-object relationship presents one argument regarding agency, another part of the sentence contradicts and suggests otherwise. The tension directs the reader’s attention to the fact that beyond the “character I” who receives an evaluation of his self by his wife, the narrator has some control over the entire novel; “narrator I” is controlling the perception of the lack of agency, and in that way, there is a possibility that Henry Park, the narrator, has some agency over his identity and story. But there is a reason for the illusion of lack of control.

The first sentence highlights a variety of tensions and complications related to control over the story, which I will refer to for the rest of this chapter as the agency of the narrator. It clues the readers in to why Henry Park is trying to write this story - who is he? - and establishes the sorts of ambiguities and confusions Henry Park runs into with his own identity. Identity, or the concern with who I is, is presented at the very beginning of novel as a finished list, and a confrontation with who produces it and with how it’s produced. In such a way, the first sentence proposes a questioning of the finished idea of identity presented to Henry Park as “character I.” And, in form, it betrays and denies the reader’s expectations.

But what exactly constitutes the list?

“You are surreptitious
B+ student of life
first thing hummer of Wagner and Strauss
illegal alien
emotional alien
genre bug
Yellow peril: neo-American
great in bed
overrated
poppa’s boy
sentimentalist
anti-romantic
_______ analyst (you fill in)
stranger
follower
The description of Park in this list echo national characterizations of East Asian immigrants in America. They were stated in Leland Stanford’s speech at the edges of this thesis; “there can be no doubt but that the presence of numbers among us of a degraded and distinct people must exercise a deleterious influence upon the superior race, and, to a certain extent, repel desirable immigration,” he says in his inaugural speech. To have the list, then, contain words that historically define exclusion, such as “alien” or “Yellow Peril,” further emphasizes the extent to which Henry Park’s identity seems to lie outside of his control. It carries paradoxes that are unresolvable by the reader, because we’ve only just been introduced to Henry. He’s a “sentimentalist” and an anti-romantic, a “peril” and “neo-American.” The list’s items draw attention to the isolation that occurs in these words and in rhetoric regarding migrants: “alien,” “stranger,” and other words that perpetuate a difference are repeated. And so, the reader searches for an antithesis to one of the first sentence’s ostensible claims: that in some way, these words are what completely describe Henry Park. Henry adds a disclaimer to such a perception: “Eventually, I would understand that she didn’t mean the list as exhaustive, something complete, in any way the sum of my character or nature” (1). But, the “eventually” in this sentence describes how it takes a while for him to accept such an understanding; there is a moment in time during which he believes the list is exhaustive and wholly his. “I can see this only now, reinvent it in this present time, for in some moments then, I forgot the entirety of what I was doing” (198). Henry voices the necessity of reinvention to come to such a benign conclusion.

So how does character Henry Park react to such a belief? The list is a symbolic characterization of the narrative framework of *Native Speaker*. He destroys the original list and
creates copies. “The original I destroyed. I prefer versions of things, copies that aren’t so precious” (4). By destroying the original and creating his own unique copies of a list that supposedly sums up his existence, Park is exerting agency over that original characterization. He is repurposing what his wife believes he is. And in such a clarification, Park highlights how what the list might entail for Lelia could starkly differ with how he interprets the list. And such an interpretation may vary per copy, so the idea of a copy is redefined and subverted. Copies are associated with unoriginality, as if originality were the pinnacle of artistry.

When he prefaces his entire narrative with an explanation of how he destroys the original list that supposedly defines his entity and creates copies of those lists, Henry Park is heavily hinting at the format of the rest of the novel. Except, instead of lists, he plays with masks and performance - he must struggle with the idea of an already created identity, and thus resulting story, for a Korean American man, and search for his own individualism within the events he is about to narrate to the reader. Here, at the very beginning of his narrative, Henry Park deliberately remarks that he prefers the less precious; he prefers the copies of the list. He is challenging an opinion regarding authorship and ownership. Such a statement in the beginning of the chapter also alerts the reader to the purpose of this narrative. It is being retold to the reader, and the value of all of the experiences in the novel will be re-evaluated to the reader. What exactly does the narrator Henry Park have in mind for me, the reader, as I continue through this novel? Will Henry Park ever settle these anxieties regarding his existence?

Or is he actually throwing the doubts regarding his identity back into the reader’s face?

In order to answer such questions, I will dwell on how Henry Park decides to describe himself.

“I can be most personable, if not charming, and whatever I possess in this life is more or less the result of a talent I have for making you feel good about yourself when you are
with me. In this sense I am not a seducer. I am hardly seen. I won’t speak untruths to you, I won’t pass easy compliments or odious offerings of flattery. I make do with on-hand materials, what I can chip out of you, your natural ore. Then I fuel the fire of your most secret vanity” (7).

He is a shadow, not the original. “I am hardly seen” is an allusion to Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* - but to whom, as Toni Morrison once observed about Ralph Ellison’s invisible man, is Henry Park’s native speaker hardly seen? The burden of representation, or the need to present a specific story in order to prove one’s existence or one’s link to a community, is only necessary to a certain type of audience.

Henry Park as narrator of his own story is incredibly self-aware of this burden. He, as leading character, will have to shoulder the burden of the story. To whom must he exhort to believe that Henry Park is, indeed, a native speaker? Not to me. I know exactly what he means and the scenario occurs in my head before he writes it down in the language of the novel. Park would only have to prove his mastery over the language to a reader who would not believe it. Who would “check again that [his] voice moves in time with [his] mouth, truly belongs to [his] face” (349). To a reader who would not accept such a possibility. To a reader who believes that he knows all there is to know about Henry Park. And all of this plays out in the relationships Henry Park has with people. After the list, he finds another one-liner from his wife. “False speaker of language” (Lee 6). Here is an explicit example of the anxieties expressed in the title of this novel, and thus presumably exist within the main character. What does it mean to be a false speaker of language? “I won’t speak untruths to you, I won’t pass easy compliments or odious offerings of flattery,” Park says (7). Instead of saying he tells the truth, he negates the rhetoric of the line of his wife - he is not a false speaker of language; on the contrary, he is a truthful speaker. But overall, such an exchange regarding truths suggests that rather than proving

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7 In her interview with Junot Díaz, Morrison speaks about her role as a publisher and of the whiteness that pervades publishing culture.
honesty or otherwise, Park’s struggle with “false speaking” is related to his ability to speak English. It rings similarly of the tension in the opening lines of the novel. He states, “I make do with on-hand materials, what I can chip out of you, your natural ore” (7); the statement highlights how he proposes to shape his language to display himself – through format and the “natural ore,” which points to an idea of a “native” source. Thus, not only is there a process of masking happening in this description, but also he divulges the materials through which he performs. Through language.

In fact, Park narrates this otherness throughout the novel in the form and theme of copies and splitting. He becomes other characters or extra characters in order to examine himself. He explicitly relays the transformation process to the reader when he narrates how he and his wife, Lelia, “the American,” become involved with one another.

I did something then that I didn’t know I could do. It was strangely automatic. Instantly I was thinking of the lover she might want, the man whom she’d searched out but hadn’t yet found in her life...I put myself in her place and imagined her father and mother. Boyfriends, recent loves. I made those phantom calculations, did all that blind math so that I might cast for her the perfect picture of a face” (13).

Henry Park imagines and transforms himself into a paper role. He wears masks. He imagines himself into the reader he expects will challenge his story as a native speaker. He does the “calculations,” is “cast.” What’s mind-boggling about this transformation, though, is that he becomes “the man whom she’d searched out but hadn’t yet found in her life.” In other words, he becomes a copy of someone who does not exist in reality, and is only in Lelia’s imagination. He does not even need a specific original to “recreate” somebody. His imagination is enough. A literal original copy. He may be performing someone and masking a part of himself as a result, but such actions are not devoid of creativity. His relationship with Lelia continues in similar language; instead of words, they exchange faces. “I showed Lelia how this was done, sometimes
brutally, my face a peerless mask, the bluntest instrument” (96). Henry Park hints at a theme of masks and performance that metaphorizes how writing this story obscures his search for the “origin,” or for a story that aptly covers his own identity.

He ends the narrative in a physical mask. In the present, he and Lelia work as speech therapists for English as Second Language students with his wife. Lelia leads the class while Henry wears “a green rubber hood and act[s] in [his] role as the Speech Monster” (348). However, even in the moment of reveal, when he takes off his mask, the children question the way his face matches up with his language ability. “I take off my mask and we both hug and kiss each one…I sense that some of them gaze up at me for a moment longer, some wonder in their looks as they check again that my voice moves in time with my mouth, truly belongs to my face” (349). Even the children of immigrants question Henry Park’s ability to speak. They envision a mask on Henry’s actual face because he does not look like what they grow to associate with the story of a native speaker.

The way Henry incorporates figurative and literal masks in his language is by using his job, a sort of research agent, as a means of writing new narratives. While he never specifies what exactly his job is beyond “investigating” certain subjects, Henry uses language with his subjects that makes him sound like a novelist, a clear metanarrative move for readers to wonder about the overall narrative he presents to us. And the stories he tells are, in part, through masks. During his recovery process after the loss of his son, Park says, “I would tell a familiar story. The ones we recite in our sleep” (140). Here is an explicit reference to retelling, or the recreation of a new copy of a story “we” all know well enough to recite in our sleep. With these research subjects and secondary narratives and masks, he is, just as he did with the list, creating copies, and wondering if he can re-evaluate the origin. The copy-making embedded in Native Speaker adds
to the paradoxical tensions in Henry Park’s language and relay Henry Park’s difficulty in narrating his own unique story without having it swayed or sidetracked by the imagination of the reader on who he might be. Stuart Hall quotes Frantz Fanon in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” who wonders if “new forms of… representation” come from “not the rediscovery but the production of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past” (Hall 224). I posit that such an approach to identity is present throughout *Native Speaker* because each “copy” Henry depends on is a sort of re-telling and new production that adds to whatever “origin” he may be searching for. In other words, the origin does not exist; identity in *Native Speaker* is a continuous process of retelling.

The question wrestles with an argument made in Rebecca Walkowitz’s “Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature.” Her essay, which investigates the theme of copies and clones in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, illuminates how Lee’s own identity, framed by the physical copies of the list that say “who he is,” is able to have its own uniqueness and identity because of the permutations and retellings of it in each instance.

In her challenge to existing arguments regarding “national literatures,” Walkowitz asks, “What of those contemporary texts, written by migrants and for an international audience, that exist from the beginning in several places? How does reflecting on unoriginality, as some contemporary writers now do, influence the ideas of community that authors – and readers – are able to imagine?” (Walkowitz 218).

Walkowitz points out how a significant portion of literature cannot be location-tied because of the transnationalism inherent in certain works’ beginnings; characters and their families have crossed borders in time and space to reach the point in which they can tell a story. Walkowitz breaks down assumptions regarding imagined communities, similar to the ones Henry must
reflect on as he ponders his own family background and origins. “Then, inevitably, if I asked hard questions of myself, of the one who should know, what might I come up with?” he asks hopelessly (53). He then meanders through a string of memories in which his father pushes him to speak English for business, and Henry retaliates with Korean. But with the Korean language, he discovers that such a language does not exist beyond himself or the father who desires him to drop it: “I saw that if I just kept speaking the language of our work the customers didn’t seem to see me. I wasn’t there” (53). What does this have to do with originality and copies in *Native Speaker*? First, *Native Speaker* is undeniably a story of a migrant: Henry Park is a man who cannot trace his roots to one place because of the influences not only of place, but also of time. He also recognizes the manifestations of traceability in language and ability of speech. In his attempt to speak his original language, he is ignored. So, later in time, as the narrator, Henry writes this entire narrative in English. And he makes explicit that the search for his identity peters out continuously in his youth; he only meets confusion. Thus, the creation of this novel as copies of life experiences through which he explores unique moments is a way through which Henry comes to terms with his own identity.

The way Park creates copies is an action that reflects originality, and posits uniqueness. Especially because *Native Speaker* is a story about a Korean American man reflecting on his identity as an immigrant’s son, the transnational focus of Walkowitz’s essay is pertinent to our understanding of copymaking and conceived unoriginality, and thus the analysis of identity in *Native Speaker*. Walkowitz describes how the state of unoriginal expression can be valued differently in a world context. In *Never Let Me Go*, by Kazuo Ishiguro, clone characters must situate themselves in a world that values individuality and interiority on “the capacity for genuine love, authentic expressivity, and artistic originality,” and the donation system decimates
the clone population “because humans see the clones as non-individuated organisms” (Walkowitz 225). The idea that originality can only derive itself from complete heterogeneity is, according to Walkowitz, debilitating. “Only by appreciating the unoriginality of art, Ishiguro suggests, can we change the idea of culture itself” (Walkowitz 228). Perhaps then, the fact that Park highlights his mimicking and copying in the first pages of the novel, are surreptitious announcements of authority. The way Park brings the copies to life, while introducing his novel and himself, represents a challenge to the favoritism originality and authorship suggest in the first sentence of the novel. I return to the first sentence. “She gave me a list of who I was” (Lee 1) does sound like a passive acceptance of his wife’s analysis. But the following pages suggest differently: “The original I destroyed. I prefer visions of things, copies that aren’t so precious” (Lee 4). Suddenly, ownership is transferred with the reproduction of the list. “I” states preference. He builds security over the copies he creates, decreasing the preciousness of the original, or even, the concept of an original. Thus, by re-working the language, he must narrate the story by creating copies of events.

The list, through words alone, ostensibly controls the identity of a man who narrates the rest of this story. And because of the ambiguity of that language, readers recognize that Park’s re-telling of his life thrives in the tension between the control and seduction he encounters in the English language as a native-speaker-but-suspect-illegal-alien. Park is a second-generation Korean American man living in the United States. He speaks flawless English. But the ability is questioned or shocks his listeners throughout the novel. The conflict in the possibilities of interpretation and the varied amount of control Park has over his narrative continues to materialize throughout the novel. Thus, the first sentence brings up questions regarding the amount of control the narrator holds over his own story, his own identity, rather than whether or
not the narrator is hiding something from the reader. Indeed, there are hidden things, but whether those hidden parts of the story are purposefully included.

Such an interpretation actually becomes a layer of the ambiguity this sentence builds for the reader as the novel barely begins. The first-person narration and the clear past tense setting of time suggest that the narrator is in full control of the story. And the fact that the narrator can control how “I” is perceived suggests agency and originality. The sentence proves that there are identity crises built into the language of the novel. However, there are small moments of control Park exerts over the story that occur in unconventional ways, and perhaps would not even register to the reader as independent actions. Such moments further complicate the extent of ownership Park believes he has over his story. Later in the chapter, Henry Park reveals that he destroys the original list his wife gave him, and creates copies of it to carry around.

But what triggers such a search? Is there a moment embedded in the novel that acts as an access point for these copies to occur? So what happens when one of his biological copies is destroyed? What happens when he loses Mitt Park? What happens when one of his biological copies is destroyed? In the next chapter, I argue that a literal biological hole, the loss of a physical part of his genome, is a moment fraught with the idea of the origin in the sense that it provides a vulnerable moment from which Henry begins the original process of copy-making via language.
CHAPTER 2 – THE WOUND

“The wound is the place where the light enters you.” - Rumi

Until now, I have detailed how Henry Park, through his narration form, style, and content, delivers his personal, self-conscious anxieties to the reader in a more complete experience. The language is so ambiguous that parts of it wars with itself. It acts out the self-acceptance Park seeks and rejects in writing this narrative, creating a space for the reader to interact with its clashing parts. But for what reason does such a narrative exist? Is there ever even an answer to the question posed by the first sentence - does Henry Park have or need an origin to his identity? What event has driven Park to such self-loathing? In the following chapter, I posit that the accidental, traumatic death of Mitt Park, Henry Park’s mixed-race son, is actually the true origin of the “identity” crises and character identity of Henry Park in Native Speaker. And the narrator version of Henry Park delivers that story to the reader to make a point: the traumatic instance is when Henry is most vulnerable in his narrative. But it is also the only place in the novel that explicitly talks about origins and creation of new language and space, suggesting that a blunt exploration of a painful experience is the necessary foundation for creating a story for oneself. Henry must separate himself from the actual event in order to heal.

First, I must explain what I mean by a traumatic instance. Mitt dies in an accident witnessed by his parents, grandfather, and the neighborhood children who killed him. Although we are primed as readers by the narrator of this event, to Henry as character, it is unforeseeable. A trauma is defined not only as the scientific wound, break, or lesion per its Greek and English roots (Caruth 3), but moved forward in psychoanalysis and modern psychology as a similar break or hurt inflicted on the mind. In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History,
Cathy Caruth details the narrative of trauma; its relevance in literary reading and theory is key to our understanding of Park’s narration of this moment, and why I view this moment as the origin of Park’s pain and ambiguous story that is the novel, *Native Speaker*. Furthermore, in Susan Stanford Friedman’s essay, “Bodies on the Move,” Friedman discusses the inscription of trauma and terror on the body - and with not just the human form. “Terror is practiced at the expense of wounds inscribed on the body. We speak here of martyrdom and passion in the strict and quasi-etymological sense of these terms. And when we mention the body, we are naming the body of language and writing, as well as what makes them a thing of the body” (27). I draw from Friedman’s insight to elaborate on Henry’s narration, character, copy, and mask scheme -- clearly the tensions inscribed in Henry’s words are results of terror. What occurs to his human form occurs to his body of words. So, I choose to zoom in on a particularly traumatic moment in Henry’s life in order to uncover the paradoxes that drive the opening of the novel.

This particular traumatic scene in *Native Speaker* is witnessed. The act of witness means, among others, two very important things: the death is watched by an audience, and the actual moment of death remains a mystery to all those who watched. In other words, the moment of loss is masked by the fact that all witnesses cannot relate to or know of the feelings of the dead victim. Caruth describes this very complex moment and how it emotionally manifests in many patients of trauma to this question: “Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?” (7). Such a question reverberates throughout the narration of Mitt’s death scene. *Native Speaker* answers: both, in that the encounter cannot be explained in language by witnesses, and the ongoing experience of having survived it is the reason behind the creation of *Native Speaker*. 
Caruth states, “The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (17). The point regarding latency is consistent with how I’ve chosen to split character versus narrator in my reading, and the reason why Henry would have taken all this time to distance himself from the origin of the pain. Character and narrator versions of Henry Park, as established in previous chapters, exist in two different, parallel planes of time throughout this novel. And that is because one version of Henry Park is crucial to the process of healing through the other version.

At the scene of accident, language fails the characters. It is a physical manifestation of the forgotten realities in the premises of this novel. The novel clarifies, “This a city of words” (344). And in the city of words, to have characters suddenly alienated from their abilities to speak does not merely highlight the extent of pain the event evokes. It also notes an incredible shift in power dynamics. In this city of words, the only person left to describe the scene with language is our narrator, the person we question as Native Speaker - Henry Park. Lelia “was wailing nothing [Henry] could understand or remember now, and she sounded like someone else, an anybody on the street” (105). As narrator Henry relates the characters’ loss of verbal ability to process the event, the reader recognizes that his very narration of this moment is revelatory. People are dispossessed of the language to comprehend Mitt’s sudden passing. The scene of death is chaotic. People present are not identifiable - Lelia sounds like “an anybody on the street.” Henry, narrator, can speak of a string of time in which Henry the character cannot register any. And in describing, Henry is still searching for a new way to encounter this painful moment. Latency is his narrator version stepping in to reconfigure this scene. And so, the scene is a highlight of how a copy moment of the event relays Henry’s desire to determine and control
his own narrative. He is, in many ways, evoking Hall and Fanon’s argument regarding production of identity via “re-telling of the past” (Hall 224).

But, this scene is a clear point of origin for this entire narrative because Henry narrates how the traumatic accident, as a point of dispossession and death, is also a point of new language. Henry’s ability to create and describe a new language process in this scene points to a beginning that manifests in the novel and argues for his agency throughout. The birth he mentions at the opening of the theatrics begins in this very scene.

The narrator introduces the scene of death and trauma as a stage. “Like a cinematic mantra, a mystical trailer of memory, I replayed the scene of all those boys standing in the grass about the spontaneous crèche of his death” (103). The narrator frames this scene as a theatrical moment. The mention of “trailer” and “cinematic mantra” immediately triggers notions of film and staging. Words like “replay” and “scene” also emphasize the separation between Henry’s narrator version and the character entering this replay – theatrical space. Park describes a still setting – it is one frozen scene of motionless characters. He might as well have pulled back curtains with the “cinematic mantra” to bring the reader to an opening scene. The introduction to Mitt’s death scene confirms the important presence of masks and performance throughout the narrative. It is in this moment that the narrator reveals to the close reader the possible origin of Native Speaker. In this sentence, Park uses specific words that suggest that Mitt’s death is the beginning of something.

With the sentence’s heavy emphasis on theatrics, immediately linking it to the beginning pages of the novel and the rhetoric surrounding masks and identity, that something is likely the whole of the narrator’s reflections on his character’s experiences. He describes the death as a “spontaneous crèche” - a paradoxical phrase, if the definition of crèche is taken into account.
According to Merriam-Webster, a crèche is “a set of statues that represents the scene of Jesus Christ’s birth.” Set of statues neatly falls in line with staging premises. And to describe his son’s death scene as a moment of sacred birth then is a clear announcement of a beginning. To have it connected to the nativity and a story about a man’s death as rebirth is an even clearer sign - this moment is the beginning point of Henry Park’s need to tell a story.

To describe this traumatic moment as a birth is no accident. A birth is reproduction - reproduction – a production repeated – a moment when, biologically, a child made up of existing genetics becomes a unique human being. A literal original copy. Mitt Park was Henry Park’s original copy in the flesh. And Henry, character, witnesses the loss of a unique creation. Henry describes this phenomenon in the scene previous to Mitt’s death. While staring at his profile, he narrates, “…his boy’s form already so beautifully jumbled and subversive and historic” (103). The words he chooses to describe Mitt all follow the tension inherent in the idea of a unique copy. Subversion suggests overthrowing, rebellion; Mitt’s being and physiology act against the set characteristics of his father and mother. Historicity is a word that draws tension further - it could mean that his boy’s form is historic in the sense that it’s set new boundaries, or historic in the sense that it presents all of its lineage and time. But then, “No one, I thought, had ever looked like that” (103). All of these subversive, historic descriptions lead to a line that posits uniqueness. The loss of such a copy in such an unforeseeable way forces Henry back to the drawing board.

Furthermore, he places this moment and point of origin at a place not in chronological nor logical narrative or time order (ie, at the beginning of the story he tells), because it plays into the masquerade he struggles with as a being. Park’s narration is a formal end-product of the list-copy play he introduces at the beginning of the novel. Technically, the reader realizes, the
beginning of the novel is a part of the end of the story chronologically. It contains active present-tense voice from the first-person narration and, as the previous chapter of this thesis details, ends with “I am” statements that further obfuscate his identity. The non-chronological time placement of this scene is a point Henry makes in order to preface the act of retelling to come. But, for the words related to rebirths and new beginnings that open the stage for this part of his story, this mask might be the last one the reader hits before recognizing what the “origin” might mean.

In order for Henry to have agency in this story, he must create a new language. And in order to create a new sort of language midway a novel for this event and for himself, he must recreate an entire setting. Thus, the language during and surrounding Mitt’s death scene evokes Henry’s desire to create new space, a new narrative, a new person. And then, it proceeds to create those new spaces, and hint to the reader that the novel in its entirety is the new narrative, and the narrator version of Henry is the new person.

So how would I describe this new language? “New” suggests that there was a certain type of “old” language. And besides the tensions detailed in the previous chapter, how does Henry signal this “newness” to the reader?

Before the reader encounters Mitt’s death, Henry details a seemingly random scene in which he, as a leading character, is incapacitated by language because of his son. Mitt comes home repeating racist words thrown at him by the kids. Henry fails to, in language, offer Mitt an explanation for or armor against the cruelties of the boys in the neighborhood. Mitt is a mixed-race boy growing up in East Coast suburbia, surrounded boys who mimic racial slurs from their environment and throw them at Mitt. Some of the slurs don’t even fit Mitt properly, and when mimicked by Mitt to Henry, they hit a surer target. “One afternoon Mitt tugged at my pant leg and called me innocently, in succession, a chink, a jap, a gook…” (103). The memory does not
stray far from Lelia’s list. And Henry has no words to fight against them, except to try to weaken the impact or power “words” hold in his world. Which, at that point, the reader recognizes as the weakest possible explanation he could have given to his son. Language, in the world of the novel, is agency and power. He has no words to respond.

“I couldn’t immediately respond and so he said them again. They’re just words, I then told him firmly, confidently - in the way a father believes he should - but mostly because I didn’t know what else to say” (103).

“They’re just words” completely stands in contrast to how Henry feels the need to strip all others of speech in the death scene. In addition, the amount of copy-making happening in this scene acts as comparative material for the tragedy that follows in the text. Mitt must repeat the words to his father because Henry cannot initially respond. Not to mention that those words are repetitions of words the neighborhood boys call Mitt, and no doubt that because those boys are children, they are repetitions from language they heard from their parents. Then, Henry stresses that his firm, confident response to Mitt (which was far from firm and confident) is a sham - they are prayed and delivered in “the way a father believes he should.” Once again, he is playing a role that must be imagined, especially considering his poor relationship with his own father, and this particular scene highlights the extent to which Henry is at mercy to language. To words. To the extent that the only form of refuge he can offer to his son is denial of the force of the words that will tear and reshape the rest of his life, as Native Speaker proves.

After Mitt comes home having had dirt stuffed in his mouth, “Lelia, who up to now had been liberal and assured, started shrieking angrily about suburbia, America, the brand of culture we had to live in, and packed Mitt up the stairs to scrub his muddy face, telling him all the while how wonderful he was” (103). A question from the previous chapter resurfaces: how is identity produced? Lelia does not believe that words shape her son, but is indignant when something else is stuffed into Mitt’s mouth. She then proceeds to give Mitt words - she tells him how wonderful
he is. Unfortunately, the actions do not save Mitt at the end of the day, but the scene is included for a reason. To Henry, words very much form relationship and people. This entire, renarrated scene shows the extent to which Henry believes his identity relies on other people’s words.

For example, when Henry talks about love, he explains how the language codes a person’s intentions and actions. It controls a person’s agency and identity: “I never felt comfortable with the phrase, had a deep trouble with it, all the ways it was said. You could say it in a celebratory sense. For corroboration. In gratitude. To get a point across, to instill guilt in your lover, to defend yourself. you said it after great deliberation, or when you felt reckless. you said it when you meant it and sometimes when you didn’t. You somehow always said it when you had to” (112-13). The words, normally associated with goodwill, are used like a weapon. “To get a point across.” Or “to defend.” To shine light through the wound that offsets everything, Henry illuminates his philosophy towards the words he must use to potentially build himself to recover from trauma. But will the copy-making prove effective or detrimental?

So now, I enter the wound. In the novel portion of *Native Speaker* that details trauma and Mitt’s death, the language becomes distinctly geological - new spaces are used as metaphors and described and portrayed in this section. It resounds with a quote from my previous chapter regarding language as a “natural ore” from which to dig – it seems that Henry excavates those moments in response to the proposition he makes in displaying himself.\(^8\) The continuous connotations of separate spaces help build the new setting the stage opens to in Henry’s reflections and narration of Mitt’s death. And then, Henry enters the space as a character. “I would let myself wander over the ground of what happened” (104). When he replays the scene in the new, dramatized, crèche - birth - set-up, Henry is alone. He is free from outside connotations

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\(^8\) Page 15 of this thesis.
or associations that drag him in the opening of the novel. Lelia is not, so-to-speak, on set. Henry needs her next to him as “bodied up, but off in another world” (105). This separation also explains Lelia’s lack of language in Henry’s little world, in his mind’s recreations of the scene. It also takes away any authority she may present over Henry’s identity because of the list in the beginning of the novel. Thus, Henry’s isolation in this scene is, through form, an announcement of control, and freedom from other characters’ imaginaries and perspectives possible in this moment.

Henry Park rewrites and repositions death via the geological language. “Here we are strewn about in the lengthy expanse of an archipelago, too far to call one another, too far to see” (106). In this quote, Henry describes the pain of the living and remaining in the presence of the dead. The archipelago creates an image of disconnection, of isolation; the reader zooms out to see the entire chain of islands and must physically render that new space. It also aligns well with Cathy Caruth’s description of trauma as witness: “…since the murder is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (17). Not only does the image of the archipelago ramify an image of separation in spaces that seem related, but also it literally creates a new place and time in order for the murder of Mitt Park to be “fully evident.” Once again, it becomes a new form of visual setting that Henry must create to cope with the accident. Furthermore, because the language establishes a new setting, it once again marks this moment as the origin point of the rewriting of this narrative. Inevitably, because it was his son, it’s tied to Henry’s own identity and so the narrative ends up also being an exploration of his place in this new space of the narrative.

In a description of his coping mechanisms post-accident, Henry as narrator illuminates what that origin setting might look like. By using a point of physical intimacy between himself
and Lelia, the setting becomes the clearest clue to Mitt’s death as beginning of this novel. It is most ideal in relaying those ideas: their procreation is what brought Mitt into this world, and Henry and Lelia are trying to cope for the loss. Additionally, the scene also mimics the way in which Mitt leaves the world.

“In the bed, in the space between us, it was about the sad way of all flesh, alive or dead or caught in between, it was about what must happen between people who lose forever the truest moment of their union. Flesh, the pressure, the rhymes of gasps. This was all we could find in each other, this the novel language of our life” (106).

This passage is the only moment when he explicitly mentions a renewal in language. “This was all we could find in each other, this the novel language of our life” (106). While what comes previous may also be a portrayal of desperate intimacy between Henry and his wife, note that the descriptions of such intimacy are familiar. The scene highlights and seals the death-life hybrid and power struggle that seems innate in all of the language in Native Speaker.

“It was about what must happen between people who lose forever the truest moment of their union” (106) is a sentence that stands in both strands of time, of Henry’s narrator and character. Not only does the statement preface and foreshadow how the following sentence cruelly mimics Mitt’s final moments on earth, but also it speaks frankly about the physical coping mechanisms of Henry and Lelia. “Gasping” as a description in the following sentence comes at an earlier moment when one of the children who suffocates Mitt cannot comprehend his action. “A boy to my side was crying fitfully and telling me between gasps how they didn’t mean to stay on him as long as they did” (105). Furthermore, “flesh, the pressure, the rhymes of gasps” are all similar to actions that would describe a dog-pile. “[Lelia] knew what to do, what to do to me, that I was Mitt, that then she was Mitt, our pile of two as heavy as the balance of all those boys who had now grown up” (106). It is probably the last thing Mitt hears before he dies. And in order to make up for the space Mitt leaves behind, Henry and Lelia reenact the death.
Creche comes to mind. Once again, there is a theme of birth made out of the death. The form is a fat hint. The new language, the novel, becomes an original copy to fill the space that Mitt has left behind. In the final chapter, Henry Park narrates, “This is a city of words” (344), confirming that the reconstruction of New York in his novel (or possibly “This” referring directly to the novel) is necessary through new words and new language.

And, in a grander scheme of things, the geological aspects of the new language reflects the diasporic and confusing parts of Henry Park’s background and family history. Archipelagos are collections of islands, sometimes ones that had nothing previously to do with one another except vicinity. Before archipelago, Henry describes the setting as “narrow and broken” (106). The visualization of islands for the reader helps accomplish the certain isolation Henry feels in the aftermath of Mitt’s death. It is a new sort of setting his character must navigate; in order to process, the narrator must recognize the death but separate himself from the actual event.

“Archipelagos” give a great confirmation as to how such a task is accomplished. The description occurs partway through Henry’s analysis of the accident, and right after his character version realizes that there is nothing possible to be done to save Mitt. The living on the ground have no choice but to parse through the “narrow and broken” remnants of their memories.

And so, in the “novel language” of Henry and Lelia’s lives, in the mornings after that “brought sober hope” (106), Henry suddenly switches into the present tense imperative. Reflections and ponderings on Mitt’s death transform into commands. “Isolate the wonderments, the curiosities of his death; they will help you see. Shed sentimentality. Stop this falling in love with fate. Reside, if you can, in the last place of the dead” (106). These self-inscribed commands are clearly the aftermaths and waking reflections of his need to separate himself from certain memories.
But the way Henry suggests to culminate these imperatives casts the reader responsible. All of a sudden, he begins addressing a “you.”

“Reside, if you can, in the last place of the dead. Maybe this way: A crush. You pale little boys are crushing him, your adoring mob of hands and feet, your necks and heads, your nostrils and knees...You can hear the attempt of his breath, that unlost voice, calling us from the bottom of the world” (107).

All of a sudden, the reader is addressed as a “you,” as a part of this “adoring mob” responsible for the death of Mitt Park. Henry addresses himself as this collective “you.” But Henry can also visualize and narrate for us this moment and not the moment of his son’s death. This focalization and sudden turn of point of view implies this spot as an “origin” of sorts in another way: Henry is directly addressing the imagined reader. And the imagined reader manifests as the killers of Mitt, suffocating any form of expression - like a mask. The end of the passage highlights the disappearance and struggle of voice to pass through. The reference is not unlike the language and narration patterns of Henry as he writes the novel, and the strangulations and tensions Henry must undergo in order to finish. But because this moment he shines a light on that process and surfaces these tensions in a very clear, direct way, it must be a beginning point.

In this moment, Henry points out the failure of the narrative as a coping mechanism for the “individual” trauma because it only serves one type of a narrative. The novel, Native Speaker, becomes an original copy to fill the space that Mitt has left behind. But even though we’ve figured out the origin, we’re reading it still in the copy of the experience. And that’s just a part of the healing process. The copy-making is necessary. Painful, but necessary. And detrimental only because of the writer’s imaginations about the reader’s inhibitions. But because of his unique-copy form, Henry navigates the reader successfully through his traumatic moments and simulates the pain he must endure to recover his own voice.
Conclusion

Thus ends my analysis of *Native Speaker* via agency-filled copy-making as recuperation from trauma, as much of critical analyses regarding migrant literature expects such ruptures and traumatic moments. But in the larger context, to what extent does the unique circulation and pedestal-placement of *Native Speaker* in the American and western market reflect certain expectations of those award-givers and the imagined readers? It is not a question my thesis attempts to answer, but certainly a relevant one to end with as the words “transnationalism,” “globalism,” and “cosmopolitan” begin dominating political and literary spheres.

Are there stories of migrant identities sans lesions and ruptures, or are they inherent in the development of the migrant, or overall human experience? I believe, yes – they are not specific to the physical mover, though I cannot speak for the extents of pain different movers undergo. We are, after all, migrants of time.  

And perhaps the change through vulnerability *Native Speaker* expresses is an important lesson when piecing together our own narratives.

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**Works Cited**


