

Chapter Two

PLAGUE: TOXIC CHIVALRY, CHINATOWN CRUSADES, AND CHINESE/JEWISH SOLIDARITIES

THIS CHAPTER TRACES intertwined histories of sinophobia and antisemitism in the age of “Yellow Peril” and social anxieties about plague and public health at the turn of the twentieth century. I trace how Chinese and Jewish diaspora solidarity movements emerged and took action in response to a geopolitical environment that vilified racialized urban minorities as sources of physical contagion and moral corruption. The essays and ethnographic writings of Chinese American author Wong Chin Foo and the journalism and short stories of Sui Sin Far (born in England to a white English father and a Chinese mother) combat the dehumanization of Chinese communities throughout North America, and both authors critique the era’s medievalizing discourses that support harmful forms of white Christian supremacy.

Bubonic Plague Returns: Sinophobia and Antisemitism

In the year 1900, the bubonic plague struck San Francisco’s Chinatown. As the first modern outbreak of the epidemic approached the west coast of North America, news reports sparked widespread fears over public health and the corrupting forces of crowded urban environments. The Sunday edition of the *New York Journal* (March 18, 1900), owned by William Randolph Hearst, featured the headline “Black Plague Creeps Into America,” accompanied by medieval iconography and biblical quotations.¹ Reports describing “bubonic plague” as “the dreaded ‘black death’ of the Orient” stoked public fears in the age of “Yellow Peril,” a set of cultural discourses throughout Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand that associated Asians collectively with socioeconomic threat, disease, and contagion.² In one vivid example, the *Lincoln County Leader* (May 11, 1900) featured an illustrated map of the “Progress of the Plague Across the Pacific” from Australasia toward North America, stating that “[o]nce the plague gets a foothold among East Indians or Chinese coolies it is almost impossible to check it, except with the extermination of the population affected.”³ An illustration accompanying these headlines reveals “How Russia Cures the Bubonic Plague,” depicting a group of

1 Risse, *Plague, Fear, and Politics*, 118.

2 “Chinatown Is a Menace to Health!,” *The San Francisco Call*. Subheadings read “Physical Assimilation Impossible,” “Grave Danger of Over-Production,” “Crowding Out Americans,” and “Question Involves Our Civilization.” For an anthology of “Yellow Peril” texts and resources, see Tchen and Yeats, *Yellow Peril!*

3 “Scourge!,” *Lincoln County Leader*.

soldiers with their guns aimed to execute a group of “[un]fortunate coolies” who carry the “terrible disease.”⁴

When reporters and government officials used phrases along the lines of “Black Plague”—and envisioned the prospect of “extermination” of entire populations deemed a threat to public health—these “Yellow Peril” discourses recalled violent scapegoating rhetorics of the medieval European past. In Western Europe, disparate origin myths describing the fourteenth-century spread of the so-called Black Death had ascribed the source of what they called in their own time the great pestilence (*pestis*) or mortality (*mortalitas*) to somewhere in Asia, and accounts of disease transmission claimed that the plague entered into Western Europe through port cities, with European writers associating the disease itself with black rats and moral depravity.⁵ In one notorious version of this origin myth, Sicilian chronicler Michele da Piazza ascribes the arrival of the pestilence “at the port city of Messina” in October 1347 to “Genoese galleys, fleeing our Lord’s wrath which came down upon them for their misdeeds,” who brought with them “a plague that they carried down to the very marrow of their bones.”⁶ Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani (ca. 1348) ascribes the “pestilence” to Asian origins, stating that “God’s justice fell harshly among the Tartars [Mongols], so much that it seemed incredible,”⁷ and “at Silvas [in Anatolia], it rained an immeasurable quantity of vermin ... all black and with tails, some alive and some dead,” emitting a foul “stench” and all of those “who fought against the vermin fell victim to their venom.”⁸ French physician and medical authority Guy de Chauliac (1363) describes a great “mortality” that “overtook the whole world, or nearly all of it,” which “began in the East, and like shooting arrows it passed through us on its way west.”⁹

By ascribing the “pestilence” to foreign bodies and black vermin, and describing the disease as deeply ingrained in the bodies of those who transport it, Western European discourses of plague participate in what Geraldine Heng calls an essentializing process of biopolitical “race-making.”¹⁰ European writers circulated an array of discourses for describing “foreign” threats by associating plague with corpses, vermin, or “hordes,” in addition to adopting racializing sensory discourses of smell,¹¹ in order to construct a dehumanizing and morally coded discourse of invasion and urban contagion (and interpreting the transmission or acquisition of the disease itself as a sign of divine

4 Ibid.

5 On the Black Death as a global pandemic via genetics and the history of medicine, see Green, “Making Black Death Global”; Green, “Learning How to Teach the Black Death.”

6 Aberth, *Black Death*, 29. (Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, ed. Antonino Giuffrida (Palermo: ILA Palma, 1980), 82, 86.)

7 Ibid., 19. (Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta, 3 vols. (Parma: Bembo, 1990–1991), 3:486–88. Translated by Aubrey Threlkeld.)

8 Ibid., 20.

9 Ibid., 64. (Heinrich Haeser, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Medizin und der epidemischen Krankheiten*, 2 vols. (Jena: Mauke, 1853–1865), 2:175–76.)

10 Heng, *Invention of Race*, 3–4 et passim.

11 Heng, *England and Jews*, 71–72 et passim.

punishment). As the plague progressed throughout medieval Europe, scapegoating of vulnerable urban populations resulted in physical violence, most notoriously through massacres of Jews and segregation of “lepers” or people who exhibited symptoms of what we might now interpret as Hansen’s Disease.¹² In a long view of histories of plague and dehumanization, the *Lincoln County Leader*’s reference to the “extermination of the population [of] Chinese coolies” who transmit the bubonic plague, supported by a chronology of “The Plague in History” that includes the “pestilence” in the fourteenth century moving “from Arabia” through “Asia Minor” before claiming “25,000,000 victims in Europe,”¹³ exploits journalistic medievalism for alarmingly racist ends.¹⁴

In the age of “Yellow Peril,” the resurrection of medievalizing origin myths for disease transmission presents white Europeans as the lamentable “victims” of a foreign threat, creating a fiction of what Cord J. Whitaker in a related context calls “a golden age of white racial homogeny ... a fantasy [medieval] era organized by the notion of white innocence” that cultivates “a prevailing sense of white victimhood” in which “all non-whites are aggressors” or existential threats while “whites are blameless victims.”¹⁵ The vilification of “Chinese coolies” in the early twentieth century blaming Asian “hordes” for bringing disease upon “victims in Europe” revives medieval European forms of racial scapegoating. More recently, modern journalists writing during the outbreak of the global COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic in 2020 have used fourteenth-century European accounts of the bubonic plague’s alleged origins to launch their own interpretations of the social consequences of the so-called Black Death, and academic medievalists such as Su Fang Ng and Mary Rambaran-Olm have exposed how such modern narratives of disease transmission can replicate the xenophobic propaganda that medieval writers promoted in their own day.¹⁶

In response to the bubonic plague outbreak at the turn of the twentieth century, public health discourses regarding Chinatowns—in port cities around the globe—sought to scapegoat urban ethnic minorities and to quarantine the perceived threats (medical, social, and cultural) that these populations posed, and the era’s discourses about Chinatowns have a long prehistory in the medieval ghetto itself.¹⁷ In *Writing the Ghetto: Class, Authorship, and the Asian American Ethnic Enclave*, Yoonmee Chang frames the “China-

12 Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*; on medieval leprosy, see Green and Hsy, “Disability, Disease, and a Global Middle Ages.”

13 “Scourge!,” *Lincoln County Leader*, May 11, 1900.

14 When the plague appeared in Honolulu’s Chinatown, *The Hawaiian Star* featured the headline “Bubonic Plague, Breed of Filth, Here.” It also notes that the rat is a “powerful medium for the propagation of the disease.” *The Hawaiian Star* (Honolulu, Hawai’i), December 12, 1899. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress; <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015415/1899-12-12/ed-1/seq-1/>.

15 Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 3.

16 Ng, “Detention Islands”; Rambaran-Olm, “‘Black Death’ Matters.” See also letters to the editor of the *New Yorker* by Carol Symes, July 15, 2020, <https://twitter.com/medievalglobe/status/1283531803073171456>; and Elly R. Truitt, July 16, 2020, <https://twitter.com/medievalrobots/status/1283835800799649792>.

17 Shah, *Contagious Divides*; Risse, *Plague, Politics, and Fear*; Echenberg, *Plague Ports*.

town” in predominantly white anglophone societies as a ghetto, challenging a persistent modern resistance to “naming Chinatown, and other Asian American ghettos more generally, as slums or ghettos.”¹⁸ The term “ghetto” first denotes an ethnic enclave or segregated community in reference to the Jewish quarter in Venice in 1516 but precursors to the term “ghetto” exist in other European languages, such as the ill-defined “Jewerye” situated amidst “Cristen folk” within a certain “greet cite [in] Asie” (a great city in Asia) as described in Chaucer’s fourteenth-century Middle English “Prioress’s Tale.”¹⁹ Over time the term “ghetto” has shifted targets among divergent ethnic and racial minority groups including European Jews and African Americans, and the idea of the “ghetto” is repeatedly deployed as a biopolitical tool to manage vulnerable groups through socio-economic disenfranchisement, segregation, and urban violence.²⁰ The racial discourse and medievalism surrounding plague upon its modern emergence in Chinatowns suggest how global histories of sinophobia and antisemitism are intertwined, with Jewish and Chinese diaspora communities constructed as threatening contagious “others.”²¹

Dehumanizing discourses of invasion and infestation did not only occur in the context of plague or disease; economics also played a key role in casting racialized minority groups as physically undesirable and socially corrupting. Mark Twain’s “Concerning the Jews” (1899) observes that a long history of global antisemitism has “the business aspect of a Chinese cheap-labor crusade,”²² and cultural historian Hsuan L. Hsu notes how Twain’s observation “not only indicates parallels between the treatment of these ethnic groups but also avows that the racialization of Chinese and Jewish diasporas was rooted in anxieties about economic competition and falling wages.”²³ As discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese American activist Wong Chin Foo publicly challenged the anti-Chinese labor organizer Denis Kearney to a duel, and Kearney’s use of the epithets “low blackguard” and “almond-eyed leper” to reject Wong’s challenge shows how readily xenophobia and racism exploit the rhetoric of disease. Aggrieved masculinity and white Christian supremacy combine to form a toxic chivalry—with whiteness itself as the harmful condition.

My term “toxic chivalry” refers to the particular resonance of toxicity in histories of anti-Chinese racism and white anxieties about illness, disability, and corruption that Chinatowns provoke, a set of cultural phenomena that critical race scholar and queer theorist Mel Y. Chen has richly explored.²⁴ I use terms such as “toxic medievalism” and

18 Chang, *Writing the Ghetto*, 25.

19 Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, “Prioress’s Tale,” lines 488–89.

20 Schwartz, *Ghetto: History of a Word*.

21 Renshaw, “Antisemitism and Sinophobia”; Sheshagiri, “Modernity’s (Yellow) Perils.” The “Fu Manchu” stereotype, invented by English novelist Sax Rohmer (pen name of Arthur Henry Ward), was famous globally by 1913. Rohmer’s *Tales From Chinatown* (1922) opens with a wily Jew and demonic Chinaman as co-conspirators in the underbelly of London’s Chinatown. See also Bae and Tseng-Puterman, “Black-Asian Internationalism.”

22 Twain, “Concerning the Jews,” 531.

23 Hsu, *Comparative Racialization*, 21.

24 Chen, *Animacies*, 159–88, esp. 169–71.

“toxic chivalry” along the lines of present-day intersectional feminist analysis of toxic masculinity, i.e., the critique of the pervasive harms of ideas of “manliness” that are associated with “oppressive, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic” forms of violence, to name just a few.²⁵ Crucial to this chapter is an awareness of what Chang calls “the structural race, class, and gender inequities that materially and affectively aggrieve Chinatown life,”²⁶ and my analysis shows how systems of racial and gendered oppression interact within Chinatown spaces.

Racializing Urban Space

During the age of “Yellow Peril,” urban space itself became racialized, and medievalizing discourses were one form of propaganda constructing Chinatowns as corrupting ghettos set apart from white Christian spaces. *The California Pilgrimage of Boston Commandery Knights Templars* (1884), an ethnographic narrative of modern-day white Knights Templar making a tourist visit to San Francisco in 1883, contrasts the Gothic and medieval beauty of Eurocentric architecture to Chinatown squalor. The Masonic Temple on Montgomery and Post looks “like an old castle of the Middle Ages,”²⁷ and a grand welcome arch on Market Street demarcates the parade route as white space: an “immense but beautiful specimen of Gothic architecture” bears an “inscription in gold on a black ground, ‘*In hoc signo vinces*’” [the imperial Latin phrase, meaning “in this sign you shall conquer”] beneath a red Maltese cross.²⁸ By contrast, Chinatown is a “labyrinth of passages” with “subterranean chambers and narrow alleys” where “Mongolians are packed in the sty-like dens, like herrings in a box” and along the curbs are “gutters ... which threw off a pungent odor and lighted up the scenes of barbaric peculiarity” full of “dark-visaged pagan[s].”²⁹ The crowded environments of Chinatown, created by racist legislation restricting Chinese inhabitants to a small section of the city, are described through dehumanizing representations of living space.

Such forms of racializing urban environments informed poetic medievalism as well. A travel account from 1883 reports that an organization associated with the anti-Chinese Knights of Labor in San Francisco disseminated engravings depicting a personified “America blowing a Chinaman from a gun” with the “following doggerel” underneath: “Blow loud your trumpets, / Beat well your drums, / And let the cannons roar; / The Mongolian Hordes / Shall never again / Invade our Golden Shore.”³⁰ Such doggerel employs violent and militaristic imagery to endorse forced exclusion of Chinese, and later forms of medievalizing verse would further demarcate racialized urban spaces. *Lays of Chinatown* (1899), composed by physician George Macdonald Major, contrasts

25 Gilchrist, “What Is Toxic Masculinity?”

26 Chang, *Writing the Ghetto*, 113.

27 Roberts, *California Pilgrimage*, 167.

28 Ibid., 169.

29 Ibid., 157.

30 Adams, *Our American Cousins*, 309.



Figure 3: Old Saint Mary's Cathedral and Chinese Mission, San Francisco's Chinatown. Built in Gothic Revival style ca. 1854 on stone foundations from China, the church stands across from the Sing Chong Building built in "Oriental" style just after the 1906 earthquake. July 2019. Photo by the author.

New York's Chinatown to an idealized medieval Britain. Major's "Westminster Abbey" casts the poetic speaker as a "pilgrim" who has come "far from my native land" in order "to worship at the shrine" of Poets' Corner which stands as an architectural-spatial monument to "Chaucer's golden morn" and glories of "the English tongue."³¹ White anglophone peoples are collectively racialized throughout this poem, as the "Anglo-Saxon soul" and the "race of Alfred [the Great] and of [George] Washington"³² spreads across continents and asserts dominion over all peoples including "China's millions walled [in] by custom."³³ The grand medieval architecture of Britain and Europe is a rhetorical cornerstone for the racial construction of Chinatown as a threatening ghetto, an alien presence within the modern city "walled in" by strange customs.

The opening poems within Major's collection, evoking medieval forms, juxtapose the fantasy of an exotic Chinatown—the "[g]olden legends of a place / Full of romance ... Chinatown, O Chinatown"³⁴—with the disenchanted physical reality of experiencing the space: "Ramshackle houses, brick and wood, / Where hides Disease with shroud and hood ... mucky streets and garbage lanes ... pungent, sickening opium fumes ... this is Chinatown."³⁵ Major's dedicatory epistle blithely employs racial epithets for Jewish, Chinese, and Asian immigrants hurrying throughout the city: "[jostling in] that o'ercrowded place" are the "pig-tailed Chinaman, the Jew, / The Lascar [South Asian], Jap, and Arab, too."³⁶ This busy mix of ethnic minorities and "Oriental" communities of color fill a perceived space of urban blight. Through such representations across predominantly white anglophone cities (London, New York, and San Francisco), a crowded, filthy, dark, and "pagan" Chinatown populated by "heathens" and Jews marks a contrast with clean, spacious medieval spaces coded as white and Christian. Ethnographic writing and poetry conspire to racialize urban space.

Wong Chin Foo, a longtime resident of New York's Chinatown, offers a vision of his home environment countering accounts by white contemporaries—and he suggests how sinophobia and antisemitism intersect as systems of prejudice. Debunking "Yellow Peril" discourses aligning Chinese with filth, rats, and barbarism, Wong embarked on a quest in May 1883 to critique the anti-Chinese "libel" or ubiquitous false perception that Chinese ate rats, and the launch of his newspaper *The Chinese American* first published in New York in February 1883 propelled him into leadership against the "crusade against the men of Chinatown" by Mott Street's Catholic Church of the Transfigura-

31 Major, *Lays of Chinatown*, 114. Major's poem "Robert Burns" praises "my childhood's poet," noting "in my veins there runs some Highland blood" and it "grips my heart to hear a Scottish song" (Ibid., 201); he envisions the "blue-domed sky" of Scotland with a "Highland Mary, in the hawthorn bowers," hearing "some nightingale" singing "the bard's 'Mary in Heaven'" surrounded by the "white light" of "Religion" (Ibid., 202).

32 Ibid., 115.

33 Ibid., 119.

34 Ibid., 17.

35 Ibid., 18.

36 Ibid., 12.



Figure 4: Transfiguration School, Catholic parochial school associated with the Church of the Transfiguration on Mott Street in New York's Chinatown. Situated in a formerly Irish and Italian immigrant parish, the church now serves the largest Catholic Chinese-speaking congregation in the US. November 2019. Photo by the author.

tion accusing Chinese men of corrupting young white girls.³⁷ Throughout the European Middle Ages, “blood libel” traditions (false stories accusing Jews of murdering Christian children to use their blood in religious rituals) incited violence against Jews that continued for centuries, and in his own day Wong addresses how the so-called “rat libel” with its vilifying associations of social corruption contributes to violence against Chinese.³⁸

In his aim to debunk “rat libel” and change how audiences think about Chinatown as a space and cultural community, Wong’s “The Chinese in New York” (1888) depicts

³⁷ Seligman, *First Chinese American*, 101.

³⁸ Ibid. The term “rat libel” comes from Seligman.



Figure 5: Doyers Street (between Pell Street and Mott Street) in New York's Chinatown today. Wong Chin Foo lived near here and describes Mott Street vividly in "The Chinese in New York" (1888). April 2019. Photo by the author.

the environment in and around Mott Street, offering an autoethnographic corrective to white-authored accounts of Chinatown travel.³⁹ Assuming the position of a "native informant" while strategically employing an objective third-person voice, Wong discusses Chinese hygiene and grooming, religious worship, food preparation, and rich food traditions—dismantling myths of eating rats and opium consumption. "The hygienic functions of cooking elevate the kitchen director in China to high social status,"⁴⁰ Wong states, noting the quality of dining in New York's Chinatown: "There are eight thriving Chinese restaurants which can prepare a Chinese dinner in New York almost with the

³⁹ Wong, "Chinese in New York."

⁴⁰ Ibid., 305.

same skill as at the famous ‘Dan quay Cha Yuen’ (Delmonico’s) of Shanghai or Canton.”⁴¹ Most importantly, Wong addresses ghettoization by implicating white Christians in self-segregation: “Chinatown is the most interesting corner of the ‘Melican man’s’ metropolis—the little world composed of every variety of Christians, heathen, Irishmen, and other savages.”⁴² By listing “Irishmen” among “other savages,” Wong signals the hypocrisy of anti-Chinese violence by Irish American men, including the “rat libel” campaign by the neighboring Church of the Transfiguration, and he ironizes white discourses of Chinatowns as “walled in” ghettos. By noting the “cosmopolitan tendency of New York” is “developing little foreign cities ... within our water-walls,”⁴³ Wong suggests how white Christians participate in ghettoization and “othering” of their own Chinese neighbors.

Wong’s sketch of New York’s Chinatown is consistent with his general strategy of rejecting white Christian supremacy. In the middle of his autoethnographic study, he states: “So long as a Chinaman continues a heathen he is generally honest,” but he warns his audience to “look out for him once he becomes ‘converted.’ He is said then to have the ‘devils’ of two hemispheres,” or the “shrewdness of both races, while his virtues are so confused that he finds it difficult to make use of them.”⁴⁴ In contrast to the missionary discourses about “rescuing” Chinatown residents from vice, Wong suggests that converted Chinese inherit the bad qualities of white Americans. Wong enacts resistance to Christian white hegemony through his own authority as a “heathen,” and the spaces that he calls “little foreign cities” in close proximity set the stage for forms of resistance to white Christian norms as well as opening up new kinds of intimacies among marginalized ethnic communities.

Shared Space: Chinese and Jewish Solidarity

The proximity of New York’s Chinatown and its historically Jewish neighborhood on the Lower East Side set the ground for cultural exchange and acts of solidarity between these two ethnic communities. As discussed in the introduction to this book, the Chinese theater in Doyers Street managed by Joseph H. Singleton, a Chinese American and naturalized US citizen,⁴⁵ hosted a performance fundraiser in May 1903 for the benefit of Jewish victims of the recent Kishinev pogrom (massacre of Jews) in what is now Chişinău, Moldova.⁴⁶ Contemporary news reports widely confirmed that the Kishinev massacre had been incited by “blood libel” narratives,⁴⁷ and the Chinese-language historical drama staged that night entitled *The Lost Ten Tribes* not only depicts Chinese sub-

⁴¹ Ibid., 304.

⁴² Ibid., 297.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 299.

⁴⁵ “Evidences Chinamen are Mentally Broadening,” 5.

⁴⁶ Seligman, “Chinese for Jews.”

⁴⁷ Ibid. On “blood libel,” see Heng, *England and Jews*; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

jugation by foreign rulers but also evokes the biblical dispersal of Jews.⁴⁸ This Chinese theater performance crafted in response to the violence of persistent “blood libel” traditions not only addressed harmful modern-day legacies of the medieval European past, but it also offered an urgent commentary on contemporary forms of oppression that Chinese and Jewish diaspora communities were experiencing around the globe.⁴⁹

This fundraiser in the Chinese theater—followed by a not entirely kosher Chinese dinner nearby, most likely in the famous Chinese Delmonico’s restaurant—provoked snide commentary by (white) journalists, who apparently didn’t fully grasp nor appreciate this solidarity between Chinese and Jewish communities. One sentiment widely repeated in newspaper coverage of this event (unattributable to any named source) stated: “As Shakespeare might have said, one touch of abuse makes the alien races kin.”⁵⁰ The surrogated kinship that the “alien races” of Chinese Americans and Jewish Americans expressed in this venue is a complex one, rooted in shared experiences of oppression, segregation, and urban violence yet also a complex reclaiming of medieval pasts. For American Jews in the audience, *The Ten Tribes* addressed persistent harms of “blood libel” on a global scale. For Chinese Americans (and converts to Christianity) such as Joseph H. Singleton, the fundraiser allowed for a conspicuous display of charity and status through political activism. The theater manager could publicize a maligned and misunderstood dramatic form with roots in medieval China, while also showing that Chinese Americans would stand up for Jews even if their white Christian peers would not.

Although Wong Chin Foo died years before this Chinese-Jewish solidarity event occurred, his essay “The Chinese in New York” praises the Chinese Delmonico’s restaurant, and Wong expressed an earlier vision of taking a Chinese theater troupe on the road not only to popularize this particular performance tradition but also to encourage cross-cultural understanding.⁵¹ In an article in the *New York Tribune* (1883), Wong expressed his hope that bringing a San Francisco Chinese theater troupe across the country would help “people to understand the other,” and he aimed to “establish the Chinese theatre in the United States” as a venue for “Chinese drama,” which is the “oldest in the world, going back to the first stages of recorded history.”⁵² Wong envisioned mobilizing the broad cross-cultural appeal of historical romance and the potential for Chinese theater to facilitate social change.

An informative literary commentary on acts of Chinese and Jewish solidarity in New York’s Chinatown comes from the contemporaneous author, journalist, and essayist most commonly known as Sui Sin Far (1865–1914). Born as Edith Maude Eaton in Mac-

48 Ibid.

49 On medieval antisemitism and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the COVID-19 pandemic, see Ng, “Border Walls and Detention Islands.”

50 Untitled, *Indianapolis Journal*, evoking Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*: “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin” (3.3.181).

51 Wong, “Chinese Stage”; Wong, “Chinese Drama,” August 28, 1883; Wong, “Produce Chinese Drama,” September 2, 1883. Seligman, *First Chinese American*, 126–27.

52 Seligman, *First Chinese American*, 126.

clesfield, UK, to a white English father and a Chinese mother, she evades simple identity categories and unlike Wong she did not specifically claim an identity as a “Chinese American” (nor “Chinese Canadian”), as such a term could not fully encompass her shifting subject positions.⁵³ Although she was able to pass as white, she chose to write her most famous works under the Chinese pseudonym Sui Sin Far (a transcription of the Cantonese 水仙花 for “water lily”)—among other pen names and fictive authorial personas.⁵⁴ Raised in a typically “English” manner, she moved at a young age to Montreal, then lived in Kingston, Jamaica, then locations throughout the US (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Boston) before relocating to Montreal. Her restless travel informs much of her works, which often explore Chinese immigrant communities throughout North America.

In a fictive work of journalistic travel writing published in the *Los Angeles Express* as “Wing Sing in New York City” (June 9, 1904), Sui Sin Far writes as a character named “Wing Sing” who is identified as an “American Chinaman.”⁵⁵ The narrator describes a visit to “Mott street” in Chinatown within “the Country’s Metropolis” and discusses a restaurant meeting where “Japanese, Chinese and Jews Affiliate in Common Cause.”⁵⁶ Wing Sing’s narrative, which takes shape as a stylized vernacular deviating from expected norms of standard American English, begins with an episode of sitting next to a “white man Jew” who feels a sociopolitical alignment of Japanese and Jews during the ongoing Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905): “he say he think the Japanese ... are the avengers of the wrongs the Jews suffer at the hands of Russians.”⁵⁷ Such a sentiment suggests that the eventual victory of the Japanese will constitute retroactive justice for antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence under the Russian Empire. Meanwhile, “Jews speak fine words to the Chinese” and the “Chinese merchants also contribute much to the aid of the poor Jews persecuted, as they say, by Russia.”⁵⁸ Wing Sing continues: “I find Jew people like Chinese food, and many go to the Chinese restaurants,” even if it all “seems strange, as the Chinese prefer the flavor of pork.”⁵⁹ Such commentary constructs Chinatown restaurants as key venues for intercultural exchange as well as sociopolitical solidarity.⁶⁰

In setting this Chinatown narrative in “the Country’s Metropolis,” Sui Sin Far retreads some of the same ground (literally) as Wong’s “Chinese in New York,” but through a reconfigured literary and geopolitical context. Sui Sin Far recognizes that Jewish Ameri-

53 Chu, *Assimilating Asians*, 100; Shih, “Seduction of Origins,” 49; Chapman, *Becoming Sui Sin Far*, xxiv.

54 Her sister, Winnifred Eaton, styled herself as “Japanese,” writing romances as Onoto Watanna (to commercial success). On the divergent trajectories of the sisters, see Ferens, *Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*; Chang, *Writing the Ghetto*, 61–66. On Watanna’s medievalism and *The Tale of Genji*, see Ganz, *Eastern Encounters*, 37–38 and 142–159.

55 Chapman, ed., *Becoming Sui Sin Far*, 223–25, at 223. (Sui Sin Far [Wing Sing], “Wing Sing in New York City,” *Los Angeles Express*, June 9, 1904, 6.)

56 Chapman, ed., *Becoming Sui Sin Far*, 225–27, at 225. (Sui Sin Far [Wing Sing], “Wing Sing in New York City,” *Los Angeles Express*, June 14, 1904, 6.)

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 226.

59 Ibid., 225.

60 Liu, “Kung Pao Kosher.”

cans have some claim to whiteness yet Jewish communities are also subject to prejudice and violence on a global scale. At the same time, the white Jewish man's praise for Japanese military power that rivals the might of Europeans hints at the idea that "honorary whiteness" could be extended to the Japanese in North America, a community who collectively enjoyed a more privileged status in the US and who were subjected to far less restrictive immigration laws than their Chinese counterparts.

This particular sketch follows within a week after "Wing Sing" recounts a Chinese Reform society meeting on Mott Street that names "Joe Singleton," praises a dinner at "the Chinese Delmonico," and discusses Chinese drama and white incursions into Chinatown spaces.⁶¹ The narrator visits "one Chinese theater ... very much the same as in San Francisco," asking one Chinese actor, a "bright fellow," whether "he be the good princess in the play" and he responds: "I the villain."⁶² All the "actors in Chinese theater of male persuasion," and he sees "plenty white men and two white women" inside the theater, as well as in the "joss house" where "plenty white people" are "much curious about things Chinese and sometimes their behaviour be not proper."⁶³ This literary version of the native informant critiques uninformed white intrusions into Chinese spaces (the theater and the space of worship), and this account offers some fuller context for appreciating the cultural conventions of Chinese drama on its own terms.

Although they both adopt autoethnographic postures, Wong and Sui Sin Far make strategically divergent choices in how they represent themselves and the predominantly male communities prevalent in Chinatowns. Wong uses an "objective" third-person voice that conforms to standard American English, while Sui Sin Far crafts for Wing Sing a "pidgin" or "accented" voice that oscillates between standard and nonstandard features. Although Chinese Americans such as Wong and Singleton aimed to recuperate Chinese drama and to promote its virtues, Sui Sin Far exposes some of the concerns that the homosocial spaces of "bachelor" societies and Chinatowns could provoke. The narrator states that all the Chinese actors are "of male persuasion" and a male actor could play the "good princess" or masculine "villain." Such a comment insinuates a potential for sexual deviancy or queer desire ("male persuasion"), confirming what social historian Nayan Shah calls "Chinatown's reputation for lascivious immorality" and "deviant" sexuality.⁶⁴ At the same time, the versatility of young male actors in this social context brings the conventions of the Chinese theater in alignment with historical English counterparts, such as Shakespearean and medieval performance practices.⁶⁵ Sui Sin Far's fictionalized visit to New York's Chinatown as "Wing Sing" creates new spaces for solidarity across ethnic groups, yet it also hints at white fears of the corrupting queer potentials of homosocial Chinatown spaces.

⁶¹ Chapman, ed., *Becoming Sui Sin Far*, 223–25, at 225. (Sui Sin Far [Wing Sing], "Wing Sing in New York City," June 9, 1904.)

⁶² *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶³ *Ibid.* On white audiences in Chinese theaters, see the introduction to this book.

⁶⁴ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 210; see also 77–104.

⁶⁵ On cross-dressing in Sui Sin Far's fiction, see Chapman, ed., *Becoming Sui Sin Far*, xlviii.

Chinatown Missions and Queer Domesticity

This final section turns to Sui Sin Far's fictional narratives, particularly those participating in medievalizing conventions of sentimental romance. As many scholars have observed, Sui Sin Far's fiction often seeks to use the genre of romance to humanize the Chinese in North America, and to urge audiences to sympathize with experiences of family separation, discrimination, poverty, and injustice. The author often engages with the anglophone medievalism of her peers. "Sweet Sin" (1898) ends with its biracial (Chinese and white American) protagonist sending a deathbed letter, a trope distantly evoking "the lily maid" Elaine of Astolat's posthumous letter to Sir Lancelot of the Lake in Arthurian narratives, including the versified retelling of this story in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.⁶⁶ Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* (1912) gathers together tragic romances and stories of mixed-race protagonists and families. In the story "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" set in Seattle's Chinatown, a young woman who is initially forbidden to marry the man she loves has the "American name" of Laura (sharing the name of the unattainable love object of Petrarch's sonnets) and a "Chinese name" of "Mai Gwi Far (a rose)," evoking the medieval French *Roman de la Rose*, and the story's characters repeatedly recite the poetry of Tennyson.⁶⁷

Sui Sin Far's Chinatown stories use medievalizing imagery and narrative structures to respond to classed and gendered norms constructing Chinese as unfit for citizenship. As Shah states: "The American system of cultural citizenship combined class discourses of respectability and middle-class tastes with heteronormative discourses of adult male responsibility, female domestic caretaking, and the biological reproduction legitimated by marriage."⁶⁸ I place my reading of Sui Sin Far's work in the context of contemporaneous women's writing on public health and rescue narratives in Chinatown, showing how the author addresses "Yellow Peril" discourses of disease, disability, and corruption that seek to exclude Chinese from white norms of "respectability" and "cultural citizenship."

"The Chinese Lily" (1908), originally published in *Out West Magazine* and ascribed to "Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far)," is set in San Francisco's Chinatown with exclusively Chinese characters.⁶⁹ "The Chinese Lily" (reprinted with emendations in 1912) might seem to conform to the genre of a sentimental romance (three characters, a romance plot, and a tragic outcome), yet it inverts these expectations. Most conspicuously, the central character is not a fair maiden but Mermei, a disabled and disfigured Chinese woman whose story explores intimacy between women and affective relationships beyond het-

⁶⁶ Chapman, ed., *Becoming Sui Sin Far*, 166–71. (Sui Sin Far [Sui Seen Far], "Sweet Sin: A Chinese-American Story," *Land of Sunshine* 8, no. 5 (April 1898): 223–26.) On the deathbed letter of Elaine of Astolat (or Ascolat), see Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, bk. 18, chap. 20, p. 435; Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, "Elaine," 147–22, esp. 212–17.

⁶⁷ Hsu, ed., *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 35–36. On this text's allusions to Tennyson and Dante among other poets, see Howard, "American Words."

⁶⁸ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 204.

⁶⁹ Eaton (Sui Sin Far), "The Chinese Lily," 508–10. In this first iteration of the text, the protagonist's name is "Tin-a" and the other woman is named "Sui Sin Far."

erosexual marriage.⁷⁰ The story bluntly introduces Mermei as a character unlike the others: “She was a cripple.”⁷¹ The narrator notes that a “fall had twisted her legs so that she moved with difficulty and scarred her face so terribly” that nobody except for her brother Lin John “cared to look upon it.”⁷² Mermei, restricted in mobility perhaps due to her injury or an undisclosed chronic condition, is enclosed in domestic space atop a building as if she were an imprisoned damsel: “Mermei lived in her little upstairs room [and] knew nothing of life save what [she] saw from an upstairs window” and she “could embroider all day in contented silence” if only she had company.⁷³ In “her mental portfolio” of thoughts,⁷⁴ it is clear Mermei desires companionship—but her company will not take the form of a male lover.

The story shifts upon the entry of “the most beautiful young girl that Mermei had ever seen,” who stands at the door “extending to Mermei a blossom from a Chinese lily plant.”⁷⁵ Mermei “understood the meaning of the offered flower, and accepting it, beckoned for her visitor to follow her into her room.”⁷⁶ The narrator notes: “She forgot that she was scarred and crippled, and she and the young girl chatted out their little hearts to one another.”⁷⁷ Such a moment reworks romance conventions in two ways. First, the beautiful maiden is subject to a woman’s gaze. Secondly, the reference to momentarily “forgetting” Mermei’s disability and deformity suggests that the audience might also almost forget that the fully humanized characters portrayed are Chinese, rather than the “universal” white subjects of anglophone literature.

The beautiful maiden intriguingly shares a variant of the author’s name: “Sin Far—her new friend, and Sin Far, the meaning—of whose name was Pure Flower, or Chinese Lily.”⁷⁸ When John Lin first “[beholds] Sin Far,” the text presents her as the proper erotic object of the male gaze: “her sweet and gentle face, her pretty drooped eyelids and arched eyebrows” make him “think of apple and peach and plum trees showering their dainty blossoms in the country that Heaven loves.”⁷⁹ The courtly blazon of medieval romance is eroticized and Orientalizing, associated now with an exotic beauty with her features implicitly racialized.

Lin John, the hardworking laundryman, fully emerges as a chivalric hero in the conclusion when Mermei’s building catches fire and he seeks to rescue her: “The uprising tongues licked his face as he sprung up the ladder no other man dared ascend.”⁸⁰ Both

70 Sui Sin Far, “The Chinese Lily,” in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, ed. Hsu, 129–32.

71 *Ibid.*, 129.

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*, 130.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Ibid.*, 131.

80 *Ibid.*

Sin Far and Mermei are inside but only one of them can fit on the ladder, and each offers to sacrifice herself for the other. “The ladder will not bear the weight of both of us,” says Sin Far, and Mermei responds: “But he loves you best. You and he can be happy together. I am not fit to live.”⁸¹ Lin John hesitates for “one awful second” and “his eyes caught the eyes of his sister’s friend”⁸² who we infer has sent a signal for him to save Mermei. In the end, Lin John notes: “I—I did my duty with her approval, aye, at her bidding.”⁸³ This tale of chivalric heroism and sacrifice demonstrates the nobility of familial duty over erotic love—and, curiously enough, the disabled woman is not sacrificed for the expected heterosexual pairing. Thwarting expectations that a disabled, deformed, or unwell Chinese woman is expendable and “not fit to live,” Mermei has a potential future—and the author recuperates Chinese masculinity in the process.⁸⁴

The author’s decision to name a protagonist “Sin Far,” along with Mermei’s allusion to a “mental portfolio,” marks an intertextual connection to Sui Sin Far’s autobiographical essay published within a year entitled “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian” (1909).⁸⁵ In this autobiographical text, Sui Sin Far reflects on the complexities of her biracial identity and notes that she has a chronic health condition, “prostrated at times with attacks of nervous sickness” with a “heart ... unusually large” and “the strength of my feelings [takes] from me the strength of my body.”⁸⁶ Later she remarks that episodes of “rheumatic fever” exact a toll on her body, and “I still limp and bear traces of sickness.”⁸⁷ Such a condition is not just physical, but psychic: “the cross of the Eurasian bore too heavily upon my childish shoulders.”⁸⁸ Hsu argues that this “excessive sentimentalism contradicts stereotypes about the Chinese, who are ‘said to be the most stolid and insensible to feeling of all races,’” and such “inordinate sensitivity to the suffering of others” makes the author “eminently qualified for her vocation as sentimental author.”⁸⁹ The queer intimacy between women in “The Chinese Lily,” one of whom bears the author’s pen name, suggests possibilities for stigmatized Chinese women beyond dehumanization and death. Reading the “Mental Portfolio” alongside “The Chinese Lily” shows how Sui Sin Far’s texts gloss one another. The proxy for the author is not just the beautiful maiden Sin Far but also the disabled Chinese Mermei who claims she is “not fit to live” and who can only be saved by a ladder that “cannot bear the weight” of both herself and her counterpart.

Sui Sin Far builds sympathy for Chinese characters within the medievalizing structures of sentimental romance, and her positioning of the Chinese laundryman Lin John

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 132.

⁸⁴ See also Sibara, “Alien Body in Sui Sin Far.”

⁸⁵ Sui Sin Far, “Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian,” in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, ed. Hsu, 221–33.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 224.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 229.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 224.

⁸⁹ Hsu, ed., *Mrs Spring Fragrance*, “Introduction,” 19.

as a chivalric hero is particularly clear in contrast to Chinatown rescue narratives by contemporaneous white female authors. Mabel Craft Deering's "The Firebrand: A Short Story of Old San Francisco" (1907) offers a fictionalized account of Donaldina Cameron, a white Presbyterian missionary who helped immigrant Chinese girls and women to escape enforced sex work.⁹⁰ This fictionalized hagiography forms part of a genre of Chinatown rescue narratives glorifying "white saviors" who save Chinese women from Chinese men—and this story is fascinating for its exploration of cross-racial relationships between women.

It should be noted that Miss Mabel Craft (as she was known before marriage) was known locally as a crusader and white savior who "stood forth as the champion of the social equality of colored women,"⁹¹ and a commitment to racial equality informs this narrative about Cameron. The story is narrated through the white missionary gaze. Situated within the safe house for women amidst the "motley background of the city's riff-raff," Miss Cameron sees a Chinese woman Jean Ho appearing at the doorbell and she thinks: "Is this a Chinese woman or a strapping boy masquerading in feminine dress?"⁹² Jean Ho, described as "a figure of fury," and "so strange a figure,"⁹³ and "a queer 'un,"⁹⁴ does not fit the stereotype of the stoic, unexpressive Chinese woman. Cameron thinks: "She needed only the cross and coat of mail to look a Joan of Arc."⁹⁵ Cameron's inner thoughts align queerness with Joan of Arc, the French medieval martyr-saint renowned even in her own day for her extraordinary status as a maiden who assumes the trappings of elite masculinity (such as arms and armor) and leads troops to victory.⁹⁶ Through this momentary glimpse into Cameron's thoughts, the narrator marks the verbal correspondence of two names (Joan of Arc and Jean Ho) that anticipates the unconventionally queer crusading role that this particular Chinese woman will adopt later in the story.

The interracial intimacies in this story are complex. Jean Ho loves one teacher named Miss Evelyn who is "a beautiful, fragile, blonde girl, with indomitable spirit in a delicate sheath," and she "sang beautifully [while] Jean Ho, the long-armed, the sombrely dressed, never tired of hanging over the piano like a lover."⁹⁷ This idealized figure of feminine beauty is "beautiful, fragile, blonde" yet also strong, and the "sheath" (hidden sword) metaphor and simile "like a lover" disclose a potential for queer intimacy. The subversive prospect of homosocial desire between women is superficially resolved after Jean Ho's conversion and marriage, after which she exhibits a "Caucasian fury,"⁹⁸ rescues one of her biological children from abduction, and delivers the child to the Mission to

⁹⁰ Deering, "The Firebrand."

⁹¹ "'Color Line,'" *San Francisco Examiner*, 1.

⁹² Deering, "Firebrand," 453.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 453.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 454.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Crane, *Performance of Self*, 73–106.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 456.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 460.

ensure her safety. This child, a daughter, becomes “one of the pets of the Mission” and “sings hymns for American visitors,” as beautiful and “gay as a butterfly.”⁹⁹ This white female missionary narrative of conversion, in broad terms, enacts a transformation of Jean Ho from a “heathen” stereotype (“figure of fury,” “strange,” “unexpressive,” and “queer”) into a “Caucasian fury” whose daughter helps to ensure the future of the Mission, and this progressive narrative of Chinese self-actualization relies upon a script of assimilation into heteronormative white Christian femininity.

The progressive impulse of white women’s missionary narratives places “The Chinese Lily” within a broader context of “Yellow Peril” fears of homosocial intimacy. The disabled and disfigured Mermei in “The Chinese Lily” could also be a “queer ‘un” due to her seeming desire for the company of women, and her weeping at the end of the story could disclose a mourning for her lost and impossible object of love (Sin Far). The fictive assimilation of Jean Ho into norms of white Christian heterosexuality and the persistence of Mermei’s thwarted and undisclosed desires add a racial dimension to these characters. Writing from an Asian American perspective, literature scholar David L. Eng and psychoanalyst Shinhee Han theorize racial melancholia as unresolved grief.¹⁰⁰ Eng and Han “[configure] whiteness as contagion” through a reading of the novel *Caucasia* (1998) by biracial author Danzy Senna—who, like the protagonists in her book, have a white mother and African American father—noting that the novel “connects assimilation to illness and disease.”¹⁰¹ If the “ideals of whiteness for Asian Americans (and other groups of color) remain unattainable,” then the perceived “processes of assimilation are suspended, conflicted, and unresolved.”¹⁰² In this situation, “melancholia” is an “unresolved process” in which “ideals of whiteness are continually estranged, [remaining] at an unattainable distance, at once a compelling fantasy and a lost ideal.”¹⁰³

In the context of racial melancholia and medievalizing romance, the biracial Sui Sin Far—who partially inserts an authorial namesake into her story “The Chinese Lily”—reveals how full belonging is impossible under the “condition” of white supremacy, and whiteness itself is revealed as the environmental harm. In “The Inferior Woman,” Sui Sin Far implicitly thematizes “Yellow Peril” discourses along such lines: “Prejudices are prejudices. They are like diseases.”¹⁰⁴ In “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” the white first-person narrator recounts a friend’s assessment of her sick (white) child: “There is no necessity for its being sick ... There must be an error somewhere.”¹⁰⁵ Reflecting moralized understandings of illness as divine punishment, she states: “Sin, sorrow, and sickness all mean the same thing,” and she claims that “[w]e have no disease

⁹⁹ Ibid., 461.

¹⁰⁰ Eng and Han, “Dialogue on Racial Melancholia.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 668.

¹⁰² Ibid., 671.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Sui Sin Far, “The Inferior Woman,” in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, ed. Hsu, 47–60, at 59.

¹⁰⁵ Sui Sin Far, “White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, ed. Hsu, 94–104, at 96.

that we do not deserve, no trouble that we do not bring upon ourselves.”¹⁰⁶ The narrator simply responds: “What had sin to do with [my child’s] measles?”¹⁰⁷ This conversation among white women marks a distinct contrast to the humane reactions of the Chinese man Liu Kanghi, whom the narrator later marries, who immediately has sympathy for the “[p]oor little baby,”¹⁰⁸ and by witnessing her child “grow[ing] amongst the little Chinese children” the narrator learns that “the virtues do not all belong to the whites.”¹⁰⁹

Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown fictions critiquing systems of prejudice and the era’s racialized discourses of public health anticipate what is now known as the social model of disability. Literary historians Jennifer C. James and Cynthia Wu define disability, within such a framework, as a “discursively engineered social category” that “call[s] attention to how built and social environments” disadvantage and harm “those with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments” and also “privilege those who are normatively constituted” along the lines of race, class, and gender.¹¹⁰ Consequently, understanding how “categories of race/ethnicity and disability are used to constitute one another” requires an awareness of how systems of oppression intersect.¹¹¹ In her own day, Sui Sin Far demonstrates that it is not any individual person’s disabled, disfigured, or diseased body that poses a “problem” that requires correction (or somehow signals deviancy or divine punishment); rather, it is a surrounding environment—an entire set of legal and political structures—that harms racialized individuals and disadvantages entire populations.

“The Chinese Lily” almost conforms to a normative chivalric romance—yet not quite. Even when Sui Sin Far is writing in the Chinese male persona of “Wing Sing,” she recognizes Jewish American proximity to whiteness and implicitly acknowledges the partial access that Japanese can claim to honorary whiteness, all the while implying that whiteness itself is a condition that Chinese in North America can never claim. Whether she writes as an omniscient narrator or in the persona of a Chinese male narrator specifically, Sui Sin Far transforms “Yellow Peril” discourses to challenge her audience’s preconceptions, and her interests in cross-ethnic solidarities engage in a productive dialogue with works by Wong Chin Foo. Wong resists white Christian scripts of conversion and assimilation while also rebuking manifestations of toxic chivalry. Both authors not only humanize their Chinese characters, but they also open up possibilities for expansive forms of empathy with Jews, disabled people, and “others” stigmatized by rhetorics of contagion.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 99.

109 Ibid., 101.

110 James and Wu, “Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature,” 3.

111 Ibid., 4.

Engendering Community

Wong Chin Foo and Sui Sin Far—writing against the era’s medievalizing discourses of white Christian supremacy—use their journalism and autoethnographic publications to address dehumanizing discourses of “Yellow Peril” and plague, and they confront longstanding practices of racialized “othering” in urban spaces. Each author repurposes a submerged history of medieval antisemitic discourses within a modern urban context of “heathen” identities, segregation, and assimilation. Mindful of the potentials for queer intimacy through medievalism (journalistic and literary), my close readings of these authors trace strategies of addressing historical processes of dehumanization. Each writer asks what forms of racial belonging are available to Chinese people in North America, creating potentials for cross-ethnic and interracial alignments. In the process, they demonstrate how intersecting forms of structural oppression can engender new kinds of solidarity and community.