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Christine Lorre

Ordinary Tragedies in Madeleine Thien's "A Map of the City"

1 "Does my family have any hold on me?", Miriam asks herself at the beginning of "A Map of the City" (162), the novella that concludes Madeleine Thien's short story collection *Simple Recipes*[1]. This is the kind of question any young woman asks herself, but in Miriam's case, it also refers to her family's specific history of displacement: what difference does her parents' status as Indonesian-Chinese immigrants make to her life? The question has yet a third dimension for Miriam: does her father's pathological melancholy have any influence on her? Miriam's reflection is complicated further by her feeling of being caught in "the troubles of day-to-day life" that burden "ordinary people" (176). In giving this double edge to the story—the family's specific story as Chinese-Indonesian immigrants to Vancouver, and the ordinary character of Miriam's confusion—Thien adds to the genre of the immigration story: by relying on a narrative of the familiar, she avoids the trap of post-colonial exoticism[2] that she could have fallen into if she had exploited the potential for strangeness of the Chinese diaspora motif. She makes strangeness ordinary by suggesting links between the grief Miriam feels as a young adult, and the loss her father experiences as an immigrant. Indonesia, the place of Miriam's father's past, plays a key role in the story, but is kept at a distance: it is mediated in Miriam's reflection through pictures from everyday life—family photographs, postcards, newspaper pictures. Finally, Miriam realizes that strangeness is made up not simply of her parents' history before they came to Canada, but of the unknown in general, all of which can be charted on a metaphorical map of life.

1. Growing up and immigrating

2 "Does my family have any hold on me?" Miriam's meandering reflection on the extent of her family's influence on her brings back childhood memories of her father, which sometimes evoke youth, innocence and hope, and sometimes, bad luck and failure. As Miriam re-examines the bonds between her and her father, she comes to a better understanding of her feeling of guilt, and her confusion abates.

3 Many of Miriam's memories, even the ones from which she is absent as a child, are tinged with a double innocence—of childhood and of new beginnings in North America. For instance, her mother thinks of a bright future when seeing children play: "My mother would stand on the porch watching kids race their bikes up and down the back lane, and say, out of the blue, 'But isn't it so much cleaner here?'" (179) The mother's seemingly offhand remark, prompted by an ordinary scene, points at her sense that in Canada, even though she sometimes misses things Indonesian, she is far from the climate of political corruption that prevailed in Irian Jaya, where she immigrated from. Seeing children play in a safe environment and enjoy the sense of freedom their bikes provide, she can trust her own child's future will be stable.

4 In Canada, Miriam's father had the opportunity to make a fresh start. Snow is a rich symbol for these hopes and possibilities, for example in the haunting old snapshot of Miriam's father, "standing beside [the snowman he had created], one arm wrapped around its snowy body. Inside, the image, ghostly, stayed with me. My father in the snow, smiling for all the world to see." (216) For Miriam, this scene is emblematic both of her father's hopes as a recent immigrant, of the opportunities existing for his creative potential, but also, in hindsight, of his failure to achieve anything. The snow evokes freshness and innocence, of course, but for Miriam's father, it remains a blank, a ghost of hope.

5 The second-hand furniture store which constitutes the backdrop to Miriam's childhood years epitomizes this mix of hope and failure. It is a recurring memory in Miriam's narrative, a sign of her nostalgia for those years of her life, and for the complicity she then shared with her father. She recalls her vision of the store as a child, when it meant everything to her:

> I was six years old then, and I dreamed commercials. In my mind, my father was the owner of an exciting retail outlet. Soon the furniture store would be a household word: *Bargain Mart*. Parents would announce to their children that this weekend's excursion would be to *Bargain Mart*, and children across the city would look up from their Cream of Wheat and cheer. From where we lived in Burnaby, in the spill of houses beneath the mountain, to Maple Ridge and Vancouver, people would flock to my father's store, carting away sofas on their shoulders, tables in their arms. My father standing at the front, hands on his hips, young. (164)

6 She dreamt of excitement, prosperity, popularity, pride and happiness; a sign of her feeling loved and secure as a child. The shop seemed about to become part of the surrounding popular culture; to Miriam it meant social status and belonging. To her father, it could have meant the accomplishment of his dream of success as a salesman[3]. But years later, Miriam recreates the scene through memory very differently:

> Now, looking back, I see that the store had an impoverished look to it, that the couches were old and worn, and that my father, once so patient a salesman, had begun to speak to his customers with an air of quiet desperation. (186)

7 The father's state is reflected in the shop: Miriam sees that he was not a young hopeful anymore, but, like the couches, old. He was not the owner of an exciting retail store, but the impoverished owner of a second-hand furniture store. The atmosphere is not one of excitement, but of "quiet desperation." She realizes that her father quickly became a nostalgic immigrant trying to make it in Canada, and failing.

8 Miriam wonders about the reasons for her father's failing in his various business enterprises, which in turn caused her parents to separate. She comes to the conclusion that displacement was his bad luck: according to her, he experienced "the tragedy of place. To always be in the wrong country at the wrong time, the home that needs you less than you need it." (201-2) "Tragedy" implies that personal responsibility or incompetence are not directly involved in what happened: fate played a key role in a plot of which her father is the doomed counter-hero. However, this explanation is betrayed by other memories of Miriam's; for example the ambiguous moment in the furniture store (166-172), when an embarrassed customer found her sleeping in a closet storage room, hidden behind a curtain. This scene suggests that the father's indulging in his child's company was detrimental to his business, as were other weaknesses of his, for instance his not getting angry when Miriam would scribble on pieces of the furniture. His failures may not be entirely attributable to bad luck after all.

9 These elements point at Miriam's feeling of guilt for having contributed, involuntarily, to her father's failure. The father-daughter intimacy undermined his business, which he liked to tease her about, following the collapse of the All Day Grill restaurant:

> Perhaps because of this [the failure of the All Day Grill restaurant at the time of Miriam's stay in hospital as a baby], my father would often say that I had ruined his life…. When I tell people this, laughing, they shake their heads in disbelief. I suppose I can understand how these words might sound to a stranger. Insensitive. Cruel. But this is not so. Between my father and me there was always a tacit understanding. Despite the teasing, he had an unwavering faith in me. "My daughter, Miriam," he said to everyone. "When she grows up, she is going to buy her parents a big house. (165)

10 The faith the father puts in his daughter is part of the pattern of the immigration story: he, as a first-generation immigrant, is ready to do all he can for the benefit of his child, in the hope that she, of the second generation, will achieve material success, and eventually express her gratefulness to her loving parents. Miriam understands the implicit contract which binds her to them. But by adulthood, she doesn't seem to have accomplished her father's dream for her: after her marriage to Will, she still "loved the transience" of temp work (188).

11 Her guilt for having betrayed her father's hopes, and therefore contributing to the family's breakup, becomes pathological in her early twenties. In the opening of the story, she describes an obsession: "In the years after I left home, I used to glimpse my parents in unexpected places…. Of course it was never them" (161). Her vision reveals her attachment to the image of her parents together, before they separated; its obsessive nature is a symptom of her guilt for their separation. Her narrative translates the process through which she tries to come to terms with her grief: in the passage quoted previously, the break between the first two paragraphs

("Of course"), and the use of the form "I used to" in the first sentence, reflect her effort to draw a line between the past and the present time of the narration. She further analyzes how she felt in her early twenties:

> We had failed each other in so many unintended ways and then we had drifted apart…. So I kept my distance and thought from time to time how things might have turned out differently. If I had been the kind of daughter I never was, faithful and capable, who could hold a family together through all its small tragedies. (166)

12 Instead of being the daughter her father hoped she would become, Miriam felt the urge to move off the path he had set for her, cutting off her bonds to her family, leaving her father to his own grief, testing the scope of her freedom. If the relationship between Miriam and her father is typically one of immigration, as the father's dream of his daughter buying him a big house indicates, it also fits the universal pattern of the child wanting to "kill the father"[4], as the distance Miriam keeps shows. But her accomplishment of this act takes a dramatic literal turn when her father attempts suicide. This forces her to physically stand by him, and mentally re-examine their relationship and her attitude towards him until then:

> How could I change his circumstances? I didn't know and so I chose to withdraw. There were emotions that he carried—disappointment, regret—that I wanted gone from my present life, as if they had everything to do with him and they had no root in me. (209)

13 Miriam comes to realize that the grief she feels as a young adult is related to her father's past hopes and failures. Father and daughter have a similar response of nostalgia to their dissatisfaction with the present: Miriam is nostalgic for the innocence of childhood, but in her process of revisiting memories, she realizes that these early years were not the pre-lapserian time she imagined, but a complex period during which crucial bonds developed between herself and her father. As for her father, he is nostalgic for Indonesia, so that assessing how much of a hold her family has on her also implies for Miriam to understand what Indonesia means to him—and to her.

2. Pictures, nostalgia, mourning, and melancholy

14 Miriam undertakes no trip "back to her roots" in order to try to understand her father's nostalgia. The place of the past he longs for is mediated through pictures she encounters in everyday life: family photographs, postcards, newspaper pictures, news clips. As her reflection unfolds, these pictures set off the contradictions and dangers inherent to nostalgia.

15 In order to analyze the father's feelings, it is is worth examining the notion of nostalgia more closely. The word nostalgia originally referred to place, as Linda Hutcheon recalls in an essay entitled "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern": "*nostos*, meaning "to return home," and *algos*, meaning "pain"[5]". The father's longing for Indonesia, a place he considers as home, bears this first literal meaning. Over time, the sense of the word shifted, and it now generally refers to the relations between the past and the present in terms of loss and absence and of desire, as Hutcheon explains further:

> Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessability, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power…. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present.

16 The father's nostalgia reflects his mounting dissatisfaction with his present life in Canada more than any genuine attachment to Irian Jaya where he "lived for a short time" (171). When Miriam was six, she asked him if he missed Indonesia. "I only miss the fruit," he said…. "The country, I've almost forgotten." (171) But ten years later, Indonesia is where he returns, having experienced repeated failures in Canada after the loss of his furniture store, "the last business he would ever own" (187). Old photographs of Indonesia, representing "Indonesian plantations spread out under wide skies" (170), lured him into reimagining that time and place as a lost paradise. Miriam comments on her father's ritual of revisiting the past:

> He held on to those old photographs of Indonesia, and when he pulled them out, he examined them with an appraising eye. As if to see whether the photographs were true to the memory he carried, if a picture could ever do his country justice. (201)

17 The father "holds on to" the past, instead of "letting go" of it, an inherent part of the immigration process. The photographs are measured up against his memory of a pristine country, in terms of truth and justice, as if his memory was a record more faithful to past reality than the printed image. But ironically, his response to the pictures, as objects, modifies his memory, making him increasingly nostalgic about Indonesia. This is what Susan Sontag explains in her essay on photographs as "Melancholy Objects":

> As the fascination that photographs exercise is a reminder of death, it is also an invitation to sentimentality. Photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at time past.[6]

18 The past is revisited sentimentally, although the situation the father lived in was far from politically moral: he and his wife moved to Irian Jaya in the early 1960s, when they were in their early twenties. That is when the island was annexed by Indonesia through military force, in a move of colonization of the Irianese and their land. The parents were part of the Chinese-Indonesian minority on the island, which put them in the position of colonists in the community. The father fails to realize that he lived in an intenable position of privilege there, as the mention of the plantation on the picture suggests[7]. The photographs he holds on to do not convey the colonial reality, but a sentimental view of history, blurring its socio-economic dimension. As "melancholy objects," they feed his nostalgia.

19 Unlike her father, Miriam is aware of her parents' past position as colonizers in Irian Jaya and wonders, in adulthood:

> Some years ago, the students in Jakarta took to the streets, protesting the government. Had my family remained there, would I have been among those students, one more in that sea of faces? Or those nights when rioters set the Chinese shophouses on fire, that bitter violence, what might have become of us then? I did not know where we fit in, or on which side of the line we might have lived. (201)

20 Her parents' past obviously puts Miriam ill at ease. When her father eventually decides to go back, she admires his decision for its personal courage, calling it his "bravest act," because he finally "threw caution to the wind" (198). But she is reminded of Indonesia's violent and upsetting politics by news clips she sees at that time:

> That year, there was unrest in Indonesia. Small pockets of violence erupting, then brutally dealt with by the military. I saw clips of it on the news, a few seconds, a tiny window. The Irianese were still organized, still fighting Indonesian occupation though it seemed like no one noticed. I thought of Indonesia as the place of tumult, of unrest, where a military dictatorship muscled these disparate islands together, no matter the cost. (202)

21 As a Vancouverite, Miriam lives a fairly sheltered life, but the news clips bring into it a flitting sense of the unrest prevailing in Indonesia, a quick shot of its reality. Although she is aware that her view of the country, as seen through the reporter's camera, is limited and truncated ("a few seconds, a tiny window"), as well as focused on violence, the clips make her question and piece together the Indonesian present and her parents' past, putting their story in historical perspective. A few years later, at the time of the Timor referendum, pictures of Indonesia in the newpapers reflecting the political life of the country come to contradict further the image of "unfamiliar beauty" conveyed by the family album. And shortly after the explosion of violence in the region, the newspapers abound with "photographs of refugees, the widespread displacement" (213), of a different type from the one Miriam's parents experienced.

22 In contrast with the unfolding of Miriam's reflection on Indonesia, her father's view of the country withdraws further away from reality. The evolution of his grief, or nostalgia, may be analyzed in terms of melancholy, as opposed to mourning. The concepts of melancholy and mourning are used by the Chinese-American critic Anne Cheng, in *Melancholy and Race*; she relies for her argument on an essay by Freud which proposes two different kinds of grief:

> According to Freud, "mourning," is a healthy response to loss; it is finite in character and accepts substitution (that is, the lost object can be relinquished and eventually replaced). Mourning is healthy because, Freud tells us, "we rest assured that after a lapse of time, it will be overcome." "Melancholia," on the other hand, is pathological; it is interminable in nature and refuses substitution (that is, the melancholic cannot "get over" loss.) The melancholic is, one might say, psychically struck. As Freud puts it, "[i]n grief [mourning] the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself." Melancholia thus denotes a condition of endless self-impoverishment.[8]

23 Both Miriam's parents miss Indonesia at first; in that sense, it can be said that they are to some degree nostalgic for it. But the father's response to the grief of displacement evolves towards melancholy, wherease his wife completes a process of mourning: she misses things Indonesian, but over time she builds her life anew in Canada. She is hard-working, realistic, adaptable, successful at her work. Although Indonesia is the place she too longs for, she is aware of the political shortcomings of that country. In contrast, the father's grief is endless: after having to sell the furniture store, for years he "tried his hand at different careers," before going into real estate, where he also failed (190). Losses accumulate, his life keeps spiraling down, and melancholy looms large. But as Anne Cheng points out, following Freud's argument,

> this impoverishment is also nurturing…. The melancholic eats the lost objects—feeds on it, as it were…. The history of the ego is thus the history of its losses. More accurately, melancholia alludes not to loss per se but to the entangled relationship with loss. We might then say that melancholia does not simply denote a *condition* of grief but is, rather, a *legislation* of grief. (Cheng, 8)

24 A discrepancy points at this process of legislation of the father's grief. Although Miriam reports that "My parents (*jointly*) decided it was time to leave [Irian Jaya]" (180; parenthesis mine), her father later tells his wife, as their arguments become more frequent, that "it had always been her decision to leave Indonesia, and never his." (192) His personal attachment to Indonesia, stated in hindsight, justifies his grief. When he finally goes back, he sends Miriam a version of Indonesia that matches his distorted vision of it: "From Java, Irian Jaya, then back through Sumatra, my father sent me postcards. I marked his progress through those vivid pictures, the water buffalo and *padi* fields." (203) The picturesque images Miriam is sent is a confirmation of the discrepancy between the way her father imagines the country of his youth, and its political and economic reality. The postcards suggest that he has become a tourist in the country he considers as his own. In fact he doesn't manage to restart a life in Indonesia: he never secures a job there, and keeps asking his wife to wire him money. His attempt at starting over by recovering the imagined lost paradise of his youth was bound to fail.

25 The pictures of Indonesia which Miriam comes across elicit two types of response. The old photographs and the postcards are set, and therefore dead images. They offer a picturesque, sentimental view of reality, past or present. One likely response to them is nostalgia. On the other hand, the perceived ephemereality of newspaper pictures and news clips gives a sense of a changing world in which the old order is bound to be contested and, eventually, replaced.

26 The father is embarrassed towards his estranged wife and daughter when four years after leaving Vancouver, he ends up back there, finally calling it "home" (203). His suicide attempt is a desperate call for help from his family. The mother responds to it immediately, and forces Miriam, who is under shock, to stand by her father's side. During the days that she spends there, Miriam reflects on her relationship with her parents, and revisits her mental map of Vancouver—of her life.

3. The cartography of life

27 As Miriam's reflection unfolds, the metaphor of the map becomes a device she appropriates to lift herself above the burdensome day-to-day life[9]. Mental cartography becomes a way for her to get a hold of her life, instead of feeling her life has a hold on her.

28 Miriam wishes her relationships with her family had remained as simple as they seemed in childhood, and that she could represent them as straightforwardly as possible:

> Perhaps, knowing everything that has brought us here, I would redraw this map, make the distance from A to B a straight line…. But to do so would remove all we glimpsed in passing, heights and

> depths I never guessed at. That straight line would erase all our efforts, the necessary ones as well as the misguided ones, that finally allowed us to arrive here. (188)

29 To dream of a flawless route, of a straight line is pointless. Life is complex and rich; it takes an adequate metaphor to represent it, and the map as motif has such potential: life's journeys can be charted on it in many different ways. For instance, Miriam revisits repeatedly the car trips with her parents, which are emblematic of the family relations:

> There is my mother, the navigator, a map of the city unfurled on her lap. Me in the back seat, watching my father's eyes as they glance in the rear-view mirror, the way he searches for what might appear. (181)

30 The look of the observing child in the back seat registers how the father looks backwards—towards the past—whereas the mother uses the map to find her way forward—into the future. But the most striking image in Miriam's many fond and powerful memories of the Sunday drives in the Buick is that of the united family, protected inside the car. By extension, the car and map motifs function together; the car is always associated with family unity and protection, and with Miriam's sense of confidence as a little girl:

> My parents and I would drive across the city, going nowhere in particular, all of us bundled into the Buick. Through downtown and Chinatown—those narrow streets flooded with people—then out to the suburbs…. I was the only one of us born in Canada, and so I prided myself on knowing Vancouver better than my parents did—the streets, Rupert, Renfrew, Nanaimo, Victoria. Ticking them off as we passed each set of lights, *go, go, go. Stop*. (178)

31 While Miriam's displaced parents seemed to be wandering during those drives, she gained from them and from her family's protecting presence a sense of confidence in her surroundings. She feels that she belongs, more than her parents do.

32 The image of the three of them in the car comes back to her years later, when her father is in hospital and the family is reunited around him:

> We stayed with him all night…. It seemed that only we existed, my mother, my father and me, as it had been on those long drives across the city, the miles we covered. (222)

33 After several days taking turns with her mother by her father's side, the family intimacy is found again, and sheds a different light on the memories of the Sunday drives:

> Those tunnels and arteries. It used to be that we could lose ourselves in them, before we came to know the city well. (226)

34 All three are lost and alone together. That was before "*we* came to know the city well" (emphasis mine). This image stands in contrast with the previous one, in which Miriam remembers how, as a child, she prided herself on knowing the city better than her parents. Here, all three are strangers, lost and isolated. Through shared hardship in adulthood, Miriam feels close again to her parents.

35 It took Miriam a long time to reconcile her own map of Vancouver with her parents'. After years of wanting to walk away from them, at twenty-one, she meets Will and their motorcycle rides together along the coast epitomize the freedom she finds in his company and in marriage at first. But her father's condition and surroundings come to remind her that his perspective of Vancouver is not as bright as hers. She visits him shortly after he comes back from Indonesia:

> His apartment building, near Commercial Drive, stood out, grey and rectangular…. I walked onto his tiny balcony, looked across the road at the ramshackle apartments, the wet leaves running bright along the gutters. Out on the harbour, two yellow sulphur hills glowed neon against the grey sky…. [After lunch, w]e went outside and stood together on the balcony, and I told my father that I was planning to marry. He looked out at the grid of streets running down to the docks and said, "So soon ?" (204, 205, 206)

36 Miriam's father's place reflects his grim prospects. Commercial Drive is a suburb-like Chinese neighbourhood of Vancouver. The grid of streets evokes the entrapment of her father, who lives on welfare. The familiar sulphur hills, industrial refuse left-over from the exploitation of natural gas[10], stand under the grey sky as a glowing symbol of his uselessness. The view as a whole is a reminder of how Miriam's father had to come back to his point of departure, which looks more and more like a dead end. His presence on her map gradually paralyzes

her emotionally, and her silence and the repression of her emotions are unlocked only when he is hospitalized following his suicide attempt. After four days of sitting by his bedside, rediscovering the family intimacy of the past, Miriam walks home to rest:

> A thick fog had settled over the skyline. It wiped the sky clear of mountains and water. I walked along Broadway, past Main Street, where paper cups and newspapers littered the sidewalk. Past the sign that, years ago, my father told me was the tallest free-standing sign in the world…. He also showed me the narrowest building that still stands in Chinatown. My father, the tour guide who took me everywhere. He must have loved this city. Now it was coated with snow. A white-out, everything vanished, as if this were a game, as if I could bring it back from memory. (224)

37 Walking in the streets remains a way for Miriam to try and appropriate space, as it was when she was a teenager. But the feeling of aimlessness and blindness which she used to have then during those walks is replaced by the emergence of forgotten happy childhood memories, in which her father is at ease in Vancouver, acting as the tour guide in the Chinatown of her early years. The blank of the snow needs to be filled in, written on: it invites Miriam not only to draw on her memory, but also to tell herself stories, in which space—her father's Vancouver, which is also hers—is reinvented[11].

38 This call upon the imagination is felt by Miriam when she drives to the neighbourhood where she grew up, in the very last section of the story, which functions as a post-script. For a long time, she used to find comfort in the permanence of her old familiar surroundings (172-3). But on this last visit, her impressions are surprisingly different: "I looked for the old store, but the glass storefronts had changed too much. I had thought that what was so vivid in my imagination would call out to me in real life, as if in verification." (227) In her gesture of verification of the mental map of her childhood, Miriam realizes that the past is not so much remembered as imagined; it is told afresh rather than repeated nostalgically[12]. The map is a palimpsest on which are charted many life-stories.

39 Miriam's new approach to the cartography of life is illustrated in the final scene, which involves a little boy whom she observes:

> We could not see where he was headed, only that his arms were stretched out to both sides, like an airplane. I thought that someone would eventually catch him, his feet swinging off the ground, and lift him high. They would give him an aerial view of this street, these stores, all the people crowding along…. The little boy disappeared ahead of us in the crowd. I knew, then, that I would not find [the old furniture store]. But still I walked in the direction he had gone, at home in this place, though every landmark had disappeared. (227)

40 Miriam has grown up and the old neighbourhood is not that of her childhood anymore, but she should have the confidence to walk ahead into the unknown, all bearings gone, and to both follow and guide the child—the one she can now have with Will—into an uncertain future, ready to confront what life holds in store for both of them.

41 One could say that, in contrast with the Indian-born American writer Bharati Mukherjee, whose stated literary agenda is to "Make the familiar exotic; the exotic familiar,"[13] Thien aims at making the exotic ordinary; the ordinary tragic. She doesn't celebrate a Canadian multicultural mosaic, nor rootless cosmopolitanism. In "A Map of the City," she turns displacement into an ordinary family tragedy, developing an aesthetics of the everyday that is based on the limited, confused view point of an ordinary narrator-protagonist; on everyday objects that reflect a far-away reality; and on the narrator's search for an adequate metaphor to encompass the complexity of her personal life in a global context. In depicting the protagonist's process of piecing parts together and mapping out her own life, Thien contributes to redefining the changing map of Vancouver and of immigrant fiction.

Notes

1 . *Simple Recipes* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 2001).

2 . See Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 13: "exoticism…. might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity."

3 . For another version of the myth of the North-American salesman, see Clark Blaise's *I Had a Father: A Post-Modern Autobiography* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993).

4 . It is clear that Miriam considers her parents (and parents in general) as an impediment to her freedom to imagine her future when she remarks about Will, shortly after meeting him: "Some facts seem, at first, to explain a person. Will's mother died of cancer when he was young. His father died not long after, an electrical accident at the plant where he worked. When I first walked into Will's apartment, I thought it was an elegy, a place of grief…. To me, his apartment was the embodiment of his uncluttered life, exactly the kind of life I aspired to—both feet planted, eyes on the future." (p. 176)

5 . Linda Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," vol. 6 of the Proceedings of the XVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, *Literature as Cultural Memory*. Leiden, 16-22 Aug. 1997. Online posting: University of Toronto English Library. Last modified: Jan. 19, 1998.
<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>.

6 . Susan Sontag, "Melancholy Objects," *On Photography* (New York: Noonday P, 1977), p. 71.

7 . On the various possible attitudes towards the land in a plantation system, see Bill New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1997), p. 6.

8 . Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 7-8. References to Freud are to "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth P, 1955. 14: 239-260.

9 . On the map as literary device, see Graham Huggan, "First Principles for a Literary Cartography," *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1994). Quoting Downs and Stea, Huggan writes: "A cognitive or mental map is defined as 'a person's organised representation of some part of the spatial environment…. a cross section representing the world at one instant in time. It reflects the world as people believe it to be; it need not be correct. In fact, distortions are highly likely.'" p. 16.

10 . See Douglas Coupland, *City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's Vancouver* (Vancouver, Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2000), p. 50-3.

11 . On blindness while walking through the city, and on the practice of telling legends about the city as a practice that invents spaces, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1984), p. 93 and p. 107.

12 . See Adam Philllips, "Futures," *On Flirtation* (London: Faber, 1994), p. 153: "these dismaying repetitions—this unconscious limiting or coercion of the repertoire of life-stories—create the illusion of time having stopped (or rather, people believe—behave as if—they have stopped time). In our repetitions we seem to be staying away from the future, keeping it at bay."

13 . Bharati Mukherjee, "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman," *The Writer on Her Work: New Essays in New Territory*, ed. Janet Sternburg, vol. 2 (New York and London: Norton, 1991), p. 35. Mukherjee lived in Canada for about fifteen years (she became a Canadian citizen in 1972), before emigrating to the United States where she now lives and writes (she became an American citizen in 1988).

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Abstract

Au début de "A Map of the City", le roman court (novella) qui clôt le recueil de nouvelles de Madeleine Thien intitulé Simple Recipes, Miriam se demande dans quelle mesure sa famille a prise sur elle. Le caractère ordinaire de sa confusion et le caractère spécifique de l'histoire de sa famille, ses parents étant des Chinois d'Indonésie immigrés à Vancouver, donne à la nouvelle un double tranchant ; en choisissant d'écrire un récit du quotidien, Thien évite le piège de « l'exotisme post-colonial » que présente le motif de la diaspora chinoise.
Thien rend l'étrangeté ordinaire en suggérant l'existence de liens entre la peine que Miriam éprouve en tant que jeune adulte et celle que son père ressent comme immigrant. Miriam approche l'Indonésie, le pays de la jeunesse de son père, à travers des images du quotidien qui soulignent la contradiction entre une vision pittoresque et sentimentale de la réalité, et le caractère éphémère d'un monde changeant. Finalement, la métaphore de la carte fonctionne comme un moyen pour Miriam de s'élever au-dessus d'un quotidien qui l'accable et de reprendre en main sa vie.
Thien parvient ainsi à faire de l'expérience de la migration une tragédie familiale ordinaire en développant une esthétique du quotidien fondée sur le point de vue limité et confus d'une narratrice-protagoniste ordinaire ; sur des objets de tous les jours qui reflètent une réalité lointaine ; et sur la quête par la narratrice d'une métaphore capable d'englober la complexité de sa vie. A travers son récit du processus par lequel Miriam réussit à cartographier sa propre vie, Thien contribue à la redéfinition de la carte changeante de Vancouver, ainsi qu'à un renouvellement du récit d'immigration