

## *Editorial: Shades of Difference: The Female Characters of Monica Hughes and Paul Yee*

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A green-skinned woman with lizard-like features is not what you'll find on the cover of this issue. But there might as well be. For the girl we do give you — Paul Yee's Maylin (cook, artist, pioneer) — is not unlike Monica Hughes's Olwen Pendennis (the girl of reptilian complexion): talented, "different," strong, yet absurdly undervalued by her society. In our cover image, Maylin is flanked by the capacious paunches and phallic poles of men who steer her toward a meeting with a Chinese governor. As an image of a woman who is nearly effaced by the constraints of her society, Maylin perfectly captures the subject of this issue's articles: the philosophies of Monica Hughes and Paul Yee as they emerge through their female characters. How does one avoid such effacement? What values do the writers cultivate in their female characters to make them resilient and brave? What are Yee's and Hughes's attitudes toward the societies which supposedly nurture their characters? These are just some of the questions this issue addresses.

At first glance, Hughes's sci-fi fantasy and Yee's socio-historical realism would seem to share little in common. Indeed, Raymond Jones argues persuasively that Hughes's Olwen Pendennis has much in common with Frankenstein's monster; and Chen and Parungao argue that Yee's female characters anticipate those we find in the work of Chinese-Canadian women writers such as SKY Lee and Evelyn Lau. But as the articles in this issue make clear, both Hughes and Yee examine the ways in which female identity is formed in relation to physical appearance, family heritage, and private mission. Further, part of this formation of identity will be coloured by experiences in society; and in each case (Hughes's or Yee's), society can be a hateful force, embodying patriarchal shackles (Yee) or a violent fear of the *Other* (Hughes). But neither Hughes nor Yee gives up on society; in fact, Jones shows us that a central feature of Hughes's philosophy is the necessity for suffering, which promotes moral and psychological growth and helps prepare the likes of Olwen Pendennis for saving and renewing their societies. This philosophy is intimately tied, so Jones argues, to a Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life. Chen and Parungao, by contrast, show us how Yee's female characters are a magical combination of Confucian and Taoist tenets, helping us see in a new light Yee's ambivalent feelings about the tightly-woven Chinese society from which his female characters emerge. Thus, though their Wordsworthian or Taoist influences seem to situate Yee and Hughes miles apart, we think you'll find that the green skin of Olwen is only a more conspicuous shade of Maylin's "difference."

*Marie Davis*