

# Minor Feelings by Cathy Park Hong

## United

- **Racial self-hatred** is seeing yourself the way the whites see you, which turns you into your own worst enemy.

As a child, I picked up whatever distrust there was around Asians and animated my father's absence with it.

My ego is in free fall while my superego is boundless, railing that my existence is not enough, never enough, so I become compulsive in my efforts to do better, *be* better, blindly following this country's gospel of self-interest, proving my individual worth by expanding my net worth, until I vanish.

## Stand Up

And by telling lies, Pryor was more honest about race than most poems and novels I was reading at the time.

...which is what geniuses do: they blow up meth-balled conventions in their chosen genre and show you how a song, or a poem, or a sculpture can take any form.

...a scathing confessional that innocence, for instance, is a privilege black people don't get to experience.

What the fuck am I doing here?

...my body was dematerialized, my identity shed, and I could imagine myself into other lives.

...the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.

...I could at least humiliate myself deliberately, which seemed less toxic somehow.

The confessional lyric didn't seem right because my pain felt singled out, exceptional, operatic, when my life is more banal than that. [on writing about personal racial trauma]

- Publishers treat the ethnic story as a single story that encompasses the whole group.

- Fiction writers are mostly white and craft white stories.
- Stories about immigrants involve them facing the trauma in a distant country and then dealing with that in America - the root is always elsewhere.

Minor feelings occur when American optimism is forced upon you, which contradicts your own radicalized reality, thereby creating a static of cognitive dissonance.

**There is no immediate emotional release in the literature of minor feelings. It is cumulative.**

## The End of White Innocence

Rather than look back on childhood, I always looked sideways at childhood. If to look back is tinted with the honeyed cinematography of nostalgia, to look sideways at childhood is tainted with the sicklier haze of envy, an envy that ate at me when I stayed for dinner with my white friend's family or watched the parade of commercials and TV shows that made it clear what a child should look like and what kind of family they should grow up in.

**Even now, when I look back, the girl hides from my gaze, deflecting my memories to the flickering shadow play of her fantasies.**

Even if the aggressor who caused me shame is no longer in my life, I imagine he is, and I shrink from my shadow that I mistake for him.

My temperature rose, my body radiating heat to flush the contaminant, the contaminant that was *me*, out.

Shame gives me the ability to split myself into the first and third person.

The lie that Asians have it good is so insidious that even now as I write, I'm shadowed by doubt that I didn't have it bad compared to others. But racial trauma is not a competitive sport. The problem is not that my childhood was exceptionally traumatic but that it was in fact rather typical.

...a flashback to a feeling: a thrum of fear and shame, a right animal alertness. Childhood is a state of mind, whether it's a nostalgic return to innocence or a sudden flashback to unease and dread. If the innocence of childhood is being protected and comforted, the precocity of childhood is when one feels the *least* protected and comfortable.

Shame is an inward, intolerable feeling but it can lead to productive outcomes because of the self-scrutiny shame requires.

...an unprotected consciousness...

## Bad English

Such a politics not only assumes racial identity is pure — while ignoring the messy lived realities in which racial groups overlap — but reduces racial identity to intellectual property. [on stay-in-your-lane cultural mentality]

- We must prevent the market economy from internalizing its logic to culture where it becomes a product if shared with others.

The soul of innovation thrives on cross-cultural inspiration.

If you want to truly understand someone's accented English, you have to slow down and listen with your body. You have to train your ears and offer them your full attention. The Internet doesn't have time for that.

## An Education

This is what Myung Mi Kim first taught me: to knock at English, using what I considered my ineloquence — my bilingualism, my childhood struggles with English — and fuse that into my own collection of lexemes that came closest to my conflicted consciousness.