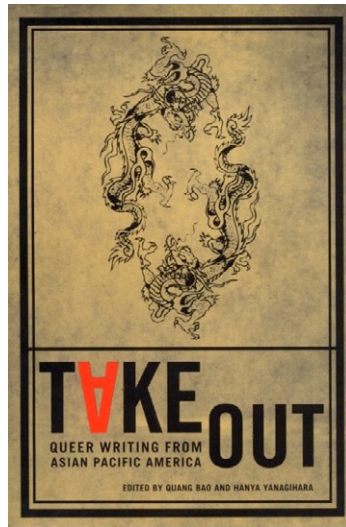


TAKE-OUT: QUEER WRITING FROM ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICA

Editors: Quang Bao and
Hanya Yanagihara. New York:
Asian American Writers
Workshop, 2001.



Note: This Study Guide is meant for teachers of literature courses, wherein Take-Out is required reading, either for high school seniors in an advanced class or college undergraduates.

Perhaps the only collection of creative writing that deals with the state of being queer and Asian Pacific American, *Take-Out* has fifty-six contributors in fiction, poetry, drama, and art. As the editors put it, the anthology followed “a laissez faire policy,” hoping thereby for surprises in the way the writers and artists explored being of a certain sexual and racial orientation—surprises that might make the reader re-think his or her own ideas of what including the terms “gay,” “queer,” and “Asian Pacific American” in the same sentence means. In the Epilogue, Timothy Liu writes, “Who’s gonna take out who remains to be seen.” He also raises the provocative question, “As writers do we get to choose our identities, or do they choose us?”

To maximize the use of *Take-Out*, while at the same time keeping discussions within a manageable scope it is best to approach this broad-shouldered book thematically and further, to narrow down the focus to certain themes: “Eros: The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name,” “Queerness and Biculturality,” and “Private and Public Being.” These selected themes should

enable the discussants to reference several contributors together rather than individually. Nor does concentrating on particular themes mean excluding others, for these three, as they are being explored, will lead inevitably to other related topics.

I. Eros: The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

Some contributors who might be considered for discussion: Noel Alunit, Alex Chee, Philip Huang, Larissa Lai, Russell Leong, Andy Quan, Ho Tam, Joel Tan, Kathryn Xian, and Chay Yew.

1. Discuss both the psychological strategies and consequences of queer love in a heterosexual world, where such love is either ignored, denigrated, or even violently attacked.
2. Unlike the conventional heterosexual world which frowns upon the body’s commodification, the queer world takes a more relaxed view. To what might this difference be ascribed? Discuss the ways in which various writers examine this issue.
3. Are there parallels to be drawn with the situation of people of color in American society?
4. In many of the book’s pieces there is an emphasis on beauty, whether of one’s person or surroundings. Examine how this emphasis relates to the queer’s sense of freedom as being fleeting if not illusory.
5. Sexual love is displayed—and pursued, and sometimes purchased—at such venues as dance clubs, bathhouses, theaters, even social gatherings. What are some of the factors that facilitate, perhaps even necessitate, such an atmosphere?

II. Queerness and Biculturality

Some contributors who might be considered for discussion: Dan Bacalzo, Minal Hajratwala, Richard Kiamco, R. Zamora Linmark, Mei Ng, Natasha Singh, Jimm Tran, Matt Uiagaleilei.

1. How does the fact of being bicultural and/or biracial complicate or simplify queerness?
 2. When queerness intersects with race and history in the lives depicted in both the book's prose narratives and poems, what are some of the consequences?
 3. How do strictures in expressing or even suppressing queerness ironically allow fluidity in crossing sexual and cultural boundaries?
 4. Relatedly, why do oppressive systems seem to engender and/or enhance aesthetic creativity?
 5. While sexual identity almost always occupies the foreground, biculturality (especially being of Asian descent), though backgrounded, remains an important, even essential, context. How so?
 6. There are some heterosexual romantic relationships examined in this anthology. How are such relationships relevant to the examination of queer identity?
2. Where the protagonist is female, the relationships within the family seem more asymmetrical. What could the difference(s) be, between a lesbian's family situation and that of a homosexual's?
 3. Confucianism occupies a central, if not always overt, place in Asian family values. What are some of its principal tenets? How would these affect relationships that queers have with their families?
 4. Other traditions are drawn upon or referred to, such as Zen Buddhism and Christianity. Is the impact of each different or the same on being queer in the world?
 5. A hostile environment that elevates heterosexuality as its norm necessitates the use by queers of subterfuge and disguise. Discuss the existence of parallel worlds in queer life and the strategies employed by queers to keep these separate.
 6. Political correctness as an Asian American demands an awareness of one's history in this country, but a history that is decidedly heterosexual in its perspectives. Discuss how such pc attitudes can be both a tool and a hindrance in dealing with intersecting issues of sexual orientation, race, social consciousness, and history.

III. Private and Public Being

Some contributors who might be considered for discussion: T.C. Huo, Larissa Lai, E.G. Louie, Eiki Mori, Shyam Selvadurai, Ricco Villanueva Siasoco, Seg Sun, Nita Yamashita.

1. Where the queer protagonist is male, the central family relationship is with the mother. Discuss possible reasons for this.