

“The Pioneer of Japanese American Literature”: Caxton Printers and the Publishing of Toshio Mori’s *Yokohama, California*

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I: Toshio Mori’s Early Life

Toshio Mori was born on March 3, 1910, in Oakland, California, to parents who were Japanese immigrants from Otake, Japan. They emigrated shortly before Mori was born, making him their first child born in the United States, and thus the family’s first American citizen.¹ At the time of his birth, Mori’s parents ran a bathhouse in Oakland—“a flourishing business because most people seldom had bathroom facilities,” Mori recalled. When Mori was three, his parents opened a florist shop and nursery with relatives, where they raised carnations and roses and other flowers in their greenhouses. A few years later, the family relocated their home and flower business to San Leandro, a city ten miles southeast of Oakland.²

In grade school, Mori had a fascination with art and wanted to pursue it long-term. It was this interest in drawing that led him to writing. As he explained in an interview when he was an adult, Mori started reading books about art “and from that I started to read some of the dime novels. [...] That interest started to draw me toward literature.” Influenced by a high school English teacher, Mori began to read and write more and more. In addition to practicing writing, he moved away from reading what he described as “low level” books to the more advanced, more literary short stories by O. Henry, Stephen Crane, and Katherine Mansfield.³

Mori considered himself a loner. At one point after graduating from Oakland High School, he contemplated becoming a monk “who would stay in a mountain retreat somewhat like Thoreau.” But that was too much like a hermit for Mori, so he selected the “next closest thing” and became a writer. Mori visited libraries and secondhand bookstores, staying for hours. “I would go by myself and select

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1. Shawn Holliday, “Mori, Toshio,” in *Encyclopedia of Asian-American Literature*, ed. Seiwoong Oh (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 200. Mori’s parents left their two elder sons in the care of their community in Japan until they could financially support them in America.

2. Russell Leong, “Toshio Mori: An Interview,” *Amerasia* 7, no. 1 (1980): 90.

3. *Ibid.*, 93.

my own interest, my own curiosities,” Mori recalled. He read widely—both American and international authors. He consumed Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Dreiser.⁴ He read the French writers Guy de Maupassant and Honoré de Balzac and “almost all” the Russian writers, including Maxim Gorky and Nikolai Gogol. Despite this diverse reading list, Mori had “very little influence from the Japanese writers” and “took very little reference into Japanese history or the past.”⁵

Mori’s biggest literary influence was the American author Sherwood Anderson, whose *Winesburg, Ohio: A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life* (1919) depicted life in a close-knit community. *Yokohama, California*, Mori’s first collection of stories, is clearly modeled after Anderson’s classic. Mori explained that “one day I started to feel akin to [Anderson’s] characters and at the same time I started to find that I, through the combination of characters I knew in the Japanese community, became more fluent in characterizing the typical Japanese people within my community.”⁶ The subject of Mori’s stories became his neighborhood. Mori also particularly liked the stories of Anton Chekhov, who he cited as “another model” and “absorbing and modern.”⁷ Reading those authors, Mori realized there were things and people to write about in his own “small Issei-Nisei world.”⁸

The most important book for Mori was the dictionary. It was, as he put it, his “Bible.”⁹ Mori acknowledged that his English was a limiting factor in his writing and his ability to market them successfully. His parents spoke little English, so the only English he learned was at school. Mori wrote his stories in the “spoken language”—the language he heard and used himself in his community.¹⁰

Mori’s earliest stories were autobiographical, from which he then turned his attention “towards commercialism” by studying the types of stories in popular magazines. That interest was soon replaced by the subjects and experiences closest to him—literally. His “nearest subjects” were the people in his community. “I tried to present some of the life patterns of a Japanese Issei and Nisei of a community to reveal to the people in general some of the small details of living that would appeal to the reader of any nationality, so I tried to stay true to the

4. Ibid., 103–4; Peter Horikoshi, “Interview with Toshio Mori,” in *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, ed. Emma Gee (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, 1976), 472.

5. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 93, 103.

6. Ibid., 94.

7. Toshio Mori to William Saroyan, February 14, 1939, William Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

8. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 476.

9. “What to Write: Beginning with Creative Journal and Diary,” speech draft, Steven Y. Mori Collection.

10. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 96.

characters that I believe were some of the typical Nisei and Issei people,” he later explained. Mori turned Oakland into the fictionalized town of “Yokohama” and described the life of the Issei (first generation immigrants to the United States) and their children, the Nisei (the second generation). Mori tried to accurately represent the “day-to-day, as-is Japanese” that he knew from his community.¹¹

Mori wanted to be a “serious writer,” which, to him, meant a published writer. But Mori had little time to write. He worked full time at his family’s garden nursery, with work days often stretching to sixteen hours. Starting when he was twenty-two years old, Mori crafted a disciplined daily schedule where he would work all day, return home, and write from ten in the evening until two in the morning. He maintained this four hours of writing every day—including Sundays—until he was forced into internment camps a decade later.¹² Mori kept that schedule “even without anything to write on or a subject, I used to sit at the table until I got something written.”¹³

Mori wrote stories with a specific audience in mind: “White American readers in general.” He hoped to reach them because he wanted to push back on the way Japanese were portrayed by white writers, which most often were stale, exaggerated “comical Japanese” stereotypes, such as those characters authored by Peter B. Kyne or Wallace Irwin. “As far as I was concerned, [those writings] didn’t typify the Japanese community at all, and I started thinking that perhaps I could reveal some of the true Japanese lives by interpreting some of the characters I knew,” he explained.¹⁴

Because he wanted to reach an audience beyond his Nikkei community, Mori refrained from submitting his stories to the English-language sections of Japanese American newspapers and instead focused on “regular American magazines.” Mori’s primary goal was “to be published as a professional” writer, which was then a novel goal.¹⁵ Indeed, there were almost no Japanese Americans writing fiction at the time. (There were West Coast Japanese American newspapers “which encouraged readers and writers to contribute stories, essays, and poems,” so some Nisei did become journalists.) Reflecting on his early writing, Mori noted that “[ethnic writing] is a good field, especially for the ethnic people because they’re the ones who have to originate the new field and explore it rather than the so-called outside writers trying to interpret and understand it. [...] The minority writers can contribute much more effectively.”¹⁶

Over the next six years, Mori produced dozens of short stories but received an

11. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 474.

12. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 100.

13. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 473.

14. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 95.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 473–75.

even greater number of rejection letters. (“Enough to paper a room,” he quipped.) “When I started to receive so many rejections a day, then it became just automatic reflex, and it did not hurt me that much. Rejections did not mean much to me after that,” he recalled. But some rejections had notes of encouragement in them, which propelled Mori forward: “The white reader or the white critics, they all gave me encouraging review[s], recognizing for the first time that there was Japanese American life existing in America.”¹⁷ So Mori kept writing.

Finally, in 1938, Mori received his first acceptance letter followed almost simultaneously by the second. At the age of twenty-eight, Mori had two stories—“The Brothers” and “Tomorrow and Today”—published in magazines.¹⁸

II: Trying to Publish *Yokohama, California*

Mori found a champion for his writing in William Saroyan. Shortly after Mori’s first stories appeared in print, Saroyan read them, liked them, and wrote a note of congratulations to Mori, where he commented that “your writing is the freshest I have seen in a long time.”¹⁹ Saroyan, who was nationally known at the time, earned a Pulitzer Prize for his play, *The Time of Your Life*, and, in 1943, won an Academy Award for his screenplay, *The Human Comedy*. Saroyan enjoyed Mori’s writing and began encouraging and promoting him as a writer. Saroyan was Armenian American, an identity he embraced, which created kinship with Mori’s own heritage.

Mori and Saroyan not only corresponded regularly but also met in person several times.²⁰ They established a working friendship where Mori ran ideas by Saroyan who then offered feedback. “I got several [rejection] letters that tell me frankly what’s wrong with my stories. As you warned me my grammar is bad. [...] Some of the mistakes I see. Others I don’t see, and it puzzles me,” Mori lamented to Saroyan. Saroyan recommended that Mori read Hemingway’s stories for the use of good English. “By marking the verbs and noting the tenses, it helps some. I know now what you said was right. I’ve got to go all the way with my English,” Mori wrote in 1939.²¹

Saroyan also offered Mori advice and recommended he find a publisher to issue a collection of the short stories. Saroyan allowed Mori to mention his name when contacting New York publishers, and Mori sent a manuscript of his collected

17. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 95–97.

18. Ibid., 95. “The Brothers” appeared in the July 1938 issue of *The Coast* on pages 26–27.

19. Saroyan to Mori, June 29, 1938, quoted in David R. Mayer, “The Philosopher in Search of a Voice: Toshio Mori’s Japanese-Influenced Narrator,” *Asian American Literature Association (AALA) Journal* 2 (1995), 13.

20. Mori and Saroyan met in person as early as January 10, 1939.

21. Mori to Saroyan, March 25, 1939, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

short stories to several firms. All, however, rejected the manuscript.²² Mori hypothesized that there was no market for “minority characters.”²³

Saroyan encouraged Mori to keep trying to find a publisher for a book of his short stories. Toshio Mori first wrote to Caxton Printers on January 6, 1941, asking them to publish “a collection of my Japanese sketches and stories.” In his submission letter, Mori made the case for his book: “I believe that the time has come for someone in our little world to be articulate. [...] In our present national crisis I believe that the American public would be interested to look into the lives of Japanese Americans living in their communities.”²⁴

James H. Gipson founded Caxton Printers in 1907 in rural Caldwell, Idaho. Gipson’s philosophy for his publishing company was uncommon: Caxton published writers, primarily those living in the Western United States, who could not find publishers elsewhere, regardless of whether or not the books made a profit.²⁵

After Caxton received Mori’s manuscript, Gipson distributed it to his team of editorial reviewers. Several editors favorably reviewed the submission. “This collection [...] would make a book we might be very proud of,” Melda Ludlow wrote in an internal memo. “Toshio Mori has not made [Japanese Americans] pathetic, nor has he propagandized them,” she continued.²⁶ Another reviewer noted that “one of the greatest potentialities is its humor” and Mori’s stories were described as “both revelatory and exhilarating.”²⁷ Gipson himself liked Mori’s collection of stories and recognized their uniqueness: “It is what you would call a good book, and it is rather important as it is the first writing dealing with Americans born of Japanese parents, and tells in simple, understandable, and unvarnished language, the problems of the Japanese. There is every reason why this should be published, as far as the Caxtons are concerned, because it fits into our traditional plan of bringing out the unusual and recognizing struggling

22. Mori to Saroyan, August 14, 1939, *ibid.* Mori’s manuscript was rejected by Harcourt & Brace, Viking, and Scribner’s, among others. Saroyan also introduced Mori to Louis Sobol, a popular New York newspaper columnist. Sobol planned to meet Mori during a trip to California, but a scheduling conflict arose. Sobol did briefly describe Mori as “the founder of a new Jap-American school of letters” in his “New York Cavalcade” column. *New York Journal American*, February 4, 1939, 13.

23. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 476.

24. Mori to John Ludlow, January 6, 1941, The Caxton Printers, Ltd. Records (Cage 873), Box 25, Folder 10, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries. (Hereafter cited as “Caxton Records, WSU.”)

25. J. H. Gipson, “Publishing in the Rockies: A Word about Caxton Printers Ltd. of Caldwell, Idaho,” *The Book Collector’s Packet* 4, no. 4 (December 1945): 5–9.

26. Melda Ludlow Memo, February 24, 1941, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU.

27. Ludlow Memo, April 14, 1941, *ibid.*

writers.”²⁸

By the summer of 1941, Gipson decided to publish the manuscript. The next step was to figure out how to publish it without his company “sustaining a staggering loss” because “books of short stories are proverbially hard to sell.” Gipson’s primary plan was to market the book to Japanese American societies throughout the country and to libraries, specifically those in California. Gipson proposed publishing the book in a 6 in. x 9 in. format with an initial print run of one thousand five hundred copies. Gipson optimistically thought they could sell half that number in the first year.²⁹

Mori originally submitted fifty-seven stories under the proposed title, *My Family and Our Friends*. Caxton’s editors recommended publishing just twenty-two of them to keep the book at a reasonable length.³⁰ (“There are really too many [stories] anyway,” one editor explained).³¹ Some of Mori’s stories were cut from the manuscript not just for space. Two or three of them were “written with so much frankness” (about sex) that their inclusion, despite being among the best, would make the book hard to sell to small libraries and schools. Gipson regretted the need to leave these out but was focused on the book’s marketability: “We have had no luck whatever in marketing anything which is written seriously, honestly, and frankly.” Gipson thought it possible that the book could be recommended for use by high school students because “it is so simply written.”³²

Gipson was honest with Mori about the financial prospects for the book. “Ours isn’t a commercial press,” he explained to Mori, “we have brought out in the past a good many books which have enjoyed but small sales, but which have, however, laid the foundation for solid literary reputations for a number of the writers for whom we have published.”³³ He wanted Mori to be under no illusions that the book would sell in large numbers.

Gipson sent Mori the contract for the book on June 30, 1941, but because of the low prospect of sales, noted that Caxton would not publish it until “a time which suits our convenience and when funds are available.” Gipson predicted that even if the book received good reviews, it would not sell enough copies to cover out-of-pocket expenses and thus “yield no return to the author, who has done really a fine piece of work.”³⁴ Gipson reiterated the possibility of low sales in his next letter: “We’ll do the best that we can, but we want to warn you that sales are

28. J. H. Gipson Memo, June 20, 1941, *ibid*.

29. *Ibid*.

30. Mori to Mabel Clore, February 9, 1941, *ibid*.

31. Ludlow Memo, February 24, 1941, *ibid*.

32. Gipson Memo, June 20, 1941, *ibid*. Specifically, the story “Four-bits” was cut because of its sexual nature. It later appeared in *The Chauvinist and Other Stories*, Mori’s second collection of stories.

33. Gipson to Mori, June 21, 1941, *ibid*.

34. Gipson to Mori, June 30, 1941, *ibid*.

probably going to be microscopic until the world is a happier place.”³⁵ This did not matter to Mori. After receiving the official contract to publish the book, Mori was ecstatic: “I don’t know how to express my feelings. [...] To a beginner his first book is [the] most important thing in his life. I am very grateful to THE CAXTON PRINTERS for this opportunity.”³⁶

Gipson’s biggest concern was how to market and find buyers for the book. Gipson hoped for strong sales among the Japanese Americans but also planned to promote it widely, especially in Japanese American newspapers. Gipson anticipated bookstores in California, in the Bay area in particular, would feature the book, too.³⁷ Poet and essayist Christopher Morley agreed to read the galley proofs to provide a blurb for the back cover, and Louis Adamic’s *Common Ground* magazine also agreed to promote the book.³⁸

Mori, too, committed to marketing the book himself as much as he could.³⁹ He secured the help of James Omura, editor of the Japanese American magazine *Current Life*, to “take charge of the sale” of *Yokohama, California*, in particular the sales to the Japanese community, and serve as the “sole promotional agent.” Omura planned to hire sales agents in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle.⁴⁰ Mori thought this plan would be successful because he viewed *Current Life* as one of the most influential magazines within the Japanese American community. But more than marketing to a niche segment of the population, Mori wanted the book to be popular nationwide: “What I would mostly like is to have the book reach all Americans.”⁴¹

Shortly after Caxton accepted the manuscript, William Saroyan wrote to Mori with his belief that *Yokohama, California* was a better title for the collection than *My Family and Our Friends*.⁴² The more Mori considered the new title, the more he liked it, too. Gipson accepted Saroyan’s suggestion in October 1941.⁴³

Saroyan also assisted with the promotion of the book by writing an “Informal Introduction” about Mori, which would appear at the front of the collection. Saroyan had already written an introductory essay for Mori in August 1938. Mori believed that Saroyan would write an introduction tailored to the specific stories that were selected and going to be published.⁴⁴ Saroyan’s introduction that was

35. Gipson to Mori, July 7, 1941, *ibid.*

36. Mori to Gipson, July 3, 1941, *ibid.*

37. Gipson Memo, June 20, 1941, *ibid.*

38. Mori to Gipson, September 22, 1941, *ibid.*

39. Mori to Gipson, July 3, 1941, *ibid.*

40. Mori to Gipson, November 22, 1941, *ibid.*; James Omura to Mori, April 7, 1942, James Omura Papers, Box 6, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

41. Mori to Gipson, June 26, 1941, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU.

42. Mori to Gipson, July 25, 1941, *ibid.*

43. Gipson to Mori, October 9, 1941, *ibid.*

44. Mori to Ludlow, January 6, 1941, *ibid.*

ultimately published, however, was mostly unchanged from the original draft written years earlier. In the introduction, Saroyan called Mori “one of the most important new writers in the country” and “a writer worth reading and following.”⁴⁵

On December 2, 1941, Gipson set the tentative publication date for the following autumn.⁴⁶

III: *Yokohama, California* Delayed

Five days later, America entered World War II. Even after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Gipson proposed moving ahead with publication as scheduled. Two days after the bombing, Gipson wrote to a colleague: “What is your advice about publishing this, under existing conditions?” and noted that Mori is an American citizen.⁴⁷ The colleague advised Gipson that the stories likely would not be received well, yet argued that “they serve as excellent propaganda for the Japanese-American way of life, which needs more understanding now than ever before.”⁴⁸ “I belong to the United States,” Mori assured Gipson in his first letter after Pearl Harbor and strongly encouraged the book to be published as scheduled.⁴⁹

In January 1942, Gipson started to worry about Japanese support of the book and thought it might have waned. Mori sought out Saroyan’s opinion about the climate in the country for a book like Mori’s.⁵⁰ Saroyan responded emphatically: “Now, more than ever, your book *Yokohama, California*, should be published.”⁵¹ Yet Gipson was still “stumped myself to know what to do.”⁵²

Saroyan recommended that Mori write two or three new stories to add to the collection. These new stories would capture the Japanese American sentiment anticipating the coming of war and then describe the feeling when the war did come. “Give everything you’ve got to these stories—remember everything clearly, it is important.” Saroyan continued, readers need “to be reminded that people are always the same—always good—and that it is only Wars, [that] overtake them helplessly, which make them *seem* unusual, or different.”⁵³

45. Saroyan, “An Informal Introduction” draft, *ibid.*

46. Gipson to Mori, December 2, 1941, *ibid.*

47. Gipson to Ludlow, December 9, 1941, *ibid.*

48. Ludlow to Gipson, December 10, 1941, *ibid.*

49. Mori to Gipson, December 29, 1941, *ibid.*

50. Mori to Saroyan, January 8, 1942, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

51. Saroyan to Mori, January 14, 1942, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU.

52. Gipson to Mori, January 5, 1942, *ibid.*

53. Saroyan to Mori, January 14, 1942, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

Gipson wanted Saroyan to update his introduction to address the reality of the United States being at war. “There is tremendous antagonism against the Japanese, and a publisher who brings out a book of that sort under existing conditions is confronted with the possibility that public opinion will react very unfavorably,” Gipson wrote.⁵⁴ Saroyan also started rethinking the book’s title. He worried it might be “misconstrued” under the present climate, so he recommended that Mori pick out a title “more charming and truly descriptive.”⁵⁵ Mori agreed—“I too was worrying about the title of the book”—but no new title was actually proposed.⁵⁶

Gipson met with both Saroyan and Mori, separately, in person in California in February 1942. After those meetings, Gipson still planned to publish the book and gave the publication date as November 15, 1942.⁵⁷ But then, shortly after Gipson’s meeting with Mori, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which required all people of Japanese ancestry living in the western United States to leave their homes and livelihoods and move into “relocation centers.”

A month after the executive order, Mori learned that he “must evacuate from the West Coast” but that his destination was as yet unknown. His district was hoping to move many of their residents to a cooperative farm in a Rocky Mountain state so that they would not have to be interned at a government camp.⁵⁸ That plan, however, did not come to pass, and Mori and his family were moved into the Tanforan Temporary Assembly Center in San Bruno, California, formerly a racetrack, that was set up by the War Relocation Authority as a staging ground. (Toshio’s brother, Kazuo, did not move to Topaz because he was already serving in the United States army, in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, where he fought and was injured in Europe.) Mori anticipated that the war would bring a scattering of races around the country, a “postwar resettlement,” and thought that a book about Japanese Americans would be a “contribution toward unity.”⁵⁹ Even from the camps, Mori hoped *Yokohama, California* would be published as planned.

Gipson wrote to Mori on March 31 with the final list of stories to be included in the collection. But the most recent two stories that Mori wrote—at the behest of Saroyan—did not make the cut; Gipson thought they were not Mori’s best. Moreover, Gipson envisioned marketing the book as having been written before

54. Gipson to Saroyan, March 7, 1942, Caxton Records (MS1984.43), Box 224, Folder 6, WSU.

55. Saroyan to Mori, February 15, 1942, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

56. Mori to Saroyan, February 17, 1942, Toshio Mori Miscellany, MSS 94/221c, Bancroft Library.

57. Gipson to Mori, March 17, 1942, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU.

58. Mori to Gipson, March 25, 1942, *ibid.*

59. Mori to Gipson, December 2, 1942, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 11, WSU.

the outbreak of the war and wanted to have all the stories pre-date the war.⁶⁰

As late as April 1942, Gipson wanted to publish the book—"I think we'll try and publish this"—despite pushback from his editorial reviewers.⁶¹ Gipson again asked Saroyan to write a few additional paragraphs to update his introduction to explain that Mori, "like thousands of others, is an American citizen, loyal and patriotic, that wars essentially have little to do with letters."⁶² The title of the book continued to be reconsidered. Gipson suggested changing the title to "The Dance That Is Still."⁶³ Mori thought it was a "good" suggestion.⁶⁴ Mori's friend, James Omura, also recommended changing the title of the book because *Yokohama, California* could be interpreted to imply American defeat and a Japanese invasion of California. Omura agreed that something like "The Dance That Is Still" would be better.⁶⁵

Saroyan correctly anticipated the importance and uniqueness of Mori's experience in the internment camps and again counseled him to write as much as he could: "You must write a story or two, or eventually a whole short novel about you and your friends, and people, at Tanforan. That is going to be something people are going to want to read. [...] In short, keep busy; there is more than ever an urgency for you to write."⁶⁶ In Tanforan, Mori initially "took things easy for a while, just observing and experiencing things that were so new to me." He did tell Saroyan that he had "enough material to keep me busy for a long time."⁶⁷

Mori argued for moving the publication up as soon as possible—even asking the book be published that spring. Mori, from talking with his friends, believed it "would do well among the Nisei readers if it was to come out earlier in the year." That way it would capitalize on the "present great interest in the book."⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Gipson was still debating the merits of whether and when to publish the book. He consulted with his editorial staff. The recurring question was who would buy the book. Gipson believed the possibility of strong sales to

60. Gipson to Mori, March 31, 1942, Steven Y. Mori Collection. "Slant-Eyed Americans" and "The Garden" were those two post-Pearl Harbor stories. The former story ended up making the final cut for *Yokohama, California* in 1949. The latter story appeared in *Unfinished Message: Selected Works of Toshio Mori* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2000).

61. Gipson to Esther Gould, April 7, 1942, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU.

62. Gipson to Saroyan, April 17, 1942, Box 25, Folder 11, *ibid.*

63. Gipson to Mori, April 16, 1942, *ibid.*

64. Mori to Gould, April 18, 1942, *ibid.*

65. Omura to Mori, May 29, 1942, Omura Papers, Box 6, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

66. Saroyan to Mori, May 27, 1942, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

67. Mori to Saroyan, September 16, 1943, Toshio Mori Miscellany, MSS 94/221c, Bancroft Library.

68. Mori to Gipson, December 6, 1941, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU.

Japanese Americans had decreased because “they are now gathered in concentration camps, however, and it is doubtful that they’ll have any money with which to buy books.” Gipson also considered how the book would be received among non-Japanese Americans: “It may be that there is so much bitterness that it would only not sell, but might hurt as even though the author is a patriotic American citizen, with a brother in the military service of the United States.”⁶⁹

One of Gipson’s colleagues likewise feared that Caxton would experience protests if they published the book because “the mind of the public is temporarily poisoned.”⁷⁰ Another colleague wrote that “people are blindly averse” to Japanese Americans.⁷¹ A third Caxton editorial reviewer described Mori’s book as “the emergence of an articulate, understandable art form that represents the fusion of two cultures” but because of anti-Japanese sentiment “we could never hope, in these times, for the decent hearing this book deserves.”⁷²

Finally, in May 1942, Gipson made the decision to push the publication date to an undetermined future date. Gipson told Mori that “I’m of the opinion that it would be far wiser, for you and for us, if we’d set the date of publication for your book forward to some time in the future. [...] To bring it out now will mean failure for it in every way” with small sales and little attention from reviewers. When releasing a book, proper timing is important, Gipson noted, because once it is released, it loses momentum and “newness.” Gipson felt bad about this decision, but he just could not envision who would buy the book.⁷³

Mori wrote back to Gipson right away arguing that the book should still be published: “There is a vast potentiality for the book.” Mori envisioned a marketing agent in each camp. He thought the book would still sell among the Japanese because internees earned wages by working in the camps, and, since their food and housing were covered by the federal government, they had disposable income, according to Mori. “Strange as it may be, we are turning to culture,” he told Gipson. Mori even acknowledged “it is a hit or miss chance but I am willing to take it as far as I am concerned. [...] Besides, the war may last a long time.”⁷⁴ But Gipson held firm on his decision. Caxton would not bring out the book during wartime. Gipson offered to let Mori withdraw the manuscript and try to find a different publisher “without any prejudice.”⁷⁵ With the ultimate fate of the book uncertain, Saroyan suggested that Mori start looking for other publishers. “An unenthusiastic or unsure publisher is no good,” Saroyan told Mori, “I cannot agree

69. Gipson Memo, May 12, 1942, Box 25, Folder 11, WSU.

70. Ludlow to Gipson, June 6, 1942, *ibid.*

71. Clore to Gipson, May 12, 1942, *ibid.*

72. James Best to Gipson, May 16, 1942, *ibid.*

73. Gipson to Mori, May 22, 1942, *ibid.*

74. Mori to Gipson, May 25, 1942, *ibid.*

75. Gipson to Mori, September 5, 1942, *ibid.*

with [Caxton] at all, but they're the bosses, and the only thing to do is to take them at their word and drop the whole thing; and then move on to other publishers.”⁷⁶ Mori, however, did not shop the manuscript around any further; he decided to wait for Caxton.

From Tanforan, Mori was transferred to the Topaz War Relocation Center Camp in the Utah desert and arrived on October 2, 1942. At Topaz, Mori served as the camp historian working to document “major and minor events.” He found “the work very advantageous to a writer.”⁷⁷

While held at Topaz, Mori’s friend and would-be distributor of *Yokohama, California*, James Omura, wrote to Mori to get a sense if the Nisei interned in the camps desired reparations for their confinement. Omura specifically wanted to know if the Japanese in the camps were “interested in having their legal rights protected.”⁷⁸ Omura had moved to Denver, outside of EO 9066’s exclusion zone, and worked to set up a network to support Japanese Americans who were interned. Omura believed a strong appeal could be made to the federal government if enough internees protested, hence his inquiring with Mori to poll the camp community. However, Mori simply replied, “I must say that the people did not care about taking up legal problems. [...] It disheartened me.”⁷⁹ Discussing this years later, Omura commented, “It always bothered me. One of the strangest things is, whatever happened to the intellectual Nisei writers? Why didn’t they protest? None of them. They didn’t even write against the program.”⁸⁰

Mori did keep writing fiction despite the restrictive conditions at Topaz. Several of his new short stories appeared in *Trek*, the Topaz literary magazine, where he was also co-editor of the fourth issue, titled *All Aboard*. Moreover, he drafted his first novel, *Send These, The Homeless*, between February and August 1943. That story, about the evacuation experience, was set in California from the attack on Pearl Harbor through Spring 1943. He then began working on his second novel, an expansion of his short story “Tomorrow Is Coming, Children,” and had two other novels planned. He wrote to an editor that he liked this new writing medium “more than the short story form.”⁸¹

76. Saroyan to Mori, May 27, 1942, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

77. Mori to Sanora Babb, December 25, 1943, Sanora Babb Papers, MS-04852, Box 48.3, Harry Ransom Center.

78. Omura to Mori, June 10, 1942, Omura Papers, Box 6, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

79. Mori to Omura, September 21, 1942, ibid.

80. “An Interview with James M. Omura,” in *Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project*, ed. Arthur A. Hansen (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991), 248–49.

81. Mori to Babb, December 25, 1943, Babb Papers, MS-04852, Box 48.3, Harry Ransom Center. Mori took the novel’s title from Emma Lazarus’s poem, “The New Colossus,” inscribed on the Statue of Liberty.

IV: *Yokohama, California* Published

Mori and his family lived at Topaz for the rest of the war. They moved back to California in 1945, and Mori resumed working at the nursery full-time. Mori married Hisayo Yoshiwara, in 1947; they had a son, Steven, in 1951.⁸²

The manuscript for *Yokohama, California* lay dormant for the duration of the war—until 1946, when Caxton’s editors revived the manuscript and resumed correspondence with Mori. That November, Gipson wrote to Mori saying that the publishing firm was “starting to pick up the pieces” and asked for a current address so that Mori could be reached when *Yokohama, California* was ready (again) for publication.⁸³ Returning to their prewar publishing output was slow going for Caxton. They were unable to publish Mori’s book sooner because of a shortage of labor and materials and a backlog of other books to publish.⁸⁴ Mori agreed to wait because he wanted to be published by Caxton, though he did admit he was “struggling for a livelihood.”⁸⁵

Five years after first accepting the manuscript, Gipson continued to believe in the book and noted that it “still merits publication as much today as it did at the time of acceptance. [...] We owe it to the Japanese-Americans to recognize and encourage their talented people without hesitation.”⁸⁶ Yet it would be another year and a half before any more progress was made. Mori was pleased to learn that Caxton was finally moving ahead with publishing.⁸⁷

Saroyan was too rushed and busy to rewrite his decade-old introduction but was glad that Mori was finally getting a break as a writer. “I believe you have the real stuff,” he reiterated to Mori.⁸⁸ Saroyan also recommended that the background of the book—the publishing history—be described in a prefatory note; Gipson asked Mori to write about the “trials and tribulations in finding a publisher,” though Mori never wrote that essay—because he did not think it needed it. Gipson ended up not pressing the issue.⁸⁹

Caxton’s editors returned their attention to the manuscript draft itself and reviewed which stories should be included. Caxton hardly edited the text despite Mori’s grammatical errors. As one of Caxton’s editors wrote to Mori, “Part of their charm is due to your sometimes quaint (you don’t mind, do you?) use of the

82. “Toshio Mori—A Brief Biography,” in Toshio Mori, *Unfinished Message* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2000), 239–40.

83. Gipson to Mori, November 29, 1946, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 11, WSU.

84. Gipson to Mori, December 17, 1946, *ibid.*

85. Mori to Gipson, December 8, 1946, *ibid.*

86. CBM to Gipson, April 1, 1948, *ibid.*

87. Mori to Gipson, June 4, 1948, *ibid.*

88. Saroyan to Mori, June 25, 1948, *ibid.*

89. Mori to Gipson, May 4, 1949, Steven Y. Mori Collection.

English language.”⁹⁰ Gipson recognized the benefit of leaving Mori’s words alone and noted that “the less editing that is done on this particular manuscript the better.” Because Mori’s grammar was not “fixed,” his words and rhythms most accurately reflected his own experiences with language.⁹¹

Yokohama, California was released on March 15, 1949. With its publication, Mori became the first Japanese American to publish a book of fiction.⁹² Mori dedicated the book to his mother.⁹³ The book received almost universally positive reviews, and Mori was described as “a natural-born writer,” a “fresh voice,” and “spontaneous.” Reviews appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The New Yorker*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, and *The Nation*, among dozens of others.⁹⁴ The harshest review came from the Japanese American poet Albert Saijo. Writing in *Crossroads*, a Japanese American newspaper, Saijo described all Nisei writing—not just Mori—as having “muddled intelligence [...] sentimentality [...] and poor craftsmanship.”⁹⁵ But Mori otherwise received laudatory reviews in Japanese American periodicals.⁹⁶ James Omura’s *Current Life* described Mori as the “brightest of embryo Nisei writers.”⁹⁷

Three of Mori’s stories were even translated into Russian. During the Cold

90. Gould to Mori, April 20, 1942, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 11, WSU.

91. Gipson to Gould, April 7, 1942, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 10, WSU. For further analysis of grammar (and grammatical errors) in Mori’s work, see David Mayer, “The Philosopher in Search of a Voice: Toshio Mori’s Japanese-Influenced Narrator,” *Asian American Literature Association (AALA) Journal* 2 (1995): 12–24.

92. Jack Hicks et al., eds., *The Literature of California, Volume 1* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 583. Although Mori was the first to publish a book of fiction, there were Japanese American literary journals that predated *Yokohama, California*, including *The Reimei Journal*, which started in 1931 and was based in Salt Lake City under the direction of Yasuo Sasaki; *Leaves* was published from 1934–1935 as a collaboration between Sasaki and Mary Oyama Mittwer; and *Gyo-Sho: A Magazine of Nisei Literature*, which first appeared in May 1936 and was founded by Eddie Shimano.

93. Mori to Gipson, June 14, 1948, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 11, WSU. Mori’s original dedication—“To Mother | Of This Earth and Beyond”—was changed to “To the Memory of My Mother | Yoshi Takaki Mori” in the published version.

94. Bradford Smith, “Humble Coast Folk,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, May 7, 1949, 36–37; “*Yokohama, California*,” *The New Yorker*, April 23, 1949, 100–101; Ernest Jones, “A Nisei Childhood,” *The Nation*, April 23, 1949, 480; Lewis Gannett, “Books and Things,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 15, 1949.

95. Albert Saijo, “Review of *Yokohama, California*,” *Crossroads: The Los Angeles Nisei Weekly*, March 25, 1949, quoted in Hisaye Yamamoto, “Introduction,” in Toshio Mori, *The Chauvinist and Other Stories* (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, 1979), 2.

96. Nancy Barr, “Toshio Mori Tells How He Came to Write His First Book,” *Pacific Citizen*, March 26, 1949, 2; “Nisei Writer Wows Critics,” *Nisei Vue* 2, no. 4 (April 1949): 4–5; “Life in ‘Yokohama, California,’” *Pacific Citizen*, April 23, 1949, 5.

97. “*Yokohama, California*,” *Current Life* 2, no. 2 (November 1941): 14.

War, the U.S. State Department published a glossy magazine, *Amerika*, written in Russian and distributed in Russia. Characterized as “polite propaganda,” the magazine sought to depict the virtues of life in America.⁹⁸ The editor of *Amerika* reached out to Gipson just a few months after *Yokohama, California* was published to secure translation permission.⁹⁹

Caxton’s promotional material for the book glossed over the specifics of Mori’s incarceration in the internment camps. Instead the advertising materials for the books euphemistically referred to Mori’s time in Tanforan and Topaz simply as “a three-year sojourn in Japanese relocation centers.”¹⁰⁰ The publisher’s synopsis emphasized the novelty of the stories: “Life in the Japanese-American settlements of California reveals a way of living almost totally unknown to most Americans.”¹⁰¹ Mori took out ads in several Japanese American newspapers to promote his book—seemingly out of his own pocket. There was a momentary possibility that the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) would purchase one thousand copies of the book.¹⁰² That did not come to fruition, however, because the JACL had already committed themselves to sponsoring another book.¹⁰³

Although it was the first work of fiction by a Japanese American, Mori’s book joined a postwar rush of new nonfiction books by and about Japanese Americans: *Citizen 13660* by Minè Okubo, *Boy from Nebraska: The Story of Ben Kuroki* by Ralph G. Martin, *A Brother Is a Stranger* by Toru Matsumoto and Marion Olive Lerrigo, *Tradition* by Anne Emery, *The Spoilage: Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement* by Dorothy Swaine Thomas and Richard S. Nishimoto, and *City in the Sun* by Karon Kehoe. All of those titles appeared in 1946 alone.

Despite the positive press, *Yokohama, California* did not sell well. In fact, it sold barely more than one thousand copies in the first two and a half years.¹⁰⁴ In the first decade, Mori earned just \$111.99 for all his efforts to bring his community to life. In April 1959, ten years after *Yokohama, California* was published, Caxton remaindered (discarded) the books they still had in stock—201 copies. Gipson wrote to Mori that “we are sorry this didn’t work out. Your book is a fine one, and it should have sold.”¹⁰⁵

98. Walter L. Hixon, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1981* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 118.

99. Gipson to Royce Moch, May 28, 1949, Steven Y. Mori Collection. The translated stories were “The Seventh Street Philosopher,” “Nodas in America,” and “The Six Rows of Pompoms” and appeared in the December 1949 issue (no. 36, 64–69).

100. *Yokohama, California* Advertising Leaflet, Steven Y. Mori Collection.

101. *Yokohama, California* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1949).

102. Mori to Gipson, September 5, 1948, Steven Y. Mori Collection.

103. Mori to Gipson, January 2, 1953, *ibid.*

104. Gipson to Mori, December 27, 1952, *ibid.* To be exact, 1,078 copies were sold.

105. Gipson to Mori, April 18, 1959, *ibid.*

Assessing why so few copies sold, Mori suggested that “the book, as far as the Japanese Americans were concerned, the interest was generally good, but I don’t believe that there was enough interest to make a good sale.”¹⁰⁶ Another potential limiting factor was the way the stories were selected and edited together. Mori often continued the narrative of a particular character in another story that was not included in the selection, thus eliminating some of the continuity in the published volume.¹⁰⁷ As poet Lawson Fusao Inada later put it, *Yokohama, California* “slid into oblivion” and was “one of the most unwanted books in history.”¹⁰⁸

V: Toshio Mori after *Yokohama, California*

After *Yokohama, California* was published, Mori continued writing but still struggled to find publishers and an audience for his fiction. Mori maintained an intermittent correspondence with Saroyan.

Despite the low sales, there were positive developments. An editor from Doubleday and an editor from Harper and Brothers both reached out to Mori; they were interested in his novels and wanted to see the manuscripts. John Fischer, of Harpers, also encouraged Mori to enter his company’s Prize Novel Contest and said that Mori’s writing “contains some of the freshest and most sensitive writing I have seen in a long while.”¹⁰⁹

Mori finished a draft of a novel, *Woman from Hiroshima*, in August 1949 and submitted it to Harpers, who rejected it. That novel was an autobiography of an Issei woman, “coming from Hiroshima as an immigrant and spending the rest of her life in America.”¹¹⁰ Mori based the titular character on his mother. Submissions to at least four other New York firms were similarly unsuccessful.¹¹¹

Mori then sent the manuscript of the novel to Caxton Printers in 1952. Gipson said that the book would need to sell several thousand copies in order to come out even. Gipson did describe the novel as “an excellent piece of work, which justifies publication [by us].”¹¹² In early 1953, Caxton agreed to publish *Woman*

106. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 97.

107. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 479.

108. Lawson Fusao Inada, “Introduction,” in Toshio Mori, *Unfinished Message*, 10; Lawson Fusao Inada, “Standing on Seventh Street,” in Toshio Mori, *Yokohama, California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), xx.

109. As quoted in Mori to Gipson, March 28, 1949, Steven Y. Mori Collection.

110. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 474.

111. Mori to Saroyan, February 10, 1950, Toshio Mori Miscellany, MSS 94/221c, Bancroft Library.

112. Gipson to Mori, December 27, 1952, Steven Y. Mori Collection. Mori sent a portion (the first eighteen chapters) of *Woman from Hiroshima* to Caxton in 1946. Caxton, however, immediately rejected it because they only considered completed manuscripts.

from Hiroshima if one thousand copies were presold.¹¹³ Mori sought Saroyan's advice, and Saroyan responded: "Toshio, I am so glad you have gone on with your writing. I am absolutely burned up at the New York publishers for turning down your work. [...] Keep after your skill, keep watching, keep writing."¹¹⁴ Mori, as grateful and effusive as ever, replied, "Your encouragement means more to me than anything else, and I hope I keep improving."¹¹⁵ Ultimately, Mori could not guarantee the sale of a thousand copies, so Caxton never published the book.

Mori continued to have great difficulty finding a publisher for any of his work. An agent told him that the commercial value of his writing was "nonexistent." As Mori later reflected, he was "handicapped by economics" of having to earn a living and not being able to write full time.¹¹⁶ At the same time, he looked back on that situation positively: "Sometimes a good writer has to starve to write good stories."¹¹⁷

Writing was not Mori's only occupation; he maintained his nursery as his full-time job and primary source of income. His business suffered in the postwar years and profits declined. Mori explained to Saroyan that the "nursery business, at least my own, is not good. The price of flowers are just a bit better than prewar but the expenses of operations are sky-high. To a little nurseryman like me, this is bad."¹¹⁸ By 1967, Mori had left the nursery business and gone to work in public relations for a wholesale florist. He wanted "to get away from the old atmosphere." With that change in jobs, he resumed writing novels and also wrote a few new short stories.¹¹⁹ Mori kept the same style as his prewar stories.¹²⁰

VI: Toshio Mori "Discovered"

It took the maturation of the next generation of Japanese Americans—the Sansei, or third generation—before Mori finally began receiving recognition for his pioneering work in Japanese American literature.

The nascent Japanese American literary movement coalesced in 1975 when the first meeting of the Nisei Writers' Symposium was held in San Francisco. Mori was one of four authors featured at the conference.¹²¹ The University of

113. Gipson to Mori, January 5, 1953, *ibid.*

114. Saroyan to Mori, February 22, 1953, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

115. Mori to Saroyan, February 27, 1953, *ibid.*

116. Horikoshi, "Interview," 476.

117. *Ibid.*, 477.

118. Mori to Saroyan, February 27, 1953, Saroyan Papers, Box 69, Folder 19, Stanford University Special Collections.

119. Mori to Saroyan, April 11, 1967, *ibid.*

120. Horikoshi, "Interview," 476.

121. The other three writers were Hiroshi Kashiwagi, Iwao Kawakami, and Yoshiko Uchida.

Washington hosted a similar conference the following year—the Pacific Northwest Asian-American Writers Conference—where Mori was again an honored guest, read from his work, and gave a talk on “What to Write.”¹²² In the forward to an interview with Mori published in 1976, the interviewer described Mori as “part of a hidden Asian American literary tradition.”¹²³ Labeled a “pioneer,” Mori was finally recognized more widely for what he achieved with *Yokohama, California*.¹²⁴ In 1974 the Combined Asian Resources Project (CARP) published *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), which reprinted Mori’s story, “The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts.”¹²⁵ Beyond *Aiiieeeee!*, Mori’s stories were anthologized frequently in that decade of his “rediscovery.”¹²⁶ He continued to be included in textbooks and anthologies for the next several decades.¹²⁷

These groups’ efforts brought renewed attention both to Mori and to other Nisei writers. With this new spotlight, Mori published one of his novels, *Woman*

122. The conference records are held at the University of Washington’s Special Collections (Collection Number 2768). To hear audio recordings of Mori reading from his work and speaking at the conference, visit radio station KRAB’s audio archive at krabarchive.com/programs/krab-1976-pacific-northwest-asian-american-writers-conference.html. Mori was also featured at the Talk Story Ethnic Writers’ Conference at the Mid-Pacific Institute in Honolulu in 1978.

123. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 472.

124. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 89.

125. Frank Chin et al., eds., *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), 123–26.

126. Other anthologized stories include: “The Eggs of the World,” in *Speaking for Ourselves: American Ethnic Writing*, eds. Lillian Faderman and Barbara Bradshaw (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1969), 174–77; “Slant-eyed Americans,” in *A Nation of Nations: Ethnic Literature in America*, ed. Theodore L. Gross (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 398–403; “One Happy Family,” in *Japanese Americans: The Untold Story*, ed. The Japanese American Curriculum Project (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 151–54; “Slant-Eyed Americans,” in *Alienation: Minority Groups*, ed. Donald Rude (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1972), 117–23; “The Eggs of the World,” in *Asian-American Authors*, eds. Kai-yu Hsu and Helen Palubinskas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 94–99; “Say It with Flowers,” in *Asian-American Heritage: Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, ed. David Hsin-Fu Wand (New York: Washington Square Press, 1974), 88–96; “Say It with Flowers,” in *In Question*, vol. 8 of *Variations: A Contemporary Literature Program* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 200–207; “The Chessmen,” in *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, ed. Emma Gee (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, 1976), 480–83; and “Tomorrow Is Coming, Children” in *The Greenfield Review* 6, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring 1977): 1–5.

127. “The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts,” in *The Big Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 216–20; “The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts,” in *Visions Across the Americas: Short Essays for Composition*, eds. J. Sterling Warner et al. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 72–77.

from Hiroshima, in 1978 through Isthmus Press. A second collection of short stories, *The Chauvinist and Other Stories*, came out in 1979 through the Asian American Studies Center at the University of California Los Angeles. Long out of print, both volumes have recently been republished by Modern Times Publishing.¹²⁸

Beyond literary conferences, Mori also received recognition when five young Japanese Americans formed a band dedicated to social justice issues and focused on writing songs “describing the Asian American communities in the 1970s.”¹²⁹ Named “Yokohama, California” in honor of Mori and his importance to Japanese American culture, the group released a self-titled album in 1977. One member of the band, Peter Horikoshi, interviewed Mori for *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, which was Mori’s first published full-length interview.¹³⁰

Mori was not the only Japanese American author who received recognition years after his work first appeared. The publishing saga of John Okada’s *No-No Boy* is fraught with sadness. Okada died before his novel received critical acclaim; his widow could not find an archive that wanted his papers, so she destroyed them.¹³¹

Mori applauded the efforts of the Sansei to consciously form “Asian writing” groups: “They’re trying to start something as a group which is much more substantial because it will help preserve some of the writing efforts, I think, of today. [...] I believe the younger generation has developed a deeper interest within themselves and their problems than the older generation.”¹³² Mori explained his theory for why people of his generation had little interest in their Japanese identity while the Sansei and Yonsei (fourth generation) had greater interest:

[M]y generation, the second generation, more or less deliberately stayed away from the Japanese interest in our native Japan, especially customs, because we were trying to become pro-American, hundred percent American citizens, and we wanted to prove to ourselves that we were loyal Americans rather than half-and-half. Because our background in California more or less made our position suspect, we studied more American things, American politics, and American traditions. Very few of us were attached even to the Issei concerns. We were so-called outcasts from Japanese

128. Toshio Mori, *The Chauvinist and Other Stories* (New York: Modern Times Publishing, 2022); Toshio Mori, *The Woman from Hiroshima* (New York: Modern Times Publishing, 2022).

129. “Yokohama, California CD and booklet,” <http://www.yokohamaca.com/yokohama-california.html>.

130. John Sammon, “Re-Release of 1970’s Album into CD Calls Attention to Issues of Concern for Asian Americans,” *NikkeiWest*, <https://nikkeiwest.com/re-release-of-1970s-album-into-cd-calls-attention-to-issues-of-concern-for-asian-americans/>.

131. Thessaly La Force, “The Things We Carry,” *T Magazine*, November 17, 2019, 43.

132. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 475.

knowledge by the Issei, our parents, because we would not study sincerely, although we did attend Japanese schools and all that. The Issei as a whole used to say, “Nisei dame,” meaning “Nisei no good,” because they never follow the traditions of the Japanese.¹³³

Yokohama, California remained out of print for twenty-five years before the University of Washington Press added it to their “Classics of Asian American Literature” series and reprinted it in 1985.¹³⁴ The book continues to be available through UW Press. Another new edition was released in 2015 and features a new introduction by University of the Pacific professor of English, Xiaojing Zhou. A new cover replaced the original one from the Caxton first edition. Thomas Eykemans, designer of the new cover, explained his concept: “As the stories are set in a fictionalized Oakland, I wanted to find a way to represent a sense of place while imbuing it with a more symbolic meaning.”¹³⁵ Reviewing the latest edition, one writer called *Yokohama, California* “ahead of its time.”¹³⁶

In the 1980s and 1990s, Mori began receiving critical attention from scholars analyzing his novel and stories, identifying themes, and placing his work in the canon of Asian American literature.¹³⁷ This posthumous interest in Mori’s work resulted in the publication of *Unfinished Message* in 2000, a collection of Mori’s unpublished work, letters, and photographs.

Toshio Mori died on April 12, 1980, at the age of seventy, in San Leandro, California, where he lived his whole adult life with the exception of his internment in Topaz.¹³⁸

133. Leong, “Toshio Mori,” 108.

134. In 1976, Caxton told Mori they could only reprint *Yokohama, California* in a paperback edition with guaranteed sales of ten thousand copies. Horikoshi, “Interview,” 472.

135. “Behind the Covers: Six Classics of Asian American Literature, Then and Now,” *University of Washington Press Blog*, November 13, 2014, <https://uwpressblog.com/2014/11/13/behind-the-covers-six-classics-of-asian-american-literature-then-and-now/>.

136. Ken Mochizuki, “Mori’s *Yokohama, California* Was Ahead of Its Time,” *International Examiner*, August 29, 2015, <https://iexaminer.org/moris-yokohama-california-was-ahead-of-its-time/>.

137. For a bibliography of this criticism, see Sarah Catlin Barnhart, “Toshio Mori,” in *Asian American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 238–39. Recent scholarship includes Heather Hathaway, *That Damned Fence: The Literature of the Japanese American Prison Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

138. “Toshio Mori, 70, Pioneer Nisei Author,” *Pacific Citizen*, May 2, 1980, 2.

Conclusion

Toshio Mori's writing defied the rules for short stories. They were rather more like "studies of life" than stories, as one of Caxton's editors put it.¹³⁹ Although Mori received little recognition for his writing for much of his life, his stories will forever be a testament to his groundbreaking work. In 1979, the writer Hisaye Yamamoto declared Mori "the pioneer of Japanese American literature." Mori's stories are not just stories to be read or analyzed, but, as Yamamoto further noted, they are "a precious record of their heritage which few at the time deemed important enough to preserve."¹⁴⁰

Yokohama, California was "ignored and rejected," yet the collection of stories endures as "a monument, a classic of literature."¹⁴¹ Despite the long trial and hardship Mori faced while trying to get his book published, Mori said he would do it all again if given the opportunity: "The adventure of writing is fascinating."¹⁴² "He loved writing," said Steven Mori, Toshio's son.¹⁴³ It is clear that Mori did love writing: his dedication to his daily schedule, his desire for continual improvement, and the sheer volume of his output leaves little doubt. His published work is a testament to his status as a pioneer of Japanese American literature: a writer trying to tell the world about his neighborhood.

139. Melda Ludlow, "A Report on New Material," May 17, 1948, Caxton Records, Box 25, Folder 11, WSU.

140. Yamamoto, "Introduction," in *The Chauvinist and Other Stories* (1979), 3, 14.

141. Inada, "Standing on Seventh Street," in *Yokohama, California* (1985), v.

142. Horikoshi, "Interview," 477.

143. As quoted in Inada, "Introduction," in *Unfinished Message*, 7.