



Thanh, Yasuko. (2019). Mistakes to Run With. Toronto: Hamish Hamilton.

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Yasuko Thanh's memoir chronicles the evolution of her psyche through her lived experience from homeless youth, to prostitute, to mother, to student, to award-winning author. Thanh's key motivation throughout her evolution was an eternal quest for love, affection, and acceptance from those in her life, which she would go to great lengths to secure. Thanh's book pinpoints the evolution of her mental illness through obsessive-compulsive disorder, self-harm, addiction, reckless actions, all portrayed as a seemingly out-of-body experience or third-person perspective of her downward spiral of degradation of mental health. Thanh actively creates discourse surrounding mental illness while effectively breaking down stereotypes surrounding those who engage in the sex trade by normalizing and contextualizing the industry's inner workings. Thanh's memoir concludes with realizing her goals of acceptance and accolades by winning the Rogers Writers' Trust Award. However, whether or not this brought her satisfaction in her quest for acceptance remains inconclusive (p. 256).

Thanh's perceptions of being alone in the world began at the raw age of approximately five or six. This insight resulted in a profound disconnect from those in her life and an overwhelming feeling of sadness. Thanh's psychological difficulties began with parental disconnect, and these difficulties have followed her throughout the relationships she has formed throughout her life (p.

15). Thanh's relationship with her parents continued to deteriorate throughout her childhood. Eventually, she left home to live as a homeless youth in downtown Vancouver. Thanh's parents willfully wiped their hands free of dealing with her difficulties, leaving social services responsible for dealing with her problematic social issues, including mental illness and other behavioural issues (p. 46).

Throughout Thanh's book, she effectively communicates to the reader the intensity and power of her depression and feelings of isolation, rendering her life to a hypothetical psychological purgatory, where she would experiment with various methods of risky behaviour to spark and maintain an emotional connection with the different characters she meets over the course of her life. At the age of seven, Thanh turned her attention-seeking on a neighbourhood boy named Shawn. With an aim to impress and a disconnect from reality, she believed she could fly as she lunged herself off of a fifteen-foot staircase. This risky behaviour acts as a catharsis, leaving Thanh left emotionally despondent as she hid her pain from Shawn (p. 17). In her teen years, Thanh continues with her disillusion and expectations and engages in sexual intercourse, losing her virginity to a mere stranger. Thanh remarks, "But unlike what I prepared for, I felt no love" (p. 56). Thanh is desperate to attain her idealized perception of what she constitutes as a loving and committed relationship and appears not to have the emotional capacity to recognize how emotional bonds are created and maintained.

Throughout Thanh's memoir, she repeatedly recounts instances where she was sexually assaulted, describing these incidents with an emotional disconnect, leaving the reader to view these incidents as a normalized, everyday part of her life. Thanh thoroughly describes the males that

assault her, yet she fails to convey to the reader her personal emotional and physical consequences of these violations. Thanh recounts an incident where her friend Shawn manipulated her as a young child, forced her to the ground and exploited her for sexual petting. She likens these actions to a game, though she does convey that she isolated herself to her home for a week afterwards (p.18). This correlation suggests that there is more going on under the surface than Thanh is willing to share with her readers.

As a child, Thanh describes her fervour of attention-seeking behaviour from her parents, from a spiral of jealousy of her brother, including attempts to break bones from jumping from trees and an obsession with cutting (p. 31). There were numerous other confessions of self-harming as a child, including sticking needles into her fingers and starvation (p. 214). Unfortunately for Thanh, self-harming did not end as a child and is a common theme throughout her book. The reader can see this clearly when she, as a young woman, became pregnant with her first child. She describes a conversation with her then spouse, Philip, who conveyed his concerns over the severity of her cutting, to the point of possibly requiring stitches. Until this point, Thanh created the illusion that she was hopeful and ready to enter the life of motherhood, leaving the reader to question what else occurred under the surface throughout her memoir.

Thanh's book fails to adequately portray to the reader the extent of cultural differences her family faced. Thanh openly reveals her parents immigrated to Canada, her father from Vietnam and her mother from an unnamed European country, resulting in an economic disadvantage for her family. A common theme among Canadian immigrants, her father's education did not transfer over to be equal in the Canadian education system, limiting his qualifications to only be qualified for

menial jobs (p. 6). Though Thanh has difficulty portraying cultural relativity, she does effectively describe to the reader her family's preference for not publicly displaying emotion. Thanh internalized this ideal to the extent that when she felt compelled to express sadness to her parents as a child, she did so by squirting nose drops on her parents' pillow, with the hopes they would assume she was crying (p. 7). Thanh leaves readers with a cliff-hanger in her recalling of conversations she had with her father surrounding the pedophilic actions of numerous Vietnamese men, including members of her family. Thanh's father normalizes and calls these incidents "cultural misunderstandings", retelling the horrific molestation of innocent children written with an emotional detachment. Thanh purposefully manipulates linguistics to inspire shock and disgust from the reader to depict soothing a starving child by allowing it to suckle on a penis (p. 37). This representation leaves the reader, once again, questioning if there was more going on under the surface than what Thanh was willing to share and what cultural practices surrounding the treatment of children were cultural norms for her family.

Thanh effectively describes her typical workday as a prostitute in east side downtown Vancouver, including establishing personal boundaries with clientele and meeting the needs of her customers. Thanh recalls, "Each man was different but everyone was the same, wanting to play games, to be spanked, to be diapered, to wear my underwear. They paid extra for these things. Some wanted to be coddled, some to be peed or shat on. Some wanted to shit on you. Which I wouldn't let them do" (p. 76). Thanh describes the inner working of the sex industry and does so without shame and fear while also addressing grave dangers that sex workers face from both their

pimps and customers throughout a workday. The safety strategy which Trahn advises for dealing with customers is to fake a lay, which sets guidelines for safety, including never allowing sex from behind, using two condoms, being aware of the risk of drugging and never accept food and drink, and so on (p. 100).

Thanh effectively conceptualizes the nature of the relationship that a sex worker forms with her pimp, describing it as similar to a domestic relationship based on concepts of a mutual give and take for both participants (p. 106). Unfortunately, a central theme to emerge for Thanh with her pimps was a high rate of physical assault, including beatings and strangulation (pp. 104-105). Another risk Thanh identifies for sex workers is contracting HIV from their pimps due to lax ideologies surrounding using protection when having sex with them (p. 142). Thanh, desperate for security, love and affection, was not comfortable sharing her pimp with other women. Sharing her pimp with another prostitute, or having a wife-in-law, was a source of distress and jealousy for Thanh, leaving her to feel insecure with providing more money and better sex than her competition (p. 89).

Thanh's book is a source of interest for those in the anthropological field, offering ethnographic insight into the sex work industry, poverty, and mental illness. This book also serves as a valuable teaching tool for university students in sociology, psychology, and criminology. It offers a unique insight into the world of those dealing with mental health issues and those who are criminalized in the criminal justice system. Thanh's book provides a unique insight that can serve to be a source of advocacy for readers dealing with mental illness, those who are victims of sexual

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assault, and those working in the sex industry. Thanh's memoir strips away stereotypes, offering a rich insight into the inner working of those who face systemic barriers resulting from personal issues, such as mental illness, which can serve to break down the barriers of understanding for society at large.