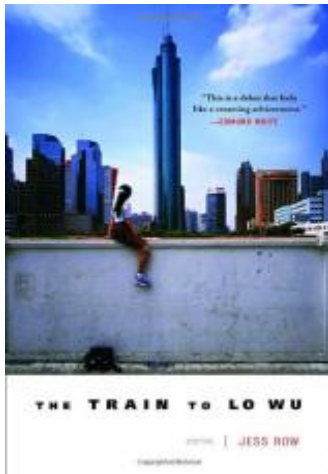


# The Train to Lo Wu

by Jess Row

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## About the Book

The characters in Jess Row's remarkable fiction inhabit "a city that can be like a mirage, hovering above the ground: skyscrapers built on mountainsides, islands swallowed in fog for days." This is Hong Kong, where a Chinese girl and her American teacher explore the "blindness" of bats in an effort to locate the ghost of her suicidal mother; an American graduate student provokes a masseur into reliving the traumatic experience of the Cultural Revolution; a businessman falls in love with a prim bar hostess across the border, in Shenzhen, and finds himself helpless to dissolve the boundaries between them; a stock analyst obsessed with work drives her husband to attend a Zen retreat, where he must come to terms with his failing marriage.

Scrupulously imagined and psychologically penetrating, these seven stories shed light on the many nuances of race, sex, religion, and culture in this most mysterious of cities, even as they illuminate the most universal of human experiences.

## Discussion Guide

1. As the title suggests, **The Train to Lo Wu** features characters in transit. Discuss the journeys portrayed throughout the collection?both literal journeys and symbolic ones taking place within an individual identity.
2. In "The Secrets of Bats," what does Alice teach the narrator about life and language?
3. How were you affected by the timeline in "The American Girl"? Does the culmination of the researcher's work, **Blindness** and **Erasure: A Case Study** reflect the reality of revolution and memory experienced by Mr. Chen?
4. In the first two stories, who are the visionaries? What metaphoric forms of blindness are presented?
5. What caused the pain in Lewis and Melinda's marriage in "For You"? What does Lewis at last discover about love and

suffering?

**6.** The title story, "The Train to Lo Wu," ends with the narrator whispering "peace peace peace." Did Lin bring him peace? If they had emigrated as he suggested, would their relationship have lasted? Why was Lin hesitant to leave?

**7.** Do Marcel Thomas and Wallace Ford perceive the world in similar or different ways in "The Ferry"? How do they experience race and invisibility? How does each of them define freedom?

**8.** "Revolutions" opens with an epigraph from Bodhidharma: "Merit and demerit are ever interpenetrated, like light and darkness." In what way is this thread woven throughout all of the stories in this collection?

**9.** Compare the vignettes of Curtis's life featured in "Revolutions." What proves to be the key to his rehabilitation? What necessary revolutions occur in his understanding of art?

**10.** What does "Heaven Lake" convey about the continuum of power, money, and security? As a philosophy professor, how does Liu interpret the crime to which he was subjected?

**11.** "The Ferry" briefly mentions the nineteenth-century Opium Wars between Great Britain and China, which resulted in the "loaning" of Hong Kong to the British. What does *The Train to Lo Wu* demonstrate about the legacy of Western colonialism?

**12.** What do the characters in *The Train to Lo Wu* require in order to experience trust and hope? What universal motivations are depicted in their lives?

**13.** Discuss the concepts of language and translation as they are portrayed in this collection. When do words become barriers rather than pathways in human interaction?

**14.** Which cities or landscapes have had the greatest impact on your sense of self? Where have you felt like an outsider? Where do you feel most at home?

## Author Bio

Jess Row is the author of the novels *YOUR FACE IN MINE* and *THE NEW EARTH*, the essay collection *WHITE FLIGHTS: Race, Fiction, and the American Imagination*, and two collections of short stories, *THE TRAIN TO LO WU* and *NOBODY EVER GETS LOST*. He's received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Whiting Writers Award; his writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Granta* and many other publications. He teaches at NYU and lives in New York City and Plainfield, Vermont.

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