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### Publication Date

2010

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The Asian American Avant-Garde:  
Universalist Aspirations in Early Asian American Literature

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Colleen Lye, Co-Chair  
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Spring 2010

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## Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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My project traces a genealogy of universalism in early Asian American literature that led to the panethnic formation of the Asian American literary canon in the 1960s and 1970s. I contribute to the recent criticisms of panethnicity as the organizing principle of the field by arguing that the panethnic paradigm, based solely on the anachronistically imposed alliance of excluded diverse Asian ethnic groups, did not structure early Asian American literature. Instead, I argue that the authors of these early texts represented the racial particularity of their “Asian American” protagonists as universal. The protagonists’ performances of universalism exposed the doubleness of American universalism—that is, the failed universalism that excluded racial minorities and the promised inclusive universalism that is yet to come. My conceptualization of Asian American universalism fortifies the theoretical aspect of the sociological paradigm of panethnicity by offering a different and more historically specific approach than the deconstructive readings of political resistance and melancholic abjection that have very recently theorized panethnicity. Since Americanism was conceived through liberal universalism during the period of Asian exclusion (1882-1943), becoming “Asian American” for these authors and their protagonists impossibly and yet productively universalized their racial particularity to their predominantly white audiences.

For some critics, Asian American subjectivity is imagined through only the impossibility of Asian American universalism. By contrast, I argue that the Asian American is formed through the dialectic between racial particularity as an “alien ineligible to citizenship” and liberal universalism. The aim of the dialectic in each of the works I study is framed by the historical moment of each work’s publication: In my first two chapters on Sui Sin Far’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and Sadakichi Hartmann’s and Yone Noguchi’s modernist haikus, I demonstrate that their protagonists and poetic personas attempt to claim space within the American literary imagination during the Progressive Era. In the latter two chapters, I examine the ways in which the protagonists of Dhan Gopal Mukerji’s *Caste and Outcast* and Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West*, and Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* employ modernist forms of temporal nonlinearity to transcend the capitalist commodification of linear time during the Popular Front era. Through performances of

American racial, gender, and class norms, all of the Asian American protagonists of my study not only reveal the exclusions and limitations of American universalism but also attempt to redeem it by articulating new sets of demands for racial, gender, and class equality. The empirical non-existence of Asian American universalism poses a baseline problem of invisibility and thus the demands of racial egalitarianism mobilized by the “not-yet” of Asian American universalism take the visible or more easily identifiable forms of modernist avant-gardism and progressive gender politics in all four of my chapters.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Toward an Asian American Modernism

#### The Possibility of Universalism?

In Jhumpa Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies," the eponymous short story of her 1999 collection of transnational South Asian American stories, the Indian tour guide Mr. Kapasi becomes infatuated with a South Asian American woman named Mrs. Das who is visiting relatives in India with her husband and children. Mr. Kapasi, who also works as a physician's language translator, channels his "drea[m] of being an interpreter for diplomats and dignitaries, resolving conflicts between people and nations, settling disputes of which he alone could understand both sides"<sup>1</sup> through his romantic fantasy of an overseas affair with her. Dissatisfied with his lackluster vocations and his own submissive and indifferent wife, Mr. Kapasi is enthralled by Mrs. Das's emasculating, voluble, American beauty. Her appearance—as she wears "a close-fitting blouse styled like a man's undershirt...[h]er hair, shorn only a little longer than her husband's"<sup>2</sup>—reminds him of his own emasculation, reflected in the emaciated Indian man and bullocks that Mr. Das photographs. After Mrs. Das praises Mr. Kapasi's "romantic" work as a physician's assistant and asks him to write down his address on a piece of paper in order to send him photograph prints of their trip, he begins his fantasy of their romantic, international exchange in which they would arrive at some sort of mutual, universal understanding of their nations: "He would explain things to her, things about India, and she would explain things to him about America. In its own way this correspondence would fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations. He looked at her straw bag, delighted that his address lay nestled among its contents."<sup>3</sup> And yet, as he becomes further acquainted with her and the "common, trivial little secret"<sup>4</sup> of her past marital infidelities, he is disenchanted with her and inadvertently insults her when he suggests that her malady is guilt rather than pain. The break in their intimacy is further represented at the end of the story when Mrs. Das is tending to her son Bobby's injury and the piece of paper bearing his address slips out of her purse and flutters away in the wind: "He watched as it rose, carried higher and higher by the breeze, into the trees where the monkeys now sat, solemnly observing the scene below."<sup>5</sup> The loss of Mr. Kapasi's written address illuminates the impossible fantasy on which he had built his anticipated relationship with Mrs. Das, signifying the very impossibility of a universal "interpreter between nations."

Reflective of its post-civil rights era, poststructuralist moment, "Interpreter of Maladies" demonstrates disenchantment with American universalism—the notion that American democracy is accessible to all and internationally replicable. The overseas interactions between Mrs. Das and Mr. Kapasi illustrate Lisa Lowe's seminal argument that "the Asian American, even as a citizen, continues to be located outside the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies," *Interpreter of Maladies* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999) 52.

<sup>2</sup> Lahiri, 46.

<sup>3</sup> Lahiri, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Lahiri, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Lahiri, 69.

and racial boundaries of the nation.”<sup>6</sup> The short story concludes with a remaining “picture of the Das family” in India—frazzled by Bobby’s injuries from an attack by the native monkeys—that “he would preserve forever in his mind.”<sup>7</sup> Rediscovering their cultural roots and yet finding themselves out of place in India, the Das family appears to have carved out an alternative space that, as Lowe argues, deconstructs American universalism and characterizes Asian American culture as a space of difference.<sup>8</sup> Lowe’s reframing of Asian American subjectivity as heterogeneous, transnational, and anti-universal initiated a spate of criticism that recast Asian American literature as transnational expressions of diaspora rather than cultural national claims of America—a framing which had initially defined the field. The transnational turn in Asian American studies thus mobilizes diasporic texts such as “Interpreter of Maladies” as “Asian American.” The celebration of American universalism in many early Asian American texts, such as Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946), trouble Lowe’s definition. In fact, the dual critique of American democracy and championing of American universalism in *America Is in the Heart*, for example, served as fodder for the cultural national aim to carve out a separatist America that was alternative to the white, mainstream United States. And yet, it is clear by the conclusion of his (now canonical) semi-autobiographical novel that Bulosan is neither celebrating a cultural national America nor a nation-less space of exile but a universally inclusive utopia that is figured in the yet-to-be-realized American nation:

It came to me that no man—no one at all—could destroy my faith in America again...It was something that grew out of the sacrifices and loneliness of my friends, of my brothers and family in the Philippines—something that grew out of our desire to know America, and to become a part of her great tradition, and to contribute something toward her final fulfillment. I knew that no man could destroy my faith in America that had sprung from all our hopes and aspirations, ever.<sup>9</sup>

His envisioned America is not a separatist space of Asian American cultural nationalism but a utopia that includes his multi-ethnic and multinational friends and family. Far from dismissing the nation as a viable concept, Bulosan declares his unabashed devotion to a deferred America despite his protagonist’s confrontations with racial discrimination in

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996) 6.

<sup>7</sup> Lahiri, 69.

<sup>8</sup> Lowe states that,

Rather than attesting to the absorption of cultural difference into the universality of the national political sphere as the ‘model minority’ stereotype would dictate, the Asian immigrant—at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation—emerges in a site that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation. This distance from the national culture constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative formation that produces cultural expressions materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen in the nation. Rather than expressing a ‘failed’ integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this distance preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulation. (6)

It is precisely in this alternative space that Mrs. Das divulges the hidden history of her marital infidelity which led to the conception of her son Bobby. She seeks the particular aid of Mr. Kapasi’s skills as an interpreter of maladies for a remedy for her “pain.”

<sup>9</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002) 326-7.



the United States. The unrealized American universalisms championed in early Asian American literature suggest that the paradigms of cultural nationalism and transnationalism, which respectively disavow and deconstruct the status quo of American universalism, offer inadequate lenses of interpretation for these texts. Early Asian American literature before the civil rights era is rife with seemingly non-ironic expressions of American universalism. For example, as a biracial “Eurasian” writing in the United States in 1909, Sui Sin Far imagines herself as a privileged, albeit self-deprecating, “interpreter between nations” in her autobiography: “I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left to the Orientals, hoping that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant ‘connecting link.’”<sup>10</sup> Unlike Mr. Kapasi, Mrs. Spring Fragrance—the Chinese American protagonist of Sui Sin Far’s book of short stories—goes on to serve as a cultural interpreter of sorts as she attempts to write a book about “[t]hese mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible Americans...”<sup>11</sup> If texts before the Asian American cultural nationalist moment of the 1970s could pledge their allegiance to American democracy and diplomacy despite contemporaneous Asian exclusions and American imperial incursions overseas, why does Asian American studies seem to repudiate and deconstruct American universalism during and after the cultural nationalist period?

While it seems that no study could be expansive enough to thoroughly tackle this question, Neil Lazarus et al.’s article, “The Necessity of Universalism,” offers some insight to explain why universalism is pervasively understood as an ideological offshoot of global capitalism after 1968:

In fact, the years since 1968, so often cited as the year zero of ‘post-’ thought, seem to us to have borne witness to a *consolidation* of the historical patterns of bourgeois class domination. Three features of this consolidation stand out: first, the expansion of inter-imperialist conflict and rise of new sub-imperialist powers; second, the intensification of market coercion in the former Eastern bloc; and third, the diffusion of economic crisis (measured in terms of declining growth rates and levels of unemployment unmatched since the 1930s) which has brought in its wake heightened instability and political conflict (crystallizing around resurgent nationalist, fundamentalist, and fascist movements) and the restructuring of the international division of labor.<sup>12</sup>

Lazarus et al. go on to argue that the consolidation of the bourgeois class domination is historically “facilitated by the crystallization of a universalistic ideology.”<sup>13</sup> The convergence of bourgeois domination and universalism since 1968 has thus provoked considerable backlash among anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist theorists as well as cultural producers who have, in turn, favored deconstruction and a politics of difference as solutions to the inequalities of capitalism and imperialism.<sup>14</sup> This study argues that,

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<sup>10</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian,” *Independent* (21 January 1909), *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 230.

<sup>11</sup> Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 33.

<sup>12</sup> Neil Lazarus, et al. “The Necessity of Universalism,” *Differences* 7:1 (Spring 1995): 80.

<sup>13</sup> Lazarus, et al, 90.

<sup>14</sup> Instead, Lazarus et al. seek to rethink the merits of radical universalism that would dialectically complete the Enlightenment project: “Only a political struggle seeking to radicalize the uncompleted Enlightenment

before the solidified dominance of bourgeois ideology, early Asian American literary texts critiqued U.S. industrial capitalism in which Asian immigrant laborers were exploited and barred from citizenship. They did so diversely through formal engagements with literary regionalism, what T. J. Jackson Lears calls “antimodern” literary modernism, and Marxist avant-gardism. Their critique of industrial capitalism attempts to herald genuine, universal democracy, calling on the U.S. to make good on its democratic promises.

### **Asian American Universalism**

My project traces a genealogy of universalism in early Asian American literature that led to the panethnic formation of the Asian American literary canon in the 1960s and 1970s. My dissertation contributes to the recent critical unmooring of panethnicity as the organizing principle of the field by arguing that the panethnic paradigm based on the anachronistically imposed alliance of excluded diverse Asian ethnic groups, alone, did not structure early Asian American literature. I maintain the paradigm of panethnicity to the extent that I demonstrate the ways in which early, multiethnic Asian texts respond to contemporaneous Asian exclusion. Rather than resting on a positive notion of panethnic solidarity, my conceptualization of early Asian American literature focuses on the ways in which the authors of these early texts represented themselves and their gendered, “Asian American” protagonists as universal. The employment of modernist literary forms and the performances of American social norms by Asian American subjects, who are always already feminized, in these texts assert a particularized universalism that exposes the doubleness of American universalism—that is, the failed universalism that excluded racial minorities and the promised inclusive universalism that is yet to come. These early Asian American subjects’ apparent faith in an unrealized American universalism differs from both the assimilationist stance of liberal universalism that denies difference and the anti-universalist endorsement of difference that seems to mobilize the paradigms of Asian American cultural nationalism and Asian American transnationalism in distinct ways. The authors explore alternative universalisms that are based, in part, on their racial experiences during Asian exclusion in the U.S., through which they each imagine an alternate universe or a cosmos that is inclusive of difference. This imagining often finds its geographical figuration in an anticipated America—in contrast to the protagonist’s empirical U.S.—and, in so doing, provides an avenue to a more effective realization of American universalism than the blindness to racial and gender exclusions of liberal pluralism.

By privileging the U.S. as the potential space of universalism, the authors of my study indeed espouse an ideology of American exceptionalism to various extents. Yet, differing from that of Fredrick Jackson Turner, theirs is a continually deferred exceptionalism that accounts for the empirical failures of American universalism. For example, I argue in my fourth chapter that, in *America Is in the Heart*, Bulosan’s protagonist Carlos critiques the racism, chauvinism, and classism in American culture while also imagining a socialist utopia that he also calls America. Insofar as Bulosan preserves racial, gender, and class difference in his vision of utopia, the content of his inclusive universalism differs from the erasure of difference that is championed by liberal

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and socialist projects is today capable of withstanding ‘the internationalism of capital.’ Universalism is not simply a priority, but a necessity, if we are to make this labor our own” (125).

pluralism. The deferred promise of inclusive universalism informed the egalitarian visions and inclinations articulated in the early texts of my study. My conceptualization of Asian American universalism fortifies the theoretical aspect of the sociological paradigm of panethnicity. While other critics have recently theorized Asian American panethnicity through deconstructive readings of political resistance and melancholic abjection, I offer the alternative universalisms explored in the works of my study as structurally different and more historically specific political readings for the theorization of Asian American panethnicity before the civil rights era. Deconstructive approaches to these early works would disregard the extent to which these authors laid claim to America. I argue that they did so in ways that were necessarily internationalist, rather than anachronistically cultural nationalist or nationalist, during the contemporaneous moment of Asian exclusion in the U.S.

Since U.S. belonging was conceived of as liberal universalism during the period of Asian exclusion (1882-1943), becoming “Asian American,” for these authors and their protagonists, did not merely deconstruct universalism. Instead, it advanced contradictory depictions of racial exclusion and an inclusive utopia in order to expand the possibility of American universalism. The period of Asian exclusion coincided with the period of waning racial biologism, emergent liberal pluralism, and U.S. imperial conquest that was formally initiated by the Spanish-American War of 1898. While whiteness and Americanness were never perfectly synonymous in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as historians Nikhil Singh and Mae Ngai have argued, the two nevertheless acted in concert with each other to signify universalism at home and abroad to the exclusion of racialized minorities such as Asian immigrants. The early texts of my study demonstrate that, before the period of legal citizenship, attempts to represent Asians as universal figures were particularly problematic since, as Ngai suggests, Asians emerged from legal exclusions as *impossible subjects*, barred from the universalism of the nation. Instead of detaching the nation from its sovereign universalism by “provincializing”<sup>15</sup> it, the Asian American authors and their protagonists respond to the particularity of their impossible subjecthood by envisioning alternative, national or international spheres that include Asians, among many other racial, gendered, and class minorities.

My theoretical conceptualization of Asian American as a subjectivity that emerges from the contradiction between racial exclusion (particularity) and American universalism contrasts with other panethnic and more recent transnational paradigms of the field that diversely critique American universalism and celebrate racial particularity. Despite the transnational turn in Asian American studies that redefines Asian American literature as narratives of diaspora rather than cultural nationalism, critics such as Sau-ling Wong and Shirley Lim have warned against the dangers of completely dismissing the nation as a site of political resistance in the critical field.<sup>16</sup> In her introduction to *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature*, Zhou Xiaojing cites the work of Jinqi

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<sup>15</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> See Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, “Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads,” *Amerasia Journal* 21.1&2 (1995): 1-27. See also Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Immigration and Diaspora,” *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. Ed. King-Kok Cheung (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 289-311.

Ling, David Leiwei Li, E. San Juan, Jr, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and David Palumbo-Liu as significant contributions to a body of criticism that attempts to move beyond the binary of transnationalism and cultural nationalism. She writes,

The studies of Palumbo-Liu, Nguyen, San Juan, Li, and Ling, among others, point to the fact that Asian American agency resides in negotiation with, not separation from, dominant ideologies and literary traditions—a fact that underlies the theoretical assumptions and critical methodologies of this anthology. These studies suggest that in order to recognize the possibilities of Asian American authors' agency in transforming hegemony, it is necessary to understand the dominant American literary discourses are neither homogeneous nor bounded by a discrete culture.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, the discourse of American universalism was not synonymous with the culture of racial exclusion in which the early Asian American authors wrote. My focus on their rearticulations of alternative universalisms suggests that the racial particularity in the literature, which has been accentuated by cultural nationalism and transnationalism, nevertheless contains an inherent, universal vision of racial egalitarianism. Whereas, for many poststructuralist critics, Asian American subjectivity is imagined through the impossibility of its universalism, I am arguing that the Asian American is formed through the dialectic between racial particularity and liberal universalism in the early texts.<sup>18</sup> In these texts, Asian American particularity indicates the failure of American universalism while Asian American universalism repositions liberal universalism to fulfill its formal promise of racial inclusion.

Dialectically emerging from liberal universalism, Asian American universalism suggests the inefficacy of an American universalism that does not include Asians. As I mentioned earlier, since Asian men and women were historically stereotyped as effeminate and hyperfeminized,<sup>19</sup> Asian American racial exclusion was always already an implicitly gendered exclusion as well. Thus, the female and male protagonists of the texts featured in my study seem to identify themselves predominantly with activist white women and women of Asian descent. In contradistinction to the masculinist politics championed by the many of cultural nationalists of the 1970s, the authors of my study appear to subscribe to complex, Progressive or leftist gender politics. In texts such as Sui

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<sup>17</sup> Zhou Xiaojing, *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature*, Eds. Zhou Xiaojing and Samina Najmi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005) 13.

<sup>18</sup> Lisa Lowe's groundbreaking work, *Immigrant Acts*, similarly posits that Asian American critique is located in this dialectic and yet what her theorized engagement with the dialectic of American universalism appears to result, rather, in its deconstruction:

The dialectic of Asian American critique begins in the moment of negation that is the refusal to be the 'margin' that speaks itself in the dominant forms of political, historical, or literary representation. This transforms the 'minority' position from being the only form of inclusion within the universal postulates of the nation to a critique of liberal pluralism and its multicultural terrain. For, as the consideration of Asian American cultural forms in subsequent chapters demonstrates, the demand that the immigrant subject 'develop' into an identification with the dominant forms of the nation gives rise to contradictory articulations that interrupt the demands for identity and identification, that *voice antagonisms to the universalizing narratives of both pluralism and development, and that open Asian American culture as an alternative site to the American economic, political, and national cultural spheres.* (28-29, my emphasis)

<sup>19</sup> In *Orientalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), Robert G. Lee writes that Asians were perceived as hermaphroditic and othered as "the third sex" (85).

Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and *America Is in the Heart*, the visible political struggles of female activists foreground the racial conflicts experienced by the Asian American protagonists. That is to say, the alliances of sympathy created between the female activists and the racialized and gendered protagonists grant visibility to the political struggle of Asian Americans in these texts. In the poetry of Sadakichi Hartmann and Yone Noguchi and fiction of Dhan Gopal Mukerji and Younghill Kang, the poetic persona and protagonists often identify themselves closely with females or even *as* female. Such gendered identifications are self-reflexive strategies that call attention to the ways in which their formal experimentation articulate specific political concerns about race and gender that were alternative to other, contemporaneous Euro-American modernists.

### Avant-Garde Forms

Works such as Timothy Yu's *Race and the Avant-Garde*, Josephine Nock-Hee Park's *Apparitions of Asia*, Davis & Lee's *Literary Gestures*, and Zhou & Najmi's *Form and Transformation*, among many others, have marked a recent turn toward formalist criticism in Asian American literature. Many of these texts explore the ways in which Asian American writers have appropriated and rearticulated Euro-American literary forms as a strategy of political resistance and negotiating agency. In "Universalisms and Minority Culture," David Palumbo-Liu discusses the limited subjectivity that emerges from the contradictions between the ethnic subject and the aesthetic form in which the subject is located:

In the case of the ethnic subject, this particular subjectivization carries a correlate contradiction: he or she is located within an aesthetic which declares its universality for all human beings, yet that place is tenuously at the gate, awaiting proof of the ethnic subject's actual creative capacities. Furthermore, the internalization of the dominant's ideology of a universal aesthetic carries an alienating element into the psyche of the ethnic subject, as it sees itself both called into the human and reminded of its contingent status...<sup>20</sup>

Here Palumbo-Liu suggests that any engagement of an ethnic subject with an aesthetic form engages her/him with the dialectic of the particular and universal. He goes on to suggest that

...[i]t would thus be the task for minority discourse to insert within the discursive performance of 'universal' a kind of double-take, an alienation effect, that will evince precisely the friction of minor/dominant negotiations and forestall the term's automatic referencing of the old constellations of meaning. The aesthetic discourse that might affect this would thus disarticulate the assumed grounds for understanding aesthetic objects and inscribe and recover precisely those erased and submerged particulars that disturb the peace of the dominant monologic universal that has been naturalized. The result would be a progressive revising of the contents of the universal and a reformation of its social and political function.<sup>21</sup>

Self-consciously engaging with white American and European universal aesthetic forms—such as regionalism, modernist haikus, and narrative fragmentation—the Asian

<sup>20</sup> David Palumbo-Liu, "Universalisms and Minority Culture," *Differences* 7:1 (Spring 1995) 193.

<sup>21</sup> Palumbo-Liu, 204.

American authors of my study promote the progressive revising of the contents of institutionalized art. This dialectic resonates with Peter Bürger's theorization of the avant-garde as that which critiques the institutionalization of art and, in so doing, reparticularizes the aesthetic. Bürger states,

The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.<sup>22</sup>

Bürger suggests that the avant-gardism of the work is more dependent on the interpretation of its relation to society and history than on its isolated, formal content. In the "Foreword" to *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Jochen Schulte-Sasse differentiates between modernism and the avant-garde based on this distinction between formal content and social function: "Modernism may be understandable as an attack on traditional writing techniques, but the avant-garde can only be understood as an attack meant to alter the institutionalized commerce with art. The social roles of the modernist and the avant-garde artist are, thus, radically different."<sup>23</sup> Schulte-Sasse explains that institutionalization involves ideological discourses that "tend to destroy and expropriate individual 'languages' in the interests of domination. [Such theorizations of the avant-garde] juxtaposes the state of expropriation with a utopian state, in which dominated social groups reappropriate language, allowing it once again to become a medium for expressing the needs and material, concrete experiences of individuals and groups."<sup>24</sup> Although some of the Asian American texts of my study overtly engaged with dominant modernist forms, they are not, for the most part, critically regarded as modernist or formally experimental literature. My focus on the formal articulations of political resistance in these texts responds to their avant-garde reappropriation of institutionalized forms as social protest against racial and gender discrimination.

The writers of my study—Sui Sin Far, Sadakichi Hartmann, Yone Noguchi, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Younghill Kang, and Carlos Bulosan—experimented with literary forms during the interwar period of artistic modernism. And yet, as "Asian American" was not yet an articulated or socially recognizable category in which writers could consciously participate in a consolidated, artistic movement, there was no Harlem Renaissance equivalent among Asian American writers. Yone Noguchi, Sadakichi Hartmann, and Sui Sin Far were contemporaries whose literary circles overlapped and yet there is little evidence that they knew each other apart from the brief acquaintance between Noguchi and Sui Sin Far's sister Onoto Watanna.<sup>25</sup> Carlos Bulosan names Noguchi and Kang as literary influences and thus suggests a literary genealogy among the three authors.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 49.

<sup>23</sup> Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde," *Theory of the Avant-Garde* by Peter Bürger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) xv.

<sup>24</sup> Schulte-Sasse, xv-xvi.

<sup>25</sup> See Yone Noguchi, *Collected English Letters*. Ed. Ikoku Atsumi (Tokyo: The Yone Noguchi Society, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 265.

While a cultural nationalist solidarity, as such, was not established among these authors, there was commonality in their avant-garde articulations of an unrealized universal citizenship in the face of Asian exclusion in the U.S. nation.

I have entitled this study “The Asian American Avant-Garde” to capture the historicity of the modernism while also suggesting that the Asian American authors were deploying high modernist forms to different sociopolitical ends—contesting Asian American racialization—from other modernists. Setting these Asian American avant-gardes alongside the canonized modernists who constitute a complex and unstable culture of socialists, reactionaries, progressivism, and conservatism contributes to a more expansive understanding of modernism. While the distinction between modernism and avant-gardism is a highly contested one, it ultimately serves as a heuristic for reparticularizing the social function of art as Bürger and Schulte-Sasse have shown. However, the aim of this study is not to perpetuate the false binary between purportedly racist Euro-American and progressive Asian American modernists since, as scholars have shown, many Euro-American modernists were progressive and sympathetic to the struggles of ethnic minorities. In making a pronounced distinction between Asian American and high modernist cultures, Lisa Lowe argues,

...for Adorno and Horkheimer, and others who theorized the increasingly universalized reification of culture, the last site of “cultural negativity” inhered in “high” modernist art. Yet a quite different critique of universality emerges out of Asian American culture, situated differently in the material contradictions of history rather than in the marginalizations of autonomous “high” culture. Contrary to what Adorno would term the “cultural negativity” of “high” art that might lie in the residual resistance of an abstract subject outside instrumentalized culture, Asian American “cultural negativity” inheres in the concrete particulars unassimilable to modern institutions, particulars that refuse both integration into dominant forms and the logic of exchange...Asian American cultural forms neither seek to reconcile constituencies to idealized forms of community or subjectivity, nor propose those forms as “art” that resides in an autonomous domain outside of mass society and popular practices. Unlike either American national culture or “high” art, forms of Asian American culture and other racialized minority culture emerge differently from those of traditionally conceived aesthetic projects. Literary critic Sau-ling Wong has observed: “Asian American authors are not, as mechanical analogy with universalistic Western ludic discourse would suggest, promoting a rarefied aestheticism. Instead, they are formulating an ‘interested disinterestedness’ appropriate to their condition as minority artists with responsibilities to their community.”<sup>27</sup>

Lowe’s argument usefully particularizes Asian American cultural practices as distinct from other Euro-American modernist strategies. However, her deployment of Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer, who neither understood nor liked complex American cultural expressions (such as jazz), as critics of American modernism seems tangential to her critique of American universalism. While the sociological content of the Asian American texts of my study reflects Lowe’s and Wong’s points that Asian American culture does not conceive of art as positioned in “an autonomous domain outside of mass society and popular practices,” the avant-garde (even “rarefied

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<sup>27</sup> Lowe, 31.

aesthetic”) forms of the texts is not one of total difference from high modernist art. That is to say, rather than suggesting that their work expressed “responsibilities to their [ethnic] community,” I argue that their contributions to cosmopolitan communities of modernists were expressions of universalist aspirations. As my study will demonstrate, Sui Sin Far, Hartmann, Noguchi, Mukerji, Kang, and Bulosan, often explicitly, employed the high, avant-garde forms of Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot to critique their sociological racializations during the period of Asian exclusion. The politics of the named high modernists were indeed diverse: Proust has been pronounced by critics as markedly apolitical. Stein was a liberal and T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound respectively espoused conservative and fascist politics.<sup>28</sup> However, despite the criticism by Josephine Park and Yunte Huang that historicizes the work of Stein, Pound, Eliot, and Proust, and demonstrates the genealogy between their forms and those of present-day Asian American authors, these Euro-American modernists were not explicitly preoccupied with critiquing Asian exclusion with their avant-garde forms. Deviating from Wong’s statement that “Asian American authors are not, as mechanical analogy with universalistic Western ludic discourse would suggest, promoting a rarefied aestheticism”—the seemingly rarefied avant-garde forms deployed in works of Sui Sin Far, Noguchi, Hartmann, Mukerji, Kang, and Bulosan suggest their claim to a cosmopolitan universalism. As mentioned earlier, the Progressive, bourgeois to radical Marxist universalisms articulated in these works add to the already diverse modernist critiques of industrial and developing global capitalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although most critics do not perceive these authors as avant-garde, their modernist formal innovations are highlighted by their cosmopolitan articulations of an inclusionary utopia.

The paradigm of the universal and the particular more aptly encapsulates the convergent critique of Asian American (racial, gendered, class) particularity and American universalism of these early Asian American texts than the paradigm of cosmopolitanism and statism.<sup>29</sup> However, the Asian American writers of my study were cosmopolitan in the sense that they imagined themselves or their Asian protagonists to be world citizens as a response to national exclusion. In *Cosmopolitanism*, Kwame Anthony

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<sup>28</sup> In “Gertrude Stein and the Politics of Literary-Medical Experimentation” *Literature and Medicine* 16.2 (1997), Daylanne English argues that *Three Lives* explores a feminist and racial critique of American life:

Despite the well-established link between the reactionary politics and the literary experimentalism of writers such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, critics persist in seeking liberatory politics in modern narrative. Gertrude Stein is often granted an exemption from the troubling politics readily assigned to other modernist U.S. writers. Some critics have looked to her as a kind of avant-garde antidote to Pound and Eliot. And, for obvious reasons, she might seem “naturally” to represent an alternative to Pound’s brand of modernism. Certainly, many of Stein’s formal innovations disrupt received notions of the literary, even of the modern, but her formal radicalism does not always or necessarily translate into social or political radicalism. Stein scholars largely concur about the list of her departures from conventional, nineteenth-century narrative forms—although not about her politics. Her incantatory repetitions, her deceptively simple diction and syntax, her complex manipulation of narrative time, her use of unconventional (working-class, immigrant) protagonists: all contribute to a perhaps unprecedentedly experimental literary style. (188)

<sup>29</sup> In *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Pheng Cheah writes, “A second look at Immanuel Kant’s moral-political project of perpetual peace is instructive, for it reveals that cosmopolitanism is not identical to ‘internationalism’ and that its antonym is not *nationalism* but *statism*” (22).



Appiah traces the genealogy of the concept from the Cynics of fourth century BC through Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, who proposed a “league of nations,” to modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf. He describes the concept as such:

So there are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is so much to learn from our differences...As we’ll see, there will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash. There’s a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.<sup>30</sup>

In the texts of my study, Asian American subjectivity emerges from this contradiction between universal obligation to others and recognition of particularity or difference. Much critical work has been done to recuperate cosmopolitanism from its conflation with global capitalism by repositioning it as both an outgrowth and a critique of capitalism so that to name an individual as cosmopolitan does not necessarily suggest their blind complicity to global capitalism.<sup>31</sup> Lowe locates Asian American cultural practice in the contradiction between the American universalism that logically results from industrial and global capitalism and the racial and laboring particulars for its dialectical antagonists upon which it parasitically depends. For many poststructuralist critics, Asian American subjectivity exists in its potential to deconstruct and diffuse American universalism. While their subjectivities similarly emerge from the contradictions between Asian American racial, class, and gendered particularity and American universalism, the writers of my study instead championed alternative American universalisms—shared cosmopolitan citizenships that would include difference. Moreover, their subjectivities differ from that which Lowe describes insofar as they do not reaffirm an ethnically particular (Asian American) cultural sphere but a universal one that establishes commonalities among subjects that emerge from recognized racial, gendered, and class differences. Although cosmopolitanism has come to connote a (middle) class-specific positioning, the authors of these early Asian American texts came from diverse social classes: Bulosan was a working-class laborer while Sui Sin Far, Hartmann, Noguchi, Mukerji, and Kang were middle-class workers and scholars who worked menial jobs to support themselves. Despite the diversity of their social classes and their own arguable

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<sup>30</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006) xv.

<sup>31</sup> In *Cosmopolitics*, Bruce Robbins writes,

It also helps explain why, though cosmopolitanism is clearly an outgrowth or ideological reflection of global capitalism, it remains possible to speak (in Rabinow’s phrase) of ‘critical cosmopolitanism.’...This is one of the implications of Anderson’s account of nationalism. ‘Instead of capitalism, the great profaner of all that is sacred,’ Balakrishnan comments, ‘Anderson’s argument turns the compound ‘print-capitalism’ into the ‘matrix and crucible of its secular reconstitution.’ Just as it produced the nation (and the proletariat), so capitalism nurtures what Balakrishnan calls ‘vernacular sociabilit[ies]’ that, like nationalism itself, have the potential to inflect, constrain, or even oppose it. Capital may be cosmopolitan, but that does not make cosmopolitanism into an apology for capitalism. (7-8)

inclusion in the United States as published writers, their universalist aspirations envisioned cosmopolitan citizenship for their excluded Asian protagonists and poetic personas. Writing during the era of Asian exclusion in the U.S. when Asians were mostly of a laboring class, the authors of these early Asian American texts represented themselves and other, often working-class, “aliens ineligible to citizenship” as diverse citizens of inclusive utopias.

### **Looking Back: Critical Background**

While a few anthologies such as Keith Lawrence and Floyd Cheung’s *Recovered Legacies* have compiled articles that have studied pre-1965 Asian American literature, my study is the first book-length study that conceptualizes the early canon. I focus on early Asian American literature before the very existence of the term “Asian American” in order to further the work that is currently being done to reassess the parameters of the field of Asian American studies. That is to say, the question of what centrally constitutes the field of literatures has preoccupied critics since the 1990s. In her essay “The Fiction of Asian American Literature” (1996), Susan Koshy writes:

...But it is precisely this question, ‘How are we to conceptualize Asian American literature taking into account the radical disjunctions in the emergence of the field?’ that is now become historically and politically most urgent to ask, because of pressures both inside and outside the community. The radical demographic shifts produced within the Asian American community by the 1965 immigration laws have transformed the nature and locus of literary production, creating a highly stratified, uneven and heterogeneous formation, that cannot easily be contained within the models of essentialized or pluralized ethnic identity suggested by the rubric Asian American literature, or its updated post-modern avatar Asian American literatures.<sup>32</sup>

Comparing the field of Asian American studies to those of Chicana/o, Native American and African American Studies, Koshy adds, “The lack of significant theoretical work has affected its development and its capacity to address the stratifications and differences that constitute its distinctness within ethnic studies.”<sup>33</sup> Koshy’s seminal essay contributed to the transnational turn and poststructuralist theorization of the field that have reassessed cultural nationalist paradigms.

Contrary to the goals of the cultural nationalists of the 1970s who framed these early works as attempts to claim America, the writers of this early period of legislated Asian exclusion in the United States, were more interested in engaging with international modernist forms as a way to frame themselves and their protagonists as universal. That is to say, rather than claiming a culturally separatist America that revolts against an empirically racist U.S., the authors of my study claim universality through claiming America. In contrast to the immediate cultural national sphere of political resistance proposed by the cultural nationalists, the endlessly deferred, alternative utopias championed by early Asian American writers were neither culturally particular nor did they offer immediate political solutions. Instead, their claimed universalisms were cosmopolitan visions or universalist aspirations for inclusionary utopias that begin with

<sup>32</sup> Susan Koshy, “The Fiction of Asian American Literature,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 9 (1996): 315-316.

<sup>33</sup> Koshy, 316.

the envisioned transformation of the American nation. Acknowledging the anachronism of the term “Asian American” during the early period of my study, I endeavor to reconstruct the term rather than to deconstruct it.

Despite attempts by critics such as Lisa Lowe, Sau-ling Wong, Sucheta Mazumdar, and David Palumbo-Liu during the postnational critical turn in the 1990s to recuperate the field from its cultural nationalist origins, the field of Asian American literature has been criticized or simply abandoned, as such, by critics who favor less nation-centric and more transnational theoretical paradigms involving ethnic Asian diasporas, postcoloniality, migrancy, globalization or exile. My theoretical conceptualization of Asian American as a subjectivity that emerges from the contradictions between liberal universalism and a racially particular identity, and demands the fulfillment of American universalism, contrasts with cultural national and more recent transnational paradigms of the field which perceive universalism as an (ideological) impossibility. My study demonstrates that the racial particularity in Asian American literature that has been accentuated by cultural nationalism and transnationalism nevertheless contains an inherent, universal vision of racial egalitarianism that preserves racial, and thus gendered and class, difference.

Because of their canonization in the cultural nationalist anthologies of the 1970s, the writers of my study have long been associated with some of the masculinist anthologists of the period. By attempting to recuperate the image of Asian American men from the historical stereotype of Asian male effeminacy or sterility, cultural nationalists such as Frank Chin emphasized masculinity while also bludgeoning Asian American feminist projects. As a result, canonical authors such as Sui Sin Far and Carlos Bulosan have been respectively critiqued as anti-Progressive<sup>34</sup> and misogynist.<sup>35</sup> This project explores the complexity of the gender politics that are figured in the literary works beyond the binary of misogyny and feminism. I demonstrate that the gender politics of these writers were often progressive within their historical milieus. For example, in my first chapter, I argued that white female suffragism is both critiqued and the vehicle through which Sui Sin Far expresses her call for a gendered and racial democracy. In my popular front chapters, middle-class and working-class women mobilize the authors’ visions for socialist internationalism. In general, the empirical non-existence of Asian American universalism poses a baseline problem of invisibility. Thus the demands of racial egalitarianism mobilized by the “not-yet” of Asian American universalism take the visible or more easily identifiable forms of progressive gender politics and modernist avant-gardism in all four of my chapters.

My emphasis on the avant-gardism of the early Asian American literature contributes to the recent formalist turn in Asian American literary criticism which has attempted to address the paucity of critical attention to formal aspects of literature in the field. As mentioned earlier, compiled essays in works such as Davis & Lee’s *Literary Gestures* and Zhou & Najmi’s *Form and Transformation* have demonstrated the ways in which recent or post-civil rights era Asian American writers have adapted Euro-American forms. While acknowledging the tension between the conservative, even

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<sup>34</sup> See Sean McCann, “Connecting Links: The Anti-Progressivism of Sui Sin Far,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12.1 (1999): 73-88.

<sup>35</sup> See Rachel C. Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

reactionary modernist forms of figures such as Ezra Pound and the politically progressive works of recent Asian American writers such as celebrated Korean American poet Myung Mi Kim who have adapted Pound's forms, critic Josephine Park argues that Pound's Orientalism enabled him to critique and "other" industrial America in productive ways. My study demonstrates the ways in which Pound's modernist haiku form, for example, provided an international literary space which contemporary—rather than later writers, as Park has argued—Japanese American haiku writers could also claim during the period of Japanese exclusion. In contrast with many of the formalist critiques of Asian American literature that deconstruct American universalism and focuses instead on diasporic exile, my interpretation of early Asian American texts underscores the productive visions, rather than tenuous fantasies,<sup>36</sup> of a democratic universe that are articulated during the period of Asian exclusion in the U.S.

### Chapter Summaries

The four chapters of my dissertation are arranged into studies of formally avant-garde texts written during the Progressive Era of roughly the 1890s to the early 1920s and the Popular Front Era of the late 1920s to the early 1940s. My first two chapters, "Chinatown as Universal Region: Deterritorialization and Extranationalism in Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*" and "Little Postage Stamps of Native Soil': The Modernist Haiku During Japanese Exclusion," situate Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and the modernist haikus of Yone Noguchi and Sadakichi Hartmann as bourgeois, Progressive Era texts that attempt to claim their space in the American literary imagination—that is, an inclusionary space that is legally denied them as "aliens ineligible to citizenship." I demonstrate that, in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, Sui Sin Far evacuates her Chinatown of the racial discourse of disease and immorality and positions it, instead, as a site in which Chinese characters demonstrate the failure and possibilities of American universalism through their performances of Progressive Era paragons of middle-class whiteness and gender.

In Chapter Two, I explore the formal components of Hartmann's and Noguchi's haiku poetry through the politicized lens of racialization by situating their works in relation to Pound's famous imagist poems, particularly "In a Station of the Metro." As demonstrated in their letters, Pound's modernist haikus were influenced by Noguchi and Hartmann. Hartmann's and Noguchi's fraternization with contemporary, bourgeois aesthetes who were invested in Japanophilic orientalism, such as the haiku form, was a defiance of the industrial modernization promoted by liberals who likewise pushed for the legislation of the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 in the United States. In response to anti-Japanese sentiment and the Alien Land Laws, Noguchi and Hartmann stake their literary claim in writing modernist haikus—which are, themselves, spatially bound poetic forms. Their imitation and performance of white American, modernist poets, who

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<sup>36</sup> In *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Josephine Nock-Hee Park writes, "Through her experiments with American poetry, Kim's work interrogates American action in Korea and Korean American experience in America: she contends with the aftermath of a fantasized intimacy between East and West come true. Both Cha and Kim discover formal modes for demonstrating the human costs of transpacific bridges built by poetic and political alliances" (155-156).

imitated them as well, provided them with mobility within an aspect of U.S. literary culture which would otherwise have been inaccessible to them.

My approach differs from a deconstruction of universalism insofar as it asserts that their appropriation of modernist forms in these texts results in contradictory effects that expand American universalism to a logical conclusion rather than rendering it a parody or failure. Rather than merely de-authorizing such dominant notions of American universalism, these performances of Asian American universalism figure racial egalitarianism through the authors' bourgeois visions of racial and gender equality. In this way, the bourgeois universalisms of the writers and their protagonists ask America to fulfill its promise of universal inclusion. However, the Progressive, bourgeois universalisms depicted in the first two chapters markedly differ: Sui Sin Far's background of Social Reform was rooted in the universalization of Protestant middle-class understandings of social propriety and individual reform. Noguchi and Hartmann, on the other hand, champion an elitist mode of universalism in which exclusive groups of visionary aesthetes establish themselves in contradistinction to a popular mass culture.

Chapters Three and Four examine radical universalisms that anticipate socialism or alternatives to socialism as solutions to the problems of industrial and global capitalism. Chapter Three, "Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Younghill Kang, and the American Waste Land," examines two texts that have received very little critical attention—Mukerji's *Caste and Outcast* (1923) and Kang's *East Goes West* (1937). I argue that both texts choose to frame the dialectic between the U.S. as a socially and spiritually impoverished waste land and the U.S. as a utopian space of spiritual renewal and social equity through their Eliotic allusions to Buddhist themes of death and rebirth. Both novels do so as a proto-socialist alternative to anticipating a socialist revolution during the Popular Front period. Chapter Three thus suggests that one reason for their elision from literary criticism is their non-conformity to Popular Front literature.

In my fourth chapter, "Bursting the Heart of Democracy: The Politics of Nonlinear Temporality in Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*," I argue that the disjointed, temporal shifts to the future and the past within the semi-autobiographical protagonist Carlos's linear, developmental narrative signal his dialectical political development concerning class conflict and gender inequality. Contrary to critics who argue that Bulosan demonstrates either his American or Philippine nationalism—in reaction to the Tydings-McDuffie Act (1934)—throughout the text, I assert that Bulosan's temporal nonlinearity corresponds to his Marxist internationalism which he articulates through an internationally inclusive socialist utopia that he calls "America." Carlos's negotiation of his subjective split between Philippine and American nationalism through his Marxist internationalism is particularly striking since the novel was published in 1946—a year after the Philippines was granted its independence from its status as a U.S. Commonwealth, where communist rebel groups actively resisted the conservative presidential administration of Manuel Roxas. However, it is not until Carlos recognizes female labor as an integral part of socialism that he realizes his socialist politics at the end of the novel. Without the recognition of Carlos's socialism, the novel and protagonist remain limited to a nationalist interpretive paradigm.

If, as American studies scholar Michael Denning argues, Popular Front literature universalized American exceptionalist discourse and recast socialist justice in Americanist terms, my third and fourth chapters assert that these novels rearticulate

Popular Front concerns about American universalism through the lens of Asian exclusion in the U.S. That is to say, they attempt to recuperate universalism from its empirical failures in the U.S. by envisioning inclusionary utopias that begin in and indicate expansion beyond the confines of the American nation. In this vein, I argue that all three novels emerge and diverge from a majority of social realist, Popular Front texts insofar as they employ modernist forms of temporal discontinuity, based in part on those of T. S. Eliot and Marcel Proust, to imagine multiracial universalities. Moreover, the authors' diverse, dialectical visions of universal socialism and gender equality lend visibility to their racial universalism. Mukerji, Kang, and Bulosan advocate variations of universal humanism that attempt to dialectically transcend national horizons and the capitalist commodification of linear time through the forms of nonlinear temporality in their novels. Whereas Mukerji, Kang, and Bulosan imagine their Asian protagonists as champions of anti-colonial socialist internationalisms that emerge from universalist notions of the nation and their avant-gardism, Sui Sin Far, Hartmann, and Noguchi attempt to reform national democracy and perpetuate its universalism through more abstract, bourgeois forms of avant-garde internationalism. And yet, similar to the bourgeois universalities of Sui Sin Far, Hartmann, and Noguchi, the radical democratic visions of Mukerji, Kang, and Bulosan critically emerge from the failures of liberal universalism.

### **Staking Their Claims**

My study of early Asian American avant-garde writers seeks to recuperate the concept of universalism which cultural nationalist paradigms disclaimed and transnationalist frameworks have deconstructed in the field of Asian American literary criticism. The alternative or counter universalisms that the Asian American writers pursue are distinct from liberal universalism which advocates color-blind assimilation. Based on Asian American racial experiences, the writers of my study champion cosmopolitan belonging through their modernist formal experimentations and depictions of racial, gender, and class inclusive utopias. Their rearticulations of institutionalized modernist forms for the purposes of Asian American racial critique reinvigorate the avant-gardism of such forms. The Asian American avant-garde draws on the commonalities of minoritized human struggle in order to imagine utopias of universal inclusion that also preserve differences among individuals.

The universal aspirations of these early writers were generated from liberal universalism or pluralism but moved beyond liberal pluralism's empirical failures and limited scope of status quo assimilation. Such notions of assimilation were inevitably undermined or rendered incomplete during Asian exclusion. Critic Tania Friedel describes cosmopolitanism in a similar vein as that which "moves beyond cultural pluralism by thinking, at one and the same time, about difference *and* a democratic common ground and cultural field of mutual influence and growth. Cosmopolitanism allows for the possibility of inter-ethnic subjectivities, intercultural affiliations and change in any given mode of identification."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the efforts of these early writers pointed to establishing a utopian common ground of inter-ethnic, interracial, classed, and gendered subjectivities rather than a cultural national Asian American identity as such.

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<sup>37</sup> Tania Friedel, *Racial Discourse and Cosmopolitanism in Twentieth-Century African American Writing* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008) 2.

From cosmopolitan perspectives, they provided an avenue to a more effective understanding of American universalism than those undermined by their blindness to racial, gender, and class discriminations. Their prioritization of the United States as the geographical embodiment of an unrealized democratic utopia does suggest an ideological perpetuation of American exceptionalism in these works. However, as Appiah writes, "...cosmopolitanism shouldn't be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association."<sup>38</sup> The delineation of the U.S. as a site of deferred democracy in these early Asian American works also serves as a practical beginning to the conceptual development of an ever-expanding, dialectical notion of cosmopolitan universalism.

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<sup>38</sup> Appiah, xix.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank each of my dissertation committee members for their diligent feedback, extraordinary wisdom, and unwavering support: Colleen Lye, for reliably modeling intellectual rigor and detailed scholarship from the very beginning of my study at Berkeley; Richard Cándida Smith, for generously imparting his encyclopedic knowledge about history and, more generally, academia; Gautam Premnath, for offering invaluable global perspectives to my approach to Asian American literature and his thoughtful attentiveness to my writing; and Michael Omi, for shoring up the vital sociological aspects of my literary criticism and whose enthusiasm always reminded me of the joys of scholarship. I am extremely fortunate to have worked with this particular set of brilliant scholars who have not only shaped and believed in this project but have also continually gone above and beyond the expectations of any dissertation committee.

I am also grateful for the intellectual and emotional support of my congenial cohort at Berkeley, particularly Sarah Townsend, Jesse Costantino, Brendan Prawdzik, Zachary Gordon, and Kimberly Tsau. Before arriving, I had been told that at Berkeley, for all of its institutional strengths and shortcomings, I would find some kindred spirits and indeed I did. I am indebted to fellow Asian Americanist scholars Christine Hong and Gladys Nubla for their friendship, encouragement, advice, and enlivened discussions about the emergent state of the field. I would also like to acknowledge the generous support of the English Department's Block Grant, the Graduate Division Summer Grants, and the Bancroft Library Study Award. The reliance of this project on non-circulating materials brought me to the capable hands of the librarians and archivists at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, the Huntington Historical Society, Princeton University's Rare Books and Special Collections Library, University of Pennsylvania's Special Collections, Harvard University's Houghton Library, University of Washington's Special Collections, UC Riverside's Special Collections Department, the Huntington Library, and the Southwest Museum; I remain grateful to the workers at these repositories.

My dear friends and family have been the backbone of my academic career and words cannot properly express my unending gratitude to them (but I will try anyway). In particular, I thank all of my friends here in the Bay Area for their support and for reminding me to "take it down a notch." I thank my father Hen-Vai, who always encouraged me to pursue my intellectual passions, and my mother Serena, who taught me to walk with grace, strength, and integrity. I am grateful to my sister Connie and my brother-in-law Alan for celebrating my achievements and tirelessly listening to my conference papers and academic talks whenever I would visit. I owe a debt of gratitude to my brother Michael and my sister-in-law Nancy for their ceaseless encouragement, explosive laughter, and continual hospitality. I thank my other family who has truly become family to me over the years: My parents-in-law Richard and Candice, for their solid support and constant praise; my sister-in-law Karen, for her compassion and generosity; and my brother-in-law Anthony, for his sound advice about academia and his witty humor.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Charles, who has always believed in my abilities as a scholar and a teacher and who selflessly left his job on the east coast and endured nine months of unemployment on the west coast to support me as I began my graduate career. I am grateful for him in more ways than I can name.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Chinatown as Universal Region in Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*

#### Introduction: Sui Sin Far as Regionalist and Modernist

Unlike the rest of the writers in my study—Yone Noguchi, Sadakichi Hartmann, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Younghill Kang, and Carlos Bulosan—Sui Sin Far appears to have been the least explicitly involved in Euro-American avant-garde circles. In recent decades, literary critics have written of Sui Sin Far as a “pioneer”<sup>39</sup> feminist, Asian American writer and an American regionalist writer but never as a modernist writer. The recuperation of Sui Sin Far into the Asian American and American feminist literary canons by critics Amy Ling, Annette White-Parks (Sui Sin Far’s biographer), and Elizabeth Ammons has influenced other regionalist critics, such as Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, and Kate McCulloch, to treat Sui Sin Far as a minority regionalist writer who resisted hegemonic, American norms.<sup>40</sup> In her day, however, she was perhaps more conscious of her work as it was marketed—as both California regionalist and modernist literature. It is through this nexus in her publication history that I begin to locate her universalism. In this chapter, I will discuss the three ways in which I consider her an avant-garde writer: (1) I indicate her literary overlap between modernism and regionalism during the early twentieth century; (2) I demonstrate the cubistic, short-story form of her work through which Chinatown serves as a metonymic space where Progressive Era gender and racial norms are performed. These performances productively herald a new world of social inclusion; (3) I argue that Sui Sin Far demonstrates her persistent belief in an alternative universalism through her reconstruction of Chinatown as a utopian region of difference that empirically alienates both the whites and Chinese who are mired in Progressive Era ideologies of liberal universalism. Her rearticulation of the largely xenophobic regionalist convention in which foreign spaces are idyllically depicted is an avant-garde gesture that reparticularizes institutionalized forms.

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<sup>39</sup> Amy Ling, ‘Edith Eaton: Pioneer Chinamerican Writer and Feminist,’ *American Literary Realism* 16 (Autumn 1983): 287-98.

<sup>40</sup> In *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse write,

To the degree that regionalism participates in those distinctions that characterize the ideology of separate spheres—for example, it presents itself as minor not major, regional not national, storytelling not literature, folk craft not high art, as minimally literary not replete with classical references, and requiring little talent or training to produce—it can be said at once to emerge from and to reinforce the ideology of separate spheres. Yet to the degree that it questions, troubles, and complicates the oppositions, it can be said to resist the ideology of separate spheres. Regionalism constitutes a space within which nineteenth-century women writers could critique the construction and operation of this ideology, even as they sought to promote the alternative vision women constructed within their allotted ‘separate sphere,’ a vision that was itself at once a product of the social essentialism of gender and a resistance to that essentialism. (13-14)

Like Fetterley and Pryse, who describe Sui Sin Far’s “region” as “the urban Chinatown of Seattle and the West Coast—[which is] hardly the same ‘West as that of Bret Harte’s or Jack London’s fiction (12), Kate McCulloch argues that “Sui Sin Far locates Chinese-American community as intimately and complexly connected to ‘American’ national identity rather than as marginal or Other to it: a gender-shaped sense of cultural identity locates Chinese-American borderlands (both literal, national borderlands and figurative, racial borderlands) as simultaneously marginal and central to ‘American’ life” (12).

Among the various regionalist magazines and modernist little magazines in which she published her work, Sui Sin Far wrote most prolifically for Charles Fletcher Lummis's California magazine, *The Land of Sunshine*, the magazine where she first published many of the short stories found in her only book, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, published in 1912. Her publication in experimentalist, little magazines such as *The Fly Leaf* and *Lotus* as well as regionalist magazines, however, point to the cross-pollination between regionalism and modernism that critics argue took root in American literature at the turn of the twentieth century. Taking works by William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, and William Carlos Williams as examples of the "symbiosis of modernism and region" critics have argued that the "cosmopolitan and provincial aspects of modernism are complementary, not antithetical."<sup>41</sup> Despite her explicit engagement with the American regionalist tradition as a California writer, Sui Sin Far insisted on her diasporic sensibility and her cosmopolitan aspirations as a strategy to critique Chinese exclusion and the failure of American universalism. For example, in her autobiography, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," she writes of her experiences with racial prejudice in the United States and concludes,

So I roam backward and forward across the continent...After all I have no nationality and am not anxious to claim any. Individuality is more than nationality...I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left to the Orientals, hoping that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant 'connecting link.' And that's all.<sup>42</sup>

Based on Sui Sin Far's denial of nationality, Amy Ling asserts that Sui Sin Far was a diasporic, or a nationally displaced writer, whose subjectivity was situated "between worlds." However, Sui Sin Far's self-depiction as a positive, "connecting link" between the Occident and the Orient indicates her aspirations for gender and racial equality and her perception of herself as a universal ambassadorial figure. This narrative leap from a diasporic expression of racial particularity to a positive self-assertion as an international ambassador reflects her dialectical universalism—that is her enduring belief in universalism despite its empirical failures. Sui Sin Far's critical preoccupation with suffragist missionaries in her short stories indicate her roots in the Social Gospel movement, which was based on the universalization of Protestant ethics, during the Progressive Era. Through the conflicts between white suffragist missionaries and Chinese women in her short stories, Sui Sin Far critiques the liberal pluralist assumptions of blind assimilation and the dismissal of diversity advocated by the Social Gospel movement.<sup>43</sup> Her persistent faith in an alternative universalism reflects the secularization of the Social Gospelers's religious beliefs in the kingdom of God.<sup>44</sup> But her cosmopolitan perspective

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<sup>41</sup> Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, eds, *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 10-11.

<sup>42</sup> Sui Sin Far, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," 230.

<sup>43</sup> In *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), Religious studies scholar Gary Dorrien writes, "For the most part the social gospel was not outspoken on the dignity and rights of black Americans...Only rarely did a social gospel leader question the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that 'separate but equal' segregation was consistent with the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law" (30).

<sup>44</sup> In "Fleshing Out the Kingdom of God: A Synthetic Look at Anglo-American Social Christianity," *Reviews in American History* 25.1 (1997), Douglas A. Sweeney summarizes the historical view of the secularization of religion in the Social Gospel movement:

as a “connecting link” between the East and West, which recognizes and preserves difference, attempts to transcend the color-blind liberal pluralism of the Social Gospel movement. As I will discuss later in the chapter, she secularizes the kingdom of God in her cosmopolitan visions of an imminent, apocalyptic utopia in her short stories.

The productive contradiction between a diasporic sensibility that emerges from U.S. racial exclusion and a persistent faith in an alternative universalism in Sui Sin Far’s autobiography appears again in her book *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. This collection of short stories is set within a framing narrative, established by the first two short stories entitled “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman.” In this narrative frame, the protagonist Mrs. Spring Fragrance—a Chinese woman who imagines that she has assimilated into white middle-class culture—vows to write her version of the great American novel which, we are to assume, is comprised of the stories about the struggles of racially excluded Chinese Americans that follow.<sup>45</sup> This chapter examines social aspects of Sui Sin Far’s short stories such as performances of Progressive Era gender and racial constructions, as well as the depiction of Chinatown as a distinctive region. In doing so, my chapter demonstrates that the fragmented structure—that is, the short story cycle—and the unity of themes register the politics of racial and gender particularity and bourgeois universalism that Sui Sin Far champions in her book.

Published three years after Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* which was published in 1909, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* similarly incorporates metonymic, cubistic strategies that “emphasiz[e] similarity and difference as well as unity and disunity.”<sup>46</sup> As she wrote for and supported her brother-in-law Walter Blackburn Hart’s little magazine the *Fly Leaf*, a proclaimed “magazine of the New, the Modern,” Sui Sin Far was undoubtedly influenced by contemporary aesthetic movements such as French symbolism and cubism with which the magazine was explicitly preoccupied. The title and discontinuous, episodic form of her autobiography “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian” capture the cubistic composition of multiple faceted planes across a canvas. Critics have linked the works of regionalist and modernist writers such as Anderson, Joyce, and Steinbeck in their analysis of the influence of cubism on the early twentieth-century short story cycle and, specifically, Stein’s *Three Lives*. Citing linguistic theorist Roman Jakobson’s definition of metonymy as a “substitutive relationship of part and whole in which” “meaning is created” “through relationships of semantic contiguity[,]” critic Philip Heldrich argues, “a metonymic text, such as Stein’s short-story cycle foregrounds a tension between part and

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Inasmuch as Social Gospel concerns often merged with the institutional work of more secular reformers as social science and progressive politics grew in stature, scholars have frequently charted the history of the Social Gospel movement in terms of a gradual secularization and cooptation by these forces. For Christian theologians such as H. Richard Niebuhr, the leading forerunner of the “postliberal” school at Yale, such cultural accommodation has proved predictably perilous. In his own interpretation of *The Kingdom of God in America*, Niebuhr concluded that “an ideal of the coming kingdom, divorced from reliance on the divine initiative and separated from the experience of the Christian revolution, showed itself insufficient to rouse to new life the party of the kingdom of God” (1959 ed., p. 197). As liberal Christians lost the initiative in their kingdom-building efforts and relegated leadership to secular reformers, reformist institutions became the be-all and the end-all of their movement and their theological vision began to blur. (82-83)

<sup>45</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Inferior Woman,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Philip Heldrich, “Connecting Surfaces: Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*, Cubism, and the Metonymy of the Short Story,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 34:4 (Fall 1997): 435.

whole, between unity and difference.”<sup>47</sup> Heldrich also points out that a significant linking device between the three distinct parts and the whole in *Three Lives* is the fact that each story takes place in the same town of Bridgepoint. Similarly, the setting of Chinatown, specifically San Francisco Chinatown, serves as a metonymic device among the autonomous or unrelated stories of Sui Sin Far’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.

As a space in which concentrations of Chinese characters reside and encounter racial conflict with whites, Chinatown also mimics the form of endless metonymic contiguity insofar as it seems to encompass surrounding suburbs and other cities from its San Francisco epicenter. To clarify, in Sui Sin Far’s book, Chinese ethnic enclaves are primarily located in San Francisco Chinatown, proper, but extend into surrounding suburbs and other cities in the U.S. west. For example, in the first story “Mrs. Spring Fragrance,” the title character effortlessly and frequently traverses the distance between San Francisco Chinatown and the suburbs of Seattle as she attempts to create a match between a young Chinese woman named Ah Oi in San Francisco and a young Chinese man named Man You. The resulting union further elides the geographical distance between San Francisco Chinatown and Seattle. The geographical sprawl of Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown significantly contrasts the contemporary backdrop of the famous 1900 San Francisco Chinatown quarantine in which Chinese residents were sealed off from the rest of the city. As historian Nayan Shah argues in his book *Contagious Divides*, the quarantine was an outcome of the statistically unsubstantiated fear that Chinatown was the source of the bubonic plague.<sup>48</sup> He suggests that the quarantine was used to alleviate fears about U.S. international trade and relations:

In the late nineteenth century, as the United States became a rising commercial power, the federal government’s involvement in the maintenance of quarantine and epidemic power, the federal government’s involvement in the maintenance of quarantine and epidemic disease information systems attempted to allay fears that disease was transmitted through trade and migration. Production and dissemination of scientific knowledge were considered imperative in an era of imperial ambition and global trade.<sup>49</sup>

With the assistance of public health quarantines and urban zoning of Chinatown,<sup>50</sup> healthy, upstanding, white San Francisco was discursively imagined through the foreign, diseased space of Chinatown.

By contrast, Sui Sin Far imagines her Chinatown as an inclusive space where Chinese and whites alike can establish mutual friendships and respect. Among the various conventions that Sui Sin Far deploys from the American regionalist tradition, the region as an idyllic or even prelapsarian space—alternative from the booming American cities in the late nineteenth century—is one of the most prominent regionalist features of her work because of its intermittency and complexity. For example, Chinatown appears to be an “edenic” space in the story “Pat and Pan” in which Pat, a five-year-old white boy

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<sup>47</sup> Heldrich, 430.

<sup>48</sup> Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 120-121.

<sup>49</sup> Shah, 122.

<sup>50</sup> Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991) 74.

(perhaps of Irish descent), is adopted into a Chinese family.<sup>51</sup> He lives happily with the family and his Chinese sister Pan until a white missionary, Anna Harrison, “play[s] the role of the Edenic serpent” when she “purchases lichis that she offers to the children as a lure” to the mission.<sup>52</sup> Believing that Pat cannot belong to an inferior Chinese family, Anna Harrison finally succeeds, after several attempts, in “driv[ing] [Pat] away” from his Chinese family and placing him in a white family.<sup>53</sup> Later, when Pat encounters Pan outside of Chinatown, Pat, together with his newly acquired white friends, rejects his once beloved sister: “Then Pat turned upon Pan. ‘Get away from me,’ he shouted. ‘Get away from me!’”<sup>54</sup> Contrary to the discourse of disease and immorality often used to describe San Francisco Chinatown, Chinatown in “Pat and Pan” is a prelapsarian space for Pan’s family. Likewise, Minnie Carson, from “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” views Chinatown as a haven away from the danger of her ex-husband James’s threats to forcefully attain custody of their daughter.<sup>55</sup> When Minnie is rescued by Liu Kanghi from committing suicide after her divorce, Liu brings her to live in Chinatown where she begins to thrive by making and selling her needlework in Liu’s store. In Chinatown, Minnie marries Liu Kanghi and they happily raise two children together.

Sui Sin Far universalizes the racial particularity of Chinatown and its Chinese inhabitants by conveying the particularity of the space and individuals as easily relatable to mainstream American readers. However, her construction of two-dimensional Chinese characters in her article “The Chinese Woman in America” and *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* coincides with esoteric cubist preoccupations with Negro and African sculpture. Describing Chinese women as a “relic of antiquity” with “sensibilities as acute as a child’s,”<sup>56</sup> Sui Sin Far’s essentialist admiration of the primitive Chinese woman<sup>57</sup> is akin to Picasso’s and Braque’s elevation of the figure of the Negro in their work as more realistic and “conceptually true”—“a clarified image, without embellishments, composed only of essential features.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, to Picasso and Braque, the composite Negro and African primitive represents a universal human essence despite his racial particularity. Likewise, the African American character Melanctha in Stein’s *Three Lives* has “a strong sense for *real* experience.”<sup>59</sup> Formally situated between the stories of two white immigrants, the story “Melanctha: Each One as She May” tells of “a mulatta

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<sup>51</sup> Annette White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 223.

<sup>52</sup> White-Parks, 223.

<sup>53</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Pat and Pan,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 165.

<sup>54</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Pat and Pan,” 166.

<sup>55</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Chinese Woman in America,” *The Land of Sunshine* 6:2 Jan. 1897:59, 60. Her Chinese female characters such as Pau Lin and Pau Tsu in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* likewise identify with things of Chinese antiquity such as music and clothing.

<sup>57</sup> In “The Chinese Woman in America,” Sui Sin Far celebrates the industrious Chinese women as “New Women” (59).

<sup>58</sup> Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 1971) 32. Picasso’s preoccupation with Negro sculpture is evident in his (1907) landmark work, *Les Femmes d’Alger*.

<sup>59</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 72, my emphasis.

suspended between two races and sexualities.”<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Picasso’s and Braque’s insistence on the figure of the Negro as representative of primitive essence, Stein depicts Melanctha as a biracial and bisexual woman who defies racial and sexual essentialism.<sup>61</sup> At her core, however, Melanctha represents the melancholia that seems to pervade the characters in the story and across *Three Lives*. At certain moments, this melancholia seems to explicitly challenge racial stereotypes: For example, neither Rose Johnson nor James Herbert (Melanctha’s father) has “the wide, abandoned laughter that makes the warm broad glow of negro sunshine.”<sup>62</sup> At other moments, however, it affirms them: After drinking away their sorrows, James and a coachman John are “filled full with strong black curses, and then sharp razors flashed in the black hands, that held them flung backward in the negro fashion, and then for some minutes there was fierce slashing.”<sup>63</sup> If Melanctha represents the primitive reality or the essence of humanity, the line between stereotype and aesthetics in Stein’s *Three Lives* as well as Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* is indeed tenuous.

Acknowledging the racist attitude Stein shared toward minorities and immigrants, critics Ann Charters and Jessica Rabin have nevertheless argued that, as a Jewish-American lesbian living abroad, Stein identified with marginalized people such as those exemplified in *Three Lives*.<sup>64</sup> Sui Sin Far likewise expresses her marginality as a biracial “Eurasian”—“When I am East, my heart is West. When I am West, my heart is East...I have no nationality”—through the Chinese women and men of her stories with whom she identifies.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the shift in her signature from her anglicized given name Edith Eaton to her pseudonym Sui Sin Far in her personal correspondences with Charles Lummis evinces both a gradual identification with the Chinese that she describes in “Leaves” and her emphasis on the universal humanistic essence of racial minorities.<sup>66</sup> Sui Sin Far also shares with Stein the cubistic practice of two-dimensional representations of racial minorities. Formally coincident with Picasso’s flattened portraits of African masks and Stein’s refusal to demonstrate any character development in her minority characters, Sui Sin Far’s depiction of underdeveloped, two-dimensional stock characters in *Mrs.*

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<sup>60</sup> Corinne E. Blackmer, “‘The Inexplicable Presence of the Thing Not Named’: Intersections of Race and Sexuality in Twentieth Century American Women’s Writing,” (Diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1992) (15).

<sup>61</sup> In *Surviving the Crossing: (Im)migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and Nella Larsen* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), Jessica G. Rabin indicates that Melanctha has “no essential self” (87).

<sup>62</sup> Stein, 59-60, 64.

<sup>63</sup> Stein, 65-66.

<sup>64</sup> In the “Introduction,” *Three Lives* by Gertrude Stein (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), Ann Charters cites from Stein’s letter to her friend Mabel Weeks where she states, “I don’t know how to sell on a margin or do anything with shorts or longs, so I have to content myself with niggers and servant girls and the foreign population generally....Dey is very simple and very vulgar and I don’t think they will interest the great American public (xv). Charters clarifies that Stein uses two-dimensional, “very simple and very vulgar” characters “to illustrate elementary psychological types” in “her theory of composition” (xv).

<sup>65</sup> In “Leaves of the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian,” Sui Sin Far documents her changing attitude toward the Chinese: “My Chinese instincts develop. I am no longer the little girl who shrunk against my brother at the first sight of a Chinaman. Many and many a time, when alone in a strange place, has the appearance of even a humble laundryman given me a sense of protection and made me feel quite at home. This fact of itself proves to me that prejudice can be eradicated by association” (227).

<sup>66</sup> See correspondences between Sui Sin Far and Lummis in the Charles Fletcher Lummis Collection, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California.

*Spring Fragrance* is underscored by a redundancy of character names and traits: Stock characters named Pau Lin and Pau Tsu, Adah Charlton and Adah Raymond as well as two characters named Pan, and two named Fin Fan appear across the different stories. Picasso's and Stein's representations of racial minorities seem to be less politically driven insofar as their universalization of racial minorities as primitive essence suggests their view of status quo reality; Sui Sin Far's emphasis on the two-dimensionality of her Chinese and white characters, on the other hand, focuses less on her belief in human primitivism than her aspiration for a changed society wherein a biracial Chinese American woman can act as an ambassador to the Orient and the Occident without merely "trad[ing] upon [her] nationality"—an act she explicitly refuses.<sup>67</sup> Positioning primitivist discourse as "fundamental to the Western sense of Self and Other," critic Marianna Torgovnick argues that the "primitive has in some ways always been a willful invention by the West, but the West was once much more convinced of the illusion of Otherness it created. Now everything is mixed up, and the Other controls some of the elements in the mix."<sup>68</sup> The racially excluded characters in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* likewise establish subjectivity by self-consciously playing up their racialization as primitive and two-dimensional. Whereas Picasso's intersecting vertical, horizontal, and diagonal planes attempts to represent, status quo "real" space through the dialectic between a self-conscious reality of a two-dimensional, or flat, painted canvas and the reality of objects in space,<sup>69</sup> the gender and racial performances of Sui Sin Far's characters both undermine Progressive Era norms and productively herald an abstract universal democracy that is yet to come.

### **Chinese American Performances of Progressive Era Norms**

Sui Sin Far evacuates her Chinatown of the racial discourse of disease and immorality and positions it, instead, as a site in which Chinese characters demonstrate the failure and possibilities of American universalism through their performances of Progressive Era notions of gender. For example, as a universal figure—that is, a healthy, middle-class, married woman who is preoccupied with domestic matchmaking and also asserting herself within her marriage—Mrs. Spring Fragrance performs the Progressive Era paragon of the "New Woman" who, according to historian Martha Banta, was defined as simultaneously the domestic "Beautiful Charmer" and the socially "resolute" "New England Woman."<sup>70</sup> She would have been an anomaly to the book's white readership which was accustomed to discursive images of unassimilable Chinese coolies and prostitutes living in the urban ghetto of Chinatown particularly during the period of Chinese exclusion in the U.S. However, Mrs. Spring Fragrance's performance of white, middle-class femininity becomes explicit when she is othered by the white characters of "The Inferior Woman." For example, as Mrs. Evebrook and Ethel are conversing, they halt their discussion upon noticing Mrs. Spring Fragrance's pink parasol. Moreover, Mrs. Carman values her for her 'Chinese' qualities. The narrator describes Mrs. Carman's

<sup>67</sup> Sui Sin Far, "Leaves," 230.

<sup>68</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 8, 38.

<sup>69</sup> Cooper, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 46. The American Girl was seen as the precursor to the "New Woman."

perspective: “Hitherto she had found the little Chinese woman sympathetic and consoling. Chinese ideas of filial duty chimed in with her own. But today Mrs. Spring Fragrance seemed strangely uninterested and unresponsive.”<sup>71</sup>

Sui Sin Far sets up a parallel between the successful marriage plots among Chinese characters Laura and Ah Oi in the first story and those of the white characters Ethel Evebrook and Alice Winthrop in the second. And yet, in doing so, she demonstrates Laura and Ah Oi’s attempts and failures to mimic the image of “New Woman.” Whereas Mrs. Spring Fragrance recognizes the “resolute” suffragist, Ethel Evebrook, as the “Superior Woman” who is “[r]adiantly beautiful, and gifted with the divine right of learning”<sup>72</sup> and the domesticated Alice Winthrop as the “Inferior Woman,” neither Laura nor Ah Oi exhibits the capacity to fully exemplify paragons of white femininity—that is, the resolute feminist (suffragist) or the charming, domestic housewife. Even though Laura appears to be the more vocal and progressive female and Ah Oi, the more conservative and traditional, Mrs. Spring Fragrance reserves her designations of superior and inferior women for the white American community in “The Inferior Woman.” The absence of this hierarchy of female “inferiority” and “superiority” in the Chinese domestic plots points to Laura and Ah Oi’s exclusion from gendered norms. At the same time, if the Chinese domestic plot provides the reader with a glimpse of a democratic utopia, the absence of hierarchy in their story suggests that their domesticities are more utopian than those of Ethel and Alice. Similar to Mrs. Spring Fragrance, they are unable to fully assimilate as American Girls. And yet, their attempts to delineate middle-class spheres of domesticity indicate their belief in a bourgeois universalism. The incomplete assimilation of the Chinese women in the first two stories suggests that Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s own community provides a glimpse, yet falls short, of an alternative world from the empirical one of social and legislated racism.

At first glance, this mimicry or failure to assimilate to Progressive Era norms seems to demonstrate what Lisa Lowe has called “Asian American critique” which begins in the moment of negation that is the refusal to be the ‘margin’ that speaks itself in the dominant forms of political, historical, or literary representation. This transforms the ‘minority’ position from being the only form of inclusion within the universal postulates of the nation to a critique of liberal pluralism and its multicultural terrain.<sup>73</sup>

Sui Sin Far, however, does more than deconstruct the universal postulates of the nation through her characters’ mimicry of dominant social norms. Coming close to assimilating

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<sup>71</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Inferior Woman,” 38.

<sup>72</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Inferior Woman,” 41.

<sup>73</sup> Lowe, 28-29. Lowe goes on to state, “For, as the consideration of Asian American cultural forms in subsequent chapters demonstrates, the demand that the immigrant subject ‘develop’ into an identification with the dominant forms of the nation gives rise to contradictory articulations that interrupt the demands for identity and identification, the voice antagonisms to the universalizing narratives of both pluralism and development, and that open Asian American culture as an alternative site to the American economic, political, and national cultural spheres...Asian American culture is the site of more than critical negation of the U.S. nation; it is a site that shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state” (29). Although Lowe claims Asian American critique/culture to be dialectical, it seems as though her formulation is more deconstructive than dialectical insofar as it’s unclear how American universalism is being dialectically engaged (rather than merely negated or deauthorized) by Asian American culture.



into the middle-class and racial norms of feminism, the character Mrs. Spring Fragrance nevertheless continues to articulate her universalist vision by performing the middle-class complex of whiteness and gender through Chinese characters in her book. Instead of merely deauthorizing<sup>74</sup> American racial, gendered, and class norms, performativity “asser[ts] universality by those who have conventionally been excluded by the term.”<sup>75</sup> Here, I am eclipsing Butler’s deconstructive reading of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* with her dialectical reading of universalist performativity in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. She argues in the latter that the contradiction posed by performing universalism is not a self-cancelling or a deconstructive one but what she calls a “spectral doubling” that is, the failure of and enduring aspirations to universalism. During a period of anti-Chinese legislation and sentiment, assimilation was not a viable option for Sui Sin Far and her protagonists. As Mary Chapman has recently argued, Sui Sin Far’s politics reflected transnational reformist ideas of the Chinese Reform Party such as party leader Liang Qi Chao of whom she wrote in *The Los Angeles Express* in 1903.<sup>76</sup> Her universalist notion of feminism, rather than the ineluctable failure of assimilation, indeed fuel Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s vision of a true democracy.

### Middle-class Laborers

The many fatal or injurious casualties of assimilation in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* suggest Sui Sin Far’s dissatisfaction with ideologies of American universalism and liberal pluralism. Yet the performative gains of American universalism appear as middle-class, domestic friendships between white and Chinese women or white women and Chinese men. In most of the stories, Asian or Asian American difference—in the form of Chinese cultural garb, marriage, and procreation—is what is empirically sacrificed or lost in the performances of liberal universalism. What is gained, however, through these performances is subjectivity—a process that emerges from subjection. Butler states, “‘Subjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject.”<sup>77</sup> According to Butler, social power initiates a subject through a form of subordination—such as a spoken Althusserian interpellation.<sup>78</sup> Althusserian ideological state apparatuses<sup>79</sup> interpellate subjects in order to diffuse

<sup>74</sup> My argument here references Homi Bhabha’s theorization of colonial mimicry in his chapter, “Of Mimicry and Man,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Bhabha asserts that the unsuccessful mimicry of the colonizer by the colonized Other “deauthorizes” the colonizer; “Similarly, mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its ‘otherness,’ that which it disavows” (91).

<sup>75</sup> Judith Butler, “Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Freedom,” *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Eds. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (New York and London: Verso, 2000) 38.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Chapman, “A ‘Revolution in Ink’: Sui Sin Far and Chinese Reform Discourse,” *American Quarterly* 60.4 (December 2008): 978.

<sup>77</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 2.

<sup>78</sup> Butler, *Psychic*, 6. Although Butler uses the Althusserian theory of a verbal interpellation as a point of reference, her use of “interpellation” seems to allow for a spoken or an unspoken discursive initiation of the subject, which Foucault and Gramsci describe.

<sup>79</sup> In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (*La Pensée* (1977), Rpt. in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), Louis Althusser defines ideology as “an imaginary relation to real relations” which “exists in an apparatus,” such as the institutions of Church, education, family, legal systems, politics, trade-unions, communications, and culture, “and its practice, or practices” (167, 166, 143).

ideology through them. Therefore, a subject can act as a representative of the apparatus. Sui Sin Far demonstrates that paradox of subject formation is “never merely mechanical” insofar as the subject unconsciously desires subjection in order to be recognized as a social subject.<sup>80</sup> For example, in “The Prize China Baby,” Fin Fan, a tobacco factory worker (whose draconian husband owns the factory) is tempted by a white woman working in a mission to enter her baby into their baby show to prove its worth to her husband. Upon seeing Fin Fan’s baby daughter dressed in decorative American clothing—“the tiny quilted vest and gay little trousers”—the missionary invites the “dear little mother” to “send [her] little one to the Chinese baby show” on Christmas Eve in the Presbyterian Mission schoolroom. Threatened by the baby’s American dress, insofar as it mimics whiteness, the missionary immediately racializes the baby as Chinese by suggesting that Fin Fan enter her into the *Chinese* baby contest. The Chinese baby show interpellates Fin Fan and her baby as racial others as they nevertheless attempt to perform middle-class whiteness through the baby’s dress. Taking an unauthorized leave of absence from work, Fin Fan enters her baby into the contest and wins. However, as she recklessly rushes back to return to her factory work before her husband discovers she has been away, Fin Fan and her baby are killed by a butcher’s cart on the road.<sup>81</sup> Fin Fan meets a tragic end in her attempt to locate her subjectivity in what she perceives to be an all-American, middle-class activity: a baby contest. Along with the merchant-class Chinese women in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*—such as Pau Lin in “The Wisdom of the New,” who commits infanticide to prevent her son’s assimilation to American culture, and Lae Choo from “In the Land of the Free,” who loses her son to the San Francisco mission upon migrating to the United States—Fin Fan attempts to perform the maternalist role of the middle-class woman. That is, their private roles as mothers are translated into public concerns about child welfare and race.<sup>82</sup> Historian Eileen Boris argues that, whereas white maternalists attempted to challenge patriarchy by developing the welfare state, black maternalists “simultaneously sought equal rights and celebrated their femaleness and their blackness” in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century America.<sup>83</sup> Although there was not a parallel movement among contemporaneous Chinese American women, Sui Sin Far’s characters similarly demonstrate simultaneous interests in the public advancement of child welfare and the preservation of their cultural heritage.

Although white suffragists are not present in working-class stories, the discourse of the maternal, charming American Girl permeates the Chinese laboring class. A middle-class movement, suffragism of the Progressive Era shifted white suffragists’ “primary

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<sup>80</sup> According to Butler, “no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent” (Butler, *Psychic*, 7).

<sup>81</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Prize China Baby,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 117.

<sup>82</sup> In *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Seth Koven and Sonya Michel trace the genealogy of the discourse of maternalism among late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women. They argue, “Women focused on shaping one particular area of state policy: maternal and social welfare. It was in this area, closely linked to the traditional female sphere, that women first claimed new roles for themselves. Using political discourses and strategies that we have called ‘maternalist,’ they transformed motherhood from women’s primary *private* responsibility into *public* policy” (2).

<sup>83</sup> Eileen Boris, “The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the ‘Political,’” *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*. Eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993) 217.

mode of organized female reform discourse to a more pragmatic ‘political’ discourse that emphasized what women could contribute to others and thus made use of a Victorian ideal of women as self-sacrificing.”<sup>84</sup> Middle-class maternalists believed in the crucial maintenance of heteronormative family roles, imagined themselves as mothers toward the poor, and assumed that the socialization of minority women as maternal figures would lead to other kinds of democratic reforms.<sup>85</sup> For white maternalists, Americanization of non-Anglo-Saxon women was crucial for their achievement as “100% mothers of fully American children...”<sup>86</sup> Only a small portion of mother’s aid went to white minorities and some blacks but “unassimilable” minorities of color, such as Mexicans and Asians, were excluded from mother’s aid programs.<sup>87</sup> Historians Robert Wiebe and Alexander Saxton also discuss the relative assimilability of white minorities compared to minorities of color: While Irish immigrants were being assimilated into white American culture, Chinese immigrants were being violently expelled from towns across the Pacific coast after the passing of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. This act barred the entrance of Chinese laborers into the U.S. and denied Chinese immigrants naturalization in order to consolidate the white working class.<sup>88</sup> Related projects of democratic reform and Asian exclusion emerged from the tensions between small-town regions and (often government supported) monopoly capitalism: “Monopoly, in other words, connoted power and impersonality. It concerned the vast wealth, legal flexibility, and geographical scope of a major corporation far more often than a careful list of its procedures.”<sup>89</sup>

Both Wiebe and Saxton argue that, although Populism and Progressivism were contradictory movements in terms of class aims, both promoted women’s suffrage and shared ideas of the democratic reform of a monopoly-controlled society by rallying for anti-immigration laws directed specifically toward Chinese immigrant laborers.<sup>90</sup>

Antialien sentiments, cousins to antimonopoly, were almost as common and equally protean... Cries for a restriction of immigration and for stiffer naturalization laws accompanied the upsurge of nativism. Reflecting the new concern, Grover Cleveland became the first President of the century to give official mention to an ‘immigration problem’; and President Harrison followed soon after with a warning against disloyal aliens.<sup>91</sup>

The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed earlier during Chester Arthur’s presidency, was catalyzed by pressure from west coast union groups and California politicians.<sup>92</sup> An “indispensable” component of monopoly capitalism, cheap Chinese laborers—popularly referred to as “coolies”—were seen by unskilled white laborers in the west as threats to

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<sup>84</sup> Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare: 1890-1935* (New York: The Free Press, 1994) 39.

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, 55.

<sup>86</sup> Gordon, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Gordon, 48.

<sup>88</sup> In *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) Robert H. Wiebe states, “By 1890 Irish names would dominate politics in sixty-eight Massachusetts cities and towns” (50). Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1971) 263.

<sup>89</sup> Wiebe, 53.

<sup>90</sup> Saxton, 284.

<sup>91</sup> Wiebe, 54.

<sup>92</sup> Saxton, 177.

their job security and thus incited white nationalism.<sup>93</sup> Populist and Progressive groups “sought to preserve individualism and democracy, as their adherents understood the terms, by protecting America’s communities.”<sup>94</sup> Both movements viewed Chinese presence in the U.S. as representative of international monopoly capital<sup>95</sup> and therefore as definitive obstacles to the paradoxical consolidation of the democratic, white “nation of small towns” during the urban-industrial revolution.<sup>96</sup>

Mrs. Spring Fragrance continually rearticulates her region of Chinatown by granting visibility and individuality to its previously invisible and “archetypically nonindividual” Chinese merchants and working class masses.<sup>97</sup> If, according to critic Colleen Lye, the Asiatic coolie was discursively formed as “modernization rendered visible” yet “a figure for the unrepresentable,” Mrs. Spring Fragrance reproduces the Progressive Era discourse of “the individual as social atom”<sup>98</sup> by focusing on individual tales of Chinese characters across the social strata in San Francisco Chinatown. In a city where the majority of the Chinese population was, historically speaking, working class, Mrs. Spring Fragrance—herself from the Chinese merchant class of Seattle—nevertheless fantasizes that she can access the performative subjectivities of characters of both laboring and merchant classes. Moreover, her gentrification of the laboring class as (poor) imitations of the white, middle class undermines the empirical vertical social structure of San Francisco Chinatown and recasts Chinatown as a universal, bourgeois utopia. Only a few decades after San Francisco’s Central Pacific Anti-Coolie Association was at the height of its activities—such as boycotting products created by Chinese labor and stoning and beating Chinese laborers<sup>99</sup>—and during a period when newer anti-Chinese labor leagues such as the Federated Trades Council were gaining momentum,<sup>100</sup> Sui Sin Far seems to deliberately avoid portraying her characters according to popular and threatening images of laboring coolies. Instead, Mrs. Spring Fragrance focuses predominantly on narrating stories about Chinese women—housewives of merchants in the first half of the book and laborers in the latter half—all of whom are preoccupied with imitating white, middle-class, femininity.

By dramatizing the failures of and also enduring hope in American universalism, Mrs. Spring Fragrance underscores her characters’ and her own subjectivity in performing white, gendered norms. For example, in “Lin John,” Mrs. Spring Fragrance

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<sup>93</sup> Saxton, 53.

<sup>94</sup> Wiebe, 74.

<sup>95</sup> Saxton, 101. In Colleen Lye’s *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), Lye asserts, “...Asiatic is modernization rendered visible, the alienating effects of whose process is worn on a surface exterior” (94).

<sup>96</sup> Wiebe, 9. Wiebe writes, “So great numbers of Americans came to believe that a new United States, stretched from ocean to ocean, filled out, and bound together, had miraculously speared. That, it seemed, was the true legacy of the war, and by the early eighties publicists were savoring the word ‘nation’ in this sense of continent conquered and tamed” (9).

<sup>97</sup> Lye writes, specifically of naturalist literature, “But as archetypically nonindividual agencies, indeed, as entities without independent agency, coolies are specifically useful to naturalism’s representation of modernity’s dehumanization of character” (95). Furthermore, naturalists referred to Chinese of merchant classes as coolies: “London, like Norris, consistently refers to self-employed Chinese persons as coolies” (94).

<sup>98</sup> Wiebe, 139.

<sup>99</sup> Saxton, 73, 74.

<sup>100</sup> Saxton, 233.

locates her own subjectivity in the performative narration of a Chinese prostitute named Pau Sang. In this story, Pau Sang foils her brother's plan to buy her out of prostitution by stealing his money in order to purchase "a sealskin sacque like the fine American ladies."<sup>101</sup> That is to say, Mrs. Spring Fragrance is subjectified through narrating or performing Pau Sang's expression of white normativity. Pau Sang likewise speaks herself into existence (as the other) through performativity: In stating, "I wanted a sealskin sacque like the fine American ladies," Pau Sang transcends subalternity and gains subjectivity even as she remains an impoverished, Chinese prostitute. While demonstrating the impossibility of her assimilation to Progressive notions of—implicitly white, middle-class—femininity, Pau Sang's performativity interpellates her as a subject. Her subjectivity exemplifies the doubleness of American universality by exposing its empirical exclusions and pointing to its transformative potential.

### Mimicking Men?

Mrs. Spring Fragrance's depictions of white masculinity—advocated by Theodore Roosevelt during the Progressive Era—follow a similar pattern to her performances of white femininity: in the process, her Chinese male characters are subjectified through their productive practice of mimicry that does not completely subvert norms but depend on them to delineate an inclusive utopia. Other critics, however, have expressed different views on her representation of Chinese men. In their assessment of character types, namely Chinese male characters, in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, critics Lorraine Dong and Marlon K. Hom write, "despite her (Sui Sin Far's) sincere desire to defend the Chinese during a period of Chinese exclusion in the United States, she has nevertheless perpetuated certain negative images of the Chinese in her characterizations."<sup>102</sup> According to Dong and Hom, Chinese men, such as Wou Sankwei from "The Wisdom of the New" and Wan Lin Fo from "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu," are portrayed as chauvinists; other Chinese men, such as Liu Kanghi from "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese," are problematically figured as effeminate. On the other hand, white American men, such as James Carson of "The Story of One White Woman" and Jack Fabian from "The Smuggling of Tie Co," appear more masculine and virile.<sup>103</sup> That Sui Sin Far's text bears such readings of stereotypical depictions of Chinese men is indeed troubling. However, an examination of Sui Sin Far's attitudes toward race and gender reveals that she felt femininity and masculinity to be social constructs of the Progressive Era that were integral to American imperialism: In her appeal, as a journalist, to the members of the British Columbia parliament in Canada to lift Chinese exclusion and the entry tax imposed on Chinese immigrants to Canada, she writes:

I believe the chief reason for the prejudice against the Chinese, I may call it the real and only solid reason for all the dislike shown to the Chinese people is that they are not considered good looking by white men; that is, they are not good looking according to a Canadian or American standard for looks. His reason may

<sup>101</sup> Sui Sin Far, "Lin John," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 119.

<sup>102</sup> Lorraine Dong and Marlon K. Hom, "Defiance or Perpetuation: An Analysis of Characters in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, ed. Him Mark Lai, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, and Judy Yung (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1987) 140, my parentheses.

<sup>103</sup> Dong and Hom, 143, 144, 147.

be laughed at and considered womanish, but it is not a woman's reason, it is a man's.<sup>104</sup>

Deploying Mrs. Spring Fragrance's trickery, Sui Sin Far performs the Progressive Era gender types of the New American Girl/Woman and the brutish yet civilized American man. In doing so, she problematizes the hegemonic racial and gendered paradigms of American imperialism during this period in order to clear the space, as it were, for a socially transformative utopia which, as "The Smuggling of Tie Co" demonstrates, is neither in the empirical U.S. nor in Canada and is certainly not located at the border where Tie Co drowns.<sup>105</sup>

While Dong and Hom assert that the tragic fate of "assimilated" Chinese men, who have consorted with or married white women, "perpetuates antimiscegenation,"<sup>106</sup> I am arguing that none of the Chinese men in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* strike the balance of primitive virility and civilized manliness and assimilate as American men precisely *because* of the racial component of American masculinity: For, at the turn of the century, "...America's nationhood itself was the product of both racial superiority and virile manhood."<sup>107</sup> According to historian Gail Bederman, American imperialism and virile masculinity were integral parts of the discourse of civilization which Theodore Roosevelt championed during the Progressive Era:

Roosevelt drew on 'civilization' (discourse) to help formulate his larger politics as an advocate of both nationalism and imperialism. As he saw it, the United States was engaged in a millennial drama of manly racial advancement, in which American men enacted their superior manhood by asserting imperialistic control over races of inferior manhood. To prove their virility, as a race and a nation, American men needed to take up the 'strenuous life' and strive to advance civilization—through imperialistic warfare and racial violence if necessary.<sup>108</sup>

Privileging American over Chinese "civilization," Roosevelt "despised" the Chinese "as the most decadent and unmanly of races."<sup>109</sup>

Reproducing the Progressive Era discourse of (imperial) civilization, Mrs. Spring Fragrance deconstructs masculinity as an American social construct in "The Wisdom of the New." She underscores the American ideological contradiction of masculinist imperialism and democracy as a backdrop of the visions of inclusive universalism articulated in her depictions of Chinatown later in the story. The short story begins in China where young Wou Sankwei, the protagonist, meets two men who had lived in the U.S. for a period of time: a peddler, Old Li Wang, who had gone to the U.S. "to make gold" but only "learn[ed] how to lose it[.]"<sup>110</sup> and Ching Kee, a business man who had found financial success there. Ching Kee tells Sankwei about his life in the U.S.:

"Tis a hard life over there...but 'tis worth while. At least one can be a man, and can work at what work comes his way without losing face." Then he

<sup>104</sup> Sui Sin Far, "A Plea for the Chinaman: A Correspondent's Argument in His Favor," Letter to the Editor, *Montreal Daily Star* 21 September 1896: 197.

<sup>105</sup> Wiebe, 237.

<sup>106</sup> Dong and Hom, 145.

<sup>107</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 183.

<sup>108</sup> Bederman, 171, my parentheses.

<sup>109</sup> Bederman, 193.

<sup>110</sup> Sui Sin Far, "The Wisdom of the New," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 42.

laughed at Wou Sankwei's flabby muscles, at his soft, dark eyes, and plump white hands.

"If you lived in America," said he, "you would learn to be ashamed of such beauty."

Whereupon Wou Sankwei made up his mind that he would go to America, the land beyond the sea. Better any life than that of a *woman man*.<sup>111</sup>

At this moment, American discourses surrounding gender, class, and (implicitly) race subjectify Wou Sankwei as a Chinese, "woman man"—an identification which he earnestly strives to forfeit as he ventures to the U.S. In addition to the apparent transnationality of American discourses surrounding gender, class, and race, the increasing dominance of global capitalism further galvanizes Sankwei's trip to the U.S. His mother "was ambitious for her son whom she loved beyond all things on earth" and remembered that a Canton merchant had said two months before: 'that the signs of the times were that the song of a cobbler, returned from America with the foreign language, could easier command a position of consequence than the son of a school-teacher unacquainted with any tongue but that of his motherland...'<sup>112</sup> For the people of Sankwei's village, international class mobility seems predicated on an individual's "Americanization" or assimilation into the U.S. culture.

The story then jumps ahead seven years to reveal Wou Sankwei as a successful junior partner and bookkeeper of the firm of Leung Tang Wou & Co. of San Francisco. After seven years of living in the U.S., he has gained command over English; but the narrator, Mrs. Spring Fragrance, ironically asks, "Self-improvement had been his object and ambition, even more than the acquirement of a fortune, and who, looking at his fine, intelligent face and listening to his careful English, could say that he had failed?"<sup>113</sup> His "failure" in becoming a (white) American male becomes apparent in the ensuing paragraphs when he appears trapped in a sphere of domesticity, surrounded by "motherly" female callers in his store and home. In other words, Sankwei who sits "behind a desk, busily entering figures in a long yellow book" has clearly not been able to rid himself of his "flabby muscles, ... his soft, dark eyes, and plump, white hands."<sup>114</sup> Writing about the late nineteenth-century inculcation of the Cult of Domesticity into U.S. cultural norms, historian Robert G. Lee discusses the male counterpart to the domestic female:

The cult of the Western masculine hero, first embodied in the figure of Davy Crockett, valorized untamed savagery in the young single male in service to an onward march of civilization. The frontier provided ground for an anti-familial narrative that reconfigured alienation and isolation as independence and self-sufficiency. It was on the frontier that loneliness could be hammered and honed into the 'savage' skill of competitive individualism that was required for survival and success in the capitalist city.<sup>115</sup>

Sankwei arrives in the U.S. during a period in which the "combination of primitive Western masculinity and advanced civilized manliness dramatized the superior manhood

<sup>111</sup> Sui Sin Far, "The Wisdom of the New," 42-43, my italics.

<sup>112</sup> Sui Sin Far, "The Wisdom of the New," 43.

<sup>113</sup> Sui Sin Far, "The Wisdom of the New," 43.

<sup>114</sup> Sui Sin Far, "The Wisdom of the New," 43.

<sup>115</sup> Robert G. Lee, 87.

of the American race.”<sup>116</sup> Unable to achieve primitive Western masculinity, Sankwei nevertheless carves out a civilized, domestic life with his wife and family and forges a platonic friendship with a white woman, Adah Charlton which, in turn, destroys his family. Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s narrative performance of white masculinity through Sankwei has been perceived by other critics as Sankwei’s failed expression of masculinity and potentially perpetuates stereotypes of effeminate Chinese men.

At other moments, Mrs. Spring Fragrance also reveals gender to be a universal (interracial) social construction through her mimicry of white, grotesquely Rooseveltian, men: James Carson is a suffragist who is, ironically, as—if not more—chauvinistic toward his wife than Sankwei and Lin Fo are toward theirs. He verbally abuses his wife and demands that his secretary have an affair with him. Mrs. Spring Fragrance continues to criticize white women’s racialization of Chinese through her characterization of Minnie, James’s (ex-) wife, who perpetuates stereotypes of white and Chinese men by describing James as “much more of an ardent lover than ever had been Liu Kanghi[,]” her current Chinese husband. Mrs. Spring Fragrance clearly pokes fun at James’s hyper-virility when she narrates, “the papers reported his death of apoplexy while exercising at a public gymnasium.”<sup>117</sup> Mrs. Spring Fragrance also parodies Jack Fabian from “The Smuggling of Tie Co” who appears to be James’s primitive counterpart. Telling the story in first-person narrative, Mrs. Spring Fragrance takes on the guise of one of Fabian’s fellow outlaws who smuggle Chinese from Canada into the U.S. Mrs. Spring Fragrance caricatures Fabian as “[u]ncommonly strong in person, tall and well built, with fine features and a pair of keen, steady blue eyes, gifted with a sort of rough eloquence and of much personal fascination,” adding that “it is no wonder that we fellows regard him as our chief and are bound to follow where he leads.”<sup>118</sup> However, when Tie Co throws himself into the river—later to be revealed as a woman—Fabian ultimately fails to rescue Tie Co: “But though a first-class swimmer, the white man’s efforts were of no avail, and Tie Co was borne away from him by the swift current.”<sup>119</sup> And when Tie Co’s body is picked up by Canadian authorities, he is found to be a woman.

The ambiguity of Tie Co’s gender mirrors the Chinese men in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* who seem to oscillate between mimicking white masculinity and femininity or, at least, failing to precisely imitate masculinity: Sankwei is unable to escape his gender confusion as a “woman man;” Liu Kanghi is effeminate when compared to Minnie’s ex-husband James Carson and when he is shot, his body is brought to Minnie, phallically dismembered, with “two...balls in his pocket.”<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, Tian Shan from “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit” comes closest to accurately mimicking the Rooseveltian virile man. Ironically detailing Tian Shan’s many masculine, heroic defeats, Mrs. Spring Fragrance states,

Had Tian Shan been an American and China to him a forbidden country, his daring exploits and thrilling adventures would have furnished inspiration for many a newspaper and magazine article, novel, and short story. As a hero, he would certainly have far outshone Dewey, Peary, or Cook. Being however, a

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<sup>116</sup> Bederman, 191.

<sup>117</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 77.

<sup>118</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Smuggling of Tie Co,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 104.

<sup>119</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Smuggling of Tie Co,” 108.

<sup>120</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Her Chinese Husband,” 83.



Chinese, and the forbidden country America, he was simply recorded by the American press as “a wily Oriental, who ‘by ways that are dark and tricks that are vain,’<sup>121</sup> is eluding the vigilance of our brave customs officers.”<sup>122</sup>

In her tongue-in-cheek introduction of Tian Shan, Mrs. Spring Fragrance rearticulates the Chinese stereotypes from Bret Harte’s poem “Ah Sin” by dismantling the contrivance of white masculinity and framing the mutual race and gender construction of the white, masculine American man as a corollary of American<sup>123</sup> imperialism in Pacific Asia.<sup>124</sup> Tian Shan’s rugged masculinity is virtually invisible to the U.S. public; the one time his heroic adventure—a habitual undertaking—of crossing the U.S.-Canadian border is publicized, he is punished for attempting to mimic white masculinity (exemplified by Jack Fabian) and deported to China: The American newspaper indicts him of “unlawfully breathing United States air for several years.”<sup>125</sup> Rather than being deported back to Canada, he is sent to China where his mimicry of white masculinity is no longer a threat to normativity. As he returns to China, however, he reunites with his lover Fin Fan who has dressed as a man in order to be, herself, deported back to China. Fin Fan’s performance of (white) masculinity returns her to her native land and restores her relationship.

The performativity of white, middle-class femininity and masculinity in Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown problematizes such normative social constructs, clearing the space for an imminent, alternative world which promotes difference and social equality, particularly between whites and Chinese. If Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s world, rather than the disenfranchised world of her characters, is a glimpse of this alternative utopia of social equality that includes Chinese characters, it nevertheless perpetuates certain normative constructs of middle-class life. Moreover, performativity of Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s characters within her narrative frame leads to two problematics: Firstly, the Chinese characters’ mimicry can be perceived as their successful assimilation rather than failed assimilation. For this reason, Sui Sin Far’s text has been classified as an assimilationist text which, like other traditional regionalist texts, affirms the integrity of the national status quo. It should be mentioned, however, that while Mrs. Spring Fragrance comes close to fully assimilating into the American middle class, none of the characters who mimic whiteness in her “book” demonstrate social mobility into the white American middle class. Secondly, even if mimicry is recognized as defying assimilation and the authority of whiteness, the problem of representing difference without

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<sup>121</sup> Sui Sin Far ironically alludes to Harte’s original poem, “The Heathen Chinese” in which he describes the Chinaman “Ah Sin” as one who “for ways that are dark, /And for tricks that are vain, / ...is peculiar” to describe the misperceptions of her protagonist in “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit.”

<sup>122</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit,” 119.

<sup>123</sup> Although the story takes place in Canada and the U.S., it should be noted that “America” conflates the two nations in the story.

<sup>124</sup> In *Sexual Naturalization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), Koshy argues that the racial and gendered conspiracy against the Chinese expressed in anti-miscegenation legislation links domestic white management of Asians to American management of Asian nations abroad: “While most accounts of white-Asian miscegenation focus on sexual relationships within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, I highlight the critical importance of extraterritorial spaces to the management and production of white-Asian intimacies. This study argues that these extraterritorial spaces have been consistently absent from the historiography of miscegenation; it links their absence to the state-bound cartographies of American history and the invisibility of American imperialism” (10).

<sup>125</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit,” 124.

essentializing race or gender arises. The two-dimensional, sketch quality of the stories and its characters seems to, however successfully, address the difficult representation of (racial and gendered) difference without essentialism. For example, the two-dimensional stock characters, Pau Lin and Pau Tsu from “The Wisdom of the New” and “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu”—both of whom experience similar abjection from American society upon joining their husbands in the United States—take on the rearticulated form of their region: The stock quality of the characters synecdochically reflect Chinatown’s rearticulated form as an empty placeholder, evacuated of its hegemonic discourse, for an alternative world of understanding among races and genders.

Furthermore, Sui Sin Far’s orientalism functions as evacuated placeholders to describe difference. For example, upon immigration, both Pau Lin and Pau Tsu lose their culturally particular sense of femininity as they are interpellated into constructs of white, middle-class femininity. When Pau Lin and Pau Tsu each arrive in the American west, they appear in their Chinese feminine dress and, in so appearing, are said to be out of place: When Pau Lin arrives, she “appeared very worn and tired. This, despite the fact that with a feminine desire to make herself fair to see in the eyes of her husband, she had arrayed herself in a heavily embroidered purple costume, whitened her forehead and cheeks with powder, and tinted her lips with carmine.”<sup>126</sup> When Pau Tsu arrives, she is described as a “little figure in Oriental dress” who “seemed rather out of place” in the apartments furnished in “American style” by Wan Lin Fo: “In her peach plum colored robes, her little arms and hands sparkling with jewels, and her shiny black head decorated with wonderful combs and pins, she appeared a bit of Eastern coloring amidst the Western lights and shades.”<sup>127</sup> These descriptions of Oriental clothing and wares are translated through comparison with their Occidental counterparts such as Pau Tsu’s American “dress of filmy lace”<sup>128</sup> or Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s American gown that is “fit for a fairy.”<sup>129</sup> While preserving difference, “Oriental” items are translated through their parallels with Occidental wares as an instantiation of her universalist aspirations. Critics such as Lorraine Dong and Marlon Hom have suggested that the two-dimensional quality of the Chinese characters in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* perpetuates orientalist stereotypes of Chinese people.<sup>130</sup> However, Sui Sin Far does not use the term “oriental” to describe the ontology of any of the Chinese characters;<sup>131</sup> instead, she metonymically represents the term through clothing and décor and thus strategically attempts to keep Chinese difference in place without essentializing it.

### **Chinatown as Universal Region**

As a space of socially unsanctioned contact—that is, both intimacy and unresolved conflict—between whites and Chinese, Chinatown points to Sui Sin Far’s

<sup>126</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Wisdom of the New,” 45.

<sup>127</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu,” 85-86.

<sup>128</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu,” 88.

<sup>129</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Inferior Woman,” 30.

<sup>130</sup> Dong and Hom, 143.

<sup>131</sup> Sui Sin Far’s use of the term “orient” does not perpetuate the asymmetrical power relation between the Orient and the Occident as does Edward Said’s use of the term. In Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), Said defines Orientalism as, “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’ ...”(2).

vision of a utopic, extranational world for which Chinatown only acts as a placeholder in the interim. Sui Sin Far sketches Chinatown as a non-essentialist space of racial and cultural difference by emptying it of its discursive delineations of disease and immorality and rearticulating it as a space of racial contact in which the Chinese inhabitants productively perform and mimic whiteness. However, Sui Sin Far's Chinatown also demonstrates Sui Sin Far's inclination to universalize as it gestures toward a positive world of mutual understanding and friendship among races and genders. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Sui Sin Far ends her autobiography by rearticulating her national displacement as a positive, "connecting link" between the "Occidentals" and the "Orientals."<sup>132</sup> Imagining herself as an extranational subject, Sui Sin Far locates glimpses of her alternative world—one which would universally transcend nationalist, gendered, and racial boundaries—in her Chinatown. In the midst of negatively defining Chinatown as a rearticulated space, Sui Sin Far offers moments in which Chinatown positively instantiates an alternative world of national, gendered, and racial transcendence.

An example of a non-nativist and pro-immigrant region, Sui Sin Far's San Francisco Chinatown underscores the racial conflict between its Chinese and white American inhabitants as a social corollary of legislated Chinese exclusion in the U.S. While offering utopian scenes of gender and racial inclusion, the empirical Chinatown of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* empowers neither the Chinese immigrants to successfully transform American racial and gendered norms nor the white suffragists to assimilate the Chinese to such American cultural norms. In contrast to regions of American literary texts such as Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), in which the cosmopolitan visitor narrates a backwater or a foreign region which is home to similarly foreign inhabitants, Sui Sin Far's Chinatown is a region that remains universally foreign to the white Americans and displaced Chinese nationals who inhabit it. Shifting between perspectives of white suffragists and Chinese women, which frame the other as alien, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* constructs San Francisco into a dually exoticized space to both its white and Chinese inhabitants. In its regional difference, Chinatown then becomes a neutrally foreign ground—a plane of immanence<sup>133</sup>—upon which Sui Sin Far articulates her nevertheless persisting, universalist aspirations to transcend social constructions of race and gender.

As a literary genre, American regionalism served as an avenue through which the white American public could dispense with their xenophobia toward immigrants, particularly immigrants of color, during the Progressive Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the white readers of American regionalist literature, the idyllic country regions, which often housed uniformly white, Anglo-Saxon populations, created "a space of safety constructed against an excluded threat."<sup>134</sup> The works of traditional American regionalist writers such as Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* and Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* evince this sort of white American nativism in their

<sup>132</sup> Sui Sin Far, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," 230.

<sup>133</sup> In *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, Trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), Gilles Deleuze describes his notion of a "plane of immanence": "Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, *to* something; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject....Immanence is not related to Some Thing as a unity superior to all things or to a Subject as an act that brings about a synthesis of things: it is only when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can speak of a plane of immanence" (26-27).

<sup>134</sup> Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 136.

depictions of racially homogeneous regions. Hamlin Garland's all-white cast of characters of *Main-Travelled Roads* demonstrate the American frontier spirit<sup>135</sup> by overcoming familial strife, heartbreak, bankruptcy within the confines of small towns and the farmlands of South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Furthermore, Garland writes in his book of essays, *Crumbling Idols*, that regionalist literature is the new American literature with a sort of universal appeal: "This criticism to-day sees that local color means national character, and is aiding the young writer to treat his themes in the best art."<sup>136</sup> Garland also reproduces a discourse of American imperialism when he asserts that, "America is the most imaginative and creative of nations."<sup>137</sup> In a similar vein, critics Sandra A. Zagarell and Susan Gillman have argued that the coastal community of Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* is constructed by "racial attitudes, nativism, and exclusionary impulses"<sup>138</sup> and is representative of a prelapsarian, mythic past of national unity. Such myths perpetuate notions of American imperialism by "fulfill[ing] conflicting desires for both escape from and distanced confrontation with anxieties (over 'immigrant hordes' at home and a new American empire abroad) of the present."<sup>139</sup> Referring to all regionalist and local color (synonymous terms for Brodhead) literature, critic Richard Brodhead relates the xenophobia and racial nativism of the texts to their readers: As "an agency for purging the world of immigrants to restore homogeneous community[.]" regionalist fiction "was produced as an upper order's reading at a time of heavy immigration and the anxieties associated with such immigration."<sup>140</sup>

The influx of immigration into the U.S., compounded by the increasing population of big cities, propagated the popularity of regionalist fiction during the Gilded

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<sup>135</sup> In Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), Turner writes, "Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American" (189). In contrast to the "preponderantly English" population of the East coast, the frontier West was filled with "a composite nationality" of Scotch-Irish, Palatine German, and English "for the American people" (111). Turner's idea of multiculturalism was an ethnic composite of white ethnics. Turner goes on to assert that "frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy" (220)."

<sup>136</sup> Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting and the Drama* (1894), Ed. Jane Johnson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960) 53.

<sup>137</sup> Garland, 135.

<sup>138</sup> Sandra A. Zagarell, "Country's Portrayal of Community and the Exclusion of Difference," *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Ed. June Howard (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 40. Zagarell cites a moment during the Bowden reunion when a guest remarks, "I always did think Mari' Harris resembled a Chinese" (p.101) as an example of the xenophobia that is instrumental in constructing the community (39).

<sup>139</sup> Susan Gillman, "Regionalism and Nationalism in Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*," *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Ed. June Howard (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 113. Like Zagarell, Gilman also refers to the Bowden reunion in her argument that the community of Dunnet Landing attempts to construct a mythic past of the nation:

The Bowden family might as well be one of the many fraternal organizations – among them the Knights of Columbus and the Ku Klux Klan – that flourished during this period of growing U.S. interest in expansion overseas. The semi-mythological pasts constructed by such groups, as well as in popular romances and regional literature (such as Jewett's), fulfilled conflicting desires for both escape from and distanced confrontation with anxieties (over 'immigrant hordes' at home and a new American empire abroad) of the present. (113)

<sup>140</sup> Brodhead, 135-136.

Age (1865-1890).<sup>141</sup> The rising population in big cities and the industrialization of agriculture from the 1870s onward resulted in lowering commodity prices and declining economic conditions for farmers in rural regions of the U.S. Regionalism expressed a nostalgia for idyllic, rural agricultural life which also conveyed sympathy toward worsening conditions for farmers—seen as sympathetic subjects of an obsolete way of life (as in the literature of Hamlin Garland). Brodhead writes,

[Regionalism's] elegaism, further, has a clear and suspicious relation to what recent anthologists have seen in traditional ethnographic writing (regional fiction is also a nineteenth-century ethnography): the habit while purporting to grasp an alien cultural system of covertly lifting it out of history, constituting it as a self-contained form belonging to the past rather than an interactive force still adapting in the present. For the United States, regionalism's representation of tradition insulated from larger cultural contact is palpably a fiction. This would suggest that its public function was not just to mourn lost cultures but to purvey a certain story of contemporary cultures and of the relations among them: to tell local cultures in to a history of their supersession by a modern order now risen to national dominance.<sup>142</sup>

By the 1890s, during what historians have coined the Progressive Era, the modern order of American capitalism entered the *international* political arena after “opening” countries such as China to trade<sup>143</sup> and acquiring new territories after the Spanish-American War (1898) such as the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam. U.S. economic expansion overseas during the latter decades of the nineteenth century only exacerbated the plight of the rural farmers whose commodities had begun to face international competition.<sup>144</sup> In

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<sup>141</sup> “The great American cities that grew up at the new junctures of transportation and commerce in the Gilded Age—Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and the rest—embody another supersession of an older localism. Such cities drew populations from small towns and the rural countryside, a now- ‘older’ world they helped devitalize and deplete...Such familiar Gilded Age histories have an obvious relevance to the regional genre, and in the light it has seemed easy to say what office it must have performed. The cultural work of nineteenth-century regionalism, the emotional and conceptual service this writing performed that made it meet a profound social *need*—for the historical demand for regionalism bespeaks not just taste but need—has been assumed to be that of cultural elegy: the work of memorializing a cultural order passing from life at the moment and of fabricating, in the literary realm, a mentally possessable version of a loved thing lost in reality” (Brodhead, 120).

<sup>142</sup> Brodhead, 121.

<sup>143</sup> In *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), historian George C. Herring writes, “What was once called the Spanish-American War was the pivotal event of a pivotal decade, bringing the ‘large policy’ to fruition and marking the United States as a world power” (309). According to George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi’s *America: A Narrative History*. Fourth Edition, Volume Two (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), the U.S. established Open Door Policy (1899) which called for a “unilateral[!] hands-off policy” toward Chinese ports, allowing the Chinese to collect tariffs on “an equal basis” with other countries” (992). The Open Door Policy, while coinciding with the period of Chinese Exclusion, evoked a mixed reaction in many Americans: Tindall and Shi write, “The Open Door Policy, if rooted in the self-interest of American businessmen eager to exploit the markets of China, also tapped the deepseated sympathies of those who opposed imperialism, especially as it endorsed China’s territorial integrity” (993).

<sup>144</sup> Tindall and Shi assert, “For some time farmers had been subject to worsening economic and social conditions. The source of their problem was a long-term decline in commodity prices from 1870 to 1898, the product of domestic overproduction and growing international competition for world markets. The vast new lands brought under cultivation in America poured an ever-increasing supply of farm products into the market, driving down prices. This effect was reinforced as innovations in transportation and

addition to expressing sympathy for outmoded agricultural life and attempting to allay anxieties about crowded, bourgeois life in the cities, regionalism functioned to restore a lost sense of native, U.S. history during a crucial period of mounting U.S. imperialism overseas.

While Jewett's and Garland's texts arguably describe mythic regions about an imperial, racially homogeneous, U.S. pre-history, Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* focuses instead on the racially and culturally heterogeneous—and seemingly foreign—space of contemporary Chinatown. And in contrast to texts such as *Country of the Pointed Firs* and *Main-Travelled Roads* which center on constructing farming or fishing communities, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* demonstrates the ways in which the failure of community cohesion among the Chinese and white inhabitants of and around San Francisco Chinatown reflected the empirical racial tensions in Chinatown during the turn of the century. While indicating the failure of American universalism, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* gestures, at various moments, toward an alternative, extranational community of interracial understanding.<sup>145</sup> And yet, as I have argued, the alternative vision of universalism or universal democracy that the book seems to envision emerges from Progressive Era ideologies of American exceptionalism. Moreover, regardless of authorial intent, any work of art, as Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno suggests, is susceptible to acting as a vehicle of social consolation and perpetuating the status quo. The status quo, in the case of regionalist literature, was white nativism and American imperialism.<sup>146</sup> For example, although Sui Sin Far was not interested in exoticizing Chinatown's inhabitants, Annette White-Parks has argued that her editor “[Charles Fletcher] Lummis's attraction to her was undoubtedly also connected with his interest in

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communications brought American farmers ever more into international competition, further increasing the supply of farm commodities” (947).

<sup>145</sup> To clarify, I do not mean to say that all other regionalist texts that focus on community construction within the parameters of the nation are necessarily advocating U.S. imperialism or articulating a myth of the nation. In fact, the paradox of the literary American region as geographic constituent and cultural exception to the United States—as an idyllic, pre-industrial countrysides in which ethnic folk cultures and immigrant inhabitants reside—has divided critics over the social attitudes toward the foreign within the region. Critics Richard Brodhead, Amy Kaplan, and Eric Sundquist have argued that regionalist writing of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was complicit in the exclusion of marginalized others for the purposes of consolidating U.S. territories and other such imperial nationalist projects; other critics such as Stephanie Foote, Robert Jordan, Francesco Loriggio, Robert Dainotto, and Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse have offered convincing postnational and antihegemonic readings of American regionalist writing. They argue, to various extents, that the foreign setting enables and empowers the marginalized inhabitants to subvert racial and gendered norms of the imperialist nation. I would assert that many of the classic regionalist texts were indeed complicit in the project of U.S. imperial nation-building while some other regionalist texts by minority writers (usually women and people of color) were interested in critiquing U.S. domestic and international imperialism. Based on Sui Sin Far's biography and the close reading of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, I am arguing that the text falls into the latter category.

<sup>146</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 2. Adorno writes, “The clichés of art's reconciling glow enfolding the world are repugnant not only because they parody the emphatic concept of art with its bourgeois version and class it among those Sunday institutions that provide solace. These clichés rub against the wound that art itself bears. As a result of its inevitable withdrawal from theology, from the unqualified claim to the truth of salvation, a secularization without which art would never have developed, art is condemned to provide the world as it exists with a consolation that—shorn of any hope of a world beyond—strengthens the spell of that from which autonomy of art wants to free itself” (1-2).

‘exotic ethnics.’”<sup>147</sup> Early twentieth-century critics such as William Purviance Fenn (1933) ranked Sui Sin Far among other contemporary, exploitative Chinatown writers who wrote stereotypical local-color stories for the white American public.<sup>148</sup> Conversely, recent critics such as Annette White-Parks, Xiao-Huang Yin, and Kate McCulloch have continued to contrast Sui Sin Far’s work with contemporaneous racist, Chinese local color stories.<sup>149</sup>

Despite the nuanced analyses of Sui Sin Far as a regionalist writer by McCulloch, Fetterley and Pryse, and Tom Lutz,<sup>150</sup> regionalist critics have failed to account for the particularity and aberrancy of Sui Sin Far’s *region* of Chinatown in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. The urban environment starkly contrasts with rural regions such as the coastal Maine town of Dunnet Landing and Midwestern farm regions of the classical regionalist texts, *Country of the Pointed Firs* and *Main-Travelled Roads*. Furthermore, Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown investigates the racist foundations of white-Chinese social discord, defying the white American nativism that emerges from Jewett’s and Garland’s works.

Sui Sin Far does make use of many regionalist conventions such as the paradox of the region as both idyllic and foreign in her construction of Chinatown. Brodhead suggests, “the deepest paradox” of American regionalism was “that the late nineteenth-century class that saw polyglot America as a social nightmare and that made purity of speech a premier tool of social discrimination should have cherished, as one of its principal entertainment forms, the dialect or local color tale, definable after all as the fiction where people talk strangely.”<sup>151</sup> Departing from Brodhead’s interpretation, Kristin Hoganson argues that domestic spaces were international contact zones<sup>152</sup> in United States at the turn of the twentieth century. She writes, “...provincialism has another

<sup>147</sup> White-Parks, 86. Lummis also “praised her stories for their ‘excellent coloring’” (87).

<sup>148</sup> William Purviance Fenn, *Ah Sin and His Brethren in American Literature* (Delivered Before the Convocation of the College of Chinese Studies, June 1933). Fenn writes, “Most of these are stamped from the same die, with only superficial differences. Sui Seen Far, for example, leans to sentiment: in ‘The Sing-Son Woman,’ Lao Choo substitutes herself for Maggie in a marriage with a Chinese, and in ‘A Chinese Ishmael,’ Leih Tseih and Ku Yum throw themselves into the sea from a convenient headland in order to escape the revenge of Lum Choy” (116-117).

<sup>149</sup> White-Parks states, “Two short stories, Frank Norris’s ‘Third Circle’ and Olive Dibert’s ‘Chinese Lily,’ illustrate the typical attitudes of the era, ideas and content that Sui Sin Far’s work sought to overturn.” (113) In “Between East and West: Sui Sin Far—The First Chinese American Woman Writer.” *Arizona Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1991) Xiao-Huang Yin speculates that “[a]mong the early Chinese immigrant authors, she (Sui Sin Far) was virtually the only one who engaged in writing imaginative literature rather than social-anthropological works.” (49, my parentheses). And in *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women’s Fiction, 1885-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), Kate McCulloch indicates that “she recognizes the impact of, and at the same time challenges, the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century American cultural narrative wherein blood determines both personal identity and cultural location.” (228).

<sup>150</sup> Tom Lutz asserts that “Sui Sin Far’s stories about Mrs. Spring Fragrance, for instance, are classic insider/outsider tales” that are typical of regionalism in *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004) 181.

<sup>151</sup> Brodhead, 136.

<sup>152</sup> In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), Mary Louise Pratt defines “contact zone” as a deconstructive space of “autoethnography” or “autoethnographic expression” “to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (7).

meaning. Yes, it can mean narrow-mindedness and homogeneity, the opposites of cosmopolitanism. But it also means being part of a province, that is, existing on the periphery of some larger, greater entity.”<sup>153</sup> Similarly, the inhabitants of Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown talk and act *strangely* insofar as they talk and act like middle-class white people rather than evincing local color through dialect. Rather than merely deconstructing Chinatown, Sui Sin Far disrupts and transforms social norms on two, related levels: Through white, middle-class mimicry, the Chinese characters of Sui Sin Far’s text “make strange”<sup>154</sup> the empirical scenes of Chinatown’s racialized working-class inhabitants for the text’s white, middle-class readership. In contrast to the urban spaces of urban regionalism—a subgenre of American regionalism—such as that of Jacob Riis’s New York’s Lower East Side in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) in which “urban crowding” was “ma[de] vivid...by referencing China[,]”<sup>155</sup> Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown is non-referential. As an avant-garde space, it provides glimpses into a world of interracial social equality and understanding.

Sui Sin Far’s Chinese characters delineate and manage Chinatown as an alternative, non-empirical space through the performativity of dominant notions of race and gender. Sui Sin Far constructs her Chinatown using the conventions of American literary regionalism—such as the region’s paradox of nativist idyllicism and threatening foreignness, the short story form, and a cosmopolitan narrator (Mrs. Spring Fragrance) who freely moves into and out of a circumscribed community. Using these instrumental conventions, Sui Sin Far’s region of Chinatown critiques the racist nativism of American regionalism and stakes its claim as art through its visions of what Adorno has called, “a world beyond” the empirical—which is, for him, one of art’s aims.<sup>156</sup> Although it is unlikely that Adorno would have considered Sui Sin Far’s seemingly heteronomous work, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, as high art, I am arguing that, coincident with Adorno’s theorization of art, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* “rejected the empirical world”<sup>157</sup> in which San Francisco Chinatown was publicly imagined as “an unsanitary sink” and as “a morally aberrant community;”<sup>158</sup> instead, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* sought to “bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity: 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 8, 6.

<sup>154</sup> In Iyko Day’s “Intervening Innocence: Race, ‘Resistance,’ and the Asian North American Avant-Garde,” *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*, Eds. Davis, Rocío and Sue-im Lee (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), Day proposes that literary critics rethink notions of the Asian American avant-garde as projects that focus on “making strange” institutionalized, western literary forms (49).

<sup>155</sup> Lye, 29.

<sup>156</sup> Adorno, 1. Adorno describes art’s utopian aims: “If art has psychoanalytic roots, then they are the roots of fantasy in the fantasy of omnipotence. This fantasy includes the wish to bring about a better world. This frees the total dialectic, whereas the view of art as a merely subjective language of the unconscious does not even touch it” (9).

<sup>157</sup> Adorno, 2.

<sup>158</sup> Anderson, 82. Although Anderson is chiefly discussing Vancouver’s Chinatown here, she states that her study is “applicable to other racial categories and racially defined enclaves in other contexts” (4). Nayan Shah’s work *Contagious Divides* affirms that San Francisco Chinatown at the turn of the century was discursively imagined as diseased and an immoral, queer community of bachelors and prostitutes.

<sup>159</sup> Adorno, 1.



In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, San Francisco Chinatown was predominantly inhabited by working class laborers and a smaller population of merchants. Shah notes,

Public health rhetoric about the contagion of Chinatown bachelor society provided both white middle-class female missionaries and white male labor leaders the necessary foil against which they could elaborate the vision and norms for nuclear-family domestic life and a sanitary social order. The lives of Chinese men and women were depicted as contrary to respectable domesticity and an ominous threat to ideal visions of American morality and family life. From the mid-nineteenth century to World War II, white politicians and social critics characterized Chinatown as an immoral bachelor society of dissolute men who frequented opium dens, gambling houses, and brothels, and the few visible Chinese women were considered to be prostitutes.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, critic Don Mitchell writes of San Francisco Chinatown that the “city regarded Chinatown through two optics,” disease and immorality, “both of which found support in the landscape itself.”<sup>161</sup> While working for the *San Francisco Bulletin* in the 1890s, Sui Sin Far’s main task was to canvas Chinatown for subscribers. Familiar with the discursive landscape of “filth” and the working class demographics of San Francisco Chinatown, Sui Sin Far nevertheless proceeded to write short stories of mostly middle-class (and a few working-class) Chinese immigrant families who exhibit neither the stereotypical propensities toward “immoral” behavior nor disease. Sui Sin Far’s short stories of middle-class Chinese families and working-class Chinese families—all performing Progressive Era ideals of white, bourgeois families—“make strange” the empirical San Francisco Chinatown of the late nineteenth century in which anti-coolie clubs drove Chinese laborers from their work by being “stoned, beaten, [and] run down on the street.”<sup>162</sup>

In many of the stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, San Francisco Chinatown is framed in orientalist, exoticizing terms by white characters: In the short story “Its Wavering Image,” the Chinese protagonist Pan’s apartment is depicted as “the high room open to the stars, with its China bowls full of flowers and its big colored lanterns, shedding a mellow light;” nevertheless, the same image of Chinese lanterns in the bustling streets below the apartment incites Pan’s racist lover Mark Carson to comment, “How beautiful above! How unbeautiful below!”<sup>163</sup> Mark’s distinction between the oriental aestheticism in Pan’s apartment and the aesthetic lack below evinces the paradoxical discourse of Chinatown as a repudiated foreign region and a consumable foreign object. He is, however, more persuaded by the view of Chinatown as repudiated and unassimilable to the rest of the city: Carson later betrays Pan by writing an exposé on Chinatown for his newspaper, interpreting the oriental architectural and cosmetic structures of Chinatown as evidence of its social perils and disorders. By contrast, in the story “The Wisdom of the New,” the white female suffragist Adah Charlton views San

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<sup>160</sup> Shah, 12.

<sup>161</sup> Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000) 106.

<sup>162</sup> Saxton, 72, 73.

<sup>163</sup> Sui Sin Far, “Its Wavering Image,” *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 63.

San Francisco Chinatown as delightfully foreign and aesthetically assimilable. During the Harvest Moon Festival celebration, Adah sees Chinatown in

Rows of lanterns suspended from many balconies [which] shed a mellow moonshiny radiance. On the walls and doors were splashes of red paper inscribed with hieroglyphics...Everybody seemed to be out of doors...Some Chinese students from the University of California stood looking on with comprehending half-scornful interest; three girls lavishly dressed in colored silks, with their black hair plastered back from their faces and heavily bejeweled behind, chirped and chattered in a gilded balcony above them like birds in a cage. Little children, their hands full of half-moon-shaped cakes, were pattering about, with eyes, for all the hour, as bright as stars.<sup>164</sup>

The scene of the Chinese students from the University of California looking on the orientalist scene “with comprehending half-scornful interest” does not escape Adah’s attention. Even as she is touristically consuming Chinatown as a regionalist object, which according to critic Richard Brodhead was a paradoxical nativist reaction “to actively manage the socially foreign’s threat,”<sup>165</sup> the object does not sit easily with her: The mutual foreignness of the spectacle, a synecdochic representation of Chinatown, to the Chinese university students and Adah alike suggests to Adah that Chinatown is a possible space of universal racial and gender equality. Here, Sui Sin Far playfully employs the regionalist convention of describing the mythic region as foreign and idyllic to project a Chinatown as foreign, not by virtue of its unassimilated, racial inhabitants but in its potential for mutuality or egalitarianism among various races, genders, and classes. The universal is always foreign or “not yet.” Signifying universalism, the central spectacle of this scene—a manic or celebratory demonstration of cultural particularity such as a parade or dance—remains perpetually excluded from the scope of the narrative. One by one, the tiered spectators, including Adah become the spectacle itself in the narrative. Beginning with the more familiar, mainstream American image of college students, who are also Chinese, the scene becomes increasingly culturally opaque and foreign to Adah. Although she is unable to comprehend the scene of Chinese cultural expression, she sympathetically likens the image of the Chinese girls who are “lavishly dressed in colored silks” as “birds in a cage.” Her figuration of the Chinese girls as caged birds sympathetically acknowledges the social imprisonment of Chinese women within a culture of Confucian patriarchy that she later discusses with her aunt. As the girls are part of Adah’s field of vision, their position as spectators signify her hope for a utopia of gender inclusion. As the conduits of universal projects, Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Adah are the tactile representations of such egalitarian visions.

The concealment of the spectacle in this scene symbolizes the empirical failure and continual promise of universal social equality. Adah’s subsequent realization of the mutual foreignness of San Francisco’s Chinatown to the Chinese and whites alike propels her advocacy of a universal feminist ideology. In attempting to translate her white suffragist ideology in a Confucian cultural context, she refutes the gender inequality between her Chinese friend Wou Sankwei and his wife Pau Lin. She tells her aunt, “I do not believe there is any real difference between the feelings of a Chinese wife and an American wife. Sankwei is treating Pau Lin as he would treat her were he living in China.

<sup>164</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Wisdom of the New,” 54.

<sup>165</sup> Brodhead, 134.

Yet it cannot be the same to her as if she were in their own country, where he would not come in contact with American women.”<sup>166</sup> However, Adah’s failure to understand social and cultural differences between Chinese women and white American women, specifically the resentment and jealousy Pau Lin harbors against her for attempting to assimilate her son into American culture and inadvertently stealing her husband’s affections, drives Pau Lin into a state of madness. For Pau Lin, suffragist feminism is inextricable from her monolithic notion of American “Wisdom of the New” of Chinese exclusion is a perceived outcome.

Aware of the exclusionary ideology of the American “wisdom of the new,” Pau Lin finds comfort and belonging in things of Chinese antiquity earlier on in the story. When her husband Sankwei would play Chinese music on the flute for her, the music would be “a magic which transported her in thought to the old Chinese days, the old Chinese days whose impression and influence ever remain with the exiled sons and daughters of China.”<sup>167</sup> However, San Francisco Chinatown does not serve the same nostalgic function for Pau Lin as does her husband’s flute playing. Sui Sin Far writes:

The American Chinatown held a strange fascination for the girl from the seacoast village. Streaming along the street was a motley throng made up of all nationalities. The sing-song voices of girls whom respectable merchants’ wives shudder to name, were calling to one another from high balconies up shadowy alleys. A fat barber was laughing hilariously at a drunken white man who had fallen into a gutter; a withered old fellow, carrying a bird in a cage, stood at the corner entreating passersby to have a good fortune told; some children were burning punk on the curbstone. There went by a stalwart Chief of the Six Companies engaged in earnest confab with a yellow-robed priest from the joss house. A Chinese dressed in the latest American style and a very blonde woman, laughing immoderately, were entering a Chinese restaurant together. Above all the hubbub of voices was heard the clang of electric cars and the jarring of heavy wheels over cobblestones.<sup>168</sup>

Pau Lin’s focalization of Chinatown sharply differs from Adah’s insofar as it lacks a central image of universalism. This lack refers to Pau Lin’s representation as a figure of difference that is seemingly sacrificed for the good of universalism. And yet, both scenes cubistically intersect and overlap insofar as they are both carnivalesque scenes that, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, grotesquely blend high and low culture to parody hegemonic ideas.<sup>169</sup> What seems to be constructively performed, rather than parodied, in both scenes is precisely the middle-class whiteness that is mapped on to each scene in which Chinatown is described through the hustle and bustle of a sort of white, main street rather than through its discursive images of opium-filled, gloomy, insidious alleyways.<sup>170</sup>

Despite the presence of Chinese people, Chinese restaurants, and Oriental building facades, which would seem to remind Pau Lin of her seacoast village in China,

<sup>166</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Wisdom of the New,” 53.

<sup>167</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Wisdom of the New,” 50.

<sup>168</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Wisdom of the New,” 49.

<sup>169</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>170</sup> The palimpsestic focalization of Chinatown as foreign to both whites and Chinese alike reflects the hybrid architecture of Chinatown after its reconstruction of “conventional” Western structures among “pagoda like embellishments” after the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. See Erica Y. Z. Pan’s *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco’s Chinatown* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 94, 95.

Chinatown, for her, is ultimately alien and “American.” In contrast to the empirical vertical class structure of San Francisco Chinatown which positioned laborers as subalterns and merchant directors of the Six Companies in power,<sup>171</sup> this scene is, in part, a projected vision of a democratically reformed Chinatown wherein prostitutes<sup>172</sup> keep company with leaders of the Six Companies and in which whites and Chinese fraternize with one another without the stigma of miscegenation. Fear of self-effacement leads Pau Lin to reject the optimistic aspects of horizontal polyculturality<sup>173</sup> in Chinatown. Such polyculturality is figured in “a motley throng made up of all nationalities” and the “Chinese” man “dressed in the latest American style and a very blonde woman...entering a Chinese restaurant together”—a scene that is perhaps all too reminiscent of her jealousy toward her husband’s relationship with Adah Charlton. Alienated by the scene of bourgeois commerce and racial equality, Pau Lin soon after kills her son to save him from the “Wisdom of the New.” In the stories of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, social inclusion is represented often through the relationship between a Chinese man and a white woman at the expense of Chinese marriages and reproduction.

Before she kills her son, Pau Lin holds him close, crying, “Sooner would I, O heart of my heart, that the light of thine eyes were also quenched, than that thou shouldst be contaminated with the wisdom of the new.”<sup>174</sup> Pau Lin’s archaic English offsets Adah’s modern English, underscoring her tenacious yearning for things of the past. Moreover, the translation of Pau Lin’s speech from Chinese to archaic English refers to her subalternity. In *Siting Translation*, Tejaswini Niranjana modifies Gayatri Spivak’s notion that the subaltern cannot speak by asserting, “The subaltern, too, exists only ‘in translation,’ always already cathected by colonial domination.”<sup>175</sup> Niranjana defines translation according to Derrida’s term *supplement*:

The double meaning of *supplement*—as providing both what is missing as well as something ‘extra’—is glossed by Derrida thus: “The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is...the result of finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented*.”<sup>176</sup>

The overabundance—that is, the ornate archaism—of Pau Lin’s translated speech points to her subjective lack. In contrast to the other female characters of the novel, she fails to locate her subjectivity in mimicking white, middle-class femininity. However, the subjective lack that emerges from her translated speech becomes productive in its negative representation of difference. The instability of translation, along with the two-

<sup>171</sup> Saxton, 10. Saxton writes, “But the greater the pressure from outside, the more cohesive became the vertical structure of the Chinese establishment, and the more unlikely any horizontal cleavage within it” (10).

<sup>172</sup> In *Unbound Feet A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Judy Yung writes of historical “sing-song women” or “girls” in late nineteenth-century San Francisco: “Other parlor house women, known as ‘sing-song girls,’ whose livelihoods depended on their abilities to sing, converse, drink, and flatter, were available for hire as well” (28).

<sup>173</sup> Here, I am employing Vijay Prashad’s notion of polyculturalism as mutuality among races that is not nationally bound rather than a nationally bound notion of a melting pot that does little to change the status quo. See Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asia and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

<sup>174</sup> Sui Sin Far, “The Wisdom of the New,” 52.

<sup>175</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992) 43.

<sup>176</sup> Niranjana, 8-9.

dimensional characters in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, attempts to reserve space for difference without essentialism.

### **Conclusion: Connecting the Links of Universalism**

As the voice of difference and the voice of universalism, respectively, Pau Lin and Adah talk past each other. Adah's advocacy of universal gender equality fails to address the cultural violence enacted by the American assimilation which her feminist ideology entails. At the same time, Pau Lin's fatal flaw lies in her irrational adherence to oriental antiquity that is bound up with her refusal to embrace projects of racial and gender equality.

Pau Lin's tragic end follows the discourse of Social Darwinism during the Progressive Era wherein only the more socially progressive individuals would assimilate, succeed and flourish specifically in capitalist society.<sup>177</sup> Sui Sin Far's incommensurate advocacy of difference and universalism seems symptomatic of Progressive Era discourse (i.e. a nation of small towns). However, the ideological gaps between the impossibility of Chinese assimilation and the inconsistencies of American feminism in the story articulate the tension between Sui Sin Far's politics of difference and American feminist universalism. Chapman argues that Sui Sin Far's politics are modeled more closely after Chinese reformism than Progressive suffragism:

Whereas the U. S. Progressive Era ideal was the elite white beauty who privileged the "vocal mandate" of American culture through public speaking, the Chinese ideal was quieter, more private, and more domestic... While U.S. feminists organized primarily around the franchise, Chinese reformers opposed many traditional gender practices, from foot binding and sex slavery to educational restrictions and marriages arranged for money rather than love... And while U.S. suffragists celebrated alternative affiliations to the family by parading in formations organized by vocation, alma mater, and voluntary associations, the Chinese idealized a Chinese version of the American Republican Mother, that is, the sentimental self-sacrificing mentor of the nation's citizens... Inspired by these models, Sui Sin Far styles a more domestic and privately contoured model of political agency for women than the progressive ideal of suffrage.<sup>178</sup>

*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* seems to fit the role of the named "sentimental self-sacrificing mentor of the nation's citizens." Despite Sui Sin Far's critique of white American feminists' ignorance of racial, cultural, social, and class difference in stories such as "The Wisdom of the New" and "Inferior Woman," she nevertheless attempts to salvage the Progressivist vocabulary of feminist universalism in her advocacy of universal gender equality.

As a regional space, Chinatown in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* is the site of racial conflict but also bears the potential of promoting racial and gender inclusion. This aspiration coincides with the brief conditions of racial intermingling between Chinese and whites after the destruction and subsequent reconstruction of Chinatown due to the

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<sup>177</sup> Wiebe, 40, 140-141. In his contemporary "Survey of Race Relations," *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950), sociologist Robert Park followed a social Darwinist scheme in his stagist theorization of racial assimilation which "involve[d] racial competition, conflict, accommodation, and eventually assimilation" (104).

<sup>178</sup> Chapman, 978.

1906 earthquake.<sup>179</sup> In contrast to regions of American literary texts such as Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* and Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*, in which the cosmopolitan visitor narrates a backwater or a foreign region which is home to similarly foreign inhabitants, Sui Sin Far's Chinatown is a region that remains universally foreign to the white Americans and displaced Chinese nationals who inhabit it. According to Peter Bürger's definition, the avant-garde is dialectically formed between particularity and institutionalized universalism. Sui Sin Far's avant-gardism is located in its appropriation of institutionalized forms of regionalism and literary cubism, which in many cases championed elitism and whiteness, for the purposes of aspiring to universal visions of racial and gender equality. In doing so, her depictions of Chinatown once again imbues regionalist and cubistic forms with politically progressive, "avant-garde" particularity.

In contrast to Progressive Era tendencies to (re)solve difference through either assimilation or exclusion, Sui Sin Far attempts to articulate difference as a marker of potential, universal social equality. And yet, following the period's yearnings toward social utopias,<sup>180</sup> Sui Sin Far envisions Chinatown as a mutually foreign enclave that is geographically situated within the nation and represents the not-yet of social equality to both white suffragists and Chinese women alike. Moreover, Sui Sin Far employs the American idiom of liberal universalism in her depictions of Chinatown as an extranational space of social equality. Sui Sin Far's renewed faith in universalism—a connecting link between the Orient and the Occident—emerges from the dialectic between the performativity of race in San Francisco Chinatown and Sui Sin Far's utopian visions of polyculturality in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. In attempting to move beyond the confines of the nation, however, Sui Sin Far's avant-gardism is circumscribed by her bourgeois tools of Progressive Era universalism.

Through the performance of white middle-class gender and racial norms, Sui Sin Far's characters double American universalism as that which has failed and that which has yet to come. Chinatown is framed as a non-referential space of the heralded inclusive utopia from which Chinese women and white suffragists are mutually alienated. Although mutual alienation is not synonymous with universal social equality, the universalization of a discursively racialized space provides a viable starting point. Chinese American subjectivity emerges from universalizing a racialized region during Chinese exclusion in Sui Sin Far's short fiction. In the next chapter, I argue that Sadakichi Hartmann and Yone Noguchi similarly establish Japanese American subjectivity by figuratively claiming a space among the literary avant-garde through the experimentation with the modernist haiku during the period of Japanese exclusion. In response to Japanese exclusion, which was spearheaded by Populists and Progressives, these two Japanese American writers embraced the elitism of the modernist literary avant-garde. The figurative utopian space of experimentation with the English-language

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<sup>179</sup> Pan writes, "The earthquake and the fire of April 18 did great damage to Chinatown and its residents. Besides substantial material losses, the Chinese were suddenly thrown out of their colony to face and unknown world on their own. For a short instant, racial barrier was broken thanks to the exigencies of the crisis. The Chinese mingled with people of other races in their exodus to leave the city or to set up camps in the parks...However, as soon as the immediate danger was over, racial discrimination resumed" (55).

<sup>180</sup> Wiebe, 69.

haiku form selectively included a special group of individuals who demonstrated their feeling through erudite expression.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Little Postage Stamps of Native Soil”: The Modernist Haiku during Japanese Exclusion

#### Introduction: Aesthetes or Asian Americanists?

In “‘A Loose Horse’: Asian American Poetry and the Aesthetics of the Ideogram,” Josephine Nock-Hee Park traces the genealogy of contemporary Asian American poetry to Ezra Pound’s Orientalist imagisme. She writes, “I contend that it is the Orientalism at the heart of the modernist revolution in the poetic line that freights [the Asian American] inheritance with a difficult weight that many poets still choose to avoid.”<sup>181</sup> What would it mean to trace the genealogy of contemporary Asian American imagistic poetry to the modernist haikus of early Japanese American writers, Sadakichi Hartmann and Yone Noguchi, in addition to Pound? Does their inclusion alleviate or exacerbate the burden of Orientalism? This chapter examines the modernist haikus written by these early Japanese American writers who have long been marginalized within the Asian American canon and omitted from the high modernist canon. Denigrated by Frank Chin et al.’s 1974 cultural nationalist anthology *Aiiieeeee!* as apolitical and assimilationist,<sup>182</sup> Noguchi and Hartmann are briefly mentioned in David Hsin-Fu Wand’s concurrent anthology *Asian-American Heritage* as haiku poets in English. Wand provides minimal critical analysis of their work.<sup>183</sup> Since their poetry did not overtly reference anti-Asian sentiment that preceded and coincided with Japanese exclusion, which began in 1907, critics since Wand have continued to refer to them as apolitical aesthetes.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Josephine Nock-Hee Park, “‘A Loose Horse’: Asian American Poetry and the Aesthetics of the Ideogram,” *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*, Eds. Rocío Davis and Sue-im Lee (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006) 129.

<sup>182</sup> In *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974) Frank Chin et al. write, “The tradition of Japanese-American verse as being quaint and foreign in English, established by Yone Noguchi and Sadakichi Hartman [*sic*], momentarily influenced American writing with the quaintness of the Orient but said nothing about Asian America, because, in fact, these writers weren’t Asian-Americans but Americanized Asians like Lin Yutang and C. Y. Lee” (xv).

<sup>183</sup> In *Asian-American Heritage: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (New York: Pocket Books, 1974), David Hsin-Fu Wand writes, “In retrospect, Yoné Noguchi, who returned to Japan and was for a long time a professor at the University of Tokyo, is more remembered as the father of Isamu Noguchi (born 1904), the renowned *nisei* sculptor, than as a poet in the English language” (126). Citing from Hartmann’s essays collected in *White Chrysanthemums* in which he denounces white colonialism and western imperialism, Wand declares, “It is his ethnic consciousness, rather than his occasional poetry, that makes him contemporary in spirit and acceptable to the majority of postwar Asian-American poets, who are concerned with the rediscovery of their ethnic heritage” (127).

<sup>184</sup> In *New Immigrant Literatures of the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1965), Alpana Sharma Knippling has written of Noguchi that he “did not express the concerns of Japanese Americans, and, therefore, [he is of those] normally called ‘Americanized Japanese’ rather than ‘Japanese Americans’” (128). In her dissertation, *Forms of Cathay: Modernism, the Orient, and Asian American Poetry* (Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2003, Print) Josephine Park writes that Hartmann’s “use of Japanese forms without the consciousness of a cultural identity (whether imposed or self-defined) results in pastiche” (200). In her book, *Apparitions of Asia*, Park states that Hartmann and Noguchi had been considered “‘Americanized Asians’ in the 1970s (97). She uses Hartmann as an example of the perpetual divide between aesthetics and politics in the field of Asian American literature: “Once his bohemian freedom is



Yone (Yonejiro) Noguchi (1875-1947) and (Carl) Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944) were indeed literary aesthetes who wrote poetry, essays, art criticism, plays, and fiction. They were contemporaries of Sui Sin Far and participated in overlapping literary avant-garde and bohemian circles, but there is no direct evidence that the three authors knew or even knew of each other.<sup>185</sup> Joaquin Miller,<sup>186</sup> Charles Warren Stoddard, and Charlotte Perkins (Stetson) Gilman—all close friends of Noguchi—were also on the editorial board of Charles Lummis’s California magazine, *The Land of Sunshine*, in which Sui Sin Far published most of the short stories that would later comprise *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s own circles overlapped quite directly as they have both been attributed by some with introducing the haiku form (along with other Japanese art forms) to their literary acquaintance Ezra Pound.<sup>187</sup> By arguing that Noguchi and Hartmann respectively introduced Pound to the haiku, critics Yoshinobu Hakutani and Linda Trinh Moser have sparked a debate over the origins of Pound’s interest in the East. Critics have historically attributed this turn in Pound’s work to his inheritance of the late scholar Ernest Fenollosa’s papers on Japanese art and Chinese poetry in 1913. Based on Fenollosa’s critical role in advancing American scholarship on Asian art, critics Robert Kern and Yunte Huang have stated that the argument that Pound’s Orientalist “efforts were greatly stimulated by Fenollosa’s speculations about Chinese is nearly a commonplace of modern literary history.”<sup>188</sup> Although letters between Pound and

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revoked, Hartmann becomes legible as an Asian American—a fact which reveals the potent formulation of the ethnic nationalist movement, which yoked Asian American literature to anti-Asian experience” (98).

<sup>185</sup> Noguchi was acquainted with Sui Sin Far’s sister Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Eaton) whom he met in 1900 on his way through Chicago.

<sup>186</sup> Noguchi stayed as a houseguest at the Oakland hills home of Californian “Poet of the Sierras” Joaquin Miller from 1895 to 1899 during which time Noguchi wrote poems for Gelett Burgess and Porter Garnett’s little magazine in San Francisco, *The Lark*.

<sup>187</sup> In *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi*, Vol. 1 (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1990) Yoshinobu Hakutani makes a case for why it was Noguchi—whose “poetry and literary and art criticism were widely circulated in English-speaking countries in the mid-1910s”—rather than Ernest Fenollosa who influenced Pound’s imagisme (40). Given Hartmann’s close friendship with Pound and his 1904 publication, “The Japanese Conception of Poetry,” which discusses the haiku form at length and “predat[es] the interest in haiku by American imagists, critic Linda Trinh Moser suggests that he introduced the haiku to the modernists in *Asian American Poets: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2002) 129.

<sup>188</sup> Robert Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 2. In *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Yunte Huang nuances his claim about the Fenollosa-Pound genealogy,

In 1913, five years after Fenollosa’s sudden death, his widow, Mary Fenollosa, found the young poet Pound and entrusted him with Fenollosa’s papers. If Pound’s earlier flirtation with Chinese poetry was only transposing popular versions of translation into his Imagistic poems, at this stage, as the literary executor of the eminent American Orientalist, he had much more credibility in fashioning a new face for Chinese poetry and thereby promoting his modernist poetics. However, it would be a grave error to assume that Pound’s interest was only in poetry. It would be an even bigger mistake to regard his work on Chinese poetry as separable from the ethnographic interest that lies at the heart of Fenollosa’s ambitious project. Indeed, Pound, who dreamt of becoming “lord of his work and master of utterance” (*Cantos* 442), was never merely—if I may coin a word to characterize someone who is enamored by ideograph and promotes the so-called ideogrammic method—an ideographer; he had always been an ethnographer. (69-70)

Noguchi indicate that his exposure to Japanese literature began before 1913,<sup>189</sup> locating the precise origins of Pound's interest in Japanese and Chinese poetry seems to pose somewhat of a literary historical impossibility. There is evidence that both Noguchi and Hartmann were practicing haiku poetry before Pound's experimentation. Beginning in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Noguchi and Hartmann began publishing their poetry and continued to develop their modernist haiku poetry well into the interwar years, all during a period of overwhelming anti-Asian sentiment. Beyond historical concurrence, what is the correlation between the Anglo-American modernist preoccupations with the haiku and the anti-Japanese sentiment that preceded Japanese exclusion in the U.S.? This chapter argues that Hartmann's and Noguchi's publication of the modernist haiku within elite literary circles were acts of political resistance against late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century populism that led to Japanese exclusion and critical responses to their racialization within the modernist circles in which they found a narrow belonging.

Although Japanese exclusion was not formally established until 1907, Japanese immigrants faced social discrimination from the moment of their arrival in the 1880s. Shortly after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese immigrants began to arrive in the U.S. mainland, in part to replace the cheap labor that had been provided by the Chinese. When the Chinese Exclusion Act was scheduled for renewal in 1902, white workers unsuccessfully demanded that Congress extend the exclusion to the Japanese. In 1906, the San Francisco Board of education segregated Japanese and other Asian children by sending them to a designated "Oriental School." President Theodore Roosevelt, who later desegregated the San Francisco schools, nevertheless negotiated the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan under which the U.S. would grant legal protection to the Japanese living in the U.S. in return for the cessation of the immigration of Japanese laborers to the U.S. The Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920, aimed specifically at the Japanese, prevented them from owning or leasing land. The Immigration Act of 1917 prohibited the immigration of "any person whose ancestry would be traced to the Asian continent or Pacific Islands."<sup>190</sup> The 1921 "Ladies' Agreement" stopped the immigration of Japanese picture brides and essentially ended all Japanese immigration to the U.S. The 1922 *Ozawa* case ruled that a first-generation (*issei*) Japanese man, Takao Ozawa was ineligible for citizenship based on a conflation of "common knowledge" and scientific understandings of whiteness.<sup>191</sup> As historian Ronald Takaki points out, the National Origins Act of 1924 "unnecessarily" "singled out" the Japanese by officially halting the already scarce flow of Japanese immigration.<sup>192</sup> Perceptions of the Japanese "threat" to

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<sup>189</sup> In *Ezra Pound & Japan* (Connecticut: Black Swan Books, 1987) Sanehide Kodama reproduces the first correspondences in 1911 between Noguchi and Pound in which Noguchi sent Pound his book of poetry *The Pilgrimage*.

<sup>190</sup> Robert G. Lee, 108.

<sup>191</sup> In *White By Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), Ian Haney-Lopez argues, "In *Ozawa v. United States*, the Court wrote that the term 'white persons' included 'only persons of what is popularly known as the Caucasian race.' It thereby ran together the rationales of common knowledge, evident in the reference to what was 'popularly know,' and scientific evidence, exemplified in the Court's reliance on the term 'Caucasian'" (79)

<sup>192</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 209.

the U.S. and other anti-Japanese sentiments were especially apparent in popular yellow journalism between 1890 and 1924.<sup>193</sup>

The anti-Japanese legislation enacted in the early part of the twentieth century was largely aimed at Japanese American laborers rather than the scholar and merchant class to which Hartmann and Noguchi belonged. However, this distinction between the classes of scholars and laborers, recorded by U.S. immigration figures,<sup>194</sup> is murky since both Hartmann and Noguchi were forced to work menial jobs to support their scholarship when they arrived in the United States. Nevertheless, Asian immigration and legal exclusion in the United States have largely been understood by historians as symptoms of the industrial demands of liberal modernity. Between 1886 and 1900, Japanese immigrants were largely composed of students who “were compelled to work...and known by another common term: *dekasegi-shosei*, or student-laborers.”<sup>195</sup> Although they were once part of this class of Japanese student-laborers against which the Gentleman’s Agreement and the Alien Land Laws were specifically directed, Hartmann and Noguchi eventually ascended their social ranks by gaining access to elite literary circles.

### The Anti-Modernism of Literary Modernism

Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s fraternization with bourgeois aesthetes who were invested in Japanophilic Orientalism was a defiance of the industrial modernization promoted by liberals in the United States. Critic T. J. Jackson Lears argues that

During the 1880s, on both sides of the Atlantic...Europeans and Americans alike began to recognize that the triumph of modern culture had not produced greater autonomy (which was the official claim) but rather had promoted a spreading sense of moral impotence and spiritual sterility—a feeling that life had become not only overcivilized but also curiously unreal...The turmoil of the turn of the century formed the matrix of antimodernism. A common current of restiveness, a common perception of modern culture’s evasions and shortcomings, linked antimodernists like Henry Adams with thinkers as diverse as Ezra Pound, Georges Sorel, and Sigmund Freud.<sup>196</sup>

Lears’s use of the term “modernism” here refers to an industrial modernity that is distinct from the literary modernism advocated by Pound and Eliot. The rise of commercialism in the U.S. so alienated literary aesthetes that they attempted to retrieve their lost identities in their studies of ancient cultures. It is to this “matrix of anti-modernism” or what I would call anti-industrialism that Lears attributes the literary modernist fascination with the haiku and other ancient or seemingly primitive cultural artifacts: He states,

Among those who felt the antimodern impulse, the common strand of primitivism was especially clear in numerous references to medieval ‘childishness.’...The notion that the Middle Ages were the ‘childhood of the race’ linked medieval people to other childlike premodern types, notably to the nineteenth-century

<sup>193</sup> See Charles Wordell, *Japan’s Image in America: Popular Writing about Japan, 1800-1941* (Kyoto: Yamaguchi Publishing House, 1998) 157-170.

<sup>194</sup> Robert A. Wilson and Bill Hosokawa, *East to America: A History of the Japanese in the United States* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980) 35. Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1988) 7-9.

<sup>195</sup> Ichioka, 8.

<sup>196</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) 4-5.

Japanese... To nearly all Western observers, Japan was a “toy land” and her people “in many respects a race of children.” Lafcadio Hearn, the most influential popularizer of Japanese culture in America, ignored the educated, urban elites in order to create a nation peopled entirely by ‘fairy-folk’ of childlike grade and simplicity.<sup>197</sup>

Christopher Bush also argues that American “japonisme” coincided with periods in which Japan was viewed by the U.S. as an international and domestic threat.<sup>198</sup> In participating in the rise of the Anglo-American, modernist haiku, Noguchi and Hartmann were, to a certain degree, complicit in perpetuating the social imaginary of Japanese primitivism. Like many of their bourgeois white literary contemporaries, Noguchi and Hartmann were also alienated by the industrialization of U.S. culture. Industrialization and related anti-Japanese agitation directed toward immigrant laborers provoked a double loss of identity for them. However, if contemporary mass production and exchange of cheap and beautiful Japanese lacquer promoted the problematic “notion of an Oriental lack of individuality,”<sup>199</sup> Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s idiosyncratic, modernist haikus articulated Japanese American subjectivity. However ambivalently, their haiku poetry “modernized” these Japanese American writers insofar as their poetry negotiated a homosocial space of belonging for them in elite, cosmopolitan literary circles.

### “Between Men”: Japanese American Poets

In *Apparitions of Asia*, Josephine Park traces the genealogical terrain of white American male-dominated literary explorations of the Orient from the late nineteenth through the twentieth century as defined by Walt Whitman, Ernest Fenollosa, and later Pound. In pursuing her argument that Pound’s notion of America is “inextricable” from his ideas of the Orient, Park harnesses Pound’s well-known disagreements with Whitman’s populism to suggest that Pound envied his example as an American bard. She argues that although Pound eventually replaces Whitman’s notion of America with Fenollosa’s Orientalist perspective, Whitman’s Americanness “presented both an example and an obstacle for the young poet who yearned to be ‘among some/ Alien people’ but whose artistic ambitions shackled him to a despised and familiar land.”<sup>200</sup> According to Park, the differences between Pound and Whitman are glossed over by Fenollosa’s substitution of Whitman rather than a real resolution. I contend that as poets who explicitly explored the supernatural individuality of Whitmanian orphism<sup>201</sup> in their

<sup>197</sup> Lears, 143, 149.

<sup>198</sup> In “The Ethnicity of Things in America’s Lacquered Age” *Representations* 99 Summer 2007, Christopher Bush writes, “Here I wish to articulate a constellation of features essential to a specifically American ‘japonisme’ from the period of initial fascination and enthusiasm to the time when events both foreign and domestic would cause Japan to be increasingly seen as a threat—that is, during the roughly half century from the ‘opening’ of Japan in 1852/54 to the first Japanese wars of aggression (the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1905), wars that coincided with the first substantial Japanese immigration to the United States” (77-8).

<sup>199</sup> Bush, 89.

<sup>200</sup> Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Apparitions of Asia*, 32, 25.

<sup>201</sup> In Ezra Greenspan, ed., *Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: A Sourcebook and Critical Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2005), an anonymous reviewer reveals that Whitman was popularly recognized by contemporary critics as a modern-day Orpheus whose “extraordinary prose... was found in the ‘interior consciousness’ of the writer” (41). Focusing on the European side of the Atlantic, critic Adrian Hicken argues that turn-of-the-century avant-garde writers and artists such as Apollinaire and Picasso became

modernist haikus, Hartmann and Noguchi stood in the ideological gap between these two major literary figures, bridging Whitman's catalogued representation of democratic America with Pound's esoteric representations of the Orient.

In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick argues that the cultural continuum between male homosocial and homosexual bonds is contingent and disrupted by the heterosexuality needed to maintain patriarchy.<sup>202</sup> Sedgwick argues that, as a consequence, repressed homosexual desire within homosocial networks has been historically channeled through the triangulated fixation on a common female love object, which perpetuates the oppression of females.<sup>203</sup> Although Sedgwick is concerned with the ways in which homosocial/homosexual bonds oppress women, I am interested in the ways in which Hartmann and Noguchi, as common effeminized love objects of both Whitman and Pound, mediated between these two writers and their crafts to establish their subjectivities. In their poetry, Hartmann and Noguchi negotiate between Whitman's and Pound's respective ideological positions of democratic orphism and elite erudition. Self-consciously embracing stereotypes of Asian male effeminacy, Hartmann and Noguchi often envision themselves as women in their work who would enter into national and international spheres of democracy through a heteronormative and interracial embrace with their white male literary contemporaries. To be sure, Noguchi's and Hartmann's identifications with women are performances of heteronormative desire rather than feminist deconstructions of femininity.<sup>204</sup> Their identifications with women serve as strategic "outlets" that temporarily relieve them of their unstable positions as raced males with homosexual desires.<sup>205</sup> Noguchi's transgender desire comes to a head in

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fascinated with exploring their robust Orphic identities in *Apollinaire, Cubism and Orphism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002) 46.

<sup>202</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 4-5.

<sup>203</sup> Sedgwick, 20.

<sup>204</sup> Noguchi and Hartmann are both quite chauvinistic in their depictions of women in their prose writing: In *Through the Torii* (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1922), Noguchi writes explicitly of women:

Woman, at least in Japan, is always decorative in the common use of the word; in that she, as a piece of art, rarely rises into a pure high art, lies her merit. To say she is materialistic does her hardly justice; I see a case when she is spiritual, but it is more or less from the motive that she wishes to conceal her unhappiness and failure. (183)

Moreover, in his critique of U.S. culture in *Japan and America* (Tokyo: Keio University Press; New York: Orientalia, 1921), he attributes the decline of American civilization to its femininity. He addresses Americans, "Will your civilisation become man-like? If so, it will do you good certainly. The careless extravagant mind of your female civilisation is bound to grow sober, grave and thoughtful, when the war puts its hand at once on the rearrangement of our own strength" (82). Hartmann, on the other hand, appears to subscribe to certain beliefs in gender equality, writing that "women should enjoy the same privileges as men" (*White Chrysanthemums* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 69), he goes on to make such chauvinistic remarks as the following (in the year 1897):

The women artists have still to come—Rosa Bonheur was a mere suggestion—who can throw a new radiance over art by the psycho-physiological elements of their sex, and only then the large number of women will be justified in modern art. The woman who can paint men as we have painted women, and paint women as we have painted men, will run for herself the laurel wreath of fame. Where is the young paintress who has such an ambition? I would like to make her acquaintance. (*Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings*. Ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) 77).

<sup>205</sup> His homosexual relationship with Charles Warren Stoddard, a famous, openly bisexual American writer during the 1880s, is quite explicit in the love letters exchanged between Stoddard and Noguchi. According

his book, *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* (1902) which he wrote under the pseudonym, “Miss Morning Glory.” The story tells about the travels of an aristocratic Japanese girl to the United States during the period of anti-Asian agitation prior to Japanese legal exclusion. As critics have indicated, “Miss Morning Glory’s” experiences of racial and gender discrimination contrast contemporary popular Orientalist fictions about geishas.<sup>206</sup> As Laura E. Franey points out, Miss Morning Glory’s “switchbacks” into male dress in the novel suggest a double performativity and subversion of gender on Noguchi’s part.<sup>207</sup> That Noguchi took pleasure in such performativity and subjectification is evident in a letter to his then lover Charles Warren Stoddard in which he reveals his identity as “Miss Morning Glory”: He writes, “My Diary (supposed to be a girl’s diary) will be printed without my name or any name. Can you swear you will not tell anybody of its author?...If the Diary will make any success, it will be a fine joke, don’t you see?”<sup>208</sup> Despite his performative pleasure in his female identity, the “fine joke” ceases to exist when we recognize that the earnestness in his identification with a raced female object suggests that discrimination is necessary for his subjectification as a Japanese American male.<sup>209</sup>

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to Noguchi’s *Collected English Letters*. Ed. Ikoku Atsumi (Tokyo: The Yone Noguchi Society, 1975), their correspondence begins in 1897 in which Stoddard addresses him as “Dear friend who has come to me out of the Orient!” (18). Through their relationship, Noguchi is introduced to many important American and transatlantic literary figures such as Iza Duffus Hardy, Thomas Hardy’s daughter. That is, his desire for Stoddard literally and figuratively granted him access to an international fraternity of Euro-American writers. By 1902, Stoddard begins to declare his love for Yone and refers to Yone as “kid” and to himself as “Dad”:

C, my own Yone!

Your dear letter came just now. How I have mourned for you and wondered at your silence. I sometimes thought that you were angry—or that you had forgotten me. Alas! That would be saddest of all. We must cling to one another always! (Noguchi, *Collected English Letters*, 80)

“Mourning” for his lost racial object, Stoddard expresses his desire for intimacy with Noguchi. Between the years of 1901 and 1903, their intimacy appears to be threatened by their involvement in a love triangle with a woman named Ethel Armes who eventually chooses Noguchi over Stoddard. And yet, Stoddard continually declares his love for Noguchi. In a letter dated, 2 February 1903, Stoddard write to Noguchi, “Now come, place your lips to mine in one long rapturous kiss” (96). And in another letter dated 14 February 1903, Stoddard jealously urges Noguchi who is residing in England while Stoddard and Ethel remain in the states,

Love [Ethel] not, my dearest Yone; she is a flirt and not worthy of the serious passion of a true heart. I kiss you a thousand times and am your ever devoted,

Dad. (102)

Poet and critic Ikoku Atsumi informs us that “As soon as [Noguchi] returned to New York, he fled to Stoddard’s arms but in November he actually got married with [*sic*] Leonie [Gilmour—who would become the mother of Isamu Noguchi]. So it seemed that he had forgotten Ethel. When he suddenly contemplated, however, going back to Japan in July 1904 after a ten year interval because of the aggravation of the Russo-Japanese War, he decided to marry Ethel and wrote to Stoddard asking his consent.” (Atsumi, ed., “Introduction,” 12). Noguchi’s capricious love affair with Stoddard nevertheless attests to a mutual homosocial/sexual desire through which Stoddard introjects and castrates (naming Noguchi as “Kid”) the excluded “Oriental” and through which Noguchi enters international literary circles.

<sup>206</sup> Laura E. Franey, Introduction, *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* by Yone Noguchi (1902), Eds. Edward Marx and Laura E. Franey (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007) xii.

<sup>207</sup> Franey, xv.

<sup>208</sup> Noguchi, *Collected English Letters*, 63.

<sup>209</sup> Suggesting that the novel reads more like an autobiography, Franey indicates many continuities and similarities between Miss Morning Glory’s experiences in the U.S. and those of Noguchi (xvi).

Although only Hartmann knew Walt Whitman personally—serving as his informal secretary in the 1880s and attempting to start a (quickly aborted) Walt Whitman Society—both Noguchi and Hartmann profess and demonstrate Whitman’s influence on their poetry. Hartmann’s *Early Poems* (written between 1886 and 1889) and *My Rubaiyat* (1913) and Noguchi’s *Seen and Unseen or, Monologues of a Homeless Snail* (1896) and *The Voice of the Valley* (1897) employ Whitmanian free verse as well as tropes of transcendental celebration of the self in communion with nature and the universe. Both Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s obsession with Whitman are expressed in these early poems which resonate with Whitman’s free verse forms and transcendentalism. Hartmann’s sexual desire for Whitman emerges in his biographical writings. He recalls, “There was nothing overwhelming to me in Whitman’s face, but I liked it at once for *its healthy manliness*. It seems to me a spiritually deepened image of contemporary Americans: an ideal laborer, as the Americans are really a nation of laborers.”<sup>210</sup> Once again, Hartmann expresses that democracy is symbolized by a fraternity among fellow laborers.<sup>211</sup> His conflated desire for Whitman, whiteness, and Americanism is expressed in a rather loaded description of a scene recorded in his “Conversations”:

Sadakichi (rising to leave): ‘May I kiss you?’

Whitman: ‘Oh, you are very kind.’

I touched his forehead with my lips. ‘Thanks, thanks!’ ejaculated

Whitman. With a blush of false shame I offered him this tender tribute of youthful ardor, ambition, enthusiasm with which my soul was overflowing; I felt that I had to show to this man some emotional sign of love, I bore his works or those of any remarkable individuality [*sic*].<sup>212</sup>

The language of the scene suggests mutual desire between the pair and reveals the imprint of Whitman’s influence on Hartmann’s “soul” as well his compulsion to reciprocate the influence through love and desire. As Hartmann “bore [Whitman’s] works[,]” the shiny imprint of his affection is grafted on Whitman’s forehead. Whitman’s fetishism of Hartmann’s Japanese exoticism is demonstrated in his inquiries of Japan—the country where Hartmann was born and left at the age of one (shortly after his mother Osada’s death), and to which he would never return.<sup>213</sup> Whitman’s sexual/racial desire for Hartmann is expressed in the view that Hartmann could only be a racial “other”: He tells Hartmann, “There are so many traits, characteristics, Americanisms, inborn with us, which you would never get at. One can do a great deal of propping. After all one can’t

<sup>210</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Whitman-Hartmann Controversy: Including Conversations with Walt Whitman and Other Essays*, Ed. George Knox (Herbert Lang Bern, Peter Lang Frankfurt/M. und München, 1976) 67, my emphasis.

<sup>211</sup> Whether Hartmann includes intellectual laborers in this term, however, is unclear.

<sup>212</sup> Hartmann, *The Whitman-Hartmann Controversy*, 79. Hartmann details another intimate scene with Whitman in which he asks Whitman about his views on women:

Whitman (evading the question): ‘One cannot say much about women. The best ones study Greek or criticize Browning—they are no women.’

Sadakichi (rather brusquely): ‘Have you ever been in love?’

Whitman (rather annoyed by my cross-examining): “Sensuality I have done with. I have thrown it out, but it is natural, even a necessity” (81).

<sup>213</sup> In *The Whitman-Hartmann Controversy*, Hartmann recalls,

I spoke of Japan, of the beautiful bay of Nagasaki though I did not know much about it from personal recollection.

Whitman: “Yes, it must be beautiful.” (68)

grow roses on a peach tree.”<sup>214</sup> In this conversation, Whitman divulges his racial desire for Hartmann—that is “a desire to have those [Japanese] qualities that the white man has abjected”<sup>215</sup>—qualities which are metaphorically represented in the gendered example of “peaches.” Hartmann’s poetry performs with “props” of a certain cultural mixture (roses on a peach tree) that Whitman seems to reject.

Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s engagements in homosocial/sexual relationships with white writers announced memberships to national and international socio-literary spheres that were contingent on their racial authenticity. Their homosocial relationships with Pound as well as their coincident production of modernist haikus, however, doubly ensured their access to national and international modernist circles. Although desire—particularly sexual desire—is not a conventional topic in haiku poetry, the modernists seemed to make a habit of employing it in their imagiste haikus. For example in Pound’s “Alba,” which states, “As cool as the pale wet leaves/ of lily-of-the-valley/ She lay beside me in the dawn,”<sup>216</sup> the evoked image of sexually aroused female genitalia (“wet leaves/ of lily-of-the-valley”) juxtaposes the eroticized, feminine object with the stolid, implicitly white, male subjectivity of the poetic persona. Heterosexual desire easily turns into homosexual desire for the raced other within the racial haiku form as the othered female and racial male are placed on a similar plane of objectification.

The figurations of women in Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s haikus are precarious insofar as the female characters are not lucidly objectified as foundations for their male subjectivities as we will examine later in Pound’s poems. Rather, the perspectival superposition between female object and male subject/object (if there is such a shift from object to subject at all) in their poems reveal the poetic personas’ identification with their female objects. For this reason, distinctions between perceived objects of nature *as well as* feminine objects and the perceiving subjects in Japanese American haikus continue to remain blurry. In Hartmann’s Tanka IV, for example, he fixates on the objects of nature that cling to the world outside of Ume’s “casement” (a word that repeatedly emerges in Noguchi’s *Seen and Unseen*) just as Ume holds fast to the internal world that seems to encase or imprison her so that she is unable to have contact with nature:

Like mist in the leas,  
Fall gently, oh rain of Spring  
On the orange trees  
That to Ume’s casement cling—  
Perchance, she’ll hear the love-bird sing.<sup>217</sup>

By contrast, as I will later demonstrate, the emerging image of the white petals in “In a Station of the Metro” is that of the Pound’s own racial and gendered subjectivity—his own Whitmanian, god-like self. That the poetic subject of Pound’s imagiste haikus was akin to the Whitmanian god-like self is evident in Pound’s recognition of Whitman as his predecessor. In his well-known poem “A Pact” (1913), Pound addresses Whitman and invites him into “a pact” for, he says, “I have detested you long enough./ I come to you as a grown child/ Who has had a pig-headed father;/...It was you that broke the new wood,/

<sup>214</sup> Hartmann, *The Whitman-Hartmann Controversy*, 68.

<sup>215</sup> Daniel Kim, *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 14.

<sup>216</sup> Ezra Pound, *Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions Books, 1926) 108-109.

<sup>217</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, *Tanka and Haikai* (New York: Guido Bruno Books, 1915) 115.



Now is a time for carving./ We have one sap and root—/ Let there be commerce between us.”<sup>218</sup> Here, Pound avows his masculinist genealogy to Whitman. In his earlier published essay, “What I feel about Walt Whitman” (1909), Pound clarifies that their common “root” or “fibre” is America and suggests that their “sap” is their god-like status: “I am immortal even as he is, yet with a lesser vitality as I am the more in love with beauty...”<sup>219</sup> Pound goes on to express his aim “to drive Whitman into the old world. I sledge, he drill-and to scourge America with all the old beauty.”<sup>220</sup> For Pound, it is the “old beauty” of the haiku form, infused with the Whitmanian transcendental self, that “scourges America” and which Pound intends to and does bring to the European “old world.” Pound’s Whitmanian self is thus predicated on the gendered and racial (Japanese) other in his haikus. The homologous, and at times conflated, othering of women and Japanese in Pound’s poetry coincides with the historical discourse of the effeminacy of Japanese, or Asian, males. Robert G. Lee writes that the Asian male and female in the late nineteenth-century U.S. were thought of as the “third sex”:

As the white Victorian bourgeois family took its place as the social norm, the relations of desire with the Oriental (male or female) offered an alternative (albeit a tabooed one) to the social order represented by the racially exclusive, presumptively heterosexual, nuclear family. Against an emergent heterosexual and dimorphic order, Oriental sexuality was constructed as ambiguous, inscrutable, and hermaphroditic; the Oriental (male or female) was constructed as a “third sex”—Marjorie Garber’s term for a gender of imagined sexual possibility.<sup>221</sup>

Such discourses which blurred the gender and sexuality of Asians were instantiated by the visibility of Japanese American male domestic servants of which Noguchi served as one.<sup>222</sup> The Whitmanian orphism demonstrated by the haiku poetry of these racialized and gendered Japanese American poets situated them in the ideological rift between Whitman’s democratic aims and Pound’s erudition.

### “What’s in a Haiku?”: Haiku as Transcendental and Modern Form

Although Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s early poems were not explicitly called haikus, they were written with the haiku in mind. That is to say, Noguchi’s first book of

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<sup>218</sup> Pound, “A Pact,” *Personae*, 89.

<sup>219</sup> Ezra Pound, “What I feel about Walt Whitman,” *Selected Prose 1905-1965* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1973) 146.

<sup>220</sup> Pound, “What I feel about Walt Whitman,” 146.

<sup>221</sup> Robert G. Lee, 85.

<sup>222</sup> In “Some Stories of My Western Life,” Noguchi recounts anecdotes from his experiences as a domestic servant:

What a farce we enacted in our first encounter with an American family! Even a stove was a mystery to us. One of my friends endeavoured to make a fire by burning the kindling in the oven. Another one was on the point of blowing out the gaslight. One fellow terrified the lady when he began to take off his shoes, and even his trousers, before scrubbing the floor. It is true, however fantastic it may sound. It was natural enough for him, since he regarded his American clothes as a huge luxury. Poor fellow! He was afraid he might spoil them. I rushed into my Madam’s toilet room without knocking. The American woman took it good-naturedly, as it happened. She pitied our ignorance, but without any touch of sarcasm. Japanese civilization, if it was born in America, certainly was born in her household—in some well-to-do San Francisco family, rather than in Yale or Harvard. (268)

poems, *Seen and Unseen or, Monologues of a Homeless Snail* (1896) and Hartmann's early book of poems, *My Rubaiyat* (1913) followed certain conventions of the haiku or were said by either the poet or critics to articulate the "haiku spirit": This abstract term never seems to be adequately defined but suggests a spiritual transcendence from the body.<sup>223</sup> In his introduction to *Seen or Unseen*, Gelett Burgess writes of Noguchi's poems, "And though on the other hand, they are not distinctively Japanese in sentiment or in art, yet one might illustrate their intangible delicacy, by one of the Hokku's [sic] or 'inspirations' of his own 'high qualified' Basho, meaningless but wisdom-wreathed syllables,—elusive phrases,—like opiate vapors changing to the mood."<sup>224</sup> That Noguchi cites (a gloom-ridden) haiku from seventeenth-century "hokku" poet, Matsuo Ba-sho ("Ah, lonely, lonely,/ Shall this Flower's Neighbors be/ When To-morrow comes!") also suggests that he intended his early poems to share certain qualities with the haiku or that they were, at the very least, inspired by the haiku form. Similarly, in the preface of the third edition of *My Rubaiyat*, Hartmann writes, "Pictures abound throughout 'My Rubaiyat' for all who have mental pictorial vision to see them. Lines like 'turn phantoms with the colder morn' and 'in a hilltown among roses' are as concentrated as any image that can be found in a *tanka* (i.e. Japanese short poem [which contains the haiku])."<sup>225</sup> Before going any further in suggesting that Hartmann's and Noguchi's early poetry formally hailed their experimentation with the English-language haiku, it would perhaps be useful to explore the traditional as well as the modernist conventions of the haiku and the ways in which Hartmann and, mainly, Noguchi delineated the haiku.

In *The Haiku Form*, Joan Giroux delineates the conventional arrangement of the haiku verse:

In the first line the place is located, in the second the object in nature is identified and in the third the season is introduced. The balance and symmetry of short-long-short in this poem are suited to its intensity. In each haiku there is a special pause or turning, either after the 5<sup>th</sup> or after the 12<sup>th</sup> syllable, which is not so much a thought-pause as a sense-pause dictated by aesthetic necessity, perhaps reflecting the asymmetry of nature's artistry, as the odd number of lines and syllables in each line does.<sup>226</sup>

Since the foremost conventions—seventeen syllables as well as season and place referents—are often missing or bracketed in modernist haikus, which conventions qualify the designations of "hokku-like" poetry? It seems that the "the quality of directness"<sup>227</sup> of the haiku, capturing a singularity of Image through what Pound called "super-position" of ideas (or what traditionally follows the *kireji* or "the cutting word"<sup>228</sup> after the fifth or

<sup>223</sup> Following the preface to *Japanese Hokkus* (Boston: Four Seas Press, 1920), Noguchi uses this term to describe poetry that does not adhere strictly to the seventeen syllable form of the haiku but may nevertheless fall under that moniker: "Some of these poems are written in measure of seventeen syllables, and the others are more free in forms. But the Japanese Hokku spirit, I believe, runs through all of them."

<sup>224</sup> Gelett Burgess, "Introduction," *Seen and Unseen or, Monologues of a Homeless Snail* by Yone Noguchi (San Francisco: Gelett Burgess & Porter Garnett, 1897).

<sup>225</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "Instead of a Preface," *My Rubaiyat*, Third Revised Edition, 1913 (San Francisco: Sadakichi Hartmann, 1916) 6.

<sup>226</sup> Joan Giroux, *The Haiku Form*, (Rutland, Vermont, and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1974) 82.

<sup>227</sup> Giroux, 51.

<sup>228</sup> Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dream: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) 83.

twelfth syllables of a seventeen-syllable haiku) were what modernists specifically hoped to emulate.<sup>229</sup> Super-position, or the cubistic convergences of contrasting images, becomes a method through which Noguchi and Hartmann distinguish their subjectivity from that of dominant subjects such as Pound and Whitman in their poetry.

Similar to super-position, the traditional quality of “suggestion”—as distinct from symbolism—in the haiku is also explored and advanced by Pound, Noguchi, and Hartmann. In “Vorticism,” Pound clarifies the distinction between the imagiste notion of suggestion and symbolism:

Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in ‘association,’ that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word... The symbolist’s *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste’s images have a variable significance, like the signs *a*, *b*, and *x* in algebra.<sup>230</sup>

In a more circuitous manner, Noguchi describes the haiku as suggestive yet not explicitly so:

...to call the Hokku poem suggestive is almost wrong, although it has become a recent fashion for the Western critics to interpret, not only this Hokku but all Japanese poetry by that one word, because the Hokku poem itself is distinctly clear-cut like a diamond or a star, never mystified by any cloud or mist like Truth or Beauty of Keats’ understanding. It is all very well if you have a suggestive attitude of mind in reading it; I say that the star itself has almost no share in the creation of a condition even when your dream or vision is gained through beauty. I am only pleased to know that the star had such an influence upon you; and I am willing to endorse you when you say that the Hokku poem is suggestive in the same sense that truth and humanity are suggestive. But I can say myself that your poem would certainly end in artificiality if you start out to be suggestive from the beginning.<sup>231</sup>

Like Pound, Noguchi here is refuting the notion that the haiku, or its modernist version, has one predetermined, symbolic signification. Rather, the haiku is suggestive in the sense that it can have a variety of significations depending on the conditions of interpretation. Hartmann’s practice of “suggestiveness,” which involved “embodying the poetic idea, imaginative subject matter, delicate colors, and sketchy form[.]” indeed overlapped with Pound’s idea of super-position insofar as both notions “rested on canons of ancient oriental art that called for a repetition of both subject and image painted with ‘slight variations[.]’”<sup>232</sup> For Pound, Noguchi, and Hartmann—who wrote under the historical conditions of Japanese American exclusion—the repetitious poetic subject was the ideal white male poet whose image was an object of nature or feminine (Japanese

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<sup>229</sup> In *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), Ming Xie attributes Pound’s method of super-position to his discovery of the haiku: “Now the principal method employed by most Imagists was, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the device of juxtaposition, which Pound claimed to have discovered in Japanese *haiku* poems before he came upon any Chinese poetry. Pound was developing his own formulation of what he called ‘swift *contraposition* of objects’ into a theory of ‘*superposition*’” (71).

<sup>230</sup> Pound, “Vorticism,” *The Fortnightly Review* 573 1 Sept. 1914: 463.

<sup>231</sup> Noguchi, *Japanese Hokkus*, 20.

<sup>232</sup> Jane Calhoun Weaver, ed., Introduction, *Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings* by Sadakichi Hartmann, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) 27.

American) object. This is certainly not to say that the melancholic relation of racial dominance is the *only* way (by virtue of “suggestivism”) of interpreting the modernist haiku but it is one interpretation that has been overlooked or suppressed.

Pound’s haiku-like imagiste poems, in contrast to those of Noguchi and Hartmann, are not necessarily “nature poems” wherein the poet reflects on his interior life through a total immersion in nature. Rather, his poems often take on urban, cosmopolitan settings or elements that are set in super-position to—contrasting yet touching—objects of nature. In this way, Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s haikus, which dwell in natural, almost pastoral, settings, adhere to traditional Japanese haiku conventions of self-transcendence in nature.<sup>233</sup> On the one hand, Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s haiku-like poems often adhere to traditional Japanese conventions of a de-emphasized poetic persona who curbs all emotion—except the melancholia that is necessary to do so—in order to convey an unadulterated portrait of nature. On the other hand, their work is the modernist incarnation of Whitmanian transcendentalism wherein the poetic persona celebrates himself and his representation of the universe through his communion with nature.<sup>234</sup> Rather than occupying the privileged position of a white male who is able to represent, via an expansive catalogue, the diverse spectrum of American people, Hartmann and Noguchi confine themselves to the narrow plot of haiku verse precisely through these vacillations between a de-emphasized self (or self-denigration) and self-assertion. As unsteady poetic subjects (whose subjectivities rest on self-objectification), they often hesitate to assume the communion with an objective addressee of the poem which Whitman so quickly and easily asserts in his famous opening verses of *Leaves of Grass* (“Song of Myself”): “I celebrate myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”<sup>235</sup> Instead, Hartmann thematically describes a disjunct between the poetic subject and his object of address in *My Rubaiyat* in such statements as: “For my happiness cannot be yours” or “I cannot tread your well-paved roads...”<sup>236</sup> Noguchi’s transcendental poems in *Seen and Unseen*, so mired in the poetic persona’s objectification and isolation, forgo any attempt to commune with objective addressees. Nevertheless, Noguchi articulates the universal appeal of the poetic subject’s dejected musings and invocations of death through his intermittent visions of a universe of social equality.

Although critic Gerald W. Haslam has mistakenly observed that *Seen and Unseen* “retain[s] the traditional 5-7-5 metric form” of the haiku—it simply does not—he is perhaps not far off in his suggestion that Noguchi’s book “may be regarded as a pioneering effort in American haiku,...but introducing [*sic*] a uniquely American

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<sup>233</sup> In *Three-Cornered World* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2002), Natsumi Sōseki, a contemporary of Hartmann and Noguchi, expressed his desire to “get away from the world and immerse himself in Nature” through his haiku poetry by “curbing [his] emotions” (as opposed to consolidating an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time) to feel only the melancholy appropriate for a poet to look upon a scene objectively (23, 18). Sōseki argues that this position contrasts European poets who “are content to deal merely in such commodities as sympathy, love, justice and freedom, all of which may be found in that transient bazaar which we call life” (19-20).

<sup>234</sup> In *Apparitions of Asia*, Park traces a genealogy from Pound to Whitman in which she states, “Pound’s struggle with Whitman’s influence was an agonistic battle with the American public” (16) rather than transcendentalism itself.

<sup>235</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Penguin Books, 1959)

<sup>236</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 18.

speculative and...romantic bent.”<sup>237</sup> Rather than blindly celebrating the status quo of American democracy, Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s experimentations with the haiku form can be seen as efforts to construct, for Hartmann, a new democratic American art<sup>238</sup> or, for Noguchi, an international, Pacific-centered aesthetic form. That is to say, the cosmopolitan form of the English haiku whose aesthetic object spans the geographical and cultural landscape of the U.S. and Japan symbolized a mutual validation of both nations and enfranchised the Japanese nationals living in the United States.

Essays written by Hartmann and Noguchi also indicate their awareness of and outrage against anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States. For example, after he returned to Japan, Noguchi wrote in his Japanese publication, *Geijutsu no Tōyō-shugi* (1927),

I crossed to a foreign country at a time when Japan, unlike today, was not regarded by various foreign countries as strong and powerful. The Westerners in those days did not even know the difference between Japan and China, at times thinking that Japan and Korea were the same country. I was laughed at, cursed at, and even beaten up by them in their land. As a representative of the Japanese, I tasted the pain and climbed their gallows. Their world was a world of material prosperity. I decided that it was entirely natural that materially destitute human beings were despised in such a world. I must compete and fight with them....If so, with what kind of weapon should I war with them? I would never be able to hope to win if I competed with material. I would have to challenge their materialism with spirit. It wouldn’t work unless I extolled our spiritual life, struck at their weak point, and defeated them. That was my strategic plan. *Thus was born my Orientalism in the United States.*<sup>239</sup>

A leftist until the 1930s, Noguchi’s growing faith in Japanese imperialism (which he regrets and renounces after World War II) by the late 1920s is already evident. What is most interesting here, however, is his conscious conceptualization of his Orientalist art, namely his haiku, as political *weapon*. If, according to Edward Said’s influential study, Orientalism is “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts”<sup>240</sup> that legitimates the “othering” logic of western imperialism, then how can it be used as a weapon *against* western domination? By entering into the discourse of Orientalism via their haiku poetry, Noguchi and Hartmann self-consciously frame the Orient as self rather than other. The wielding of Orientalism by racialized Japanese Americans, on the one hand, reveals its very discursiveness and its social construction. On the other hand, recasting the Orient as

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<sup>237</sup> Gerald W. Haslam, “Three Exotics: Noguchi, Tsuneishi and Hartmann,” *CLA Journal* 19:3 (1976): 364.

<sup>238</sup> Moser writes, “Although Elaine Kim does not extensively analyze Hartmann’s work, she quotes one of his essays to suggest his acute awareness of racism and colonialism: ‘Anyone familiar with colonization...should feel ashamed to belong to the white race’ (*White Chrysanthemums* 117)” (130).

<sup>239</sup> Hiraoki Sato. “Yone Noguchi: Accomplishments & Roles,” *Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 13 (1995): 115, cited in translation, my emphasis.

<sup>240</sup> Edward Said, 12. Said goes on to describe Orientalism as “it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of ‘interests’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world” (12).

the native self disrupts the othering of classical Orientalism as Said defines it. In certain ways, however, their Orientalism seems to instantiate what critics have identified as American Orientalism.

In making a distinction between European and American Orientalisms, critic Colleen Lye writes, “Where a European Orientalism had disclosed the discursivity of nineteenth-century, territorial-based colonialism, America’s Asia thus reflected the discursivity of a neocolonialism that installed the East as a Western proxy rather than antipode.”<sup>241</sup> Building upon Lye’s argument, Park locates the beginnings of American literary Orientalism in the works of Walt Whitman and Ernest Fenollosa: “For Whitman, India was ‘The Past! the Past! the Past!...but Fenollosa’s Asiatic vision anticipated the future... Together, Whitman and Fenollosa set the terms for a literary American Orientalism constructed out of commercial ties and calibrated to modern desires: they are American prophets of a poetic revolution and an Asiatic turn.”<sup>242</sup> Following Park’s argument that Pound developed Whitman’s and Fenollosa’s notions of the Orient to imagine America,<sup>243</sup> I argue that Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s participation in constructing the modernist haiku form calls attention to an American Orientalism in which “there is no there there” in the East, rather than suggesting that their work is complicit in the system of western (Occidental) domination over the socially imagined and geographically delineated Orient that inheres in Said’s definition of Orientalism.<sup>244</sup> Just as Pound “created a revelatory intimacy between China and America which has marked not only American ideas of the Far East but also a new openness in modern poetry[,]”<sup>245</sup> Noguchi

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<sup>241</sup> Lye, 10.

<sup>242</sup> Park, 9, 14.

<sup>243</sup> In *Apparitions of Asia*, Park writes, “The Whitman-Fenollosa-Pound-Snyder genealogy I trace is marked by a repeated desire to reinvigorate an epic sense of America through contact with the Orient. In returning to these canonical figures, I aim to account for the endurance of a highly visible figuration by reconsidering American interests” (16).

<sup>244</sup> As I mention earlier, this classically Orientalist reading of Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s work has been the norm as demonstrated in their omission from or dismissal in cultural nationalist texts and Asian American criticism since. In *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), Earl Miner writes

It requires a certain indulgence of the historical spirit to deal with the marvelous fact that readers a generation ago were excited by the writing of Yone Noguchi, the successor to Hearn as popularizer of Japan, and an acknowledged influence on John Gould Fletcher. He was praised, after all, by Richard Le Gallienne, Bliss Carman, Meredith, Richard Garnett, William Rossetti, Hardy, and others. But why? *Seen and Unseen* (189) with its apt subtitle—‘Monologues of a Homeless Snail’—echoes Emerson and Whitman more than the Japanese poets, and Noguchi kept echoing them in unrhymed verse of *From the Eastern Sea* (1903), in the adaptations of Japanese poetic forms of *The Pilgrimage* (1912), and in the prose poetry of *The Summer Clouds; Prose Poems* (1906). There are at least two explanations for Noguchi’s extraordinary popularity. To begin with, he was taken to be a real Japanese poet who just happened to write in English. How little he was the real article can be seen from his *Japanese Hokkus* (1920) where he sometimes tries to maintain the Japanese syllabic form and sometimes attempts merely to reproduce ‘the haiku spirit’—no mean thing when haiku has meant very different things to three centuries of poets... But Noguchi seemed like the real thing to a generation who knew no Japanese. The second reason for his popularity is the ironic fact that he adopted the styles, often the worst styles, of contemporary poets in English. His ‘hokkus’ are as exotic as any of theirs, his free verse is obviously inspired by Whitman, and his experiments with ‘prose poems’ are almost indistinguishable from Amy Lowell’s ‘cadenced prose’ in technique. (186-7)

<sup>245</sup> Park, *Apparitions of Asia*, 25.

and Hartmann established their authorial subjectivities through the American haiku form. Their authorial subjectivities—as both subjection and agency—are located in their interpellative “turn” toward Orientalist exoticization by writing haiku. A proclaimed “usefulness of uselessness,”<sup>246</sup> the haiku form offers a narrow literary space for the Japanese American poet to negotiate his subjecthood within the American racial landscape by seeing himself as exotic and feminine through the objectifying lens of white America. Writing during periods of anti-Asian sentiment and Japanese exclusion, Hartmann and Noguchi create what critic Jonathan Flatley calls “affective maps” of melancholic self-estrangement to testify to their racialization, thus figuratively reclaiming a space of belonging in the U.S. that had been taken from Japanese Americans through anti-Japanese agitation and the Alien Land Laws which literally deprived them of the right to own land. Flatley elucidates that “the affective map is not a stable representation of more or less unchanging landscape; it is a map less in the sense that it establishes a territory than that it is about providing a feeling of orientation and facilitating mobility.”<sup>247</sup>

Throughout Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s poetry, their personas continually alternate between emotional withdrawal and exuberant self-assertion.

The following pages will demonstrate the ways in which these affective oscillations dialectically map out their respective visions for racially inclusive utopias. Citing thinkers such as Wolf Lepenies and Walter Benjamin, Flatley explores “dialectic and mutually constituting relationship between melancholy and utopia, one that can be traced through different historical moments, in which utopian thinking is motivated by the desire to find a remedy for melancholia.”<sup>248</sup> Whereas Sui Sin Far’s Chinatown is emptied of its racial imaginaries and positively recast as a mutual space of universality between whites and Chinese, the haiku form offers Noguchi and Hartmann an affective map of a circumscribed, overtly racialized space of subjectivity during the period of Japanese exclusion in the U.S. Likewise, Hartmann’s and Noguchi’s investment in the haiku form provided them a place within U.S. literary culture which would otherwise have been inaccessible to them. Noguchi and Hartmann’s experimentation with Whitmanian transcendentalism in their early, proto-haiku poetry marks their transition into writing haiku, traditionally understood as nature poems—that is, a mode of reflecting on the self through nature.<sup>249</sup> In this way, the English-language haiku—in its mediations

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<sup>246</sup> In *Through the Torii*, Noguchi writes, “But what our *hokku* aims at is, like the *haori* of silk or crepe, a usefulness of uselessness, not what it expresses but how it expresses itself spiritually; its real value is not in its physical directness but in its psychological indirectness” (13-14). Though resonant with Immanuel Kant’s principle of “purposiveness without a purpose,” which he describes in *Critique of Judgment*, Noguchi’s haiku does not merely exist for itself as a socially autonomous work of art. Instead, its “psychological indirectness” references the liminal subjectivity of the Japanese American during the period of exclusion.

<sup>247</sup> Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008) 7.

<sup>248</sup> Flatley, 37. Flatley goes on to say, “In the melancholic state, the world becomes a set of objects with no necessary function or meaning, the object has been emptied of significance, and in this sense it has also been prepared for allegorical transformation. The melancholic state of mind, then, even as it dwells on ruins and loss, is at the same time liberated to imagine how the world might be transformed, how things might be entirely different from the way they are” (37).

<sup>249</sup> Giroux states, “The belief that nature is the realm par excellence of poetry is the fundamental tenet of *shofu haikai*” (18). She goes on to say, “For a haiku poet the expression of austerity is twofold: first, in his life of detachment, and second, in his sparing use of words. Basho is the model par excellence on both

on the self, nature, and universality and its cubistic concision—can be seen as a mediating link connecting the sequential literary movements of American transcendentalism and Anglo-American modernism.

### Noguchi's Embassy of Imagism

Although he does seem to adhere to Whitmanian transcendentalism, Noguchi describes the failure of Whitman's work to incite democracy—that is, enfranchisement of racial others in the U.S. where “under the democratic clothes, people...hide undemocratic minds” his book of essays *Japan and America*.<sup>250</sup> He adds, “It is the fact at least that the democracy Walt Whitman persisted in with such self-assertion has become sad fragments, and because those fragments of democracy were scattered on the world without discrimination, Whitman's democracy became thin and diluted in its own meaning.”<sup>251</sup> Written at the cusp of Whitmanian transcendentalism and Poundian Imagisme, Hartmann's modernist haikus consciously attempt to inspire a romantic laissez-faire democracy—a sense of self-governance that would inspire social equality among races and racially distinct nations—in their readership. Noguchi, on the other hand, perceived the modernist haiku as the preeminent form that would solidify a mutual union between eastern and western nations—Japan and the U.S. in particular—but not necessarily ensure an international democracy. Noguchi predicts,

The time is coming when, as with international politics where the understanding of the East with the West is already an unmistakable fact, the poetries of these two different worlds will approach one another and exchange their cordial greetings. If I am not mistaken, the writers of free verse and the so-called imagists of the West will be ambassadors to us.<sup>252</sup>

Although Noguchi's work does resonate with those of American transcendentalists such as Whitman and Emerson who championed American democratic individualism,<sup>253</sup> his aim appears to have been to establish a mutual culture between the East and the West. In contradistinction to the esoteric (and, as Park argues, nationalistic) purposes of recognized Imagiste poets such as Pound, Noguchi's haikus and haiku-like poems were meant to serve a variation on the traditional purpose of creating an inclusive common culture, on an international scale.<sup>254</sup> In “A Proposal to American Poets,” Noguchi exhorts

counts; he desired actually to feel want in order to come closer to nature—a desire which prompted him to undertake his long and difficult journeys—and in his haiku his austerity is reflected in their complete lack of conceit and ornamentation” (55).

<sup>250</sup> Noguchi, *Japan and America*, 56.

<sup>251</sup> Noguchi, *Japan and America*, 55.

<sup>252</sup> Noguchi, *Japan and America*, 100-101.

<sup>253</sup> In *The Pragmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), critic Stephen John Mack argues “that Whitman's crisis required him to develop what I would call ‘poetic agency,’ a verse form that was not exclusively concerned with representing the free play of cosmic and social forces but one that was designed to enable the self to negotiate the psychic dangers such forces entail – a language of self-governance...equipping his verse with the power of agency...” (78).

<sup>254</sup> Shirane describes the community that is constructed through the haiku starting in the seventeenth century when the haiku became a more popular literary form: “As a form of popular literature, haikai reflected the variegated social and economic worlds of the participants, who came from a broad spectrum of society—from high-ranking samurai to merchants, farmers, doctors, and priests—but is also provided an important window onto ‘imagined worlds,’ onto the newly discovered ‘past’ of China and Japan, giving the participants a sense of participating in a common history and cultural tradition” (25). Shirane discusses the



American poets to abandon old, aristocratic English poetry which he compares to “a mansion with windows widely open, even the pictures of its drawing-room being visible from outside” and thus, “it does not tempt [him] much to see the within.”<sup>255</sup> Noguchi urges them instead to “try Japanese Hokku... You say far too much, I should say.”<sup>256</sup>

Although his early, haiku-like poetry thematically and schematically segues from transcendental free verse to modernist imagism, Noguchi’s poems do not evince a neat fusion of self-transcendence and super-posed images of nature—that is, self-transcendence through imagistic objects of nature. This disjunct is demonstrated in his disparate descriptions of the haiku: In *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* (1914) and *Japanese Hokkus* (1920), he describes the haiku as an abstract, interstitial and kinetic presence: “...*Hokku* is like a spider-thread laden with the white summer dews, swaying among the branches of a tree like an often invisible ghost in air, on the perfect balance; that sway indeed, not the thread itself, is the beauty of our seventeen syllable poem.”<sup>257</sup> Elsewhere, he defines the haiku in an imagistic fashion—as a concrete image “through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing”<sup>258</sup> and which, in turn, affirms the perceiving subject: He writes, “...the ‘hokku’ poem itself is distinctly clear-cut like a diamond or a star”<sup>259</sup>—and a “tiny star, mind you, carrying the whole sky at its back.”<sup>260</sup> As a medium of self-expression, the haiku—in Noguchi’s disparate depictions—coincides with the American transcendental view of human individuality as both concrete self-assertion and the abstract, interstitial transcendence of the self:

Thus, the doctrine of human individuality as both self-transcending and self-asserting—as both acknowledging its oneness with and obligation to something higher than itself, and yet ever cherishing its uniqueness and independence as a distinct being—and the further conception that individual happiness depends upon the successful synthesis of these twin tendencies, provided an almost perfect theoretical framework for a new effort to discover supernatural sanction for the swift-moving and constantly changing panorama of American life.<sup>261</sup>

Noguchi synthesizes the twin functions of self-assertion and self-transcendence through the dialectic between affects of melancholia and mania in (his early book of haiku-like

haiku poet Bashō’s significant contribution to the popularization of the haiku form: “Bashō’s haikai was unorthodox, reacting against the rapidly growing, often flamboyant, material culture of the new cities. One consequence was that Bashō’s haikai differed in significant ways from the *mitate* found in Moronobu’s ukiyoe prints and from the poetry of Saikaku (1642-93), another contemporary haikai poet. The popular culture found in Bashō’s poetry and prose was not the stylish men and women of the floating world (*ukiyo*), of the great urban centers, but rather the mundane, everyday lives of farmers and fishermen in the provinces” (11-12).

<sup>255</sup> Yone Noguchi, “A Proposal to American Poets,” *Reader; an illustrated monthly magazine* (Feb. 1904).

<sup>256</sup> Yone Noguchi, “A Proposal to American Poets.”

<sup>257</sup> Yone Noguchi, *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, W. , 1914) 51. Noguchi, *Japanese Hokkus*, 8.

<sup>258</sup> Pound, “Vorticism,” Pound writes specifies here that his notion of the image is synonymous with the vortex: “The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name ‘vorticism’” (469-470).

<sup>259</sup> Yone Noguchi, “What is a Hokku Poem?” *Rhythm* 12 January 1913: 355.

<sup>260</sup> Noguchi, “A Proposal to American Poets.” Yone Noguchi, *The Pilgrimage* (Kamakura: The Valley Press, 1909; Yokohama: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, 1909) 137.

<sup>261</sup> Fredson Bowers, *Whitman's Manuscripts: Leaves of Grass (1860), A Parallel Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 14.

poetry), *Seen and Unseen (or, Monologues of a Homeless Snail)* wherein the poetic persona metamorphoses into a snail who alternates between expressing himself as an abject, homeless “soul” and a Whitmanian transcendent god.

The very title of Noguchi’s book of poems, *Seen and Unseen*, evokes a certain paralysis or loss of subjectivity as it invokes Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendentalist masterpiece, “Nature,” in which he delineates the synthesis of self-assertion and self-transcendence:

In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgraces, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. *I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all.* The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God...I am the lover of uncontained and immoral beauty.<sup>262</sup>

Despite his “return” to a natural setting, Noguchi’s persona not only fails to occupy the subjective position of the transparent eye-ball—he is the object who is *seen*—but he is also *unseen*, invisible. The isolated, dejected—in both a vernacular and structural, subjectifying sense—image of a homeless snail pervades the entirety of the book,<sup>263</sup> articulating a split between the persona’s impoverished soul and his alien body (or shell). Constantly positioned as the marginal object who is cursed to slide along the ground that watches other privileged creatures literally and figuratively transcend their “selves” and the earth, Noguchi’s—that is the snail persona’s<sup>264</sup>—melancholic relation to the white, male transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Whitman, or white males in general, is played out in his poetry.

Critic Anne Cheng has theorized that white American subjectivity is defined by the exclusion of the racial other which creates a sense of national loss, causing the white subject to experience racial melancholia. Building upon Sigmund Freud’s distinction of mourning from melancholia as the “capacity to adopt any new object of love” following a loss of a love-object,<sup>265</sup> Cheng writes: “Since the melancholic subject experiences resentment and denigration for the lost object with which he or she is identifying, the melancholic ends up administering to his or her own self-denigration...The melancholic is not melancholic because he or she has lost something but because he or she has

<sup>262</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature” (1836), *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Buell (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 35-36, my emphasis.

<sup>263</sup> In “Vorticism,” Pound defends the notion of a long imagiste poem: “I am often asked whether there can be a long imagiste or vorticist poem. The Japanese, who evolved the hokku, evolved also the Noh plays. In the best ‘Noh’ the whole play may consist of one image. I mean it is gathered about one image. Its unity consists in one image, enforced by movement and music. I see nothing against a long vorticism poem” (471*n.1*). Only here, I am suggesting that the image of a homeless snail remains the constant throughout his entire book of poems.

<sup>264</sup> In citing the appellation from the *Chap Book*, Noguchi acknowledges that he is “‘the Homeless Snail, Yone Noguchi,’” who “‘alone remains: — ‘Standing like a ghost in the smiling mysteries of the moon garden.’” Indeed, I was left alone at Miller’s Heights sadly or happily...” (“Some Stories of My Western Life,” *The Fortnightly Review*, XCV, 1914) 272.

<sup>265</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 165. He adds that “melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss” (166).

introjected [or taken in] that which he or she now reviles.”<sup>266</sup> Cheng goes on to homologize the structure of racialization in the United States with Freud’s theorization of melancholia:

Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others. The national topography of centrality and marginality legitimizes itself by retroactively positing the racial other as always Other and lost to the heart of the nation. Legal exclusion naturalizes the more complicated “loss” of the unassimilable racial other.<sup>267</sup>

According to Cheng, racial melancholia structures both the racially unmarked and the racially marked—in this case, the Japanese American—subject who both internalizes the white ideal and the image of himself through the eyes of white America: “For the invisible [racially marked] man is both a melancholic object and a melancholic subject, both the one lost and the one losing.”<sup>268</sup> Thus, according to the psychoanalytic structure of racial melancholia, the racially marked subject not only *feels* inevitably ashamed for being non-white but can only access his subjectivity through the perception of and longing for whiteness.

In the poem, “Is this World the Solid Being?” the poetic persona bemoans the entrapment of his “soul” who, “like a chilly-winged fly, roams about/ the sadness-walled body, hunting for a/ casement to flit out.”<sup>269</sup> Set in juxtaposition to his static existence, he sees “an inspired bird [that] flies upright into/ the atom-eyed sky” whose “reflection sinks far down into the mileless bottom of the mirrory rivulet[.]”<sup>270</sup> The perceiving snail here examines the splitting super-position or juxtaposition of the transcendent bird and its “sunken” reflection and relates this image to the cosmos into which the bird has ascended: He wonders, “Is this world the solid being?—or a shadowy/ nothing?” and, relatedly, “Is the form that flies up the real bird,?/ Or the figure that sinks down?”<sup>271</sup> In his dissection of the super-posed bird and his shadow, the narrator opens up the possibility of the “real bird,” that is the agent of transcendence, inhabiting the “form that flies up” into the world *or* the “figure that sinks down.” The latter suggests the possibility of transcendence and subjectivity for the lowly—the “shadowy nothing”—such as himself.

Many poems of the collection continue in this vein of loneliness, abjection, and despair: In “Alone,” the snail describes himself as

...apart, alone, not even  
with my own shadow in the world of  
darkness; with only my withered soul,  
housed in the tear-rusted body,<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 8-9.

<sup>267</sup> Cheng, 10.

<sup>268</sup> Cheng, 17.

<sup>269</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, V.

<sup>270</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, V.

<sup>271</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, V.

<sup>272</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, V.

The absence of the speaker's shadow attests to the darkness of his world and points to his loss of subjectivity in the structure of (racial) melancholia: While the transcendent bird, *suggestive* (rather than necessarily symbolic) of his white forebears, leaves behind his abject, lowly shadow in "Is this World the Solid Being?," the snail is without a subjectifying object—his shadow, his own racialized other.<sup>273</sup> Failing to locate an external shadow, the snail persona introjects his image as a racialized, isolated (the word "Alone" begins lines 1, 11, 13, and 16), and non-transcendent other and casts it onto the ego—that is, his shell. Since the ego has taken on the "shadow of the [lost] object," the speaker continually reproaches his ever impoverished encasement—his "tear-rusted body," or his "cabin/ walls dying like formless corpses into the/ darkness of vacuity."<sup>274</sup> He articulates abjection in reproaching his own encasement—his external, raced body, and his internal ego—which grows further and further impoverished, finding his soul triumphantly "under the radiant darkness" of his encasement. However, that his soul—in contrast to its robust, kinetic state in "Is this World the Solid Being?"—is likewise decayed and withered here points to the objectification that inheres in his subjectivity as a raced individual.

The speaker begins another poem, "Drankest Thou Snowy Death," by formally super-posing the privileged addressee and his impoverished self through a visible break:

Drankest thou snowy dew of pleasure,  
write right on thy soul the  
taste of sadness.

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Alone without friend,—abroad, I cover my ears  
against the wind's silly question: "What  
are tears?"<sup>275</sup>

Although he introduces the addressed other, who is seemingly in a position of greater racial ("snowy") privilege and power over himself, he commands the addressee to "write...on thy soul the taste of sadness"—a taste that seems to correspond with his own abject state. Such a gesture suggests that he has identified himself as the "soul" of the white addressee, that is, the racially introjected other—who is living "abroad" from his nation of origin. Although "alone," seemingly without a subjectifying other, he interpellates and introjects himself as the racial other who, in turn, imitates<sup>276</sup> the white, transcendental addressee. This identification affords the snail enough subjectivity to question, "Am I a visitor in this world?—or a master of/ this world?"<sup>277</sup> Referring doubly to the U.S. nation and the international sphere as "the world," the speaker explores the

<sup>273</sup> In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud asserts that,

for the melancholic, his libido fails to cathect to another object; it is withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object. It did not find application there, however, in any one of several possible ways, but served simply to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. *Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego*, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. (170, my emphasis)

<sup>274</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, VII.

<sup>275</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, XIII.

<sup>276</sup> I am employing the term "imitate" as distinct from Bhabha's deconstructive notion of mimicry. Although the Japanese American poets' imitation of white male poets does suggest the failure of American universality, it also enables them to positively strive for the fulfillment of democratic universality beyond the national legal inclusion of Japanese Americans.

<sup>277</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, XIII.

possibility of belonging to an envisioned, international universe despite his exclusion from the U.S. as an ethnic Japanese. The anticipation of death appears to transport him from a posture of racial impoverishment and exclusion to one of universal inclusion:

Ah, my soul roams loneliness out, like a ghostly  
lantern under the rains, consoled even by  
the sound of the desolate funeral bell  
drowned by the rivulet, forgetting its way  
to an unknown other-world.<sup>278</sup>

This contradiction between self-denigration and self-assertion creates an affective map of a positive, however “unknown,” “other-world.” The speaker’s consolation in (the anticipation of) death resonates with Freud’s theorization of the death drive, which works to return an organism to a pleasurable state without tension, or an inorganic state. Freud asserts that psychic life is governed by death instincts and life instincts—which are comprised of the pleasure-seeking drive called the pleasure principle and the unpleasurable, self-preserving drive called the reality principle.<sup>279</sup> For the raced (racially marked) subject, such as the speaker in *Seen and Unseen*, the melancholic introjection of the white ideal and his racialization is the work of the reality principle; the repetition of the unpleasurable introjection gives him subjectivity or a certain mastery of the objectifying situation.<sup>280</sup> The speaker’s longing for death as a complete release from his bondage of sadness substitutes for his inability to transcend the self and commune with nature and the universe. Here, perhaps, death can be seen as a return to nature rather than the social universe. His desire to return to inorganicity is a sort of negative transcendence in which he returns to the inorganic, lost self. In the concluding lines of “Alone,” the snail states, “my one desire is to be/ myself as nothing.”<sup>281</sup> Likewise, in “Seas of Loneliness,” he writes, “I want not pleasure, sadness, love, hatred, suc-/cess, unsuccess, beauty, ugliness—only the/ mighty Nothing in No More.”<sup>282</sup> In contrast to Emerson’s transparent eyeball which becomes nothing to commune with nature and the universe, the nothingness that Noguchi expresses here is a return to the self who had been lost to a landscape of racialization. Imagining himself in the fatal collapse of time and space in the very first poem of the book, the speaker states, “And at last I came back to me...”<sup>283</sup>

With death still on the horizon, the speaker dialectically emerges from his abjection and arrives at an exuberant and utopian sense of belonging to the world, and still greater, the universe—to which he constantly alludes as a greater space of freedom beyond his physical (his shell) and social encasement. Flatley writes, “Within the

<sup>278</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, XIII.

<sup>279</sup> Although classified as a life instinct, Freud makes the admission that since the purpose of the death drive is to return the organism to an inorganic state, thereby most pleasurably reducing tension to the zero degree, the “pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts” as well as life instincts (63).

<sup>280</sup> In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (*Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud XVIII*, London: Hogarth Press, 1953), Freud gives an example of the reality and pleasure principle working through a case study of a child who repeats a game in which he throws and hides object only to find them (14). Freud notes that the disappearance and return of the object, which represents his mother, is itself unpleasurable but grants the boy mastery over the situation: “At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overwhelmed by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took an *active* part” (16).

<sup>281</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, VII.

<sup>282</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, XXXII.

<sup>283</sup> Noguchi, “I Come Back to Me,” *Seen and Unseen*, I.

discourse of melancholia we find a dialectic between emotional withdrawal and its apparent opposite, the most intense or exceptional devotion of affective energy.”<sup>284</sup> Here, Flatley substitutes “affective energy” for Freud’s theorization of mania as the same condition of unrelinquished loss as melancholia only “euphoric”<sup>285</sup> or “accompanied by a completely opposite symptomology” from melancholia.<sup>286</sup> In the last poem of the book, “My Universe,” the snail is no longer isolated but identifies himself in a collective group by speaking in the first person plural:

We roam out,—  
 Selfless, will-less, virtueless, vice-  
 less, passionless, thoughtless, as  
 drunken in Dreamland of Dawn,  
 or of Nothing, into visible darkness— this  
 world that seems like Being.<sup>287</sup>

Noguchi celebrates his utopian universe that is illustrated according to the transcendental notion of “the universe as an embodiment of a single, cosmic psyche, now manifesting itself as man, now as nature”<sup>288</sup> that is both “Nothing” and “Being.” He inflates his universe by demonstrating the “theoretical fiction”<sup>289</sup> of such linguistic oppositions:

The world is so filled with names; often the  
 necessity is forgotten, often the difference  
 Is unnamed!  
 The Name is nothing!  
 East is West,  
 West is East:  
 South is North,  
 North is South.<sup>290</sup>

Racial difference is utopically erased in his universe through the collective “we” and the deconstruction of “East” and “West.” His universe becomes an equalizing space in which the racial and white subjects are on equal social planes. It is only this manic space—articulated through the exclamations of the unnameable world—of collective, de-racialized universalism, in which “Good-/ness, Badness, Wisdom, Foolishness meet/ face to face at the divisionless border be-/tween them[,]” that Noguchi finally becomes “like

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<sup>284</sup> Flatley, 1.

<sup>285</sup> Cheng, 24.

<sup>286</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 174. Freud writes that in a manic state, “what the ego has surmounted and is triumphing over remains hidden from it...[The maniac then] runs after new object-cathexes like a starving man after bread” (175, 176). Freud goes on to say that “both the disorders are wrestling with the same ‘complex,’ ...[but] in melancholia the ego has succumbed to it, whereas in mania it has mastered the complex or thrust it aside” (175).

<sup>287</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, L.

<sup>288</sup> Bowers, 14.

<sup>289</sup> In *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) Derrida writes, “One is but the other different and deferred, one is differing and deferring the other. One is the other in *différence*, one is the difference of the other. That is why every apparently rigorous and irreducible opposition (for example the opposition of the secondary to the primary) comes to be qualified at one moment or the other, as ‘theoretical fiction’” (18).

<sup>290</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, LI.

an unknown” Whitmanian “god”<sup>291</sup> whose “every atom belonging to [him] as good belongs to you.”<sup>292</sup>

In his penultimate poem, “I am what I like to be,” the mania of self-assertion and universal belonging is once again overtaken by the melancholia of abjection. In this poem, Noguchi imagines himself as being freed from his casement and allowed to partake in “the floating world.” Envisioning such a utopia, he asserts his subjectivity and states, “I am what I like to be.” This self-assertion is short-lived as he goes on to say, “Spring, Autumn, poverty, friends, the world and myself are dead to me!”<sup>293</sup> And by the end of the poem, he is once again “Alone in my cabin” whose “door would never be open-/ed to the floating world”<sup>294</sup> and unable to join the ranks of the transcendentalist poets.

### Hartmann’s Democratic Vistas

Hartmann similarly alternates between racial mania and melancholia throughout his early book of poems, *My Rubaiyat*. Although entitled *My Rubaiyat*, after the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* which had been famously translated by Edward Fitzgerald in the previous century, Hartmann’s poems are curiously written in six unrhymed, lines of tetrameter rather than in the eponymous quatrains of his title (“Rubaiyat” can be translated as “quatrains”). In his preface, Hartmann responds to critics who accuse him of lacking western “rhythm” in his poems:

If my verses contain this possibility of aural gratification they cannot be utterly devoid of rhythm. No doubt my sense of sound alliteration is foreign, unconsciously Oriental. I feel a sound relation, not even a rhyme suggestion in words like “chance” and “spring,” “herd” and “feet” at the end of succeeding stanzas. The alliteration of Japanese poets is much subtler (due to peculiarities of the language) than the word music of our Laniers and Whitmans... It always remains fragmentary, it rarely resembles full orchestration.<sup>295</sup>

In a self-denigrating manner, Hartmann claims his racialization as an Oriental which emerges in the shortcomings of his “foreign” verse. He nevertheless takes pleasure in his subjectifying *turn* towards his racialization by celebrating the “pictorial harmony” in his verse which resonates with the *tanka*.<sup>296</sup> His identification of his poetry with the “foreign” Japanese haiku form seems to empower him and perhaps allows him to temporarily believe that he has “triumph[antly]” “surmounted” his racial othering.<sup>297</sup> For he begins his first poem in first person plural, with a celebratory, Whitmanian air of self-assertion and collectivity: “What should we dream, what should we say,/ On this drear day, in this sad clime!”<sup>298</sup> This poem, though far from following the seventeen-syllable

<sup>291</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, L.

<sup>292</sup> Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 25. Whitman also articulates that all humanity, including himself, dons the face of God: “Why should I wish to see God better than this day?/ I see so

<sup>293</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, XLIX.

<sup>294</sup> Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, XLIX.

<sup>295</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 6.

<sup>296</sup> Hartmann writes, “Pictures abound throughout ‘My Rubaiyat’ for all who have the mental pictorial vision to see them. Lines like “turn phantoms with the colder morn” and “in a hilltown among roses” are as concentrated as any image that can be found in a *tanka* (i. e. Japanese short poem)” (*My Rubaiyat*, 6).

<sup>297</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 175.

<sup>298</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 7.

form of the haiku (or the thirty-one-syllable form of the tanka), nevertheless employs the haiku convention of self-reflection (even self-transcendence) in nature. The collective persona in this poem engages in such an intimate communion with nature that he concludes, “Can we be gay when skies are grey!”<sup>299</sup>

In an explicit indictment against westerners for their fetishism of the Orient (and, by extension, him), Hartmann employs another haiku convention in his second poem—the induction of “the haiku moment” or a momentary enlightenment. He begins the poem, reveling in Oriental images:

Would joy prove a more steady guest,  
In palm-girt, sunnier Southern lands,  
Some lambient [*sic*] world of green and gold  
Fanned by the charm of Orient lay!  
'Tis vain delusion thus to think  
That life will change with change of scene.<sup>300</sup>

The concluding two lines are meant to induce a sobering, “moment of ‘ah-ness,’ [or] the haiku moment”<sup>301</sup> by juxtaposing and admonishing the Orientalist decadence of the first four lines. The (near) chiasmus of the concluding line—“life will change with change of scene”—reinforces the redundancy of life despite fanciful or delusional changes in locale. Moreover, the phrase “vain delusion” refers also to and critiques the othering image of the Orient as a “lambent world of green and gold.”

Hartmann’s affectively manic identification with the Orient often reverts to a melancholic fatalism even as he inhabits the Whitmanian posture of collective self-assertion. In the eighth poem, Hartmann writes, “One is born rich, the other poor, . . . We are forever what we are.”<sup>302</sup> This chiasmus articulates his abject feeling of entrapment by his lot in life—that is, his racialization, his lack of wealth, and his ignorance: Hartmann concludes his eighteenth poem exclaiming, “Why did so little come to me!”<sup>303</sup> Nevertheless, Hartmann returns to championing democratic inclusion of Japanese Americans in the U.S. In certain moments he seems to demonstrate an uncanny patriotism despite his critique of American imperialism in his essays. For example in poem twenty-seven, he states,

This is the land where giant minds,  
Vaster than light, vaster than space  
Hear whisperings of the infinite,  
And with proud sorrow in their eyes,  
Their wild-maned coursers ever ready,  
Soar far into the skies of thought.<sup>304</sup>

And yet, an undertone of irony can be detected in the hyperbolic depiction of “giant” American minds that are “vaster than light” and “space,” who seem to obtain their spoils by force—“[t]heir wild-maned coursers ever ready[.]” The emphasis on space and omission of time points to an imperialist perspective that exists in the perpetual present

<sup>299</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 7.

<sup>300</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 7.

<sup>301</sup> Giroux, 46.

<sup>302</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 8.

<sup>303</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 10.

<sup>304</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 12.



and, according to Johannes Fabian, relegates the Other to the perpetual past (and fantastical future).<sup>305</sup> Despite his criticism of American imperialism, which was solidified after 1898, Hartmann nevertheless maintains his faith in the realization of American democratic universality. In *Critical Modernist*, Hartmann addresses the “everlasting complaint” that “[t]here is no atmosphere in America” to which he replies, Pshaw! The true artist creates his own atmosphere wherever he goes, even if he possessed but a bare room with four white-washed walls, *and were too poor to buy his paint, he could decorate those walls with the color of imagination.*”<sup>306</sup> He goes on to observe that “Our western scenery with its clear atmosphere which preserves every aerial gradation, making it possible to see patches of snow over the forest line of mountains at a distance of ten miles, should make perspective views one of the striking features of American landscape painting...”<sup>307</sup> Framing the American terrain as an Orientalist landscape painting here, Hartmann expresses his opinion that the natural scenery of the U.S. encapsulated by (or married to) the eastern haiku form would inspire the material democracy among the masses—that which Whitman’s work failed to do: for Hartmann wrote of Whitman’s poetry, “Alas, his ‘democracy’ never sent its roots very deep into the masses; its deals remained thought clouds, drifting and shifting, no doubt laden with lightning, but seldom striking, and the Jovian thunder is a distant grumble that nobody heeds.”<sup>308</sup>

In poem twenty-six, Hartmann calls for “the upheaval of the race,/ To reach some pinnacle of truth/ Where light envelops you all”<sup>309</sup> in his quest for an anti-imperialist democracy. Here he suggests that the upheaval of the white American race will bring “light” to all and “true” democracy to the American nation. His criticism rests on Americans who “do not think, they merely dream,/ They only long for crude, rough things,/ Madly chasing will-o’-wispes,/ Success by force they try to grasp” in poem twenty-nine.<sup>310</sup> Hartmann holds such an imperialist ideology responsible for the contemporary world war of his poems to which he refers as a “dull haste, this sordid waste/ Of youth and manhood’s fullest powers.../ To amass riches for your heirs/ The

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<sup>305</sup> As anthropologist Johannes Fabian has argued that ethnography others its objects of study by framing them in a moment that is not coeval with the readership of the ethnography. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), Fabian writes, “Another strategy of escape from Time and history common to both movements has been to declare the unconscious the true object of anthropological research. But nowhere are these convergences clearer and more directly significant for the problem of Time-distancing and the denial of coevalness than in the valuation of cultural difference as *distance*” (67-8). He goes on to clarify ethnographic fixation on the past:

To say that reflexive distance is necessary to achieve objectification does not mean that the Other, by virtue of being located in our past, becomes thinglike, or abstract and general. On the contrary, an ethnographic past can become the most vivid part of our present existence. Persons, events, puzzlements, and discoveries encountered during fieldwork may continue to occupy our thoughts and fantasies for many years. This is probably not just because our work in ethnography constantly turns us toward the past; rather it is because our past is present in us as a *project*, hence as our future. In fact, we would not have a present to look back from at our past if it was not for the constant passage of our experience from past to future. Past ethnography is the present of anthropological discourse inasmuch as it is on the way to become its future. (93)

<sup>306</sup> Hartmann, *Critical Modernist*, 68.

<sup>307</sup> Hartmann, *Critical Modernist*, 70.

<sup>308</sup> Hartmann, *White Chrysanthemums*, 6.

<sup>309</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 12.

<sup>310</sup> Hartmann, *My Rubaiyat*, 12.

highest interests seem low[.]”<sup>311</sup> Although Hartmann goes on to decry the waste and futility of war—“Why should youth be killed from afar,/ Races struggle in deadly clutch!”<sup>312</sup>—he heralds an alternative but equally apocalyptic war that will make “both man and woman free”:

One holy war has to be fought—  
To make both man and woman free:  
The world will flash with signal lights,  
Each land ring with its people’s voice—  
For from those crimson rivulets  
Will rise a saner sun-warm life.<sup>313</sup>

Hartmann, who founded the anarchist magazine *Mother Earth* with Emma Goldman,<sup>314</sup> suggests that an anti-imperialist, democratic revolution would create space in which “Men must rough a freer wind-blown life” and “Women no longer shed their bloom/ In drudgery for bed and fare”<sup>315</sup> and where hunger would no longer cause “peaceful men to revolt.”<sup>316</sup> The world that Hartmann envisions is one of racial and gender equality for which both men and women have revolted. In the meantime, Hartmann attempts to establish a Whitmanian fraternity with normative and supernumerary members of the American social landscape through pathos:

Oh, the helplessness of the aged,  
Of the needy, sick, and lonely.  
Can you explain why they suffer,  
Must some lose all while others thrive?...<sup>317</sup>  
...Thieves, bandits, outcasts, vagrom folks,  
Eternal victims of the law,  
Who cannot change, who have no chance  
To wash their grimy hands from crime.<sup>318</sup>

He acerbically asks his addressee/himself, “Will you teach them?/ Have you a larger soul than they?” for what thinly separates him/his addressee (who are one in the Whitmanian poetic schema) from the criminals is that “You have drawn a lucky number,/ For them gay fortune went astray.”<sup>319</sup> The pervading image of Hartmann’s god-like Whitmanian self who catalogues the subjects/objects of American society—which sharply contrasts the impoverished image of Noguchi’s homeless snail—nevertheless begins to fall apart by the end of the book. He chastises himself for “vain[ly] think[ing] that [his] idea/ May cure the vanity of things[.]”<sup>320</sup> Moreover, he realizes the impossibility of his position as a universal figure and separates from his seemingly more privileged, fraternal addressee:

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<sup>311</sup> Hartmann, Poem XXX., *My Rubaiyat*, 12.

<sup>312</sup> Hartmann, Poem XLV., *My Rubaiyat*, 15.

<sup>313</sup> Hartmann, Poem XLVII., *My Rubaiyat*, 16.

<sup>314</sup> Moser, 126. Hicken writes that “Apollinaire had expressed sympathies with aesthetic modernism since 1898. The association of anarchic individualism with aesthetic modernism was not uncommon among the poet’s generation, which looked to Nietzsche and Bergson’s *élan vital* for guiding principles” (3).

<sup>315</sup> Hartmann, Poem XLVIII., *My Rubaiyat*, 16.

<sup>316</sup> Hartmann, Poem LI., *My Rubaiyat*, 16.

<sup>317</sup> Hartmann, Poem LIII., *My Rubaiyat*, 17.

<sup>318</sup> Hartmann, Poem LV., *My Rubaiyat*, 17.

<sup>319</sup> Hartmann, Poem LVI., *My Rubaiyat*, 18.

<sup>320</sup> Hartmann, Poem LVII., *My Rubaiyat*, 18.

“For my happiness cannot be yours;”<sup>321</sup> he goes on to declare: “I cannot tread your well-paved roads/...What you like best, is best for you.”<sup>322</sup> Hartmann’s use of chiasmus here points to a sort of tautological individualism that is nevertheless liberating. He returns to a state of self-assertion: “To bend your neck to no one’s yoke,/ To be full master of yourself,/...That is the happiness of life.”<sup>323</sup> This fantasy of liberation from racialization enables Hartmann to proceed as an individual “wanderer myself” and “Onward I stroll and ever on/ In my own way courting the sun”<sup>324</sup>/ And fashioning Arcadia”—a vision of a utopian, racially inclusive America that features natural objects “Of passing winds and flying clouds.”<sup>325</sup> In this manic moment of self-empowerment and self-determination, Hartmann resembles the wandering haiku poet who, in his travels, preaches and demonstrates self-transcendence and affirmation through communion with nature and in so doing, binds together a common culture.<sup>326</sup>

Hartmann and Noguchi figure their racial subjectivity as excluded yet assimilated foreign others through their identification with and practice of the Oriental form of the haiku. Such racial abjection is manifest in their inability to act as self-transcending subjects who enter easily into a universal brotherhood—which, for them, seems to symbolize democracy or a social enfranchisement of Japanese American subjects. At other moments, however, they surmount their melancholia and manically transform their poetic personae into supervisible, transcendent, Whitmanian gods whose access to the universe becomes an avenue through which they can advance their respective politics of democratic nationalism and cosmopolitan internationalism. Thus, before the modernist haiku became an esoteric form of Poundian imagisme, Hartmann and Noguchi constructed it as a democratic form—one that would initiate and record a shared culture between Japan and the U.S. A response to Japanese exclusion and melancholic abjection, their energetic visions of national and international utopias are predicated on their incarnations as Whitmanian gods and their related figurations of gender.

### Pound’s Wet Black Bough

As Lears argues, Anglo-American modernists also suffered from a loss of identity during the industrialization revolution. These modernists, such as Pound, recovered their loss by appropriating Japanese cultural forms such as the haiku and asserting their identities through the objectification of others—such as women and their Japanese American literary contemporaries—in their writing. As I will discuss further, Pound’s

<sup>321</sup> Hartmann, Poem LIX., *My Rubaiyat*, 18.

<sup>322</sup> Hartmann, Poem LX., *My Rubaiyat*, 18.

<sup>323</sup> Hartmann, Poem LXVI., *My Rubaiyat*, 20.

<sup>324</sup> Hartmann’s image here of courting the sun resonates with Whitman’s famous passage in “Song of Myself” where he states, “Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sunrise would kill me,/ If I could not now and always send sunrise out of me” (50).

<sup>325</sup> Hartmann, Poem LVIII., *My Rubaiyat*, 18.

<sup>326</sup> Shirane asserts that travel was part and parcel of the haiku practice and necessary in establishing a common culture:

The cultural implications of *angya*, the journey of a renga or haikai master through the provinces, were complex. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, *angya* means travel as an ascetic practice and as a means of seeking spiritual masters or companions; in the Pure Land Buddhist Ji sect (Jishū) tradition founded by Priest Ippen in the Kamakura period, *angya*—or *yugyō* (spiritual wandering) as it was called—meant a proselytic journey for the purposes of preaching to and enlightening the populace in the countryside. (286)

famous imagiste poem, “In a Station of the Metro” shifts perspectively from “a thing outward and objective”—that is, a composite of white women and children—to “a thing inward and subjective,”<sup>327</sup> or a transcendental image of petals. In this poem, nature (the white petals) becomes synonymous with the assertive, subjective self and their dependence of the white petals on a racialized medium is represented, in part, by the dark backdrop of the “wet, black bough.” Bush points out that Japanese lacquer became identified with Eastern blackness in the west over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: “Even after synthetic lacquers were developed in the twentieth century, the name still stuck: ‘Japan Black’ was the color of all those Model Ts Henry Ford famously joked you could get in any color you liked.”<sup>328</sup> He goes on to document the ways in which shiny veneer of Japanese lacquer also came to synecdochically represent the Japanese in scholarship:

Ernest Fenollosa similarly remarks that critics of Japan ‘declare that the recent progress is a farce, a veneer over barbarism’ (‘Coming Fusion,’ 116), and Lowell too thinks of the Japanese in terms of their *finish*, signifying both their charm and their inability to undergo substantive change: ‘The descendants of this rude forefather [the Tartars] have now taken on a polish of which their own exquisite lacquer gives but a faint reflection. The surface was perfected after the substance was formed. Our word finish, with its double meaning, expresses both the process and the result’ (*Soul of the Far East*, 10).<sup>329</sup>

The shiny “wet, black bough” of Pound’s modernist haiku not only references the Oriental poetic form but also the racialized Japanese that are implicated in japonaiserie.

In his article “Vorticism,” published in 1914, Pound describes how “In a Station of the Metro” was generated from his interest in the Japanese haiku form. He states:

Three years ago in Paris I got out of a ‘metro’ train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child’s face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. And that evening, as I went home along the Rue Raynouard, I was still trying, and I found, suddenly, the expression. I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation...not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. It was just that—a ‘pattern,’ or hardly a pattern, if by ‘pattern’ you mean something with a ‘repeat’ in it. But it was a word, the beginning, for me, of a language in colour... I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work “of second intensity.” Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence:—

‘The apparition of these faces in the crowd :

Petals, on a wet, black bough.’

...In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.<sup>330</sup>

<sup>327</sup> Pound, “Vorticism,” 467.

<sup>328</sup> Bush, 90.

<sup>329</sup> Bush, 91.

<sup>330</sup> Ezra Pound, “Vorticism,” 465, 467.

Although not composed in the conventional seventeen syllables of the traditional hokku or haikai (later called the haiku<sup>331</sup>)—which are the first three verses (5-7-5) of a (5-7-5-7-7) linked sequence called waka or tanka, dating back to the eighth century—Pound’s poem aims to articulate the “pinpointed” “quality of directness” that characterizes the haiku.<sup>332</sup> Critics have argued that “In a Station of the Metro” ultimately fails at delivering the pared-down directness that Pound envisioned;<sup>333</sup> however, the haiku form remained central to Pound’s conception of the image as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” In addition to formal concision, the haiku seemed to offer Pound’s imagisme the template of a singular image in “super-position”<sup>334</sup> —“that is to say it is one idea set on top of another”<sup>335</sup> in cubistic fashion.<sup>336</sup> Moreover, Pound ascribes “the sense of exploration” that is fundamental to imagiste poetry to the Japanese who “have understood the beauty of this sort of knowing” and “evolved the still shorter form of the *hokku*.”<sup>337</sup>

First seeking Noguchi’s approval of his famous “Metro” poem (and perhaps dedicating his effort to him), Pound writes in a letter contained in the collected English letters of Yone Noguchi:

To Yone Noguchi

In a station of the ‘Metro’  
The apparitions of these faces in the crowd:  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound<sup>338</sup>

This early version of the poem incorporates the title into the body of the poem, giving the poem more of a semblance of a haiku structure in which the second line is longer than the

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<sup>331</sup> In *The Haiku Form*, Giroux writes that the Japanese poet Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) developed the term “haiku” from “hokku” in his development of the subject matter of the form during the late nineteenth century (20-21).

<sup>332</sup> Because of its many variants, I will refer to the “hokku” and the “haikai” with the modern-day term “haiku” throughout this chapter.

<sup>333</sup> For example, Giroux writes, “On the other hand, although Ezra Pound was aiming at directness in his famous Metro poem, the work fails as haiku. The poet’s metaphor comparing the faces in the crowd to petals on a black bough does not make the relationship clear enough” (53).

<sup>334</sup> Shirane clarifies, “Haikai did in fact stress the notion of juxtaposition, but it differed significantly from the modernist notion of nonrepresentational collage in that it often required a double reading of the juxtaposed texts, both as paratactic collage and as representational fragments of a larger scene or narrative” (44).

<sup>335</sup> Pound, “Vorticism,” 467.

<sup>336</sup> Here I am thinking of Sadakichi Hartmann’s analysis of cubism as “the combination of several colors which call forth a tone of reflection which in turn becomes the dominating one” from his essay, “The Esthetic Value of Cubism” that is cited in his *Critical Modernist* (41). Ming Xie points to juxtaposition as a major principle by which Pound abides in his ideogrammic and imagistic poems: “The ideogram for Pound represents the juxtaposition of concrete images on the level of the character itself, but he also seems to think that such a principle of ideogrammic juxtaposition or combination can also be applied to other levels of poetic discourse, for example in a whole poem the unity of which may be achieved by juxtaposing two or more clusters of images. In this light Pound’s ‘Metro’ and ‘Fan-Piece’ poems are not so much images in sequence as nodes of relationship or plans in dynamic interplay. They are two images or two levels of perception compounded to produce a meaning or significance larger than the two in isolation” (39).

<sup>337</sup> Pound, “Vorticism,” 466-467.

<sup>338</sup> Yone Noguchi, *Collected English Letters*, 15.

(seemingly symmetric) first and third lines.<sup>339</sup> In this way, Pound solicits from Noguchi “authentic” tidbits of japonaiserie.<sup>340</sup> In contrast, Pound’s attachment to Hartmann is manifest in his own wish to imitate, even become, him: He writes, in a letter to Hartmann dated 17 April 1937, if one hadn’t been one s [*sic*] self it wd. have been worth while being Sadakichi. meaning that life won’t have been a dead loss” and adds “NOT a remark I shd. make about most of the blokes cited in yr/ table.”<sup>341</sup> Pound’s guise of fondness masks his melancholic desire to assimilate and even inhabit Hartmann’s Japaneseness. Pound similarly expresses his adulation and unconscious desire for Hartmann in the *Cantos* as he states, “. . .as for the vagaries of our friend / Mr Hartmann,/ Sadakichi a few more of him,/ were that conceivable, would have enriched/ the life of Manhattan/ or any other town or metropolis. . .”<sup>342</sup> The line, “Sadakichi a few more of him,” explicitly divulges Pound’s view of Hartmann’s reproducibility and commodification as a Japanese object, “were that conceivable.” Pound’s desire to locate his own modern, lost identity in literary forms (which include Japanese writers themselves) and to possess those [foreign] qualities that the white man has abjected<sup>343</sup> is fulfilled in his mastery of “hokku-like” imagisme.

Pound’s depiction of the poetic movement in “In a Station of the Metro” from “a thing outward and objective”—“The apparition of these faces in a crowd”—to “a thing inward and subjective”—“Petals on a wet, black bough”<sup>344</sup>—reveals his objectification of the white women and children at the metro station and, consequently, his own subjectivity as the gazing eye of the image. The syntactic break, or what Pound calls “super-position,” between the perceiving subject and feminized object or object of nature becomes a crucial focal point for tracing melancholic subjectivity in the modernist haiku. The formal and imagistic super-position of the white women and children as petals against a wet, black bough palimpsestically references the amorphous crowd in the metro station as well as the (assimilated yet foreign,) racialized medium of the haiku that accents the white petals. As critics have argued, many of Pound’s “hokku-like” poems take women as their objects that super-pose and emit the envisioned image of the poetic, white male, subject: For example, both “Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord” (O Fan of white silk,/ clear as frost on the grass-blade,/ You also are laid aside)<sup>345</sup> and “Alba” (“As cool as the pale wet leaves/ of lily-of-the-valley/ She lay beside me in the dawn”) move

<sup>339</sup> In the published version in *Personae*, the title is typographically set apart from the rest of the poem, making the body of the poem seem more like a “hokku-like sentence” than an actual haiku.

<sup>340</sup> In *Japan and America*, Noguchi writes, “The time is coming when, as with international politics where the understanding of the East with the West is already an unmistakable fact, the poetries of these two different worlds will approach one another and exchange their cordial greetings. If I am not mistaken, the writers of free verse and the so-called imagists of the West will be ambassadors to us” (100-101).

<sup>341</sup> Ezra Pound, “Ezra Pound Letters,” Rivera Library, Special Collections (Riverside: University of California).

<sup>342</sup> Ezra Pound, Canto LXXX, *Cantos* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1948) 73.

<sup>343</sup> Kim, 14.

<sup>344</sup> Pound, “Vorticism,” 467.

<sup>345</sup> Of this poem, Zhaoming Qian writes, “Pound had experimented with the Japanese form in other poems, but this appears to be more like a genuine *haiku*. Not only has it followed the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern more rigorously, but it has an authentic Far Eastern content. (By contrast, his ‘Metro’ poem has a contemporary French subject, and ‘Alba’ contains a Provençal overtone)” (*Orientalism and Modernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 46). Despite Qian’s distinction between the Far Eastern and Western subject matters, the racializations of the feminized Japanese other and the white male self structure all three poems.

(in an inverse fashion from “In a Station of the Metro”) from the perceiving, universal, male subject to the particular, feminine object.<sup>346</sup> In the Anglo-American modernist haiku, traditional haiku conventions such as the super-position of subject over object<sup>347</sup> and the pared-down directness in verse act as phallic signifiers of the white poetic subject’s masculinity. In recapitulating his earlier argument about Pound’s ethnographic depictions of the Orient in “In a Station of the Metro,” Yunte Huang argues that the poem “contains a long history of dislocation and transformation of cultural meanings across the Pacific.”<sup>348</sup> Beyond “projecting an image of Asia by means of linguistic appropriation and reinvention,”<sup>349</sup> Pound’s “Metro” poem encrypts the racial other—the excluded Japanese Americans—in the assimilated foreignness of its form juxtaposed by its English language composition and white, universalist subject matter.<sup>350</sup>

Although they are both credited with introducing the haiku as well as other Japanese artistic forms to Pound and other modernists, Noguchi and Hartmann are not necessarily *the* encrypted racial others of modernist haikus. That is to say, the racial other that is “uneasily swallowed”<sup>351</sup> or tensely encapsulated by the melancholic, Oriental form is a representational figure rather than a specific individual. However, in the haiku poetry of Noguchi and Hartmann, the poetic subject/object struggles to locate the representational as well as his own individual Japanese American self that has been lost in the Orientalizing form. Despite their working relationships with Pound,<sup>352</sup> their marginality within American modernism is exemplified in the conclusion of the first part of Pound’s 1913 essay “Patria Mia”:

If a man’s work require him to live in exile, let him suffer, or enjoy, his exile gladly. But it would be about as easy for an American to become a

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<sup>346</sup> Ezra Pound, *Personae*, 108-109.

<sup>347</sup> Shirane describes the transformation from objective to subjective and vice versa in the haiku: “...the seasonal word, the requirement of every hokku, often exists simultaneously on a number of axes or in different contexts: as a reference to an external scene, as an implicit metaphor or extension of the poet’s inner state, as a complex literary and cultural sign, and as a greeting to the addressee. The first highly objective and referential; the second tends to be highly subjective; the third is often highly fictional and intertextual, and the fourth is a performative utterance” (49).

<sup>348</sup> Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics* (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) 143.

<sup>349</sup> Huang, *Transpacific Displacement*, 62.

<sup>350</sup> Cheng writes, “When we begin to exhume, as Morrison proposes, the buried body in the heart of the American literary, we see that the nature of the ‘presence’ uncovered is overlaid with political, intellectual, psychological, and ethical significations. The crypt reveals not *an* object, nor a whole subject prior to defilement, but the morphology of ghostliness itself” (24).

<sup>351</sup> Cheng asserts, “The melancholic eats the lost object—feeds on it, as it were...The ‘swallowing does not go down easily. As the libido turns back on the ego, so do the feelings of guilt, rage, and punishment (Freudian melancholia is anything but mild) originally attached to the initial object of loss and disappointment” (8).

<sup>352</sup> In a letter dated, 2 September 11, Pound writes Noguchi of his books of poetry: “I am reading those you sent me but I do not yet know what to say of them except that they have delighted me...Of *your* country I know almost nothing—surely if the east & the west are ever to understand each other that understanding must come slowly & come first through the arts” (Kodama 4, 5). In a letter to Hartmann dated 17 April 1937, Pound writes, “if one hadn’t been one s [*sic*] self it wd. have been worth while being Sadakichi. meaning that life won’t have been a dead loss” and adds “NOT a remark I shd. make about most of the blokes cited in yr/ table” (“Ezra Pound Letters,” Rivera Library, Special Collections, Riverside: University of California).

Chinaman or a Hindoo as for him to acquire an Englishness, or a Frenchness, or a European-ness that is more than half a skin deep.<sup>353</sup> However Pound might have perceived the Orient vis-à-vis the United States, he is clear in his conviction that an Asian can never be an American. Although the racially melancholic subjectivity figured in Pound's poem does not offer a positive remedy for the racialization it evinces, it indeed carves out a space for the representation of Japanese American subjectivity as Yao suggests that Pound's *Cathay* does for Chinese subjectivity.<sup>354</sup>

### Japanese American Imagism

The perspectival movement between the object of nature or feminized object and the self-assertive/self-transcendent subject that exists in Pound's poetry is obfuscated for the racially marked poet whose racial subjectivity collapses easily with his self-conscious objectivity within the imported haiku form. Super-position in Hartmann's and Noguchi's haikus shifts between objects of nature to other objects of nature without moving toward "a thing inward and subjective."<sup>355</sup> For example, in *Tanka and Haikai* (1915), Hartmann writes in Haikai II:

Butterflies a-wing—  
Are you flowers returning  
To your branch in Spring?<sup>356</sup>

The speaker focuses on the "outward" object of butterflies which brings him to look upon the bare branches of late winter or autumn (the seasonal referent is not clear) branches that are missing their petals. The subjective self, however, is not asserted or reflected upon through nature. In *The Three-Cornered World*, Natsumi Sōseki, a contemporary of Hartmann and Noguchi, expressed his desire to "get away from the world and immerse himself in Nature" through his haiku poetry by "curbing [his] emotions" (as opposed to consolidating an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time) to feel only the abjection and self-estrangement appropriate for the Japanese poet to look upon a scene objectively.<sup>357</sup> Sōseki argues that this position contrasts with European poets who "are content to deal merely in such commodities as sympathy, love, justice and freedom, all of which may be found in that transient bazaar which we call life."<sup>358</sup> In this way, Hartmann seems to adhere to more traditional haiku conventions of the melancholic de-emphasis of the self.

Hartmann's Haikai II and Haikai I both make reference to "flowers" and "white petals"—images that resonate with Pound's "Metro" poem so to suggest that these haikus

<sup>353</sup> Ezra Pound, "Patria Mia," *Selected Prose 1909-1965* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1973) 124.

<sup>354</sup> In "Toward a Prehistory of Asian American Verse: Pound, *Cathay*, and the Poetics of Chineseness" *Representations* 99 Summer 2007, critic Steven G. Yao goes as far as to argue that, while his poetry "performs its own set of recognizably 'orientalist' epistemological operations[,]...[Pound] successfully established a new 'poetics' for representing Chinese subjectivity in English" in an age of American fascination with Oriental cultural products and objectification of Asian laborers (135, 140).

<sup>355</sup> Pound, "Vorticism," 467.

<sup>356</sup> Hartmann, *Tanka and Haikai*, 123.

<sup>357</sup> Sōseki, 23, 18.

<sup>358</sup> Sōseki, 19-20. While the Japanese poet's curbing of emotions and avowal of melancholia appears contradictory, it is possible that "one turns one's attention to melancholia in order to avoid falling into a depression"—according to psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva (Flatley, 41).



are meant to respond to the famous imagist haiku. Through this correlation, a racial subjectivity emerges through an expressed desire or longing to be the white male self that is represented in the lost or fleeting “white petals.” In Haikai I, Hartmann expresses his longing for the white petals—which had represented the faces of women and children in Pound’s poem but which have come to signify white male subjects such as Pound himself—and the perceived ease of their existence,

White petals float  
On a winding woodland stream—  
What else is life’s dream!<sup>359</sup>

Unmoored, the white petals here do not depend on the wet, black bough for their subsistence. Such freedom is exclaimed as “life’s dream!” In his early experiments with the haiku form, Noguchi seems to express a similar desire to be the white male self by relating his prostrate position of repose to that of the sleeping flowers:

Where the flowers sleep,  
Thank God ! I shall sleep, to-night.  
Oh, come, butterfly !<sup>360</sup>

Although he does not specify whether the flowers sleep on a “wet, black bough” of privilege, he expresses his euphoric levity—“Oh, come, butterfly”—at the notion of communing with Pound. In contrast to Hartmann’s haiku which moves between contrasting external objects, Noguchi’s perspective in the poem oscillates only between inward, subjective perceptions: The perceiving subject does not attempt to portray the flowers in their natural environment; his perspectival depictions of their anthropomorphic somnolence and subsequent appearance as butterflies seem to take up the whole of the haiku. Noguchi’s fixation on the “thing inward and subjective” continues throughout the six haikus produced in *The Pilgrimage*.

Neither Hartmann nor Noguchi adheres to the traditional conventions of seventeen syllables and referents of season or time and location. Their syllabic variations are continuous with their earlier haiku-like poems written in free verse. Hartmann makes it a point to ridicule the referents of time and season in his Tanka I which begins, “Winter? Spring? Who knows?”<sup>361</sup> Although Hartmann seems to deride seasonal and place referents, such omissions seem to accompany homogeneous perspectival superpositions (subjective-subjective or objective-objective perceptions) and point to a loss of the racialized Japanese American self. For example, in Hartmann’s Haikai III, in which objects of nature are completely elided, the speaker experiences a complete dislocation in time (from past to present, anticipating the future) and place as he addresses a loved one at the end of the poem on whose behalf he speaks at the beginning of the poem:

At new morn we met!  
Two weeks I’ve waited in vain,  
To-night!—Don’t forget.<sup>362</sup>

Although the speaker moves from an inward subjective perspective, a singular image—even of the self—fails to emerge due, in part, to the confusing loss of time and place in the haiku.

<sup>359</sup> Hartmann, *Tanka and Haikai*, 122.

<sup>360</sup> Noguchi, *The Pilgrimage*, 137.

<sup>361</sup> Hartmann, *Tanka and Haikai*, 112.

<sup>362</sup> Hartmann, *Tanka and Haikai*, 124.

Hartmann and Noguchi express anticipations of death through subjective or objective meditations on the images of dead leaves. In *Haikai IV*, now through a dejected, perspectival fixation on external objects, Hartmann remarks on the abundance of dead maple leaves on the ground,

Oh, red maple leaves  
There seem more of you these eves  
Than ever grew on trees.<sup>363</sup>

Their deathly state, however, is not explicit until the super-posing, final line that clarifies that the red maple leaves are no longer on the trees. The relished and vibrant “red” of the maple leaves rather than brown or dried suggests Hartmann’s morbid desire for their condition. Noguchi repeats this image of desire in the juxtaposition between the perceived leaves as spirits and his own mortal separation of body and spirit in *Hokku II*:

Fallen leaves ! Nay, spirits?  
Shall I go downward with thee  
‘Long a stream of Fate?’<sup>364</sup>

Noguchi anticipates that rather than rising up, his spirit will “go downward” like the leaves. The downward motion of the spirit after death suggests death, as it is portrayed in *Seen and Unseen*, is a negative self-transcendence which, rather than joining with nature and the universe, joins the racial self that had been lost.

Racial subjectivity in death also emerges through its apparitional return. In *Hokku 17*, Noguchi asserts that fallen leaves should always be an ominous reminder of his spectrality:

Is it a fallen leaf?  
That’s my soul sailing on  
The silence of Life.<sup>365</sup>

The presence of death in life, or the racial object in the subject, carries with it a sense of agential revenge that is wreaked upon the dominant racial subject—a revenge that is nevertheless curtailed by his own apparitional immateriality.<sup>366</sup>

### **Conclusion: Haiku in the Age of Japanese Exclusion**

My study of the literary and biographical dialogues between Whitman, Hartmann, Noguchi and Pound delineates the aesthetic and political forms of early Japanese American literature. During a period in which Japanese laborers were excluded from the United States, Japanese American writers were able to secure a place for themselves within elite modernist literary circles. The ways in which the formal components of their haiku poetry respond to Japanese exclusion are illuminated when situated in relation to Pound’s haiku forms, particularly in “In a Station of the Metro” (1911). As one of a multiplicity of interpretations, my reading of racialization in Noguchi’s and Hartmann’s haiku poetry broadly attempts to recuperate them in the genealogy of politicized Asian

<sup>363</sup> Hartmann, *Tanka and Haikai*, 125.

<sup>364</sup> Noguchi, *Pilgrimage*, 138.

<sup>365</sup> Noguchi, *Japanese Hokkus*, 44.

<sup>366</sup> Cheng writes that “the melancholic would have to make sure that the ‘object’ never returns, for such a return would surely jeopardize the cannibalistic project that, one might note, is a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce” (9).

American poetry and more specifically situates them as ideological mediators between Whitman and Pound.

By design, the signification of the haiku is capacious. And yet, its rise to popularity in the U.S. literary culture during the rise of industrialization and anti-Asian agitation suggests that, at a meta-level, Japanese American and Anglo-American modernist haikus functioned to recover identities that were lost, to varying degrees, during this period. Reading the modernist English haiku as a form of racial melancholia, though potentially limiting, offers its Japanese American writers a reflexively “foreign” apparatus of interpellative subjectivity as they respond to their racialization as foreign objects and their desire to become the white male ideal. In other words, rereading modernist Orientalism as racial melancholia traces the related affects of abjection and energetic exuberance in Asian American modernism in a dialectical manner that transcends melancholia and envisions a utopia. During the period of anti-Japanese sentiment and Japanese exclusion, the haiku created a tangible literary and emotional space, however narrow, in which the Japanese American poet could imagine himself *as* the white male ideal who had access to international, cosmopolitan circles and could champion a utopian common culture (which includes Japanese Americans) through a dialectical posture of self-assertion and self-transcendence. That is to say that the modernist haiku mapped a way in which Noguchi and Hartmann could become Whitmanian gods in tone. The manic, “little postage stamp of native soil” of professional and social belonging—a phrase which William Faulkner used to describe his fantasy world of Yoknapatawpha—which the haiku offers Noguchi and Hartmann, just as soon turns into an interstitial, not completely empty, space of abjection. Whether that native soil is American or more elusively cosmopolitan is perhaps still subject to debate. If, according to critic Daniel Kim, “the body of the Asian man has tended to figure as a kind of absence,” it is the form, or orifice, of the modernist haiku that offers him presence.<sup>367</sup> I conclude here with another haiku from Noguchi’s *Japanese Hokkus* which, despite the pathos and vulnerability it conveys, nevertheless secures an ambivalent fraternity between the “spider-thread” haiku and its Japanese American “master”:

Like a cobweb hung upon the tree,  
A prey to wind and sunlight!  
Who will say that we are safe and strong?<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Kim, 1. Kim goes on to cite Richard Fung’s argument that “narratives [that] always privilege the penis while assigning the Asian the role of the bottom; Asian and anus are conflated.”

<sup>368</sup> Noguchi, Hokku “61,” 87.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Renewing America in Dhan Gopal Mukerji's *Caste and Outcast* and Younghill Kang's *East Goes West*

#### Introduction: Critical Exile and Cosmopolitan Utopia

Dhan Gopal Mukerji and Younghill Kang, like Hartmann and Noguchi, have been largely neglected in the canon of Asian American literature. After having been out of print for several decades, Mukerji's *Caste and Outcast* (1923) was edited and reprinted in 2002 by Gordon H. Chang, Purnima Mankekar, and Akhil Gupta. Likewise, the printing of Kang's *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee* (1937) has been repeatedly halted and resumed over the past ten years. In contrast to Hartmann and Noguchi, who are briefly mentioned in David Hsin-Fu Wand's cultural nationalist anthology *Asian American Heritage* (1974), Mukerji and Kang were altogether overlooked in the cultural nationalist anthologies of the 1970s. Since then, there have been a few published critical responses to these two works but established bodies of criticism on them have yet to be realized. The relative lack of criticism on Mukerji's and Kang's texts perhaps stems from an inability to place them either as Asian American or modernist writers. In an attempt to give shape to our understandings of both writers as literary modernists who were critiquing Asian exclusion, this chapter will explore the formal cognitive mappings, the shared views of Buddhistic spiritualism and the related allusions to T. S. Eliot's poetry in their novels. I argue that, during a period in which Asians were "ineligible to citizenship and thus "impossible subjects,"<sup>369</sup> Mukerji and Kang turn to Buddhistic idioms and spatial narrative development—rather than temporal character development—as modes of making Asian American exclusion visible. Together, the exposure of their racializations and their constructions of spatial maps imaginatively transform multiracial and gendered exclusion into universal spaces of cosmopolitan belonging.

The historical placelessness and invisibility of these authors in the Asian American literary canon ironically mirror the very themes of exile and invisibility explored in their novels. *Caste and Outcast* and *East Goes West* both feature protagonists who leave nations of origin that are colonized by Great Britain and Japan, respectively, and attempt to find a democratic refuge in the United States. Upon their arrival, however, both protagonists Dhan<sup>370</sup> and Chungpa Han confront instantiations of racism, sexism, and classism that belie their expectations of American democracy. As Gordon H. Chang points out, *Caste and Outcast* was published in 1923—the same year in which “the Supreme Court ruled that Asian Indians were racially prohibited from obtaining American citizenship because they were not ‘white persons,’ as required by law.”<sup>371</sup> Not among the 3,453 Asian Indians denied entry between 1908 and 1920,<sup>372</sup> Dhan expresses his awareness of Asian Indian exclusion and discrimination when he arrives to the U.S.:

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<sup>369</sup> See Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>370</sup> From here, I will distinguish the semi-autobiographical protagonist of *Caste and Outcast* as Dhan from the author Mukerji.

<sup>371</sup> Gordon H. Chang, “The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji,” Introduction, *Caste and Outcast* by Dhan Gopal Mukerji, 1923 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 7.

<sup>372</sup> Takaki, 297.

America at last! The seventeen days of Asiatic steerage seemed like the experience of another man the very moment the immigration authorities gave me permission to enter the United States. The reverence that I felt for this country was so great that nothing short of falling on my knees and kissing its soil would have sufficed to express my feelings. But Americans are strange people! No sooner did they see that I had such feelings for their country than they began to knock it out of me in a very unceremonious fashion.<sup>373</sup>

As Dhan seems to willingly place himself in a servile (kneeling) position when he lands, his reverence for the U.S. is figuratively knocked out of him: he is forced to work menial jobs despite his caliber of education and he faces the racism of his socialist comrades.<sup>374</sup> Writing after the National Origins Act of 1924 halted all Asian immigration, Kang similarly demonstrates his consciousness as an “alien ineligible to citizenship” through a conversation between Chungpa Han and a senator whom he meets. In response to Senator Kirby’s insistence that Han declare himself an American, he states, “But an Oriental has a hard time in America. He is not welcomed much.”<sup>375</sup> When pressed further to explain why he cannot be an American, he tells Kirby, “But legally I am denied.”<sup>376</sup> Although Dhan finds himself to be an “outcast” in the United States just as Han proclaims himself and the other Koreans around him to be “exiles,”<sup>377</sup> neither of them are content to remain in such a state of diasporic placelessness. Despite his experiences with racism, Han continually endeavors to find “roots for an exile’s soul”<sup>378</sup> in the United States. Over the course of the novel, Han attempts to shed his exile status by becoming a cosmopolitan New Yorker—“an Oriental yankee.” The emphasis on a universal cosmopolitanism culminates in Han’s concluding dream of an international utopia that includes Koreans and Americans. The utopian vision is deferred by a dystopic instantiation of racial brutality. Even though his celebratory anticipations of American democracy are unceremoniously knocked out of him, Dhan continues to herald a democratic America that has not yet been realized. After a series of misadventures, Dhan compares the racial inequality in the United States to the caste system in India: “America lynches Negroes. India illtreats her untouchables.”<sup>379</sup> And yet, he goes on to differentiate between the two nations, “India has caste. America aims at equality. Thus runs the resemblances and differences between the two countries.”<sup>380</sup> Rather than excluding India, his vision of utopia rests on an unrealized cultural synthesis of India and the U.S.: “The differences are so extreme that the extremes must meet. It is this madness that has drawn me to them both.”<sup>381</sup> Each protagonist’s focus on an anticipated utopia of universal inclusion suggests their prevailing interests in renewing genuine American universalism rather than

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<sup>373</sup> Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *Caste and Outcast*, 1923 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 141.

<sup>374</sup> A comrade named Gordon tells the group of socialists that “You may convince an Easterner like Mukerji. After all he’s a damn fool. But I want logic” (Mukerji 159).

<sup>375</sup> Younghill Kang, *East Goes West, The Making of an Oriental Yankee* (New York: Kaya Production, 1997) 352.

<sup>376</sup> Kang, 353.

<sup>377</sup> Among Koreans in the United States, Han states, “Koreans thought of themselves as exiles, not as immigrants” (69).

<sup>378</sup> Kang, 5.

<sup>379</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>380</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>381</sup> Mukerji, 223.

assimilation to the status quo. This chapter argues that the formal emphasis on nonlinear, spatial mapping over the protagonists' temporal and emotional developments in both novels articulates visions of cosmopolitan utopias instead of reproducing liberal notions of color-blind assimilation.

In *Assimilating Asians*, critic Patricia Chu argues that Asian Americans create alternative versions of the bildungsroman—the literary site of national belonging—in which they deconstruct American liberal universalism and claim their ethnic Americanness.<sup>382</sup> Chu's transhistorical claim is nevertheless challenged by the lack of character development in *Caste and Outcast* and *East Goes West*. Although seemingly about the lives of their immigrant protagonists, neither of these novels focuses on the development or education of their protagonists nor carves out a specifically ethnic Asian American space for them. Instead, they each document their protagonist's peripatetic wanderings throughout the U.S. west coast and east coast, respectively, and represent marginalized others such as ethnic Indians, white anarchists, white women, African Americans, ethnic Koreans, ethnic Chinese, as well as an interracial working class. The interiority of each protagonist appears abbreviated throughout the narrative. The protagonists' lack of interior development telegraphs the problem of Asian subjecthood during Asian exclusion. Historian Mae Ngai writes,

But restriction meant much more than fewer people entering the country; it also invariably generated illegal immigration and introduced that problem into the internal spaces of the nation. Immigration restriction produced the illegal alien as a *new legal and political subject*, whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility—a subject barred from citizenship and without rights. Moreover, the need of state authorities to identify and distinguish between citizens, lawfully resident immigrants, and illegal aliens posed enforcement, political, and constitutional problems for the modern state. The illegal alien is thus an 'impossible subject,' a person who cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved.<sup>383</sup>

Mukerji and Kang were examples of such “impossible subjects” who, despite their repeated attempts, were never able to become U.S. citizens. As I will demonstrate in the pages to follow, the absence of interior development in the semi-autobiographical protagonists of both novels reflect the problem of subjectivity for illegal aliens in the United States. In contrast to Chu's argument, the emphasis on mapping social and literary communities in the novels designates cosmopolitan spaces of belonging for the protagonists that depends upon the reconstruction, rather than the deconstruction, of American universalism.

The authors' faith in American universalism despite their rejection from citizenship is played out in their relationships with contemporary American modernists. In a letter to his friend Witter Bynner in which Mukerji thanks him for the criticism of his work, Mukerji asks another favor of him:

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<sup>382</sup> Patricia Chu, *Assimilating Asians* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 3, 4. Chu writes, “In contesting, subverting, and complicating the predominant models for assimilation (the ethnicity paradigms), Asian American texts do two complementary kinds of ideological work: they claim Americanness for Asian American subjects, and they construct accounts of Asian ethnicity that complicate, even as they support, the primary claim of Americanness by representing Asian Americans as grounded in highly specific ethnic histories in America” (4).

<sup>383</sup> Ngai, 4-5.

...Can you get me out of a hole, it is a terrible hole? [sic]

I find out that I am not allowed to become an American citizen in spite of the first paper that I have and the present moment when my second papers are due. Yet they are drafting me into an American army. I claimed exemption on the ground that since I can't become an American citizen my first paper is well null and void [sic] consequently I should be exempted.<sup>384</sup>

Although it doesn't appear from his biographies that he was successfully drafted into the American army, Mukerji's letter instantiates Ngai's argument about the double-bind of socio-economic inclusion and legal exclusion experienced by Asians. Like Mukerji, whose literary circles also overlapped with T. S. Eliot, Kang was acquainted with many famous modernist writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe—who also lectured at New York University—all of whom shared the same publisher, Scribner's Sons. Despite his (unsuccessful) efforts to become a naturalized citizen during the period of Asian exclusion, Kang spoke out against the U.S. army occupation in Korea.<sup>385</sup> In a letter to his Scribner's Sons editor Maxwell Perkins dated 1 January 1947, he writes, "The only excuse for the continued presence of Americans in Korea is to help prepare the Korean people for their promised independence. The steps in accomplishing this mission are clear: we are getting nowhere."<sup>386</sup> Rejected from attaining American citizenship and skeptical of U.S. neocolonial forays into Asia, Kang and Mukerji found kinship in their cosmopolitan modernist circles. Their own cosmopolitan belonging is doubly reflected in their visions of a utopia of universal inclusion, which they articulate through formal experimentations with nonlinear cognitive maps.

Disrupting the linear "development of a protagonist's mind and character... which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world"<sup>387</sup> that defines a traditional bildungsroman, Mukerji and Kang construct cognitive maps in which their protagonists can identify themselves in relation to multiple class, racial, and gendered structures. Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson devises cognitive mapping as a counter-globalization strategy in which a subject, that is decentered by global capitalism, can recenter itself in relation to the ever-elusive totality of class structures and resist capitalist reification by forming a global class consciousness. Finding themselves in a time and place in which Buddhism has already been an exploited and imported commodity by modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot, Mukerji and Kang rearticulate Eliot's Buddhist motifs for the different purposes of critiquing the inequities of American global capitalism and demanding the fulfillment of its promises of universal democracy. That is to say, like Hartmann and Noguchi and their self-conscious pioneering and subsequent rearticulations of the Anglicized haiku form, Mukerji and Kang—as unassimilable immigrants from eastern countries—explore Buddhist spiritualism as a self-conscious "reappropriation" of a commodified philosophy. Rather than making an argument about authenticity or authentic eastern subjectivity, I am using the term "reappropriation" to

<sup>384</sup> Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Letter to Witter Bynner, 19 May 1919. Witter Bynner Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>385</sup> Walter K. Lew, "Before The Grass. Roof Younghill Kang's University Days," *Korean Culture* 19: 1 (Spring 1998): 22.

<sup>386</sup> Younghill Kang, Letter to Maxwell Perkins, 1 January 1947. Scribner's Sons Archives, 1930-1962, Firestone Library, Princeton University, New Jersey.

<sup>387</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999) 193.

describe the self-conscious process in which marginalized Asians self-consciously rearticulate dominant fascinations with the Orient in order to critique the failures and demand the fulfillment of American universalism in both domestic and global spheres. Mukerji's and Kang's thematic emphases on Buddhism evidence the global commodification of the East but also envision a metaphysical renewal of American universalism. In doing so, they positively represent the transformative possibilities that emerge from global capitalism.

However problematic and politically asymmetrical to other projects of counter-globalization, their reappropriations of Eliot's Buddhistic spiritualism are wielded to portray the U.S. as a democratic waste land that has yet to make good on its universalist promises. In "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism," theorist Slavoj Žižek argues that the western importation of Buddhism during the more recent era of global technology creates an increasing inability to engage in cognitive mapping. Buddhism ironically "offers a way out of this predicament [of subjective loss] that definitely works better than the desperate escape into old traditions. Instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of techno-logical progress and social changes, one should rather renounce the very endeavor to retain control over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination."<sup>388</sup> Here, Žižek is poking fun at those who fetishize Eastern philosophies and wares as a ways of coping with the increasing fragmentation of class structures in global capitalism. However, this chapter endeavors to understand Buddhism as a counter-globalizing practice in the ways in which it is used to thematically reconstruct alternative universalities. Moreover, strategies of employing Buddhistic thought as counter-globalization in Mukerji's and Kang's work are not necessarily anachronistic. Although historians and political scientists seem to agree that the U.S. did not emerge as the primary leader in global capitalism until after World War II,<sup>389</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson indicate that "[e]ven earlier, in the decades prior to World War I, the planet was becoming the frame of reference for the thoughts actions and experiences of a rapidly growing percentage of the world's population."<sup>390</sup> Political scientist David A. Lake characterizes the period of developing global capitalism between 1887 and 1939 as that of an ongoing struggle between Pax Britannica and Pax Americana in which the U.S. unhinges British hegemony in the international economy, creating a bilateral system of competing nation-states over the world economy.<sup>391</sup> However measured the U.S. influence was in the global economy, it nevertheless emerged as a political power in the global arena after the Spanish-American War of 1898.<sup>392</sup> Critic Nikhil Singh similarly argues that from the moment of "the formal

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<sup>388</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism," *Cabinet Magazine* 2 2001 Feb 2010 <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php> .

<sup>389</sup> In *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson write, "In this sense, the end of the war in 1945 represented a global turning point... The experience of worldwide economic crisis and world war meant that this new agenda would be one of global modernization, spearheaded by the United States" (111).

<sup>390</sup> Osterhammel and Petersson, 82.

<sup>391</sup> David A. Lake, *Power, Protection, and Free Trade: International Sources of U.S. Commercial Strategy, 1887-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 61-62.

<sup>392</sup> George C. Herring writes, "The War of 1898 did not produce a realignment in the global balance of power, but did mark the onset of a new era in world politics... Indeed, although it was by no means at the time, the War of 1898 also marked the beginning of what would come to be called the American century" (336).



entry of the United States into the world imperialist competition in the Spanish-American war of 1898...[a]t least until the mid-twentieth century, American national subjectivity was organized by the competing universalisms of liberal-democracy supplemented by a range of racial dividing practices that constituted ‘the people’ and imagined the world in specific racial-cultural terms.”<sup>393</sup> It is against liberal universal notions of colorblind assimilation that Mukerji and Kang direct their counter-globalizing strategies of nonlinear mapping based on Buddhistic structures of death and rebirth. Through this mapping, they herald the death and rebirth of American universalism that is figured in visions of an internationally inclusive utopia.

Despite their “reappropriation” of a cultural philosophy, Mukerji and Kang are in no way exempt from the “fetishistic logic”<sup>394</sup> of western Buddhism that Žižek critiques. However, through their self-conscious rearticulations of imported cultural forms during a period in which Asians were considered “aliens ineligible to citizenship” in the U.S., they demonstrate that such cultural fetishism can be inflected to critique the very source of the fetish—which is global capitalism. The self-conscious inflection of western Buddhism is the strategy of their cognitive maps. In the same vein, American universalism—of which global capitalism is a corollary rather than a synonym—and its geographical analogue, the United States, are depicted as a waste land of failed universal democracy that nevertheless contains the possibility for renewal in both Mukerji’s and Kang’s texts. Their depictions of the U.S. as both the empirical problem and the deferred solution of a capitalist democracy exemplify the foundations of American exceptionalism but also emphasize the dialectical emergence of American democratic universalism from the ideology of exceptionalism.

### **Mapping India, Mapping America**

Although Mukerji denied being a Red, “claiming he was a Brahmin interested only in spiritual matters[,]”<sup>395</sup> his novel abounds in critiques of capitalism and class consciousness. Chang writes that “he rejected Bolshevism vehemently and was even uncomfortable with the socialist ideas of his friend Nehru... Though Mukerji condemned colonialism, race prejudice, and the arrogance of the West toward India, he never was attracted to formal political ideologies.”<sup>396</sup> Nevertheless, his protagonist expresses his desire to socialistically free the world of “the possessing and dispossessed classes” or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Mukerji was also well aware of the formation of the

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<sup>393</sup> Nikhil Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) 29

<sup>394</sup> Žižek writes, “‘Western Buddhism’ is such a fetish. It enables you to fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it; that you are well aware of how worthless this spectacle is; and that what really matters to you is the peace of the inner Self to which you know you can always with-draw.”

<sup>395</sup> Chang, 12. Chang writes, “The press carried lurid articles about ‘Hindu-German’ conspiracies centered in San Francisco and New York and possibly linked to anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman or communists such as Leon Trotsky. Mukerji himself came under suspicion. He knew the British were closely watching his family’s activities in India and warned American friends visiting India to stay away from his relatives. Rumors swirled about that he was also a Red. He adamantly rejected such characterizations, claiming he was a Brahmin interested only in spiritual matters... Publicly, Mukerji frequently expressed anti-Bolshevik sentiments, which helped to establish his true identity and shed the Red tag” (12, 13).

<sup>396</sup> Chang, 39.

Indian socialist groups that were gaining prominence in the United States by the 1920s.<sup>397</sup> Despite the violent exclusion of Asian Indians by the AFL,<sup>398</sup> the radical, anti-colonial Gadhar Party gained prominence in 1923 when they began to receive support from the Soviets. His celebration of America, in spite of Asian exclusion and its support of British colonialism,<sup>399</sup> evinces his firm aspiration that the U.S. carries the exceptional potential to become a transcendent space of cultural syncretism and spirituality. Through his vagrant mapping of the U.S. in which he familiarizes himself with universal struggles of poverty and spiritual impoverishment, he transitions from a Marxist to a Buddhist worldview.

After his reverence for America is “unceremonious[ly]” “knocked out” of him by racist white America, Dhan meets a socialist named Leo who, in turn, introduces him to a group of socialists and anarchists. He temporarily finds a sense of belonging among these activists. While preoccupied with his studies at the University of California, Berkeley, Dhan volunteers to carry around a soapbox for his friends’ campaign against capitalism. When Leo asks him to do so, he states, “. . . I will gladly contribute that much. We must destroy the capitalist system. My carrying the box is another stroke of the pick at the foundation of capitalism.”<sup>400</sup> Despite his interest in Kropotkin’s anarchism and his aid to his friends, the socialists he meets continually stereotype him as an Oriental. His socialist friend Gordon calls him an Easterner who “is a damn fool” without “logic.”<sup>401</sup> Jerry, the seeming leader of the socialist-anarchist group, parts ways with Dhan stating, “You see, Dhan, . . . you come from another civilization, and you are not tough enough to stand this bumming. You must be brought up in shelter. This hard life of freedom is hell. Hungry, without a coat on one’s back, the men yet love their life of freedom. Well, goodbye, go to your factory. Let’s see each other once in while.”<sup>402</sup> In defining freedom as “hell,” Jerry’s statements complement Dhan’s musings during his pilgrimage in India that the west believes in linear time and therefore good and evil, reminding him of the limitations of western materialism.

Through his experiences with socialist-anarchists, Dhan understands that western Marxism offers the possibility for international, rather than narrower national revolutions. And yet, in the ways that Marxism seems privilege Western materialism, it falls short of a paradigm that is useful for his desire to include India in an imagined democratic utopia. When he returns to San Francisco from his factory work in Cannington, Dhan experiences yet another rebirth—that is, of his passion for India and Indian spiritual philosophy: “My zest for anarchism was coming to an end. I began to see that there was nothing to do but to find a new philosophy, something that had little concern with the material future of mankind. It was during this period that I began to rediscover India.”<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Chang, 8.

<sup>398</sup> Takaki, 296.

<sup>399</sup> In *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), Joan Jensen writes, “The growing discontent of Indians made the British more anxious than ever to court American diplomats favorable to colonialism” and that the British in India were especially relieved when Taft defeated William Jennings Bryan (who had voiced anti-imperialist convictions) in the presidential elections in 1908 (96). Moreover

<sup>400</sup> Mukerji, 160.

<sup>401</sup> Mukerji, 159.

<sup>402</sup> Mukerji, 189.

<sup>403</sup> Mukerji, 193.

Even as he turns his attention toward India, he never completely abandons his interest in western dialectical materialism. For, he states, “By now I had drunk the dregs of the Western civilization. I found it had its vulgarity, its bitter indifference, its colossal frauds. It has made just as many mistakes as India has in her time. And yet there was something constructive in both of these civilizations.”<sup>404</sup>

As his interest in India revives, Dhan meets other Indian students whose nationalist aim is to “free India.” With his remaining Marxist convictions, he critiques the fantasy of anticolonial nationalism:

They wanted to free India. As if a politically free India meant an India traditionally and uniquely herself! Bitter quarrels ensued between myself and many of these Indians. These people thought that if India had factories and a government as well as an army and navy of her own, she would be one of the civilized countries of the earth.<sup>405</sup>

Instead of framing India as a stereotypical damsel in distress that is crying out for the help of nationalist radicals, Dhan argues with an Indian nationalist, stating, “...your quarrel is not with the British nation, but with Western capitalism.”<sup>406</sup> Here, he deems western capitalism, regardless of whether it is espoused by an imperialist nation such as Britain or a colonized country such as India, as “uncivilized.” He goes on to ask his Indian nationalist acquaintance named Nanda why “he wanted to overcome imperialism by a nationalism just as crude and as greedy”<sup>407</sup>:

“But why,” I asked him, “don’t we think in terms of two classes, the possessing class and the dispossessed classes, throughout the world? These two marching against each other are to my mind the forces of the conflict. I cannot make out much difference between imperialism and nationalism.”<sup>408</sup>

Despite his Marxist lexicon, alluding to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—“the possessing class and the dispossessed class, throughout the world”—he denies being a socialist when Nanda accuses him of being one. He retorts, “I am not a Socialist...I hate Socialism. Socialists only want to create a new authority in the place of an old one. What I want is to create a sense of freedom in people’s souls. Then all will be well.”<sup>409</sup>

Drawing upon a story in which Buddha purifies a harlot’s house just by walking into it, Dhan advocates changing and “overcoming” the self: “By changing ourselves we automatically change the world.”<sup>410</sup> Dhan appears to defend the opposing Buddhist concept of *anātman* or, no-self. His adherence to this concept seems to illuminate the pattern of characterological death and rebirth and an altogether absent sense of the (protagonist’s) self in the text. In this way, Dhan employs a Buddhist idiom as a mode of accounting for Asian American absence of subjectivity during the period of exclusion. His interlocutor, Nanda, however is not convinced that the West can accept the spirituality of the East “until by force we free our country (India) from any Western domination.”<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Mukerji, 193.

<sup>405</sup> Mukerji, 193-4.

<sup>406</sup> Mukerji, 195.

<sup>407</sup> Mukerji, 195.

<sup>408</sup> Mukerji, 195.

<sup>409</sup> Mukerji, 195.

<sup>410</sup> Mukerji, 196.

<sup>411</sup> Mukerji, 197.

In his vagrant mappings of the San Francisco Bay Area, Dhan encounters his socialist friends again. At this moment, they appear to have changed their attitudes toward him and the significance of Indian spirituality. His friend Frank states, He (the Indian) must not try to overcome Western materialism with a rival materialism of his own. The Indian who is an oriental must give an answer like Christ's—'I am so busy with my spiritual business that I have no time to pay attention to you who are demanding something material.'...If I were to choose between the conquered or the conqueror I would prefer to be the conquered. At least your soul is saved. Give your spirituality to the British as Christ gave his to the Romans. And it is because you are conquered that you are spiritually sound. If you were not conquered you would not be spiritual.<sup>412</sup>

Here, Frank delineates a dialectic of sorts between the conquered race and the race of the conquerors from which emerges the victorious spirituality of the conquered and the impoverished "prostitution"<sup>413</sup> of the conquerors. The structure of the dialectic coincides with the spiritual themes of death and rebirth that run throughout the novel.

In "Marxism in a Buddhist Perspective," V. A. Gunasekara argues for a theoretical parallel between the Marxist dialectic and Buddhist rebirth:

The dialectic has been defined as "the pattern or mechanism of development through inner conflict". A dialectical viewpoint considers motion and movement, and therefore change and impermanence, as central. One of Marx's persistent endeavours was to discover the "laws of motion" of phenomena. Admittedly he applied this only to history and social phenomena. Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature* attempted to extend its area of applicability further. Here we have a similarity with *anicca*. However to Marx, as to Hegel, the dialectic was a progressive movement "upwards", always toward some form of perfection. In *anicca* the emphasis is on the dissolution of phenomena, and there is no necessary implication of movement in any specific direction. Marx's presumption of an eventual ideal state (the inexorable triumph of communism) is in fact [*sic*] a leftover from his Christian past. The Buddhist law of *anicca* assumes that no such "promised land" could be found within conditioned existence.<sup>414</sup>

That is to say, in Marxist philosophy, the moment of dialectical synthesis is a simultaneous death and rebirth of another social stage and mode of production. In *Buddhism and Marxism: A Study in Humanism*, critic N. V. Banerjee similarly draws parallels of humanistic striving between the Marxist conception of liberating the proletariat through communism and the Buddhist goal of *Bodhisattvahood* or a spiritual sublimation of "individual self-culture into universal liberation of mankind."<sup>415</sup> Inspired by his socialist friends' acceptance of Eastern spirituality, Dhan finishes his semester at school and works in asparagus fields where he meets Christian and Muslims who tell each other that their God would punish the other. His facetious translation of the "Salvation Army" to his fellow Hindu worker as the "Militarism of Nirvana" elicits a

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<sup>412</sup> Mukerji, 199.

<sup>413</sup> Mukerji, 198.

<sup>414</sup> V. A. Gunasekara, "Marxism in a Buddhist Perspective," *Vimamsâ* July 1984 Feb. 2010 <http://uqconnect.net/slsoc/bsq/marxbud.htm>

<sup>415</sup> N. V. Banerjee, *Buddhism and Marxism: A Study in Humanism* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1978) 15.

great deal of suspicion from them toward the Christians.<sup>416</sup> He concludes his time as a migrant field worker by witnessing the dishonesty and hypocrisy of Muslim bookkeepers, implying that Hinduism and Buddhism exceed the latter two religions in humility and virtue.<sup>417</sup>

Dhan's advocacy of a Buddhistic worldview grants him visibility yet ironically stereotypes him in the various communities that he visits. In the last chapter (before the epilogue) entitled, "Spiritualism," he returns from the fields and is invited to board at the home of a woman who hosts spiritualist séances. He quickly realizes that he is invited to board to serve as a tokenized Buddhist yogi who "can tell the past, present, and future...[and who can] talk to the spirits...tell people's fortunes."<sup>418</sup> Revealing himself not to be said yogi, he resiliently concludes,

The experience served to show me that people in the twentieth century are just as credulous as they were in the time of Christ. If the Son of God came to earth today, they would still be asking for miracles and charms. The majority of mankind is spiritually incapable of understanding the largest majesty of God. They want tricks, magic and miracles. Only a few grasp the deep inertia of the sublime, which the mind cannot fathom and words cannot measure.<sup>419</sup>

Comparing them to early Christians, Dhan denounces the ignorance of "people in the twentieth century" and their faddish approach to the commodified "charm" of Buddhism.

Although he recognizes that words cannot measure "the sublime" or Nirvana, he nevertheless attempts to use words to advocate this concept. He also seems to realize the circularity, or the death and rebirth, of the human condition that asks "for miracle and charms" as it did "in the time of Christ." Disappointed in the shallow attempt of Americans to engage with Eastern, specifically Indian, spiritualism, Dhan temporarily shifts his focus back to socialism. When he returns to school, he organizes a club for the study of socialism. He then leaps to the concluding moment of the chapter in which he meets the woman who initially denies that she is a prostitute and then turns out to be one nevertheless. Faced yet again with one of the problematic symptoms of capitalism in which women are forced to sell their bodies, Dhan "turned [his] face toward the East and thought of India."<sup>420</sup> In the last scene of the novel before the epilogue, he sadly recalls a scene in which he sees a woman with whom he had become acquainted resort to prostitution in order to make a living. Immediately following this scene, Dhan concludes, "This was America—neither worse nor better than India. All life was a wretched joke and every joke was a sordid travesty. I could bear it no longer. I turned my face toward the East and thought of India."<sup>421</sup> He compares America with a prostitution of sorts—insofar as it has compromised its potential as a mode of survival. His statements resonate with the concluding scene of "The Waste Land" in which the Fisher King "s[its] upon the

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<sup>416</sup> Mukerji, 205.

<sup>417</sup> Mukerji, 210. Despite the historic rivalry between practitioners of Hinduism and Buddhism and the philosophically contradictions of the two religions (Banerjee, 36), Mukerji seems to curiously speak of the two philosophies as if in one breath, thus resulting in a seeming conflation of the two religions throughout the novel.

<sup>418</sup> Mukerji, 216.

<sup>419</sup> Mukerji, 217.

<sup>420</sup> Mukerji, 220.

<sup>421</sup> Mukerji, 220.

shore/ Fishing, with the arid plain behind me”<sup>422</sup>—that is, London and the West—and is unable to “set [his] lands in order” due to destruction caused by the war. He then turns to the East, India specifically, and recites from the Upanishads: “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata/ Shantih shantih shantih” (Give. Sympathize. Control/ The Peace which passeth understanding.). An acquaintance of T. S. Eliot,<sup>423</sup> Mukerji alludes to the concluding scene of “The Waste Land” as an attempt to harness peace for his protagonist amidst the “wretched joke” and “sordid travesty” of both America and India. Here, he compares war-torn London to the social unrest in both countries. Although America is “neither worse nor better than India,” Dhan turns to the *thought* or idea of India—that is the virtues of grace, sympathy, discipline, and peace that the culture seems to value—for comfort. That is, he once again turns to Eastern spirituality as the solution for the evils of capitalism. Although he seems to favor Eastern spirituality over Western materialism as a productive avenue toward a universal liberation, he designates America as the privileged space of renewal. To a certain extent, Dhan’s waste land seems to invert Eliot’s: Whereas Eliot portrays the West (London) as a waste land ravaged by World War I and seeks renewal from the East, Dhan figures both India and the U.S. as waste lands that are respectively overtaken by British colonialism and social inequities. However, he looks to the U.S. as an internationally transformative space that could encapsulate a cultural synthesis of India and America.

His vacillation between Eastern spirituality and Western socialism during his travels throughout the Bay Area exemplifies his cognitive mapping. However, in addition to a dialectic between “phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience[,]”<sup>424</sup> the dialectic also exists between two transcendent realities—an Indian spirituality that advances concepts of reincarnation and nirvana and the Marxist dialectic. These “realities” are indeed bolstered by Dhan’s immediate perceptions during his peripatetic travels around India in the first part of the novel and around the San Francisco Bay Area in the second part of the novel. The novel parallels the literal mapping established by the character’s constant movement around a geographical locale with his cognitive mapping of “the gap[s] between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he... is situated.”<sup>425</sup> Through his literal and cognitive mappings, Dhan seems to ultimately aspire to the spiritual sublime “which the mind cannot fathom and words cannot measure.”<sup>426</sup> Despite his empirical failures in envisioning the totality of class structures and attaining the sublime in both India and the United States,<sup>427</sup> Dhan nevertheless concludes his epilogue with a vision of East-West syncretism or synthesis that is just beginning to take root within the Pacific Coast. He states,

<sup>422</sup> T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 1248.

<sup>423</sup> Chang, 38.

<sup>424</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 353.

<sup>425</sup> Jameson, 353.

<sup>426</sup> Mukerji, 217.

<sup>427</sup> In their “Afterword: “The Homeless Self: Problems of Cultural Translation in Autobiography,” *Caste and Outcast* by Dhan Gopal Mukerji, 1923 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta suggest that Dhan “continues to search for spiritual enlightenment, and is no closer to it by the conclusion of the book” (232).

As regards the Pacific Coast, it cannot resist the culture of Asia, as the East cannot be impervious to Europe. Oriental decorations along with Oriental aloofness are becoming discernible elements. In the homes of the Pacific Coast I have found that the people are aloof. They build a Chinese wall of pride around themselves. On the Pacific Coast one also finds something Spanish, not altogether European, but rather Africo-Saracenic in character.<sup>428</sup>

In this rather circuitous depiction of the Pacific Coast, a seeming contradiction emerges as Dhan describes the eastern permeation into the west coast: The Pacific Coast seems to natively *possess* Eastern elements. This contradiction of the nativity of eastern “elements” on the Pacific Coast positions the U.S., more specifically the west coast, as a site of counter-globalization—in which the East might find *its* civilizational origins in the West. The west coast in *Caste and Outcast* is positioned as the receptacle of all cultures and therefore, metonymically represents the U.S. as a waste/promised land that continually contains the possibility of renewal. Dhan’s suggestion seems to reverberate with Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 “Frontier Thesis,” which claims that the exceptionality of the American spirit and success is reflected in nation’s westward expansion into the vast, uncharted frontier that was meagerly populated by Native Americans. This perpetual frontier emblemized American exceptionalism. Dhan’s claims about the U.S., however, are not unequivocally celebratory. After all, he states, “America lynches Negroes.” And yet it “is abyss-wombed...[and] is mad with restlessness”<sup>429</sup> or an inchoate freedom. Nevertheless, Dhan’s America is a “seed continent,” not just a country, which, like Eliot’s waste land is a space of dystopian failure but also one of transformational renewal.

Dhan begins the epilogue by positioning the U.S. and India in contradistinction to one another:

There is nothing in Europe that matches the sky hunger of the Himalayas and the fierce fatality of life in the jungles. India has spaces so acrid with loneliness that the greater part of Europe, even Russia, is sweet by comparison, yet Europe is not sweet enough. So a Hindu, who wants to find a complete antithesis to his race and culture, had better avoid Europe and come straight to America.<sup>430</sup>

And yet, he goes on to homologize India and America: “In America, man is what he is in Asia; he is, as he ought to be, an episode in the life cycle of a continent. He learns that the universe is not homocentric, but cosmocentric.”<sup>431</sup> His constant comparison and homologization of India and the U.S. and their ideologies result in an envisioned cultural synthesis that is spatially located in the U.S. Yet the commonality between “acrid” Indian spirituality and “sweet” American materialism lies in their cosmocentric perspective. At

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<sup>428</sup> Mukerji, 221. Previous to this statement, Dhan writes, “I found the United States divided into four psychological groups: the East, the Middle West; the South; and the Pacific Coast. The first section, the East, is indirect touch with Europe and is more like Europe than it is like the rest of America. The second has very little contact with any great external influence. So its culture is more provincial and more indigenous. The South is extremely difficult to make clear. It might seem open to the influence of the Africans, yet that is not the case. It has not great indigenous element. It is full of the eighteenth century European conservatism. But if the climate can be trusted, the Southern men and women will build a tropical culture—sinister and beautiful” (221).

<sup>429</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>430</sup> Mukerji, 222.

<sup>431</sup> Mukerji, 222.

the end of the epilogue, Dhan seems to come close to envisioning an ideological synthesis between the two nations, which nevertheless finds its spatial belonging within the U.S.:

The differences are so extreme that the extremes must meet. Both India and America are mad. India has been mad with peace and America is mad with restlessness. It is this madness that has drawn me to them both. Europe is poor fare for my hungry Hindu soul. I want the fecundity of America. I cannot live twenty-four hours a day. I want to live two days in one.

America was discovered in the name of India. Columbus, whose first name was ‘the Christ bearer,’ set out for the land of Buddha—for India. He found instead a new land where Christ and Buddha shall meet. The voyage of Columbus ended in a mistake. The next five hundred years will prove that his error was an accuracy of the gods.<sup>432</sup>

Resorting to Buddhism as a more viable worldview, his envisioned synthesis of India and the U.S. serves as a metaphysical substitute for a socialist democracy.

Dhan’s desire “to live two days in one” exemplifies his aim for a synthesis of the East and West within “a new land where Christ and Buddha shall meet.” The depiction of the America as a promised land of syncretism and renewal as well as a space in which “peace” (“Shantih shantih shantih”) and “restlessness” find synthesis once again rearticulates the Orientalism of “The Waste Land.” That is, the representation of America as a renewable utopia partially inverts the solution of Eliot’s waste land to look to the east for peace and renewal. Likewise, the apocalyptic renewal or rebirth in both the poem and Mukerji’s novel appear imminent: Like the fisher king in “The Waste Land” who sits upon the shore “with the arid plain behind [him,]”<sup>433</sup> Dhan awaits a revolutionary nirvana of sorts (“an accuracy of the gods”) which he predicts will take place in the “next five hundred years.”

### **Female Continuity in *Caste and Outcast***

Dhan’s perception of gender is bound up with the renewable utopia he envisions. In the epilogue, he makes a circuitous claim about the role of women and men as representations of the (American) nation:

The American woman, too, is chained to the purpose of the race. She has to make her home in a continent fierce with homelessness. In every race it is man that progresses while woman represents continuity. It is the task of the American woman to weave an ever-growing thread of continuity into the changing warp of her life.<sup>434</sup>

As in the previous passage, Dhan articulates a complementarity between the roles of men and women insofar as there is little difference between “progress” and “continuity”—particularly since continuity is an “ever-growing thread” that must be actively woven. Moreover the verb “chained” here suggests Dhan’s awareness of the oppression of women in both India and the U.S. Without the vocabulary with which to articulate his own oppression as an Indian or South Asian American, he articulates the plight of women in an empathetic manner. Just as it is the “task of the American woman to weave an ever-

<sup>432</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>433</sup> Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 1248.

<sup>434</sup> Mukerji, 222-223.



growing thread of continuity into the changing warp of her life[.]” Dhan similarly posits continuity throughout his wandering narrative in India and the U.S.

While concluding the second portion of the novel titled “Outcast” with an eastward glance toward India, Dhan continues to vacillate between his admiration for and disparagement of both the U.S. and India in the epilogue. He states:

America is victorious. India is conquered. America is carefree. India is careworn. America lynches Negroes. India illtreats her untouchables. America is abyss-wombed. India has given birth to her abyss. America believes in herself. India is too old to believe in herself. India has caste. America aims at equality. Thus runs the resemblances and differences between the two countries.<sup>435</sup>

Once again describing the feminized nations with poetic circumlocutions, he seems to equate the Indian caste system with American racism: “America lynches Negroes. India illtreats her untouchables.” And yet, he ultimately seems to favor America, which he describes as “victorious” and “carefree,” whereas India is “conquered” and “careworn.” The main difference Dhan seems to accentuate, here and elsewhere, between the U.S. and India is a temporal lag. He consistently imbues the U.S. with the youthful characteristics of unborn potential and India with geriatric traits of exhausted potential as he states, “America is abyss-wombed. India has given birth to her abyss. America believes in herself. India is too old to believe in herself.” Although these images and ideas smack of conventional Orientalism, Dhan’s rearticulation of Eliotic images, which he refers to as “abyss-wombs.” The image of abyss-wombed nations or nations that give birth to abysses once again hails to “The Waste Land” in the second section entitled, “A Game of Chess” in which a woman during World War I prematurely ages after an abortion because she is overwhelmed by the burden of motherhood, particularly while her husband is deployed in the army. Her friend tells her, “You ought to be ashamed...to look so antique.”<sup>436</sup> The section concludes with the lines from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* which the youthful Ophelia speaks before she commits suicide.<sup>437</sup> Both instances of premature aging and premature death parallel Dhan’s depictions of India and America as respectively aged and abyss-wombed, pointing toward diverse states of prematurity in both nation. India, to Dhan, is never able to fulfill its potential because of its long history and because the British have “conquered” it.<sup>438</sup> The U.S. is “victorious” precisely because it is not colonized by another imperial nation nor has it fully realized its own imperialism by 1923. The very phrase “abyss-wombed,” used to describe the U.S. also resonates with the “What the Thunder Said” section of Eliot’s poem in which surrealistic depictions of deep, “blackened” yet “empty cisterns” and “exhausted wells” allude to wombs that are vast yet empty.<sup>439</sup> In Eliot’s poem, it is precisely out of this barrenness that renewal emerges: In the end, the Fisher King is able to put the “arid plain behind [him].”<sup>440</sup> Although figured as “empty cisterns,” the motif of abyss-like wombs also refers to the underlying multitude of possibilities for the soul which sixteenth-century German Protestant mystic Jakob Boehme—who deeply influenced Eliot’s work—describes as the “unground.” Historian

<sup>435</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>436</sup> Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 1240.

<sup>437</sup> “Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night” (Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 1241).

<sup>438</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>439</sup> Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 1247. The imagery of the womb is made especially poignant when the “bats with baby faces” fly out of these empty wells.

<sup>440</sup> Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 1248.

Richard Cándida Smith states, “The soul becomes a rocket from what Boehme called the ‘unground’ (*Ungrund*), one of the most influential and most difficult of Boehme’s concepts. The unground is the dark and irrational abyss that lies outside being.”<sup>441</sup> Therefore, the images of abyss-wombs possess a double function in both Eliot’s poem and Mukerji’s novel of depicting the ravages of their respective waste lands but also heralding the multiple possibilities of spiritual renewal and birth. Thus Dhan’s depiction of the U.S. as “abyss-wombed” articulates his complaints against the failures of American universalism and his desire for the utopian “fecundity of America.”<sup>442</sup> He suggests that, despite the vast emptiness of *her womb* or the empirical failures of democracy (“America lynches Negroes”), America is nevertheless capable of the prolific productivity of democratic universalism (“America aims at equality”).

Dhan’s gendered figurations of nations—America and India—point to the historical problematic to which critic Annette Kolodny alludes in *The Lay of the Land*. She states,

...gendering the land as feminine was nothing new in the sixteenth century; Indo-European languages, among others, have long maintained the habit of gendering the physical world and imbuing it with human capacities. What happened with the discovery of America was the revival of that linguistic habit on the level of personal experience...Beautiful, indeed, that wilderness appeared—but also dark, uncharted, and prowled by howling beasts. In a sense, to make the new continent Woman was already to civilize it a bit, casting the stamp of human relations upon what was otherwise unknown and untamed.<sup>443</sup>

Dhan undoubtedly reproduces the vocabulary of this historic problematic in which nations are portrayed as feminine and thus defined as maternal and vulnerable to rape. For example, in the epilogue, he describes America no longer as a prostitute but as a maternal “seed continent”: “All the world and all the nations are planting their best and their worst seed in this spring-smitten island. Asia has planted her mysticism, Europe has sown her seeds of diverse intellectual culture, and Africa has offered her innocence.”<sup>444</sup> Although America’s rape here is not explicit, her reception of these international “seeds” appears passive and, at times, unwelcome: “their worst seed in this spring-smitten island.” However, the anthropomorphized nations that are planting their “seeds” in her are likewise feminized: “Asia has planted *her* mysticism, Europe has sown *her* seeds of diverse intellectual culture, and Africa has offered *her* innocence.”<sup>445</sup> And thus, according to Dhan, America as a feminized land is vulnerable and open to the imprints of other feminized nations, rather than to the advances of masculine settlers as Kolodny argues. The feminization of both the East and the West in his epilogue suggests a kind of universalizing homogenization among the nations. The image of America’s impregnation by other nations, particularly continents of third-world nations, is a quintessential vision of the universalism that Dhan pursues.

<sup>441</sup> Richard Cándida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 61.

<sup>442</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>443</sup> Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975) 8, 9.

<sup>444</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>445</sup> Mukerji, 223, my emphasis.

Moreover his reverent depictions of women elsewhere, particularly in India, demonstrate his identifications with their social plight. In the “Caste” portion of the novel, he recalls a memory in which his eldest sister becomes a widow and his father “in spite of his principles, fasted with her, a not unusual practice. He did this out of love and sympathy. He used to say, ‘Since men have made such rigorous laws, it is good that a man should submit to them with a woman.’”<sup>446</sup> Acknowledging patriarchy in India, Dhan attempts to work against it by bringing visibility to the harsh rigors of gender indoctrination in the lives of his sisters. He goes on to describe his younger sister, whose “quaint mixture of impulse and reflection” is curbed by her discipline in becoming an acceptable female:

Manners also were an important part of her training. One day she ran across the room to speak to me and made rather a noise about it. My mother called her back, saying, “No daughter of my house brings misfortune by making her footsteps audible to others.” When she took her turn with her older sisters in serving us food, she had to learn a certain grace of gesture. She was told to stoop, bending like a swan’s neck; to sit down and rise silently like a fawn leaping the dusk. She was taught to salute by putting her palms together and touching her forehead to them at the thumbs.<sup>447</sup>

Through the silence that is demanded of his sisters, Dhan narrates their inaudible presence and the prematurity of their fates: youthful widowhood and childhood death.

But my little sister was not to know in this incarnation either the glory of being a mother or the sorrow of widowhood. When she was about twelve years old, she fell ill one evening near sundown. It was the plague and at dawn the next day her soul set forth again on its eternal vagrancy.<sup>448</sup>

The theme of premature doom that is depicted by his sisters coincides with his portrayal of India as “careworn,” prematurely aged, yet “hungry.”<sup>449</sup> Even in early death, his little sister evokes an image of spiritual reincarnation. In the epilogue, once again drawing the comparison between the nation and womanhood, Dhan suggests that India, along with other Asian nations, offers the U.S. the “seed” of her mysticism.<sup>450</sup> In this way, Dhan deploys a Buddhist framework for the social vagrancy caused by Asian exclusion in the U.S.

Throughout his narrative, Dhan ascribes his sense of spirituality to his mother who, upon his departure from India, bids him, “[k]eep the doors of your mind open, so that not one of God’s truths will have to go away because the door is shut.”<sup>451</sup> Earlier in his youth his interest is sparked in anticolonial nationalism by one of his brothers who is an anti-British activist. As historian Joan Jensen points out, Indian nationalism in the first decade of the century was pervasive in India and North America.<sup>452</sup> Dhan states that his

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<sup>446</sup> Mukerji, 66.

<sup>447</sup> Mukerji, 62.

<sup>448</sup> Mukerji, 67.

<sup>449</sup> Mukerji, 223, 222.

<sup>450</sup> Mukerji, 223.

<sup>451</sup> Mukerji, 136.

<sup>452</sup> Jensen writes, “On 30 April 1908, someone threw a bomb at the house of a British judge; the bomb landed in the carriage of a British woman and her daughter, killing them both...The Indian government responded by arresting a leader of the Bengal nationalists for editorials he had written and sentencing him to six years’ imprisonment for sedition...The Canadian minister of labor had informed Grey King’s

“mother too was in sympathy; her heart responded to the idea of working for India though she was unable to grapple with our desire to improve India by means of Western materialism. To her mind so simple, yet as I now realize, so much more mature than ours, it was more important to insure our country’s religious heritage than to acquire the riches of this world.”<sup>453</sup> Once again, he exalts and identifies with his mother. Returning to Žižek’s point that colonialism is a search for lost origins of the self in the civilizational other, I am suggesting that—whereas Western searches for origins are historically associated with patriarchy, positioning the foreign country as a “fatherland” of sorts to westerners—Dhan’s emphasis on his nation of origin as a motherland articulates his subjectivity as an Asian alien. And despite the peripatetic quality of the novel, the telos lies in Dhan’s realization of the importance of his spirituality over Western materialism. This early understanding is illustrated through his grandfather’s insistence that the western Colonial cartography that is based on the export and import trade, which Dhan learns in his Scotch school, is inaccurate and impoverished. Instead, his grandfather relays a tale from Sanskrit in which a Titan, exiled in India, sends a messenger to his wife with the following directions:

When you come to the blue mountains, you feel the breeze becoming different. The wind caresses you. The white cranes make eye-pleasing circles before you. Peacocks stand on branches of the trees, their fans outspread, dancing to the drumming of thunder. At last you reach the Himalayas. And you will see where the rainbow bends its glory to make an entrance for the gods. You will find a woman there whose bracelets are too big for her wrists, because she has grown thin, longing for me. She is my wife.

“That,” said my grandfather, “is geography, not exports and imports.”<sup>454</sup>

In recalling this memory, Dhan continues to explore anticolonial avenues that are alternative to a system of Western domination and materialism—“exports and imports.” Filled with nature depictions and symbols of eastern mysticism, the map that his grandfather describes reaches its end at “an entrance for the gods” where the Titan’s wife who “has grown thin, longing for [him]” can be found. Once again in the novel, the woman problematically represents the apotheosis of the spiritual journey. However, while the privileged act of vagrant wandering that the messenger undertakes seems to be characterized as an exclusively masculine one, Dhan states earlier that his younger sister’s death likewise releases her into an eternal vagrancy. He thus again acknowledges the constraints placed on women in the social. Restrained by his caste, young Dhan sets out on his own vagrant tramp around India as part of his initiation into Brahmin priesthood. Although vagrancy appears to be paradigmatically masculine in *Caste and Outcast*, it also maps an exceptional space in which social visions of women’s oppression that move beyond metaphors of (foot)binding and fixity can be articulated. Thus, Dhan’s vagrancy creates an avenue through which he surveys social and spiritual impoverishment in India and the United States and imagine an inclusive utopia that would potentially resolve the social exclusions of women and the dispossessed classes in India and the U.S.

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investigations of Indian nationalists—an additional reason to supervise carefully all immigration, he noted” (95).

<sup>453</sup> Mukerji, 133.

<sup>454</sup> Mukerji, 56.

### Nonlinear, Incomplete Autobiographies

Dhan's narration of his vagrancy is composed of incomplete, fragmented anecdotes. His anecdotes usually circulate around the topics of God and yet no conclusions are made to mark his development or education even though he candidly states, "If I did not find a lesson in one town, I went on to the next, always searching for an experience of the inner life."<sup>455</sup> His "lessons" include contact between Christians, "Mohammedans" (Muslims), and Hindus. When he returns from his pilgrimage, he recognizes the difference between Eastern and Western conceptions of time:

The West believes in time, in the time process, and consequently, in cause and effect, then in good and evil. But the East begins by denying the fundamental reality of time, which necessarily changes for us the relative importance of all that results from time. This is the essential difference between the East and the West.<sup>456</sup>

The holy man whom he visits likewise states, "[Westerners] think the road has an end, and that they must be there before the rest of the world, while we know that the road has no end, so we sit still and meditate."<sup>457</sup> The delineation of non-teleological or non-linear time from the Easterner's perspective mirrors the peripatetic and fragmented quality of the narrative.

Critics Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta have argued that, The two halves of *Caste and Outcast*, divided by the act of immigration, register a profound shift in the narrator's persona as well. In the first part of the text, when Mukerji is describing his life in India, we get a picture of a precociously wise person who persistently seeks out answers to life's most difficult and elusive questions. Through his own search for knowledge, Mukerji attempts to explain some important Hindu concepts to his primarily North American audience. By contrast, the second half of the book is written from the perspective of a rather naïve observer, a new-comer to a culture whose fresh perspective both informs and discomforts.<sup>458</sup>

Mankekar and Gupta go on to indicate that "in terms of calendrical time, Mukerji (Dhan) progresses in age but, metaphorically, immigration represents a rebirth."<sup>459</sup> By the end of the novel, Dhan's polemical statements about America and India in the epilogue demonstrate his maturation once again. The pattern of death and rebirth throughout the narrative evinces his ultimate adherence to Eastern conceptions of time and the spiritual philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism. And yet, despite the fragmentation of his narrative, the "golden thread of [narrative] consciousness"<sup>460</sup> articulates his attempt to understand and reconcile his ideas of the East and West. Although this cultural reconciliation of the East and the West seems to rehearse traditional Orientalism, Mukerji's deliberate rearticulation of Orientalist texts such as Eliot's "The Waste Land" explicitly critiques American democracy and envisions America as an unrealized space of

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<sup>455</sup> Mukerji, 106.

<sup>456</sup> Mukerji, 134.

<sup>457</sup> Mukerji, 134.

<sup>458</sup> Mankekar and Gupta, 240.

<sup>459</sup> Mankekar and Gupta, 241.

<sup>460</sup> He states, "Through all life is running the golden thread of consciousness which binds the world together—man, animals, stars" (72).

spiritual renewal. This reversal suggests a radical revision of an Orientalist syncretism that, by fetishizing the East as a mystical space of renewal, would perpetuate that status quo of social inequality. His renunciation of calendrical or commodified time moreover converges with Lukacs's argument in *History and Class Consciousness* (1920) that the bourgeoisie subscribe to a false-consciousness of commodified time and are therefore unable to position themselves in relation to the totality of history.<sup>461</sup> The novel's refusal to follow a *bildung* model of linear characterological development reflects the impossibility of Dhan's subjectivity as an unassimilable, illegal alien in the United States. At the same time, the cognitive mapping, which substitutes the narrative of legal and social assimilation of the bildungsroman, confronts social injustices enacted toward racial, classed, and gendered minorities. In so doing, he envisions a spiritually transformed totality of social relations in which previously minoritized subjects would be included and rendered visible.

### A Feminized Metropolis

Further defying the conventions of the bildungsroman, Mukerji omits his courtship with and marriage to a white woman named Ethel Ray Dugan from his semi-autobiographical novel. This omission supports Chu's argument that "Within the codes of the bildungsroman, Asian American protagonists generally can't appear as well-married heroes because marriage would signify their successful integration into the nation, a full assimilation that has not yet occurred either in fact or in the symbolic realm of mainstream culture."<sup>462</sup> In a similar vein, when Kang's *East Goes West* was first reviewed by Scribner's, his editor Maxwell Perkins attempted to enforce the autobiographical parallel between the two couples—Younghill Kang and his wife Frances Keely and Chungpa Han and Trip—by "urg[ing] Kang to include more information about Trip 'and to show definitely that you married her, because the fact that you did, makes one of the principal points of the book, in that the Easterner became a Westerner through this experience' (147: 8 Feb. 1937)."<sup>463</sup> Neither *East Goes West* nor *Caste and Outcast* seems to depict, in Chu's terms, the protagonist's attempt to successfully integrate into the status quo nation; instead, both novels seem to envision a revolutionized nation in which such a belonging would be possible and desirable.

Han's platonic relationship with Trip, since his romantic love appears unrequited, seems to be a vehicle through which he imagines himself as part of a utopian cosmopolitan space. Despite the racism he faces in New York, he envisions the city as an inclusive space of modernity and infinite possibilities. "And as I walked New York streets, it did not seem possible that Trip could not be here, she who had been mystically

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<sup>461</sup> In *History and Class Consciousness*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971), Georg Lukács writes that, in capitalism "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space. In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, and environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialized production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented" (90).

<sup>462</sup> Chu, 19.

<sup>463</sup> Sunyoung Lee, "The Unmaking of an Oriental Yankee," *East Goes West* by Younghill Kang (New York: Kaya Production, 1997) 380.

interwoven into my whole dream of America.”<sup>464</sup> While a significant presence in his life, Trip does not represent the entire fabric of his utopian dream but a significant thread. Rather than othering or merely fetishizing her, Han identifies himself with Trip: “Now it had come, for my love for Trip seemed sublimely natural, inevitable, born with me, carried from Asia, since the far moment when I set out to reach the West... Trip—as close to me as my own...”<sup>465</sup> Moreover, his relationship with Trip represents a “new combination” “during this strangely great age of disintegration” “of either society—Christian or Confucian.”<sup>466</sup> His relationship and identification with Trip—whose very name refers to the map-like structure of his narrative—further depict his vision of America as a cosmopolitan utopia of universal inclusion.

### **From Exile to An Oriental Yankee**

Han’s anticipation of New York modernity and cosmopolitan inclusion is belied by his racialization. When Han first arrives in the U.S., specifically New York, he begins to feel his racial difference from whites. He comments that his handwriting appears to him as “Oriental”—that is, “not Western”—and is compelled to “[wash] off the dirt[s] [*sic*] of the Old World that was dead, as in my country people did before they set out on a Buddhist pilgrimage.”<sup>467</sup> And yet, he ironically compares his attempt to wash off his Asian-ness to a Buddhist pilgrimage—thus suggesting the impossibility, which he later admits, of washing his “inside.”<sup>468</sup> This self-determined act of Buddhist deracination is an example of a strategic response to western globalization. His attempt to be a cosmopolitan New Yorker and his failure to complete the act during an era of Asian exclusion in the U.S., demonstrates the asymmetrical power dynamic in counter-globalization; in other words, even though westerners believe themselves able to permeate the ideological and cultural “inside” of eastern cultures through global capital, the reverse does not appear feasible for easterners in western cultures in the novel. The *inside* to which he refers is nevertheless not a self-proclaimed essentialism of Koreanness; indeed, he finds it difficult to relate to most of the Koreans whom he meets in the U.S. Rather, he attempts to wash off his racialization. Despite his failure to cleanse himself of his Asian-ness because of his empirical encounters with racism, he nevertheless clings to his aspiration to belong to his vision of U.S. as an inclusionary land of anticolonial democracy. Exiled from Korea, Han looks to the U.S. as a nation in which he might find “roots for an exile’s soul.”<sup>469</sup> Doubly exiled from his native Korea and its colonial ruler Japan, Han envisions a “younger” “world” that would offer him spiritual roots: He states, “It was here... here in America for me to find... but where? This book is the record of my early search, and the arch of my projectile toward that goal.”<sup>470</sup>

Han’s encounter with people at a New York City hotel where he is lodging inaugurates his visceral attempt to westernize himself:

... The fat, six-foot doorman with red face seemed an imposing sentinel. Past him, I saw inside the people walking to and fro... talking mysteriously, perhaps

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<sup>464</sup> Kang, 354.

<sup>465</sup> Kang, 315.

<sup>466</sup> Kang, 314.

<sup>467</sup> Kang, 11.

<sup>468</sup> Kang, 11.

<sup>469</sup> Kang, 5.

<sup>470</sup> Kang, 5.

of Michelangelo, but more likely of stocks and bonds.<sup>471</sup> The image of the red-faced doorman, standing as a sentinel, reappears at the end of the novel in Han's dream sequence in which a red-faced lynch mob are coming to hang him and other African American who are hiding in a cellar. The menacing foreboding of his immanent death because of a race crime is coupled here with the "mystery" and abstraction of capitalism—of people "talking mysteriously...more likely of stocks and bonds."<sup>472</sup> In this scene, Han is subjectified as a racial and global other through his alienation and the references to the lynch mob that takes place later in the novel and the global capitalism that perpetuates Orientalism.

His subjectification as a racial other and foreigner forces himself to dispense with the empirical U.S. as a fulfillment of a universal democracy while it also enables him to continue searching for a new vision of the America. Resonating with the "torchlight red on sweaty faces" of the "What the Thunder Said" section of Eliot's "The Waste Land," the image of the red faces in *East Goes West* similarly heralds the coming of a new, restored land of democracy. Reflective of Eliot's Christological interests, the trope of the torch-lit red faces recalls the Old Testament story of the Judeo-Christian God sending a face-blazing torch to burn the offerings that the future patriarch of the Israelite nation Abraham has laid on an altar. In this way, God articulates his oath to Abraham about a promised land for his descendants despite his childlessness.<sup>473</sup> J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, to which Eliot was also indebted, also discusses a cultural practice of an indigenous tribe in South Australia in which unmarried women signified their entry into puberty by painting their faces red as a warning sign to protect their chastity.<sup>474</sup> Regardless of the specific reference, the red painted face in Eliot's poem and Kang's novel dually signify imminent danger and fertile rebirth in both texts. The motif thus mirrors Han's vision for America as the democratic "promised land" despite its racial and class oppressions.

While representing the empirical failures of domestic and global American democracy, the image of the red faced "sentinel" nevertheless heralds a democratic space, or a social nirvana, that is yet to come. The latter portion of the quotation which states, "the people walking to and fro...talking mysteriously, perhaps of Michelangelo, but more likely of stocks and bonds," invokes Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917) in which the narrator Prufrock consistently articulates his feeling of being stifled by the bourgeois "room [in which] the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo."<sup>475</sup> While the overt nod to Eliot's poem would suggest that Han indeed identifies with Prufrock's ennui, it is the final, utopian scene of the "Love Song" which seems to more closely align with his utopian aspirations.

To Wan Kim, Han's Korean friend, overtly references Prufrock's mermaid fantasy at the end of "The Love Song" when he describes his shared aspirations to both his white lover Helen and Han. He states:

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<sup>471</sup> Kang, 10.

<sup>472</sup> Kang, 10.

<sup>473</sup> See the Biblical book of Genesis, chapter 15.

<sup>474</sup> J. G. Frazer, "Part VII: Balder the Beautiful," Vol. 1, *The Golden Bough*, Vol. 10 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1913) 77-78.

<sup>475</sup> T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 1230.



This time tomorrow night, we will be upon the sea. Under us, all around us, there will be nothing....no nationality, no civilization, only sea...out of the human world, into the mermaids' world.... Yes, I always wanted to see mermaids singing and combing their green hair down underneath on blue rocks.... Perhaps I have let the crashing waves and perilous rocks disillusion me as to those mermaids, fancies only on the lips of outlived poets. Yet I know well what they should look like.... Mermaids are dressed in beautiful dress and carry silk fans of fish fins. They wear necklaces of pearls still wet and living out of oyster shells. They never feel cold. They think it is fun to leap out like the flying fish through rain showers, then they wring themselves out again under the sea. If ever you got their coat, it would be good material for your raincoat. Better than synthetic rubber. Better than Korean straw. Mermaids swim better than they walk. They can sing better than Whitman.<sup>476</sup>

In this passage, Kim, who is Chungpa Han's tragic foil, describes his utopia as a Prufrockian fantasy world that is nevertheless ill-fated. "The Love Song" concludes with Prufrock admitting that he does "not think that [the mermaids] will sing to [him]" and that the dream is inevitably interrupted and "drown[ed]" by "human voices."<sup>477</sup> The series of superlatives in which the mermaids sport material "better than Korean straw" or "sing better than Whitman"—the who attempted to catalogue the nation in his free verse—suggest that Han's and Kim's envisioned utopian sea-world would transcend the status quo nations of colonial Korea and the U.S.

Although they seem to share a vision of an oceanic, borderless utopia, Kim is perhaps more philosophical and certainly less political than Han. He concludes his long monologue about the mermaids by saying that, were he to "enter the mermaid universe[,] he would have no use for his "German books by Spengler and Kant."<sup>478</sup> It is not until shortly after Helen's death in a mental institution and Kim's suicide that Han wholly disassociates himself from Kim by stating:

... Yes, I ran from Kim. A silent life, a motionless life, an unpraised life, an unblamed life, and now a wholly undistinguished life at the end—a life that had lived in the ego and in the inner dream, that did not know if it was in inner dream or outer reality, a life that had never accepted its real worldiness, did not know if it came once to be transplanted or was hopelessly in exile, did not even know if it felt real grief that its Helen of the new age of time had been lost, or if it had only contracted some disease from the Western dead men. I ran from Kim...<sup>479</sup>

The deliberate Freudian terminology of the "ego" and latent "inner dream" and outer "reality" resonates with Freud's theory of the canny and the uncanny in which he compares the repressive psychic apparatus of the "id" to the unfamiliar "uncanny" and the realistic apparatus of the "ego" to the familiar "canny." He defines the "uncanny" as that which can be familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Han's flight from Kim in this passage marks a break from the uncanny similarities of their views about globalization and the cultural convergences of east and west. The characterological foiling of the two characters Kim and Han, a convention of the bildungsroman, is nevertheless reflective of

<sup>476</sup> Kang, 249-250.

<sup>477</sup> Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," 1233.

<sup>478</sup> Kang, 250.

<sup>479</sup> Kang, 364.

their strategic responses to globalization in the novel. Žižek also characterizes colonial globalization as the search for the uncanny: “Colonization was never simply the imposition of Western values, the assimilation of the Oriental and other Others to European Sameness; it was always also the search for the lost spiritual innocence of *our own* civilization.”<sup>480</sup> Upon Kim’s suicide, Han realizes that, in contrast to his own active (he “runs”) and productive strategies of inverting western globalization, Kim’s response to western domination is “motionless” and inert as he ambivalently struggles to return his eastern roots. Kim’s suicide catalyzes Han’s realization that Kim’s philosophical mermaid world had been problematically divorced from “real worldiness” or the social. Han moreover critiques Kim’s inability to productively embrace his exilic status as an opportunity to locate a utopia of universal democracy. Furthermore, it is Kim’s anti-western perspective that Han renounces through his own embrace of Eliot’s poem. Earlier in the novel, Kim tells Han and Helen,

*The Waste Land* is a great poem and its creator is great. He has seen beyond most. Death and the something that once was, greater than the death that is now. How hauntingly he conveys his seriousness! But it takes a greater [*sic*] to see more than that. What inconsistency in going back! Christianity! Buddhism! Confucianism! All are like milestones on a road that is past. How impossible for me to go back, more impossible than to see how many angels can dance on the point of the needle without being jostled. And I, too, am inconsistent. I myself do not know whether Westerners like Eliot are not to be envied or pitied. I envy one moment, I pity another moment. And I myself am probably the more pitiable spectacle. My emotions are strong enough, but my intellect seems a sick, disobedient servant. I am tired of the Western learning and all it implies. Yet one thing I know. To us Easterners, until our vitality becomes all exhausted—this Western death is a luxury we can’t afford!<sup>481</sup>

As evident in this passage, Han seeks to escape, in part, from Kim’s inert, “inconsistency”—that is, his admiration for and estrangement from both Eastern antiquity and Western domination. A collector of Oriental antiquities and an avid adherent to Confucian philosophy, Kim continually contradicts himself as he pursues an intimate relationship with a white woman of old New England stock whose name, Helen, references the Western classical myths surrounding Helen of Troy.<sup>482</sup> Han, moreover, highlights a difference in class consciousness between Kim and himself when he visits Kim’s room in a hotel where he is employed and a fellow worker brings them ice: He states, “Strange! Kim wouldn’t appreciate how many hands that ice passed through on its round-about journey...”<sup>483</sup> Believing in social equality, Han resolutely chooses the West, specifically New York, as a new space of cosmopolitan potential. Recognizing that Kim

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<sup>480</sup> Žižek, <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php>

<sup>481</sup> Kang, 237-238.

<sup>482</sup> Han likewise critiques Helen’s orientalist and tragic love for Kim—insofar as it is forbidden by her family who institutionalizes her as a result—in suggesting that she “looked eagerly for love with racial nostalgia” (366). Similarly, Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*, Helen is a divisive character who infiltrates breaks up the progress of Filipino labor unions by having affairs with the workers.

<sup>483</sup> Kang, 187.

had been resigned to a negative state of exile,<sup>484</sup> Han resolves to continually attempt to root himself in the cosmopolitan space of New York.

### **Mapping New York, Mapping the Nation**

When Han first arrives in New York, becoming a New Yorker is first and foremost on his mind as he states, “But I was not a New Yorker yet, though fast becoming one.”<sup>485</sup> Rather than becoming an “Oriental” or Asian American, he aspires to become an “Oriental yankee.” This catachresis, which is part of the novel’s title, references Han’s strategies to call attention to globalization through an impossible inversion—that is, “going native” or assimilating in the U.S. And yet, the very attempt to become the said “Oriental yankee” suggests an enduring belief in a productive construction of an inclusive, cosmopolitan utopia that emerges from the problematic effects of global capitalism, of which New York has historically been an urban center. Similar to Sui Sin Far’s dual focus on overseas China and San Francisco Chinatown, the invocation of the global and local in the name “Oriental yankee” appears to skip over the national component (he could have claimed himself to be an “Oriental American”) and mirrors a certain dissatisfaction with the empirical nation-state. And despite his travels to Canada, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, he is continually drawn back to New York City. At one point, he “soliloqui[zes] inside [him]self”:

To be a New Yorker among New Yorkers means a totally new experience from being Japanese or Chinese or Korean—a changed character. New Yorkers all seem to have some aim in every movement they make. (Some frantic aim.) They are like guns shooting off. How unlike Asiatics in an Oriental village, who drift up and down aimlessly and leisurely! But these people have no time, even for gossiping, even for staring. To be thrown among New Yorkers—yes, it means to have a new interpretation of life never conceived before....Just move to New York and not be ploughed under, man must prevision and plan out. Free, factual, man is reasoning from cause to effect here all the time—not so much thinking. Prophets of hereafter, poets of vision...maybe the American is not so much these. But he is a good salesman, amidst scientific tools. His mind is like Grand Central Station. It is definite, it is timed, it has mathematical precision on clearcut stone foundation. There may be monotonous dull repetition, but all is accurate and conscious.<sup>486</sup>

While critiquing a distinctly capitalist phenomenon of the mechanization of the New Yorker’s mind, Han finds something redemptive in such mechanization insofar as the New Yorker’s mental precision has the potential to lead to prophecy or visionary poetry concerning the future of the city, country, and perhaps world. At first glance, Kang’s

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<sup>484</sup> Han states, “Yes, I ran from Kim. A silent life, a motionless life, an unpraised life, an unblamed life, and now a wholly undistinguished life at the end—a life that had lived in the ego and in the inner dream, that did not know if it was in inner dream or outer reality, a life that had never accepted its real worldiness, did not know if it came once to be transplanted or was hopelessly in exile, did not even know if it felt real grief that its Helen of the new age of time had been lost, or if it had only contracted some disease from the Western dead men” (359).

<sup>485</sup> Kang, 16.

<sup>486</sup> Kang, 152.

novel, from which the Filipino laborer Carlos Bulosan derived his inspiration,<sup>487</sup> does not seem to share Bulosan's overt Marxist overtones of capitalist critiques and labor organizing in his semi-autobiographical novel. However, *East Goes West* creates a cognitive map of New York. Jameson describes cognitive maps as "the dialectic between the here and now of immediate perception and the imaginative or imaginary sense of the city as an absent totality."<sup>488</sup> Coincident with this Jamesonian model, his mapping similarly envisions a revolutionary utopia through the dialectic between immediate perception and the totality of class structures within the confines of a city. As he tramps throughout New York City, particularly Greenwich Village, Harlem, and Chinatown, he imagines the revolution of the class structures in Korea, Japan, and China that transcends the boundaries of the nations, which he provincializes as "Oriental villages." Rather than merely renouncing his Asian heritage as the above quotation might seem to suggest, Han views New York City as a metonymic representation of a new world that heralds a revolutionary newness and potential syncretism of the East and West. Sympathetic, at the very least, with Communism,<sup>489</sup> Kang nevertheless fails to employ a Marxist idiom, however, in his search for a revolution. Instead of a Marxist lexicon, his references to "The Waste Land" and "Prufrock," offer Kang a paradigm of eastern and western synthesis through which he imagines the promised land of America. Kim ridicules Han's desire for a world of Eastern and Western syncretism when he recites a Chinese poem: Kim states, "You are a funny fellow. You can't like New York—and this at the same time!"<sup>490</sup> And yet, he does. Although Han privileges New York as the potential site of utopia or a promised land, his focus on New York City rather than the U.S. as a nation attempts to bypass an ideology of American exceptionalism.

Contrary to such an ideology that fetishizes a discourse of American multiculturalism, his desire for a syncretic world that represents a genuine democracy is continually undermined by his empirical disappointments in the U.S. New York Chinatown, for example, is a disappointment to Han. Despite his expectations of finding some semblance of his native Korea in Chinatown, it turns out to be,

...a ghostly world to be lost in, this town that was neither in America nor in China. Certainly Chinatown is less American and more segregate [*sic*] than any other foreign colony in New York. The Chinese elect their own mayor, administer their own justice, and their houses and their homes are to the outsider impenetrable. The Japanese, in spite of their fanatic patriotism, do not live like this in one great organism. Koreans abroad of course are too small in number to admit of much generalization; later I found that on the whole (though with

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<sup>487</sup> In Carlos Bulosan's semiautobiographical novel, *America Is in the Heart*, he cites that Younghill Kang was an inspiration to his own writing. He states, "I returned to the writers of my time for strength. And I found Younghill Kang, a Korean who had immigrated to the United States as a boy and worked his way up until he had become a professor at an American university. His autobiography, *The Grass Roof*, gave me an enlightening insight into the history of the Korean revolutionary movement. But it was his indomitable courage that rekindled in me a fire of hope" (265).

<sup>488</sup> Jameson, 353.

<sup>489</sup> In a letter to Maxwell Perkins, 1 January 1947 (Scribner's Sons Archives, 1930-1962, Firestone Library, Princeton University, New Jersey), Kang writes, "A Russian friend of mine has translated [his first novel] the *Grass Roof*. He is here and does not know any publisher in Russia. Do you know how [*sic*] he can contact? Would E. Browder be interested in this?..."

<sup>490</sup> Kang, 154.

exceptions) they do stick together rather closely, but with none of the formidable breastworks of the Chinese. They do not have the money or the American footholds, as have these Chinese merchantmen, who practice Westernization with such inviolability that sons are still sent back for education, marriage, death. I found myself still in the shadow of the Confucian world.<sup>491</sup>

Han describes Chinatown here through negation—as neither situated in America nor in China. In spite of his seeming estrangement from the Chinese and Confucianism, he goes on to say, “Yet if I had not been so worried about the future, I must have vastly enjoyed Chinatown. However gloomy and impassive, Chinatown is one of the most picturesque quarters of New York... You are struck by colors everywhere, colors which are not exactly Chinese and not exactly Western, but are a mixture, an exotic hybrid of the East and West.”<sup>492</sup> Rather than a mere contradiction, his disapproval and celebration of Chinatown move dialectically between a fragmented space of racial ghettoization and an imagined totality of a hybridization between the East and the West. This self-conscious counter-Orientalism of calling attention to a productive hybridization rather than the exotic essence of Chinatown nevertheless reasserts the same exoticizing problematics of Orientalism. Han is unable to identify with Chinatown precisely *because* of its superficial hybridization of the East and West. For different reasons, the exotic foreignness of the urban Chinatown in both Sui Sin Far’s “The Wisdom of the New” and Han’s Chinatown becomes a placeholder for a culturally hybrid, universal democracy that is yet to come.

Han’s celebratory depiction of Harlem seems to differ from his ambivalent description of Chinatown. He states,

It was in sobered mood, not to say humbly downcast, that I entered Harlem... in blinking astonishment looking around.... The pale people with steely eyes and ridged noses and superior shrewdness had faded away. Negroes people the world, big and small, rich and poor, fat and thin, light and dark, old and young, men and women and children... barbers, hairdressers, poolrooms, dance-halls, all belong to this other kingdom, this Negro kingdom, more secret, more mysterious, more luxuriant, more soft, more exuberant. Here was no standardization. Every individual bubbled out on the streets absolutely different from everybody else in clothes, in gestures, in color. Their effort to adapt themselves to a natureless environment resulted in odd freaks at every turn. And nature glinted here, not to be routed. Everywhere laughter was more hearty, the air was richer in suggestion, more emotion-filled; the colors had more depth, so had the smells; the lights, though not so numerous, seemed mellower, gaudier, more picturesque, the spice of Africa was in the atmosphere. Their native jazz came through the windows, from brassy phonographs, a raucous, inarticulate rhythmical cacophony which I remembered having heard elsewhere as I walked... indeed it penetrated through and through New York... the soul of man dancing amidst machinery... for it expressed not Africa alone, it had caught up the rhythm of America—this Negro jazz—it had taken possession of the Western planet, working upon all hitherto known cultures and civilizations, flamboyant lazy [19] magic of disintegration.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Kang, 26.

<sup>492</sup> Kang, 27.

<sup>493</sup> Kang, 18-19.

The reproduction of racial stereotypes here in describing black culture as “secret,” “mysterious,” “luxuriant,” “soft,” “flamboyant lazy[,]” and with “the spice of Africa” seems to contradict Han’s perception of difference and a sense of nativity among blacks in New York. This sense of nativity marks the main distinction between black Harlem and Chinatown and explains the seeming success of African American expressions of difference in the novel. From this contradiction between cultural difference and nativity, he is able to imagine *Africa* as “tak[ing] possession of the Western planet[,]” and thus working to reverse the history of Western imperialism. Han aspires to a similar visionary disappearance of cultural imperialism through a counterhegemony in New York’s Chinatown and, by extension, all Asian communities. In his essay, “Unacquiring Negrophobia,” Stephen Knadler writes, “While Chung-pa identifies blacks as fellow victims of American racism, he sees African American culture as the representative soul of modern New York—and thus as a key embodiment of a distinctive American identity.”<sup>494</sup> Knadler goes on to make a persuasive argument about Han’s disidentification with blacks as evidence of his cosmopolitanism. However, he does little to explain Han’s fixation on becoming an “Oriental yankee.” Moreover, the African American figures in the novel run the gamut of different characters, from victimized, educated servants such as Lorenzo and Wagstaff to Christian extortionists such as Reverend Bonheure. With such diverse examples, Han offers an alternative vision of democratic modernity even though it is typically defined by political standardization: The range, or absence of standardization, among African American figures evinces Han’s non-essentialist, democratic vision of blacks, whites, and Asians as similarly native to a cosmopolitan, utopian space.

Cosmopolitan belonging attempts to correct the racial particularities and exclusions that plague American universalism. Like Dhan, Han creates maps of the cities along the northeast, surveying the social inequities that empirically contradict American democracy, in order to envision an inclusive utopia that would transcend the confines of the nation. By the end of the novel, Han reflects,

My exile seems as if ended. But I have never gone back. The opportunity has not come. My father’s family is all dead or scattered. My own beyond-time, time traveling ties have been made on American soil. There are, besides, political difficulties besetting the Korean who returns to the native shores. Perhaps spiritually, it would be difficult to return wholeheartedly, and [368] I would be there as an exile from America. The soul has become molded to the Western pattern, the whole man has become softened somewhat by the luxuries of Western living... When I go back, it will only be for a visit.<sup>495</sup>

His grasp of an envisioned utopia or his “beyond-time, time traveling ties...made on American soil” concludes his exile. And yet, he is clear that this utopia has not yet been realized in his dream sequence in which he seems to arrive at a democratic utopia. In this dream, Han describes an apocalyptic disintegration of racial and national hierarchies. The dream brings together his childhood friends in Korea and Trip in America. In the sequence, he climbs to the top of a lofty tree and walks across a suspension bridge from

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<sup>494</sup> Stephen Knadler, “Unacquiring Negrophobia: Younghill Kang and Cosmopolitan Resistance to the Black and White Logic of Naturalization.” *Recovered Legacies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005) 108.

<sup>495</sup> Kang, 367-368.

the tree, following his childhood friends in Korea. When he finally reaches the bridge, he states, “Yunkoo held out his hand and pointed back to what was now a never-never land. But all in a moment, things began tumbling out of my pockets, money and keys, contracts and business letters. Especially the key to my car, my American car. I clutched, but I saw it falling.”<sup>496</sup> Thereafter he enters the village where Trip is waiting in a car but he is still unable to find the car key so he climbs down the tree and looks for the car key. He then finds himself running down the steps into “a dark and cryptlike cellar” where he joins a group of “frightened-looking Negroes” who seem to be awaiting a lynch mob.<sup>497</sup> He states that, “red-faced men outside” say, “Fire, bring fire, . . . And through the grating I saw the flaring torches being brought. And applied . . .”<sup>498</sup> Instead of seeing the battle come to a head, Han “awoke like the phoenix out of a burst of flames[,]” viewing the dream as one “of good omen” for “[t]o be killed in a dream means success, and in particular death by fire augurs good fortune. This is supposed to be so, because death symbolizes in Buddhistic philosophy growth and rebirth and a happier reincarnation.” This rather loaded dream sequence again uses imagery related to death and rebirth from Eliot’s “The Waste Land” to herald the imminence of a utopia that is ultimately not located exclusively in the U.S.—for Han symbolically forfeits the key to his American car as well as his white, female friend Trip. His loss of a key to universalism suggests its deferment until a more precise political avenue toward it is established. The narrative elisions involving his Korean friends and white American (girl)friend Trip are also quite telling of Han’s critique of American imperialism as demonstrated in his experiences with racism and American foreign policy in Korea. Even before Korean immigration, President Theodore Roosevelt supported Japan’s interest in controlling Korea.<sup>499</sup> Unable to describe the moment of revolution that would abolish all imperialisms, the dream itself disappears but only “like the phoenix out of a burst of flames” to be reincarnated, awaiting its final fulfillment. That the book ends where it begins—with an image of a phoenix being burned and reborn from the ashes—demonstrates both his inability to locate his utopia in the concluding dream sequence as well as his enduring utopian aspirations. Written during the Popular Front Era of the 1930s, *East Goes West* nevertheless looks to Buddhistic spirituality to provide the narrative form and content of death and rebirth that veers toward humanistic Enlightenment rather than Marxism for a promising understanding of social revolution. Emerging from the nonlinear, circular travels of the protagonist, the dream of an inclusive promised land continuously dies with each experience Han has with racial and class discrimination and is reborn with his vision of an inclusive cosmopolitan utopia.

### **Conclusion: Trip or Pilgrimage?**

As exiles from their colonized homelands of India and Korea, Dhan and Chungpa Han perceive the U.S. as a space that promises them a democratic place of belonging and

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<sup>496</sup> Kang, 368.

<sup>497</sup> Kang, 369.

<sup>498</sup> Kang, 369.

<sup>499</sup> Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier in America, Immigration to Hawaii, 1896-1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988) 177. Patterson writes, “The American foreign minister to Korea, Horace Allen, was sympathetic toward Korean nationalism and attempted to act on behalf of Korean independence by, ironically, striking a deal with Hawaiian planters to violate immigration laws and allow Korean contract laborers into the Hawaiian islands” (178).

yet, that aspiration is continually deferred because of their experiences with legislated and socially sanctioned racism. Although the U.S. had become an imperial, colonial power by this period after the Spanish-American War of 1898, American imperialism is only referenced by the cultural rearticulation of Eliotic Buddhism in the two texts. Therefore, while the exploitative commodification of Eastern thought suggests both the problems and possibilities of American universalism at a meta-level, the social discriminations that the characters in both texts face in the domestic U.S. pose immediate, empirical challenges to the integrity of American universalism. As Chang points out, *Caste and Outcast* was published in 1923—the same year in which “the Supreme Court ruled that Asian Indians were racially prohibited from obtaining American citizenship because they were not ‘white persons,’ as required by law.”<sup>500</sup>

Both Mukerji and Kang were writing during the overlapping interwar periods of high literary modernism and the Popular Front, respectively. The engagement of both *Caste and Outcast* and *East Goes West* with T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” coincides with critic Alan Wald’s argument that, despite Eliot’s reactionary politics, many leftist writers during the Popular Front era were influenced by and responded to his work:

The modernist challenge to radical poetry was posed most directly by the verse and literary criticism of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), to judge by the number of direct responses to Eliot’s poetry and the centrality of his name in literary debates on the Left. Despite the elitism and arcane quality of many of Eliot’s literary allusions, young poets found it unfeasible to ignore the profoundly novel approach to poetic form and sensibility that his verse represented. No leftist could admit sympathy for Eliot’s politics, either those implicit in the despairing poems of his early period, or the more explicitly reactionary ones that he later wrote.<sup>501</sup>

As their work demonstrates, neither Kang nor Mukerji embraced typical Marxist-Leninism during the Popular Front Period; their critiques of capitalism are explicit but paired with advocacy of Eastern spirituality. Various allusions to Eliot’s work offered Kang and Mukerji a vocabulary of East-West syncretism and a perpetual anticipation of a renewed land despite empirical evidence of an American “waste land” in which racial, gender, and class discrimination are rife.

Writing later during the Popular Front era of the 1930s, Kang’s turn toward Buddhist spiritualism as a political protest of anticolonialism coincided with the concurrent *tenkō* movement that was taking place in Japan and its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan. According to historian Andrew Barshay, Marxism was introduced to Japan in the 1890s and gained ideological traction in the 1920s.<sup>502</sup> However, in the 1930s, there was a movement toward rediscovering Japanese cultural nationalism called *tenkō*. Intellectuals and political leaders who had previously subscribed to communism renounced it in the 30s and 40s and turned toward this cultural syncretism of Confucian and Buddhist values. In spite of Kang’s animosity toward Japanese colonialism, the cultural movement of *tenkō* would have offered him and many others an avenue within the Imperial culture to critique Japanese colonialism as well as capitalism at large. Barshay writes,

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<sup>500</sup> Chang, 7.

<sup>501</sup> Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 193.

<sup>502</sup> Many thanks to Professor Andrew Barshay for his intellectual engagement with this chapter.



One of the most spectacular and consequential instances of *tenkō* came in June 1933, when Sano Manabu (1892-1953) and Nabeyama Sadachika (1901-1979), top figures in the Communist Party leadership, renounced their allegiance to the Comintern and the policy of violent revolution, embracing instead a Japan-specific mode of revolutionary change under imperial auspices, in reaction to the Soviet Union's use of the Comintern for its own power purposes against Germany and Japan...[In their formal renunciation statements, they state,] "It is not that we are rejecting internationalism among the world proletariat. However, the even higher internationalism of the future is likely to be built out of the efforts to construct single-country socialism in crucial sites across the world.

However, there is nothing so natural or necessary as that Japan's workers should think chiefly of Japan. From ancient times to the modern day, the fact that the Japanese people have progressed through the developmental stages of human society properly, completely, and without interruption from foreign enemies, is evidence of the extraordinarily strong internal developmental capacities of our people..."<sup>503</sup>

Some adherents of *tenkō* sincerely believed that a return to Japanese cultural roots of Confucianism and Buddhism would usher Japan into a socialist democracy and overturn colonialism.<sup>504</sup> Manabu and Sadachika go on to state in their "Letter to our Fellow Defendants," that in turning to *tenkō*, "[w]e reject the capitalistic exploitation and oppression of the peoples of Korea and Taiwan as, above all, the greatest insult to the Japanese people themselves. We fight for completely equal rights for the Korean and Taiwanese peoples."<sup>505</sup> Whether or not Kang consciously subscribed to *tenkō*, his text nevertheless evinces a related belief that Buddhist spiritualism might provide a solution to the related problems of capitalism and colonialism. Like Manabu and Sadachika who paradoxically employ a rhetoric of Japanese imperialism to herald the development of an unorthodox brand of Japanese socialism (not international socialism),<sup>506</sup> both Kang and Mukerji rehearse the inherently paradoxical discourse of American exceptionalism that envisions the U.S. as a space of universal democracy for all races, classes, and genders. For Dhan and Han—and by extension, Mukerji and Kang—enabling residents of this space to spiritually "overcome the self" would address and resolve the oppression of the working class and racial minorities.

The pattern of death and rebirth in both Mukerji's and Kang's texts insists on the fulfillment of such a promised land rather than on the protagonists' own character developments. Mankekar and Gupta aptly point out that "[a]nother common feature of autobiographies is that they are often the story of the author's trials and tribulations, delineating how consciousness develops and matures through life's events. Mukerji's text

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<sup>503</sup> Andrew Barshay, "Chapter 21: Socialism and the Left," *Sources of Japanese Tradition: Vol. Two: 1600 to 2000, Abridged, Part Two: 1868 to 2000*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) 257-8.

<sup>504</sup> Manabu and Sadachika paradoxically employ a rhetoric of Japanese Imperialism to herald the development of Japanese socialism (not international socialism).

<sup>505</sup> Barshay, 258.

<sup>506</sup> "From ancient times to the modern day, the fact that the Japanese people have progressed through the developmental stages of human society properly, completely, and without interruption from foreign enemies, is evidence of the extraordinarily strong internal developmental capacities of our people" (Barshay, 258).

does not fit this model at all...’’<sup>507</sup> And yet, they continue to focus on the distinct shape of Mukerji’s autobiography. I would venture to say that neither *Caste and Outcast* nor *East Goes West*, despite their titles and character-centered veneers, are autobiographies. Instead, both novels are articulations or mappings of a future “cosmological” space that has been rid of cultural imperialism as well as racial, gender, and class discrimination through the spiritual themes of death and rebirth. Both Dhan and Chungpa Han attempt to harness such a vision through their confrontations with and critiques of racism, working class oppression, and male chauvinism.

The Buddhistic themes of death and rebirth, as well as the self and no-self, express the difficulty of Asian American self-representation during a period of Asian exclusion in the U.S. and Orientalist fascination with eastern forms—which I argue in the previous chapter are interrelated responses to industrial modernization. The thematic difference between their engagement with eastern philosophy lies in Dhan’s manifold articulations of the Buddhist *anatman* or the “no-self” and Han’s focus on establishing himself as an “Oriental yankee,” thereby emphasizing the Hindu *atman* or the “self.” However, neither seems to truly be exclusively about one concept over the other. Acknowledging the distinction between the Hindu concept of *atman* from the Buddhist concept of *anatman*, critic William W. Bevis argues that it “is commonly said that Hindus believe physical reality is illusion (*maya*), while Buddhists variously find it deluding (*samsara*), or real.” Despite the doctrinal associations between the Self with imagination and No-Self with reality, he makes the qualification that “the concepts of self and reality are so slippery within meditative traditions that such statements are only introductions to topics’’<sup>508</sup> The slipperiness between *atman* and *anatman* is exemplified during a moment in *East Goes West* when Han is trying to buy time with Trip and he asks her to help him to write a book. When she asks him about the sort of book he intends to write, he replies that he would like to write an autobiography. Tongue-in-cheek, Trip—whose very (androgynous and quotidian) name seems to reflect the novel’s formal mapping—replies, “Good. (Everything’s that.) Tell me something about it, Mr. Han.”<sup>509</sup> Her suggestion that “everything’s” an autobiography seems to sublimate the self, or the narrativization of the self; and yet, in the next sentence, she reasserts the tenability of such a self-narrative.

Although the portrayals of gender reproduce historical problematics of feminizing land, the women portrayed in both novels are figures with which the protagonists closely identify. Female figures in *Caste and Outcast* and *East Goes West* not only represent inclusive utopias but are included in them. For example, while Trip seems to represent the vehicle through which Han endeavors to write his self-narrative, she is also included in his utopian vision of New York. The association of Trip and the female characters of *Caste and Outcast* with movement and flux rather than stationary metaphors of enslavement or an inert territory constructs a rather progressive image of womanhood. Of course the depictions of women are not without their problems. The gender-specific figurations of female fertility through the motif of “abyss-wombs” as representative of the Boehmean abyss of freedom in an inclusive utopia in *Caste and*

<sup>507</sup> Mankekar and Gupta, 232.

<sup>508</sup> William W. Bevis, *Mind of Winter: Wallace Stevens, Meditation, and Literature* (Pittsburgh, PA : University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988) 91.

<sup>509</sup> Kang, 310.

*Outcast* are troubling. And yet, the feminizing of all nations in the novel's epilogue does suggest an envisioned, apocalyptic leveling of imperialist powers. Most importantly, female fertility offers a motif through which the protagonists articulate their Buddhist worldviews of attaining a collective state of enlightenment through death and rebirth.

Dhan's and Han's literary engagements with Buddhist spiritualism are not exceptions to what Žižek calls a fetishistic response to global capitalism.<sup>510</sup> And yet, their references to Eliot's work demonstrate that the fetish can easily become a symptom that indeed poses "cracks in the fabric of the ideological lie" of global capitalism. As "aliens ineligible to citizenship," they self-consciously and explicitly reappropriate the Orientalist fascination with eastern philosophy, exemplified in Eliot's "The Waste Land." By thus exposing the portable commodification of eastern thought, they self-reflexively expose their own objectification as illegal aliens in a nation that is simultaneously exerting itself as a global leader in capitalism and excluding minorities at home. This exposure defers their vision of American universalism. Without the critiques of American racism and global capitalism in Mukerji's and Kang's texts, the Buddhist devices in the two texts can be naturalized as Orientalist conventions. That is to say, the Buddhist strategies of counter-globalization that I delineate in this chapter would be easily overturned as either assimilation or conventional Orientalism were it not for the explicit critiques of the American status quo in both novels. In this way, globalization appears to contain its very critique—which is the enduring theoretical vision, rather than the failed practices, of American universalism.

Both Dhan's and Han's attempts to find "roots for an exile's soul" in the U.S. epitomize their strategic responses to globalization—a reverse exploitation of the west and a revision of it as a waste land capable of spiritual renewal and utopian inclusion. The national borders of this envisioned promised land of America in both texts seem to reassert the ideology of American exceptionalism. As the protagonist of both novels have shown, the ability for Buddhism to transcend national borders as an imported commodity creates its possibility to expansively construct a universal space of cosmopolitan belonging. The subordination of a Marxist revolution to a Buddhist collective enlightenment in both texts mutes and potentially belies the critique of American global capitalism and domestic racial structures. However, as we will see in the next chapter, Popular Front conceptions of socialism recast Marxist internationalism in terms of American exceptionalism so that Bulosan's envisioned socialist utopia is likewise named "America." The Buddhist conception of cyclical temporality—death and rebirth—that is described in this chapter and the Marxist dialectic that I will discuss in the following chapter radically disrupt the bourgeois commodification of time and its consequent disintegration from the space of democratic universalism. In contrast to my first two chapters in which democratic universalism are spatial rather than temporal, the temporality is spatialized as cyclical cognitive maps that envision inclusive utopias in this

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<sup>510</sup> Žižek writes, "Western Buddhism" thus fits perfectly the fetishist mode of ideology in our allegedly "post-ideological" era, as opposed to its traditional *symptomal* mode in which the ideological lie which structures our perception of reality is threatened by symptoms *qua* "returns of the repressed," cracks in the fabric of the ideological lie. The fetish is effectively a kind of symptom in reverse. That is to say, the symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of the false appearance, the point at which the repressed Other Scene erupts, while the fetish is the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth."

chapter. The focus on nonlinear temporality in the latter two chapters of my study indicate that an inclusive universalism is, by definition, utopian and temporally “not yet.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Bursting the Heart of Democracy: The Politics of Nonlinear Temporality in Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart***

#### **Introduction: A Mixed Critical Background**

Carlos Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical novel *America Is in the Heart* (1946) has often been read as a cultural nationalist text since its inclusion in the Asian American literary anthology *Aiiiiieee!*<sup>511</sup> Focusing on the protagonist Carlos’s experiences with racism,<sup>512</sup> the editors of the anthology described the novel as “the story of every Filipino who went to America expecting the pot of gold and discovered a pile of dung instead.”<sup>513</sup> Despite his running critique of American racism throughout the novel, Carlos nevertheless ends his novel in celebration of America:

...I glanced out of the window again to look at the broad land I had dreamed so much about, only to discover with astonishment that the American earth was like a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive me. I felt it spreading through my being, warming me with its glowing reality. It came to me that no man—no one at all—could destroy my faith in America again. It was something that had grown out of my defeats and successes, something shaped by my struggles for a place in this vast land...It was something that grew out of the sacrifices and loneliness of my friends, of my brothers in America and my family in the Philippines—something that grew out of our desire to know America, and to become a part of her great tradition, and to contribute something toward her final fulfillment. I knew that no man could destroy my faith in America that had sprung from all our hopes and aspirations, *ever*.<sup>514</sup>

The contradictory co-existence of Carlos’s critique of a racist democracy and his celebratory American nationalism, as evidenced above, resounds throughout the narrative. This seeming ideological contradiction has incited longstanding controversies among critics over whether the novel is politically conservative or subversive.<sup>515</sup> Critics such as Marilyn Alquizola and Sau-ling Wong<sup>516</sup> have chalked up the enduring

<sup>511</sup> Despite efforts by Popular Front historians such as Michael Denning to give attention to the novel’s socialist politics, the novel’s socialism has received less critical attention than its cultural nationalism. In *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), Michael Denning writes that the novel expresses “sentimental, populist, and humanist nationalism that...characterized the wartime Popular Front” as well as the racial and class struggle of a Filipino protagonist “to transcend a United States of violence” (273-4).

<sup>512</sup> From here, I will make the distinction between the author and protagonist by referring to the former as “Bulosan” and the latter as “Carlos.” Also, the protagonist is named “Allos” in the first portion of the novel when he is in the Philippines and “Carlos” in the second when he arrives to the U.S.; for the purpose of consistency, I will refer to the protagonist as Carlos.

<sup>513</sup> Frank Chin et al., *lvii*.

<sup>514</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 326-7.

<sup>515</sup> Focusing more on the Carlos’s praise of America, some scholars such as Elaine Kim, Susan Evangelista, and Patricia Chu has argued that the novel is an assimilationist text.

<sup>516</sup> In her seminal work, *Reading Asian American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University

contradiction between the protagonist Carlos's rhetoric of American nationalism and his critique of racism in a capitalist democracy to narrative irony. And yet, in light of friend and biographer P.C. Morante's testimony of Bulosan's inexplicable, yet genuine, "idealistic love" for his "Lady America," a wholly ironic reading of the book's American nationalism fails to resolve the conflicting politics of the novel.<sup>517</sup> This chapter asserts that the contradictions of American nationalism and critique of capitalist democracy work dialectically to assert Carlos's Marxist internationalism—an internationalism that is propelled by a likewise dialectical understanding of gender that is worked out in the course of the novel. By exploring Carlos's Marxist internationalism through the novel's form, this chapter suggests that diversions from Bulosan's Popular Front context lead to significant misinterpretations of the text.

The publication of *America Is in the Heart* marked the last year of the Popular Front alliance before its Cold War dispersion in 1947. Carlos's push for Marxist internationalism through both the form and political content of the novel suggests that *America Is in the Heart* was Bulosan's last plea for the continuation of the popular front based on his revision of traditional Marxist-Leninist party lines that had come to be dominated by Soviet-centered Stalinism. However, in contradistinction to Popular Front notions that, along with freeing the "factory slaves," socialism "will set woman free, and restore the Negro race to its human rights,"<sup>518</sup> Bulosan argues the inverse: In his novel, the particularity of gender and racial struggles catalyze the advent of a universalist, international socialism through the dialectical development of his protagonist's Marxist consciousness. Bulosan's novel articulates an alternative Marxism to traditional Marxist-Leninist, specifically Stalinist, party lines through his avant-garde temporal form and the centrality of race and gender to his radical internationalism. Although not a radical "feminist" of the civil rights era, Bulosan's ideas were consonant with objectives of "sexually emancipated Communist women" of his time such as Alexandra Kollontai.<sup>519</sup> Bulosan's emphasis on racial and gender equality within a Marxist internationalist context positions *America Is in the Heart* at the cusp of the Old Left and ensuing liberation movements of third-world Marxism, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Although the dialectic between Carlos's utopian aspirations and his empirical U.S. repeatedly results in a failure to realize utopia, what emerges in each instance is a further alliance with female proletarians which, in turn, renew his hope in a socialist utopia that Carlos names "America."<sup>520</sup> Evident in the novel's conclusion, Carlos represents his socialist utopia as female. As critics have indicated, his gendered

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Press, 1993), critic Sau-ling Wong expresses her bewilderment concerning Carlos Bulosan's most famous semi-autobiographical novel, *America Is in the Heart* (1946): "The story of unrelieved Necessitous mobility competes with (instead of complementing and reinforcing) the story of spiritual awakening and political commitment, with the former providing the more intrusive toponymic punctuation marks" (135). Wong concludes that the protagonist Carlos's circuitous and constant motion articulates a "subver[sion] [of] mainstream myths" about Asian American assimilation into white society and "the *failure* of home-founding" which he confronts in his political and emotional development" (136).

<sup>517</sup> P.C. Morante, *Remembering Carlos Bulosan* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984) 95.

<sup>518</sup> Wald, 57.

<sup>519</sup> Here, I am taking the phrase from the title of Alexandra Kollontai's autobiography.

<sup>520</sup> In isolating Carlos's optimistic aspiration for a socialist America from its dialectical engagement with his critique of democracy, critics have misinterpreted his optimism as a fraught demonstration of American patriotism. See Patricia Chu's *Assimilating Asians*.

representation of the American nation or, as I am arguing, America-as-socialist-utopia, resonates with historically problematic notions of the nation as a chaste, feminine land that either calls for protection or plunder. While failing to depart from this problematic gendering, Carlos nevertheless figures America favorably—as matriarchal and protective rather than weak and vulnerable—“like a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive me.”<sup>521</sup> His gendering of America emerges from his formative experiences with the female proletarians who provide for and educate him: Later in the novel Carlos describes his friend Eileen who cares for him in his sickness and teaches him about socialism as “undeniably the *America* I had wanted to find in those frantic days of fear and flight, in those acute hours of hunger and loneliness.”<sup>522</sup> Critic Rachel Lee has argued that the novel invokes a utopian “all-male collective” of laborers that is secured by two-dimensional female characters.<sup>523</sup> Building upon Lee’s argument, I demonstrate that Carlos’s Manichean figuration of women as “good” Madonnas or “bad” whores nevertheless dialectically articulates an international socialist utopia that includes women. By resituating the novel within its Popular Front context, this article demonstrates that a focus on Carlos’s socialist politics elucidates the gender politics of the novel.

### **The Popular Front Context of *America Is in the Heart***

In his semiautobiographical novel—based in part on his life and those of Filipino American laborers around him—Bulosan describes the conditions of class struggle and the particularities of racism and sexism that shape the political consciousness and emotional development of his protagonist Carlos. In so doing, Bulosan demonstrates Popular Front literary critic V. F. Calverton’s declaration that “[a]n artist is not a product only of himself, but also of the times which have made him himself.”<sup>524</sup> Similarly, Bulosan critic E. San Juan indicates the classical, dialectical materialist nature of Carlos’s development in *America Is in the Heart*:

Bulosan’s primordial interest here is the development of character within the objective historical process of society. By *character* I mean both the product and the process of interaction between consciousness and external world, between spiritual-biological needs and the material circumstances of social existence.<sup>525</sup>

Together with class conflict, Carlos’s experiences with racism and gender inequality shape his Marxist consciousness and his subsequent articulations of a socialist utopia. As my study will show, Carlos’s mutually constitutive aspirations for racial, gender, and class equality propel his quest for international socialism. I am suggesting that, in contrast to Stalinist precepts that women’s struggles were secondary to “the abolition of capitalism, the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the building of a new, socialist society,”<sup>526</sup> Bulosan’s emphases on race and gender are primary, rather than secondary, to the proletarian revolution.

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<sup>521</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 326.

<sup>522</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 235.

<sup>523</sup> Rachel Lee, 41.

<sup>524</sup> V. F. Calverton, *The New Ground of Criticism* (Seattle: University of Washington Book Store, 1930) 49.

<sup>525</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1972) 94, my emphasis.

<sup>526</sup> J. V. Stalin, “On the Tenth Anniversary of the First Congress of Working and Peasant Women” (1928), *J. V. Stalin: Works: Volume II, 1928-1929* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954) 254.

Within the CPUSA, the “Negro question” seemed to remain a vexed one throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Historian Joseph Starobin writes, At their inception in 1919, the American Communists shared the prevailing attitude of the Socialist Party and the I.W.W. that the Negro was part of the oppressed population as a whole. It sufficed to oppose discrimination on grounds of race or color, and it was assumed that racial antagonisms would come to an end when the contradictions of capitalism were overcome by a new social order. Any special program for the Negro was viewed as “reverse racism.”<sup>527</sup>

The Communist Party’s ambiguous support for Negro self-determination waxed and waned over the course of the next two decades. The CP expressed that Negro self-determination within the party demonstrated, at best, “a touchstone of the devotion of whites to the realization of unfulfilled democratic aims as well as an explosive force assisting the white majority in the struggle against the system,”<sup>528</sup> and, at worst, “a democratic demand attainable within the framework of capitalism.”<sup>529</sup> Despite small-scaled efforts within the Popular Front such as those of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign-Born to campaign for Filipino citizenship in the U.S., the presence of Filipinos within the CPUSA was apparently not significant enough to have warranted a racial “question” within the Communist Party. Bulosan’s text describes the ways in which the various formations of Filipino labor unions and the “Committee for the Protection of Filipino Rights” (CPFR) inform Carlos’s developing Marxism.

Stressing racial and gender equality as precursors to international socialism, Bulosan’s alternative Marxism emerges from a period in American history where white working class white women and Filipino men socially and sexually intermingled through contacts at taxi dance halls. In her article, “Alliances Between White Working-Class and Filipino Immigrant Men,” anthropologist Rhacel Salazar Parrenas effectively argues that “[c]ategorically identified as less worthy than other women, white working class women involved with Filipino men were seen as expendable and degenerate” and “[m]arriages and intimate relations between Filipinos and working class white women in the period of the taxi dance halls served as strategies against dominant power relations in society for both groups.”<sup>530</sup> Likewise, Carlos’s narrative describing the racism toward Filipino workers and the exploitation of white female sexual laborers works to expose the capitalist exploitation of the working class and points to the imminence of an international socialist revolution.

As a naïve child of the Philippine peasantry, Bulosan’s protagonist Carlos begins the novel witnessing brutal peasant traditions that hold women to Manichean standards of sexuality in order to preserve the integrity of the atomic family. As I will discuss in a close reading to follow, although Carlos rails against the mistreatment of his sister-in-law

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<sup>527</sup> Joseph Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972) 130. In summing up Lenin’s perspective on the Woman question, Irene Leslie writes, “Lenin’s thesis is—that only through the proletarian revolution and through communism can the woman question be solved completely (“Lenin on the Woman Question,” *The Communist* 15.3 (1936): 247).

<sup>528</sup> Starobin, 131.

<sup>529</sup> Starobin, 200.

<sup>530</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, “Alliances Between White Working-Class Women and Filipino Immigrant Men,” *Major Problems in Asian American History: Documents and Essays*, Eds. Lon Kurashige, Alice Yang Murray (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).

who is punished by the townspeople for not being a virgin on her wedding day, he nevertheless begins the novel upholding the atomic family as a template for a progressive, social utopia. Consequently, he seems to view women as either Madonnas or whores. I will demonstrate that, as Carlos comes into contact with women of various races and classes, his Manicheanism dialectically shifts from the depiction of women as either whores or Madonnas to their figuration as either bourgeois or proletarian. It is only when he recognizes the value of the sexual labor of white women whom he meets in the U.S. as equivalent with the manual labor of his fellow Filipino Americans and that of his family back in the Philippines (including the female members), that Carlos is symbolically able to throw off retrograde notions of the atomic family as a social template and articulate a new Marxist vision of an egalitarian, socialist utopia at the very end of the novel. Given, however, to essentialist notions of women and the nation as a maternal figure even by the end of the novel (or the telos of the protagonist's development), Carlos—and, perhaps by extension, Bulosan—would not have been considered a radical feminist in a post-civil rights era. His gender politics were nevertheless very consistent with profeminists of the 1920s and 1930s who were major figures of the Comintern and the CPUSA.

Alexandra Kollontai was a famous Soviet diplomat for the Comintern who felt that her developing “*Marxist outlook pointed out to me with an illuminating clarity that women’s liberation could take place only as the result of the victory of a new social order and a different economic system.*”<sup>531</sup> With the support of Lenin and Trotsky (and without that of Stalin), Kollontai directed her efforts “to induc[ing] the working-class movement to include the woman question as one of the aims of its struggle *in its program.*”<sup>532</sup> Undertaking the abstract task of describing the “New Woman” in her widely circulated 1920 pamphlet, *The New Morality and the Working Class*, Kollontai, like Carlos, attempts to break out of Manichean fixations on women’s sexuality by describing new women as “not the pure, ‘nice’ girls whose romance culminate in a highly successful marriage, they are not wives who suffer from the infidelities of their husbands, or who themselves have committed adultery[;]”<sup>533</sup> rather, the new woman “does not hide her natural physical drives, which signifies not only an act of self-assertion as a personality, but also a representative of her sex.”<sup>534</sup> However, in describing the paragon of the new woman, Kollontai problematically essentializes the female sex: For example, she asserts, “The new woman does not deny her ‘feminine nature,’ she does not turn aside from life and does not reject earthly joys which reality smilingly grants to each one coveting them.”<sup>535</sup> American communist women writers likewise problematically essentialized women and inadvertently perpetuated patriarchal hierarchies. Critic Alan Wald points out,

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<sup>531</sup> Alexandra Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* (1926), Ed. Iring Fetscher, Trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 13.

<sup>532</sup> Kollontai, 34,14. Later, in the “Report of Political Committee to Plenum,” *The Communist* 10.1 1931, Earl Browder chastises the party’s neglect of the Woman questions stating, “Anyone who has had experience will know that women are the best fighters when you once get them lined up in any kind of work connected with the labor movement” (21).

<sup>533</sup> Kollontai, 53-54.

<sup>534</sup> Kollontai, 93.

<sup>535</sup> Kollontai, 93-94.



Tess Slesinger's *The Unpossessed* (1934), while praiseworthy for its luminous presentation of the view that 'the personal is political,' is troubled by a central ambiguity; conceivably, Slesinger consciously attributes essentialist features to men (logic) and women (emotion), or at least treats maleness and femaleness as equally destructive to psychological health.<sup>536</sup>

Critic Linda Ray Pratt states of protofeminist Communist writer Meridel Le Sueur that "when Party males appear in her work, they 'help female characters recognize their true identity as members of the communal group.'"<sup>537</sup> My point, here, is not to point fingers at the shortcomings of Communist protofeminists but to suggest that Bulosan's gender politics—along with essentialist figurations of women—were on a similar par with those of other contemporary prominent Communists for female liberation. Like Kollontai, Slesinger, and Le Sueur (who, like Bulosan, also contributed to the leftist journal, the *New Masses*), Bulosan sought to give centrality to the struggle for female equality within socialism through the dialectical formation of Carlos's gender consciousness in *America Is in the Heart*.<sup>538</sup>

Carlos's vision of a socialist utopia through the dialectical consciousness of gender, race, and class coincides with minor Frankfurt School theorist Ernst Bloch's alternative Marxist theorization of utopia and the concrete utopias that are "stepping stones" toward it.<sup>539</sup> Through the development of his protagonist's Marxist consciousness, Bulosan articulates traditional Marxist-Leninist aspirations for a socialist utopia in which the international proletariat would control the means of production. However, along with many American writers and artists of the Popular Front, Bulosan diverged from the utilitarianism of Stalinist kitsch and "could not abandon entirely the semi-autonomous 'craft consciousness' championed most recently by [modernist] expatriates in the 1920s."<sup>540</sup> In his book, Alan Wald points to several examples of proletarian writers who, against the norm, employed many modernist formal devices to advance communist ideas. While the majority of American communist writers, such as Mike Gold,<sup>541</sup> nevertheless looked to the Soviet Communist cultural movement "as a model" and renounced modernist ideologies and forms, there were a few Marxist writers such as Herman Spector and Alfred Hayes who overtly modeled their forms after those of

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<sup>536</sup> Wald, 96.

<sup>537</sup> Wald, 100.

<sup>538</sup> Wald describes the instrumentality of women's rights within the CPUSA: "The Soviet Union was upheld as a model, and the Communist Party projected itself as the vanguard of the American working class. This meant that a woman's individualism was always qualified by certain loyalties to a political organization, social class, and even a foreign utopia, that were instrumental steps to self-liberation through group emancipation" (102).

<sup>539</sup> Jack Zipes, "Introduction: Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination," *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, By Ernst Bloch, Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1988) xxvii.

<sup>540</sup> Wald, 15.

<sup>541</sup> Wald points out that, in contrast to Spector and Hayes, "Gold made his antimodernist views (sometimes controverted by his own practice) explicit and even volunteered some anti-intellectual jibes, chiefly aimed at Martha Graham's latest modern dance performances on revolutionary topics, and 'cerebral' music that he head at 'some recent concert of the Workers' Music League'" (194-195).

modernist figures such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot in their advancement of proletarian class-consciousness.<sup>542</sup>

The leftist journal the *New Masses*, founded and edited by Mike Gold, published pieces that denigrated Pound's Fascism, Eliot's religious orthodoxy, and their "literary hocus-pocus rhetoric."<sup>543</sup> And yet, on several occasions, the *New Masses*—which Bulosan read and to which he later contributed—published articles celebrating the bourgeois novelist Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of things Past* for "giv[ing] us an enormously vivid sense of the corruption and unworthiness of the system under which we live. The novel, since it does not do more than that, since it does not carry us forward with a surge of determination and hope, is, needless to say, not so good as the perfect proletarian novel; it has not so much historical importance as the imperfect proletarian novel, for that, despite its failure, looks to the future."<sup>544</sup> A devoted reader of French modernist Marcel Proust,<sup>545</sup> Bulosan likewise employs a Proustian<sup>546</sup> temporal order of "anachrony" in *America Is in the Heart* in his articulation of his protagonist's developing Marxist consciousness. Like Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Bulosan implements what narratology theorist Gérard Genette calls temporal "analepses," or retrospective "returns," and temporal "prolepses," or "anticipations," in his own narrative.<sup>547</sup> That is to say, *America Is in the Heart* is replete with temporal leaps to the narrative future and to the narrative past within the linear narrative of the protagonist's development from childhood to adulthood—that is, the progressive "narrative present" of the "story time."<sup>548</sup> The proleptic and analeptic temporal shifts in the novel respectively refer to utopian visions of American democracy while he is a child in the Philippines and the familial bonds that had existed in his childhood while an adult. These nonlinear utopian moments that seem to center on Carlos's interactions with women both inform his developing, socialist internationalism and reflect his (supremely proleptic) utopian vision

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<sup>542</sup> Wald, 102. Wald writes, "The modernist challenge to radical poetry was posed most directly by the verse and literary criticism of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), to judge by the number of direct responses to Eliot's poetry and the centrality of his name in literary debates on the Left. Despite the elitism and arcane quality of many of Eliot's literary allusions, young poets found it unfeasible to ignore the profoundly novel approach to poetic form and sensibility that his verse represented. No leftist could admit sympathy for Eliot's politics, either those implicit in the despairing poems of his early period, or the more explicitly reactionary ones that he later wrote. But there was contention about the extent to which his technical innovations, as well as those of Ezra Pound (1886-1972), who in the late 1920s personally befriended radicals and for an interval contributed to Left publications, could be assimilated if bereft of ideology" (193).

<sup>543</sup> See *New Masses* September 1931 and June 1939.

<sup>544</sup> The writer goes on to say, "But Proust is, nevertheless, a better writer than the avowed revolutionary who cannot give us an intense perception of either the character of the proletariat or the character of the bourgeoisie" ("Proust and the Bourgeoisie," *New Masses* February 1933: 5). See also Granville Hicks's "Revolution and the Novel," *New Masses* 22 May 1934 in which he extensively discusses his admiration for Proust's literary craft.

<sup>545</sup> In the novel, Carlos recalls when Alice Odell sends him a copy of *Remembrance of Things Past* (232).

<sup>546</sup> In *The sense and non-sense of revolt* (Trans. Jeanine Herman. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Julia Kristeva views Proust as a contemporary figure who, "in bringing new figures of temporality to the fore[,] has attempted to "rekindle the flame (easily extinguishable) of the culture of revolt" (9).

<sup>547</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) 51, 67.

<sup>548</sup> Genette distinguishes between the temporally lagging "story time" and the "narrative time" which both precedes and eludes the story time (33).

of a familiar democracy. Bulosan's attention to avant-garde form responds to co-founder of the *New Masses* Joseph Freeman's call to overturn the idealist viewpoint of aesthetics and to advance a "sociological theory of art."<sup>549</sup> Bulosan, however, takes Freeman's address a step further by expressing "the social-political regime, erected on the given economic basis" through the nonlinear temporal form itself rather than the content of art on which Freeman appears to be focused.<sup>550</sup>

As an alternative Marxist to many Popular Front thinkers and writers in his emphasis on modernist formalism, race, and gender, as primary to the proletarian struggle,<sup>551</sup> Bulosan's nonlinear formal leaps between Carlos's childhood in the Philippines and his adulthood in the U.S. coincide with the non-Stalinist, dialectical theories of Ernst Bloch and Leon Trotsky, whom he mentions in the novel.<sup>552</sup> In particular, the utopian, non-linear expressions of democracy and familiarity resonate with what Frankfurt School theorist Ernst Bloch would call a "concrete utopia" or utopian moments. For Bloch and Bulosan, literature (and art) "contain the anticipatory illumination of that which has not yet become"—which is, more so for Bulosan than Bloch (whose utopia is more mystical than social), a pseudo-spiritual, socialist utopia.<sup>553</sup> The concrete utopias in literature and art act as "stepping stones and indications of what the human individual and the world could become" insofar as they methodologically raise social and political consciousness through socialist aspirations and paint "wish-landscapes" that contrast with (often dystopian) empirical realities.<sup>554</sup> Carlos's concrete utopias move dialectically between Blochian mysticism<sup>555</sup> and scientific socialism to form a socialism that retains the primitive mysticism representative of his life in the Philippines as he develops his class consciousness.

The evolution of Carlos's socialist ideology and utopian vision that emerges from shifts to his narrative future in the capitalist U.S. and his narrative past in the semi-feudal Philippines reflects Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution," that is, the law of uneven and combined development.<sup>556</sup> In this theory, Trotsky proposes that "backward" (feudal or semi-feudal) countries—whose bourgeoisie are, as in the Philippines of Bulosan's novel, too dependent on foreign capital and imperialism to revolt—do not necessarily follow the same order as the more "advanced" (capitalist) countries. Instead, the

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<sup>549</sup> Joseph Freeman, "Literary Theories," *New Masses* May 1929: 12.

<sup>550</sup> Freeman, 13.

<sup>551</sup> Wald, 57.

<sup>552</sup> In *AIH*, Carlos states, "I was naïve. I wanted to be sure that communism was what Filipinos needed. I felt somehow that I needed it too. What was the nemesis of communism? Was it Trotskyism? Whatever it was that seemed relevant to the needs of the Filipinos in California, I knew I must assimilate it" (270).

<sup>553</sup> Jack Zipes, "Introduction," xv.

<sup>554</sup> In his "Introduction," Zipes states, "It follows naturally that wish-images and wish-landscapes are formations conceived by artists to measure the distance we have yet to go to achieve happiness. The wish-landscapes seem to transcend reality yet, in fact, leave indelible marks in our consciousness and in cultural artifacts..." (xxxix).

<sup>555</sup> Bloch has been criticized for the mysticism and lack of scientific socialism in his theorization of utopia. See Jack Zipes, "Ernst Bloch and the Obscurity of Hope: Introduction to the Special Section on Ernst Bloch," *New German Critique*, No. 45 Autumn, 1998: 3-8.

<sup>556</sup> Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London: Verson Editions and NLB, 1981) 87.

Trotsky rejects Stalin's concept of stagism, which fixes "an order of succession for countries at various levels of development" from feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and to communism (98).

backward countries have the ability to leap over the capitalist stage or combine the unfinished bourgeois-democratic revolution with a socialist revolution by the proletariats who lead the peasantry.<sup>557</sup> The proletarian revolutions in backward countries “open” revolution on a national and international level.<sup>558</sup> Narrating from the continued aspiration for permanent revolution beyond the novel’s narrative time, Bulosan articulates the socialist promise of his present moment through the transformative moments in Carlos’s political consciousness. Although the novel appears to linearly relate Carlos’s development from his boyhood as a peasant in the Philippines and his adulthood as a migrant laborer in the U.S., the narrative continually oscillates between his childhood and his adulthood. The temporal, and corresponding spatial, nonlinearity of the novel thematically reflects the “uneven and combined” revolutionary potential of the Philippines and the U.S. The nonlinear temporal form thus suggests that permanent revolution is not merely the content of Carlos’s socialist utopia but is also part of Bulosan’s method in narrating the concrete utopias of Carlos’s socialist development.<sup>559</sup>

### **Looking Back: The Family as Carlos’s Model for Utopia**

Carlos begins his novel in the narrative present of his childhood in the Philippines, then a colony of the U.S., with the restoration of his family when his brother Leon returns from fighting on behalf of the U.S. in World War I: Carlos states, “Leon grabbed my shoulders and swung me swiftly above his head;...Suddenly with an affectionate glance at the animal, he took the rope from my father and started plowing the common earth that had fed our family for generations.”<sup>560</sup> For Carlos, familial bonds represent a wish-landscape of democratic collectivity that are both interrupted and consolidated by primitive traditions of feudalism. Carlos describes his brother Leon’s tragic wedding day when, according to a “primitive custom,” the townspeople punish his wife and their family after the groom discovers that she is not a virgin, and abstains from lighting a fire in the chimney of their house as a sign.<sup>561</sup> Documenting the event, Carlos watches as the townspeople tie Leon and his wife to a tree and physically assault them. Afterwards, Carlos cuts them loose and watches as the “girl flung her bleeding arms about my brother and wept silently...my brother lifted the girl in his arms, as ceremoniously and gently as he had done that afternoon, and carried her tenderly into their house to begin a new life.”<sup>562</sup> In this complex scene in which Leon is implicated in his wife’s, as well as his own, public shaming and punishment, their crucifixion—with Christological resonances. This punishment appears to be a part of the primitive marriage ritual through which Leon’s family with his unnamed wife is resurrected. While complicit as a disempowered onlooker of the crucifixion, Carlos nevertheless chastises the public evaluation of the bride’s virginity as “a fast-dying custom” among the

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<sup>557</sup> Löwy, 88.

<sup>558</sup> Löwy, 98*n*. In addition to a revolution on an international level, Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” suggests that the “revolution is possible at any moment everywhere (‘a permanent possibility’...) [and]...that the revolution must occur simultaneously all over the world” (Löwy, 98*n*).

<sup>559</sup> Towards the end of the novel, Carlos questions whether communism “was what the Filipinos needed”: He wonders, “Was it Trotskyism? Whatever it was that seemed relevant to the needs of the Filipinos in California, I knew I must assimilate it” (270).

<sup>560</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 4.

<sup>561</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 6.

<sup>562</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 8.

peasantry, “in line with other backward customs in the Philippines[,]” and he immediately narrates a moment in the future: “I saw him again on my way to America, but he was then a mature man with children of his own...It was good-bye to my brother Leon and to the war he had fought in a strange land; good-bye to his silent wife and all that was magnificent in her.”<sup>563</sup> The temporal looping serves as a tracking device that signals a rise in emotional and political consciousness of both the primitive practices of the peasantry and the gender inequities in the Philippines and later in the U.S. As the narrator who is situated beyond the narrative time of the text, Bulosan signals a transformation in Carlos’s consciousness through the narrative shift to this proleptic or future moment: As Carlos becomes conscious of this retrograde custom of the Philippine peasantry, his narrative leaps to a future moment in which his utopian vision of a familial, American democracy emerges from the restoration of his sister-in-law’s virtue and her “magnificence” through marriage. Carlos’s conceptualization of a utopian democracy as a familial structure emerges from his sister-in-law’s dialectical transformation from “whore” to “Madonna” through marriage and childbirth. Carlos’s Manichean perception of women as either “whores” or “Madonnas” is thus fortified, rather than transcended, by his notion of utopia as a familial democracy. His utopian notion of family through which he dialectically perceives his sister-in-law as no longer “whore” but “Madonna” is, itself, informed by his “primitive” heritage.

The wedding scene in *America Is in the Heart* is an example of what Ernst Bloch would call a “concrete utopia” which is defined by three interdependent occurrences: (1) “relative historical gains, revolutionary transformations and formations” (2) the hope or anticipation that motivates these developments (3) the linkage between “enthusiasm” and “partiality” or emotional and political consciousness.<sup>564</sup> For Bloch and Bulosan, literature (and art) “contain the anticipatory illumination of that which has not yet become”<sup>565</sup> — that is, a pseudo-spiritual, socialist utopia. Concrete utopias, which are found in literature and art, act as “stepping stones and indications of what the human individual and the world could become” insofar as they raise social and political consciousness and paint “wish-landscapes” that contrast (often dystopian) empirical realities.<sup>566</sup> For example, during his narration of his brother and sister-in-law’s traumatic wedding day, Carlos becomes aware of the primitive brutality of the Philippine peasant customs—specifically the gendered practice of evaluating female sexuality. His concrete utopia of emotional and political development includes a proleptic wish-landscape of his brother and sister-in-law happily settled in a home filled with children. This wish-landscape of a thriving atomic family symbolically ushers in his anticipatory illumination of a democratic America to which he is traveling—a country he imagines to be a harmonious, social family of mixed races and class mobility: As a Filipino colonial subject of the U.S., Carlos is taught during his childhood that the U.S. is where, simply put, a poor boy

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<sup>563</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 7, 8, 9.

<sup>564</sup> See Zipes, “Introduction,” xxvii; Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1988) 119, 216.

<sup>565</sup> Zipes, “Introduction,” xv.

<sup>566</sup> In his “Introduction,” Zipes states, “It follows naturally that wish-images and wish-landscapes are formations conceived by artists to measure the distance we have yet to go to achieve happiness. The wish-landscapes seem to transcend reality yet, in fact, leave indelible marks in our consciousness and in cultural artifacts...” (xxxix).

named Abraham Lincoln became president and died for a black person.<sup>567</sup> As a child, he is thus taught his own racial and national inferiority by the omission of Philippine-American historical affairs from grand historical narratives of American democracy. However, when Carlos arrives in the U.S.—as I will discuss later—he finds that the empirical U.S. is mired in class and racial conflict as well as gender inequity. The concrete utopias in *America Is in the Heart* move dialectically insofar as they extract certain illuminating, social truths concerning class and gender from empirical situations. At the same time, these concrete utopias confront often dystopian realities with either proleptic or analeptic wish-landscapes that anticipate Carlos’s social utopia—or what Bloch theorizes as “the not-yet-become.”<sup>568</sup>

Despite Carlos’s nostalgic association between the Philippines and familial bonds throughout the novel, he nevertheless recalls that his first experience with class discrimination had been during his childhood in the Philippines. Carlos narrates the experience of when he and his mother are desperately trying to sell beans in the marketplace at Puzorobio, a “well-to-do,” bourgeois girl, who “walked like a queen,” comes up to his mother and hatefully dashes their beans to the ground.<sup>569</sup> Carlos’s Madonna-esque mother self-effacingly replies, “It is alright...It is alright.” Framing the social interaction between the marketplace girl and his mother as a dystopian moment, he narrates his own defiance of the middle class: “I was one peasant who did not crawl on my knees and say: ‘It is alright. It is alright....’”<sup>570</sup> Carlos views this moment as “another discovery” or a concrete utopia in which he “came to know their (the middle class’s) social attitude, their stand on the peasant problem...[and] where they stood regarding national issues.”<sup>571</sup> Carlos does not specify here the national issues to which he is referring. And yet, the vagueness of his very term “nation,” since the Philippines was, at the time, a colony of the U.S. nation, suggests Carlos’s view that the Filipino middle class was complicit in American colonization of the Philippines. In this way, his critique of the bourgeoisie and capitalism is compounded by his critique of racial imperialism. The figuration of both the bourgeois and proletariat as women in this instance seems at once to perpetuate his Manichean depictions of gender and signal his consciousness of gender within class struggle.

Through this experience he begins to dialectically shift his Manichean paradigm from female sexuality to female representations of the bourgeois and peasant classes: His portrayal of women changes focus from figures that are explicitly erotic or maternal to those that are bourgeois or laboring. Despite his shift from a sexual to an economic Manichean perception of women, he seems to map the erotic and maternal components on to his paradigm of proletariat-bourgeois insofar as his peasant mother seems to maintain her maternal persona while the bourgeois girl who “attracted general attention” by “her elegant dress” becomes the erotic object of the townspeople’s gaze.<sup>572</sup> Carlos’s political consciousness of gender and class continues to develop through a dialectical interaction with a dystopian, empirical reality of class conflict. In this moment of his

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<sup>567</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 69, 70.

<sup>568</sup> Zipes, “Introduction,” xv. The German phrase used for “the not-yet-become” is “*noch-nicht-geworden*.”

<sup>569</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 37.

<sup>570</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 38.

<sup>571</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 38.

<sup>572</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 39.

advancing class consciousness, Carlos's perception of his mother as a Madonna figure, whose belly would frequently and spontaneously grow big with child, is eclipsed by his figuration of her as a laborer.<sup>573</sup> While identifying with his mother's struggle, Carlos nevertheless denounces her subservience to the middle class. Another concrete utopia emerges from his identification with a female laborer and defiance of the middle class.

The deferred, utopian "real," though not explicitly articulated in the experience with the marketplace girl, is implicit in Carlos's continual glimpses into the future of a social utopia in America during his childhood.<sup>574</sup> His empirical clashes with the Philippine and (later) American middle-classes shape, through juxtaposition, his notion of a utopian America. As Bloch asserts, "the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present."<sup>575</sup> Referring to the American colonization of the Philippines from 1898 onward and proleptically to his own travel to the U.S., Carlos optimistically and naively states as a child, "Those who could no longer tolerate existing conditions adventured into the new land, for the opening of the United States to them was one of the gratifying provisions of the peace treaty that culminated the Spanish-American War."<sup>576</sup> Such a statement testifies both to the racial and national inferiority to white Americans which Carlos is taught in the Philippines as well as his developing sense of Marxist ideological transitions of feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. As demonstrated in Carlos's experience with the bourgeois girl in the marketplace, his narrative signals a concrete utopia as it makes a proleptic leap to a later utopian moment when he comes into political and emotional consciousness of unjust class division and discrimination within a semi-feudal society in the Philippines.

Propelled by his concrete utopias, or developments in class and gender consciousness, Carlos's conception of utopia progresses dialectically in the course of the novel. As I will elaborate on later in this chapter, Carlos's empirical America fails to coincide with the anticipatory utopia of his childhood and thus, he constantly revises it based on his dialectical experiences with racism, ethnic Filipino solidarity, and interethnic labor unions. Like Bloch, whose "hope" in a socialist utopia has been criticized as mystical,<sup>577</sup> Bulosan views theology in terms of a Promethean/Mosaic tradition in which "the transcendent God of domination is displaced by a man; theology becomes anthropology."<sup>578</sup> Critic Augusto Espiritu has argued that, through Carlos in *America Is in the Heart*, the author Bulosan perceives himself as a Christ-like figure "whose suffering held the key to the redemption of his fellow Filipinos" and articulates a utopian vision to perpetuate their faith according to the cultural syncretism of Philippine folk culture and Catholicism called *pasyon*, or a native adaptation of the New

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<sup>573</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 44.

<sup>574</sup> As Carlos narrates the painful experiences of his poverty-stricken childhood, he refers to the 1934 ratification of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, stating, "Those who could no longer tolerate existing conditions adventured into the new land, for the opening of the United States to them was one of the gratifying provisions of the peace treaty that culminated the Spanish-American War" (*AIH*, 5).

<sup>575</sup> Bloch, "Utopian," 12.

<sup>576</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 5.

<sup>577</sup> See Jack Zipes, "Ernst Bloch and the Obscenity of Hope," 3-8.

<sup>578</sup> Ronald M. Green, "Ernst Bloch's Revision of Atheism," *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 49, No. 2 Apr., 1969: 132. Bulosan's mythological resonances coincide with Joseph Freeman's notion that the Marxist attitude toward art acknowledges "the economic factor is the determining factor in the last instance, but intermediate factors, such as 'mythology' play a more direct role" (13).

Testament.<sup>579</sup> I would argue, however, that if Carlos does begin the novel viewing himself as a Christ-figure, by proxy through his brother and sister-in-law's crucifixion, he nevertheless displaces his messianic focus from himself as Christ-figure onto his utopian vision. That is to say, Carlos distills folk Christianity—with which he was apparently quite familiar<sup>580</sup>—into scientific socialism; Bulosan's primary aim is to convey a socialist, perhaps even mystical, utopia which Carlos describes as "America" at the end of the novel through a series of Blochian dialectics.

Through instances of Carlos's character development in which he overcomes social discrimination and comes into political consciousness, Bulosan demonstrates that his utopian "Kingdom...is the abiding protest of man against alienated existence and the perennial hope of a reconciliation of man with nature, man with man, and man with himself."<sup>581</sup> Both Bulosan and Bloch conceived of the individual through the dialectical interaction between consciousness and the material world.<sup>582</sup> Bloch asserts that "art and literature mediat[e] the relationship of human beings to one another and to the material world around them" in order for "human beings to mold and shape themselves into 'godlike' creatures" in his theory on the "utopian function of art and literature."<sup>583</sup> Utopia, according to Bloch, is continually "transposed into the future...[and, therefore,] does not even exist. But it is not something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not *yet* in the possibility; *that* it could be there if we could only do something for it."<sup>584</sup> Bulosan's socialist utopia of "America"—in contrast to the racial prejudice and social injustice of the current America from which he is narrating—is also continually and dialectically "transposed into the future."

### **The Two Americas of *America Is in the Heart***

The narrative leaps, from moments of sadness and class struggle during Carlos's childhood to his future in America, seem to suggest a *dystopian* vision of a primitive past in the Philippines and a consequently modern, if not utopian, vision of a future moment in the U.S. And yet, as the narrative progresses to his time spent in the U.S., it becomes clear that the America in which he arrives is not the democratic social utopia he had

<sup>579</sup> Augusto Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 49.

<sup>580</sup> Through a close reading of *America Is in the Heart*, Espiritu convincingly demonstrates that "Bulosan's familiarity with oral culture, storytelling, and the pre-Hispanic animist beliefs that survive among Filipinos in the modern period...[and] also implicate Bulosan in a larger folk Christian tradition" (66). Espiritu goes on to explain, through the work of historian Reynaldo Ileto, that "these beliefs melded with Christianity during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines and found expression in the *pasyon*, a native adaptation of the New Testament, which became an integral part of popular culture. The *pasyon* narrated the betrayal of Christ and his trials and tribulations. But even more so, it was the centerpiece of Holy Week celebrations that were 'annual occasion[s] for [their] own renewal, a timing for ridding the loob ['the inner being'] of impurities (shed like the blood and sweat of flagellants), for dying to the old self and being reborn anew...for renewing or restoring ties between members of the community.' The point of these renderings of suffering—which include graphic descriptions of the shedding of blood—was to evoke emotions of pity (*awa*) and empathy (*damay*) that invited others to undertake their own journey or pilgrimage of redemptive suffering (*lakaran*), as Christ had done."

<sup>581</sup> Green, 134.

<sup>582</sup> San Juan writes, Bulosan "conceived of the mind as a developing process determined by material forces mutually interacting with the living person's consciousness and his role in economic production" (120).

<sup>583</sup> Jack Zipes, "Introduction," xxx.

<sup>584</sup> Bloch, "Utopian," 3.



imagined. Just as he is nearing the shores of Seattle, Carlos encounters the racism of the young white American girl on the ship who calls Carlos and his friend “half-naked savages.” Carlos is attracted to the eroticized girl “wearing a brief bathing suit” and yet repulsed by her racism. His dis-identification with the racist, bourgeois girl demonstrates the vexed relation between his gender politics and his developing class consciousness. The girl represents the racially prejudiced, middle class that Carlos had not expected to find within U.S. democracy. Moreover, here, as in other instances in the novel, a female character acts as a (dystopian) cipher for the nation: Carlos states, “I was to hear that girl’s voice in many ways afterward in the United States. It became no longer her voice, but an angry chorus shouting: ‘*Why don’t they ship those monkeys back where they came from?*’”<sup>585</sup> The utopian land which Carlos had anticipated as a child is undercut by his empirical reality in the U.S.

Carlos challenges his racial particularization as a “monkey” by claiming himself to be a universal subject that would, one day, belong to his socialist utopia America. Immediately after his experience with the racism of the bourgeois girl on the ship to America, he narrates:

We arrived in Seattle on a June day. My first sight of the approaching land was an exhilarating experience. Everything seemed *native* and promising to me. It was like *coming home* after a long voyage, *although as yet I had no home in this city*. Everything *seemed familiar* and kind—the white faces of the buildings melting in the soft afternoon sun, the gray contours of the surrounding valleys that seemed to vanish in the last periphery of light. With a sudden joy, I knew I must find a home in this new land.<sup>586</sup>

The narrative shifts between his past in the Philippines and his present arrival in America temper his feeling of alienation. The analeptic narrative leaps enable him to feel ironically at home in a foreign land which discriminates against his race. Although there appears to be a great deal of irony towards the idea of home in this passage, the dystopian prejudice of a democratic nation dialectically forms a renewed vision of a familial utopia. This instance is a prime example in which Carlos cites two Americas: the dystopian, empirical one in which he is othered on the grounds of race and class and the utopian one that has yet to materialize as a familial “home.” The dialectic between two Americas in the novel—a socialist utopia and an empirical dystopia—culminates in Carlos’s renewed hope for utopia and also illuminates the contradiction between the rhetoric of nationalism and the critique of democracy in the novel. Carlos’s feelings of familiarity which he derives from his past in the Philippines offset such hostile scenes of racism as that with the bourgeois girl on the boat and anticipate a sense of inclusion that will be available to all in his democratic utopia.

In the U.S., Carlos recalls a long-forgotten moment in the Philippines when he “wanted to run away from all that poverty. [And yet, he] did not want to, because there was affection in [his] family.”<sup>587</sup> He remembers that he does run away but after he returns, it is his mother who relieves him of his hunger and “reach[es] for [him].”<sup>588</sup> His mother’s affection and familial devotion seem utopian and absent in his experiences in

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<sup>585</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 99.

<sup>586</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 99, my emphasis.

<sup>587</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 281.

<sup>588</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 283.

the U.S. This utopian moment of his mother's affection in the Philippines contrasts with the alienating racism that Carlos experiences in the U.S. Therefore, inasmuch as Carlos's proleptic narrative shifts seek to deliver him from the pain of a dystopian moment during his childhood in the Philippines to a more optimistic future moment, analeptic recollections of his familiar past in the Philippines also renew his utopian aspirations insofar as they provide hope for familial affinity in a utopian America.

Carlos's narrative mirrors Bloch's description of how the writer's ever-progressing narrative present or his "now-time" oscillates between the past and the future. Bloch describes the "link between *enthusiasm* and *partiality*," which for Carlos is his hope in the utopian moment and his political consciousness, as that

which takes place only during times of ascent, [and] brings the now-time, which generates enthusiasm and partiality...into connection with other periods of awakening, no matter how long they were in the past and how differently embedded they were within the historical continuum.<sup>589</sup>

For Bloch and Bulosan, the hope and illumination of concrete utopias are achieved by looking to both future moments and past moments. Bloch encourages writers "to explode the continuum of history" but not "to explode the context"—that is, the conceptual "current" of the narrative. He adds that "to explode...does not mean to focus on one point, not even to turn something into a monad. Rather, to explode is a liberating act that frees all essentially related, utopian moments from before and after within all the respective dawning of now-time and relays their directions."<sup>590</sup> In the same way, each time an analeptic or proleptic shift brings Carlos to a hopeful, utopian moment, it is once again exploded by a dystopian experience from another past or future moment. This explosion liberates Carlos from the constraints of his empirical realities and allows him to envision another utopian moment which acts as a pathway toward his socialist utopia.

### **Combined and Uneven Development and the Nature of Bulosan's Philippine Nationalism**

Although Carlos's dialectical leaps into the hopeful past enable him to move beyond the dystopian realities of American capitalist democracy, Carlos does not attempt to deconstruct the association between the Philippines and the "primitive" past. In several instances throughout his narrative of the Philippines, Carlos nostalgically describes and often critiques the primitive semi-feudal culture of the Philippines: As I mentioned earlier, he castigates the tradition of determining the virginity of the bride as "primitive."<sup>591</sup> He likewise critiques the inefficacy of the "primitive" doctor who is retrieved to help repair Carlos's broken limbs after he falls from a coconut tree in an attempt to harvest coconuts for his family.<sup>592</sup> At the same time, he endearingly comments that his mother's business of trading *Boggoong*, or salted fish, was "very simple and primitive."<sup>593</sup> His critical commentary on Philippine primitivism does not appear to be racially motivated for neither does he privilege his dystopian present in America as necessarily more utopian than his past in the Philippines. His depiction of the "primitive"

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<sup>589</sup> Bloch, "Utopian," 216.

<sup>590</sup> Bloch, "Utopian," 218.

<sup>591</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 6

<sup>592</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 43.

<sup>593</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 33.

life in the Philippines during his narration of his childhood resonates in his comparison of the “primitive beauty of Santa Fe” with the “calm and isolation of Baguio, the mountain city in Luzon.”<sup>594</sup> As he nostalgically equates the primitive landscape of the Philippines and America through description, he also compares the retrograde politics of class discrimination in both nations. For example, later, when Carlos is working for the American socialist magazine *The New Tide*, Carlos refers to San Luis Obispo as “this feudalistic town” because there, the “agricultural workers were beginning to ask for unity, but had been barred from established unions.”<sup>595</sup>

The comparable primitivism of semi-feudal and capitalist nations in Carlos’s narrative challenges the Stalinist stagist conception of ideological class progression from feudalism, capitalism, to socialism. Carlos’s homologous leaps between the feudal setting of his past and the capitalist setting of his present advances the overlapping Blochian notion of nonsynchronism and Trotsky’s theory of a “permanent revolution,” that is, the law of uneven and combined development.<sup>596</sup> In Bloch’s 1932 essay, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” he asserts that the “more thoroughly societies are integrated into capitalism, the more synchronism or temporal ‘sameness’ they exhibit[;]”<sup>597</sup> however, capitalist modernization fails to completely assimilate the nonsynchronous elements of colonial or feudal societies. Resonant with Bulosan’s ambivalent descriptions of Philippine primitivism, Bloch writes, “The foundation of the nonsynchronous contradiction is the unfulfilled fairy tale of the good old days, the unresolved myth of dark old being or of nature.”<sup>598</sup> For him, a concrete utopia emerges when nonsynchronous contradiction to capitalist modernity dialectically “liberates the still *possible future* from the *past* only by putting both in the present”<sup>599</sup> —thus propelling both synchronous and nonsynchronous societies into a socialist future. Similarly, Trotsky proposes that “backward” (feudal or semi-feudal) countries—whose bourgeoisie are, as in the Philippines of Bulosan’s novel, too dependent on foreign capital and imperialism to revolt—do not necessarily follow the same order as the more “advanced” (capitalist) countries. Instead, the backward countries have the ability to leap over the capitalist stage or combine the unfinished bourgeois-democratic revolution with a socialist revolution by the proletariats who would lead the peasantry.<sup>600</sup> The proletarian revolutions in backward countries “open” revolution on a national and international level.<sup>601</sup> In addition to a revolution on an international level, Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” suggests that the “revolution is possible at any moment everywhere (‘a permanent possibility’...) [and]...that the revolution must occur simultaneously all over the world.”<sup>602</sup> Towards the end of the novel, Carlos questions whether communism “was

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<sup>594</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 168.

<sup>595</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 183.

<sup>596</sup> Trotsky rejects Stalin’s concept of stagism, which fixes “an order of succession for countries at various levels of development” from feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and to communism (Löwy, 98).

<sup>597</sup> Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia Press, 2002) 250.

<sup>598</sup> Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” *New German Critique*, No. 11 (Spring, 1977): 35.

<sup>599</sup> Bloch, “Nonsynchronism,” 33.

<sup>600</sup> Löwy, 88.

<sup>601</sup> Löwy, 98*n*.

<sup>602</sup> Löwy, 98*n*.

what the Filipinos needed”: He wonders, “Was it Trotskyism? Whatever it was that seemed relevant to the needs of the Filipinos in California, I knew I must assimilate it.”<sup>603</sup> The temporal dialecticism between the present in America and the past in the Philippines articulates Carlos’s anticipation of a permanent revolution whereby the proletariats of nonsynchronous countries, such as the Philippines, lead social revolutions on national levels and complete the socialist revolutions in other capitalist, synchronous countries such as the United States.

Following Marx’s critiques of the peasantry,<sup>604</sup> Trotsky emphasizes that the proletariats must lead the peasantry in the revolution: In *Results and Prospects*, he famously states, “Historical experience shows that the peasantry are absolutely incapable of taking up an *independent* role.”<sup>605</sup> Löwy, however, refutes critics of Trotsky who accuse him of “denial,’ ‘ignorance,’ or ‘neglect’ of the peasantry”:

When he universalized the theory of permanent revolution in the late 1920s as strategy for all the areas of peripheral capitalism, Trotsky continued to stress the decisive role of the peasantry in any real revolutionary process. [Löwy quotes from Trotsky’s *Permanent Revolution*,] “Not only the agrarian, but also the national question assigns to the peasantry—the overwhelming majority of the population in backward countries—an exceptional place in the democratic revolution. Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed.”<sup>606</sup>

Bulosan’s Trotskyism helps to explain Carlos’s ambivalence toward the semi-feudal peasantry in the novel. In clarifying the social grievances of the peasantry in the *hacenderos* (landlord) system that culminated in “anarchic” peasant rebellions (one of which was the Tayug Rebellion, mentioned earlier) in the 1920s and 1930s, Carlos states,

The peasants did not know to whom they should present their grievances or whom to fight when the cancer of exploitation became intolerable. They became cynical about the national government and the few powerful Filipinos of foreign extraction who were squeezing a fat livelihood out of it. They began to think for themselves and to take matters into their own hands, and they resorted to anarchistic methods. But there came a time when an intelligent campaign for revolt was started, with the positive influences of peasant revolts in other lands; and the Philippines peasants came out with their demands, ready to destroy every force that had taken from them their inherited lands.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>603</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 270.

<sup>604</sup> In *The Communist Manifesto*, Trans. Samuel Moore (New York: Washington Square Press, 1964) Marx and Engels write of the peasantry: “They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. What is more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history” (75).

<sup>605</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1969) 72).

<sup>606</sup> Löwy, 93.

<sup>607</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 23-24. The later “intelligent campaign” to which Carlos refers here is most likely the alliance of the Communist-led Philippine peasant guerilla army, the Hukbalahap (an abbreviated name for the People’s Anti-Japanese Army), with the U.S. armed forces to overthrow Japanese invasion of the Philippines in 1941. Led by Communist-leader Luis Taruc, the Hukbalahap revolt was driven by both class and Philippine nationalist objectives. However, during the closing months of the liberation from the Japanese occupation in 1945, American troops turned against the Hukbalahap by massacre and arrest (See Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of the Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1977, p. 110, 113). Furthermore, the rest of the Philippine

### Development through Racial Conflicts and the Residue of Prostitution

As Carlos travels from a semi-feudal to a capitalist society, he is dissatisfied with the state of the proletariat which seems to be mired in prostitution, gambling, and drugs and thwarted by union breakers. While racially othered himself, Carlos appears to likewise figure prostitutes and “whores” as “other.” Upon his arrival back in Seattle from Alaska, Carlos states,

I was already in America, and I felt good and safe. I did not understand why. The gamblers, prostitutes and Chinese opium smokers did not excite me, but they aroused in me a feeling of flight. I knew that I must run away from them, but it was not that I was afraid of contamination. I wanted to see other aspects of American life, for surely these destitute and vicious people were merely a small part of it. Where would I begin this pilgrimage, this search for a door into America?<sup>608</sup>

Rejecting prostitution, gambling, and opium smoking as dystopian, Carlos flees from such surroundings, not out of fear of contamination, but to search for his utopia. Again, Carlos makes a distinction between his empirical, dystopian U.S. and the democratic utopia he calls America. From the dialectic between his dystopian experiences and his previous utopian notions of a democratic America, Carlos begins to articulate his vision of a more progressive, socialist utopia. Moreover, the futurity of Carlos’s question—“Where would I begin this pilgrimage, this search for a door into America?”—telegraphs the enduring, socialist promise of Bulosan’s present moment outside of narrative time.

As the narrative seems to oscillate between utopian and dystopian moments in Carlos’s past in the Philippines and his future in America, his utopian vision of America dialectically evolves and yet its realization is continually kept at bay. In the United States, he initially attempts to realize a democratic utopia by securing an ethnic Filipino brotherhood among fellow workers against racial and class exploitation. And yet, the harsh social conditions of Filipino bachelor communities in which prostitution is rampant

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communist party (PKP)—excluding Luis Taruc and other communist Hukbalahap leaders—held the Hukbalahap at arms’ (since they represented the peasantry rather than the working class) until 1945 when the PKP formed “a new political party” with other anti-Japanese groups, including the Hukbalahap, called the Democratic Alliance (Kerkvliet, 140). The splintering cooperating between the PKP and the peasant guerilla revolts continued throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s during the HMB (People’s Liberation Army), nicknamed the Huk, rebellion from 1946 until 1954. The “nationalist” objectives of the HMB, according to Luis Taruc’s demands, included the release of political prisoners associated with the HMB and the restoration of all Democratic Alliance congressmen to their seats but “did not emphasize...the abolition of tenancy” (Kerkvliet, 171). Historian Benedict J. Kerkvliet speculates that the ideological alliance of the communist PKP and peasantry in the Huk rebellion ultimately failed because of their Philippine nationalism: Unable to detect the enduring hand of American imperialism within their new Philippine government, the majority of the Huks felt satisfied with the moderate reforms that the Philippines government instituted and abandoned the rebellion (Kerkvliet, 238). After the publication of *America Is in the Heart*, Bulosan became a supporter of the Huks about whom he writes in his posthumously published novel *The Cry and the Dedication*. In a letter to Aurelio, dated, Sept. 16, 1950, he states, “I have in the last few months made definite connections with the people’s liberation movement in the islands”—referring to the Huks (Courtesy of the Carlos Bulosan papers, University of Washington, Special Collections). Bulosan’s support of the Huks in his letters and in *The Cry and Dedication*, wherein a communist guerilla group await the arrival of their overseas leader to lead their rebellion, reveal that his Philippine nationalism was bound up with and ultimately subordinate to his Marxist politics.

<sup>608</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 104.

undermine the familial bonds that seem requisite to Carlos's initial vision of a social utopia. His identification with prostitutes as exploited laborers in the United States nevertheless continues the progression of his gender politics. Carlos narrates his troubled response to a night in which his friends Luz and José sleep with the same prostitute:

Luz and his woman made love all night. The woman was very drunk, and she screamed and laughed all night...Luz switched on the lights to see which one among us had gone to his woman...

...I almost died within myself. I died many deaths in these surroundings, where man was indistinguishable from beast. It was only when I had died a hundred times that I acquired a certain degree of immunity to sickening scenes such as took place this night, that I began to look at our life with Nick's cold cynicism.<sup>609</sup>

Lee cites this moment as an instance in which Carlos demonstrates his static Manichean construction of female sexuality which both thwarts male "proprietary claims" and yet secures an all-male collective.<sup>610</sup> While the nameless prostitute is indeed portrayed as a two-dimensional character, Carlos also appears to be a demoralized bystander who is likewise excluded from the "bestial" all-male collective which he describes. Carlos does not seem to identify with the prostitute in this instance and yet he occupies an abject, liminal position that is likewise distinct from the central position of the other male workers. From the margins of this racialized brotherhood, Carlos begins to recognize that the relations of production dictate the structure of this bachelor society and how men relate to each other. He learns that "these surroundings," or the material conditions—rather than "Luz's woman"—incite the dystopian (non)fraternal conduct among his Filipino friends in which "man was indistinguishable from beast." In short, he fails to find any semblance of a utopian family among his fellow Filipino workers. During this time Carlos's narrative analeptically resonates with a narrative moment in his childhood where he refers to the dystopian "world of men":

[My recollection of] [m]y education with Luciano was very useful to me when I was thrown into the world of men, when all that I held beautiful was to be touched with ugliness. Perhaps it was this wonderful interlude with my brother that finally led me to an appreciation of beauty—that drove me with a burning desire to find beauty and goodness in the world.<sup>611</sup>

Dialectically moving in narration between the dystopian realities of racism toward Filipinos and a hope for "beauty and goodness in the world" mobilized by an analeptic moment, Carlos establishes yet another concrete utopia of emotional and political development. He turns toward a Marxist materialist conception of history in which he perceives that social subjects are largely shaped by their relation to the means of production:

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<sup>609</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 135.

<sup>610</sup> Rachel Lee writes, "In contrast to these maternal women are those eroticized females who are ignored as laborers and who seem incompatible with workers' fraternities because, unlike [the prostitute whom Carlos later encounters named] Marian, they do not bend to manly will. What remains bestial about these women is their thwarting Luz's, José's, or Pete's 'proprietary' claims (29).

<sup>611</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 53.

I put the blame on certain Filipinos who had behaved badly in America, who had instigated hate and discontent among their friends and followers. This misconception was generated by a confused personal reaction to dynamic social forces, but my hunger for the truth had inevitably led me to take an historical attitude. I was to understand and interpret this chaos from a *collective* point of view, because it was *pervasive* and *universal*.<sup>612</sup>

From his newly acquired historical point of view, Carlos cites the racist court ruling of *Roldan vs. The United States* in which Filipinos were considered Mongolians and therefore forbidden to marry members of the Caucasian race as one of the social forces that compel Filipinos to patronize prostitutes.<sup>613</sup> Carlos begins to blame the practical pitfalls of American democracy for the hardships of his fellow Filipino workers. He states, “It was not easy to understand why the Filipinos were brutal yet tender, nor was it easy to believe that they had been made this way by the reality of America.”<sup>614</sup> In his disappointment with the failure of the American capitalist democracy to protect Filipino rights, Carlos turns to a new socio-political paradigm with which to imagine his utopian America—socialism.

Carlos’s affirms his “pervasive,” “universal” and “collective point of view” and develops his hope in an interracial, socialist class solidarity as he begins to write for the socialist magazine, *The New Tide*. Carlos solidifies his Marxist worldview during his work at *The New Tide*. Even when the magazine is extinguished, Carlos states, “the magnificent spirit behind it did not die.”<sup>615</sup> And despite the halting of the publication, Carlos observes,

...A new generation was born with the same ideals, perhaps, but re-envigorated [*sic*] with new social attitudes. The labor movement was the paramount issue; it was winning the support of intellectuals and the advanced sections of the proletariat.<sup>616</sup>

Through his work at *The New Tide*, Carlos continues his political development toward his Marxist politics and employs socialist idioms in his depiction of labor unions and his vision of a utopian America. For example, he admits that while his construction of temporary headquarters for the Filipino Workers’ Association at an office in Lompop is “drastic” and “unconstitutional, it was a necessary move to combat “fascism in California.”<sup>617</sup> His developing Marxism incites a change in his vision of America from a democratic to a socialist utopia. As he records his brother Macario’s words in his narrative, Carlos describes his vision of a new America using a riposte to Antonio Gramsci’s famous statement about the disjuncture between a nation’s end and beginning: “...the old world is dying and the new cannot be born.”<sup>618</sup>

...America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom; it is also in the eyes of

<sup>612</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 143-4, my emphasis.

<sup>613</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 143.

<sup>614</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 152.

<sup>615</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 194.

<sup>616</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 194.

<sup>617</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 195.

<sup>618</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 276. It is unclear whether Bulosan is consciously referring to Gramsci here. Rather, the emphasis is his (however offhanded) use of a Marxist idiom to describe his utopian America.

men that are building a new world. American is a prophecy of a new society of men: of a system that knows no strife or suffering. America is a warning to those who would try to falsify the ideals of freemen...America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him...The old world is dying, but a new world is being born. It generates inspiration from the chaos that beats upon us all.<sup>619</sup>

Instead of Gramsci's melancholic statement that a new world "cannot be born," Carlos dialectically narrates between utopian and dystopian instantiations of American democracy, heralding the birth of a new, socialist world order.

Carlos's experiences with prostitutes largely inform and develop his gender and socialist politics. While Carlos develops in his understanding of socialism as a politico-economic system that dialectically surpasses the previous stages of feudalism and capitalism, he seems to structure prostitution as a nonsynchronous or residual element from his past in the Philippines that continues to beleaguer his present in the U.S.<sup>620</sup> Marxist theorist Raymond Williams defines "a residual function" or element as that which "has been wholly incorporated as a specific political and cultural function—marking the limits as well as the methods—of a form of capitalist democracy."<sup>621</sup> Likewise, it is through Carlos's early experiences with prostitutes such as Luz's woman that he begins to understand the methods or "the dynamic social forces" of capitalism which function to oppress his fellow Filipino laborers and incite them to patronize prostitutes.<sup>622</sup> Carlos's experiences with prostitution catalyze his adoption of a Marxist worldview; his Marxism, in turn, continues to change his attitude toward prostitution as a residual system of exchange outside of the bourgeois family and toward the nature of the familial structure of his envisioned socialist utopia.

Throughout his childhood in the Philippines and his early years spent in the U.S. Carlos casts prostitution as a trope marking dystopian situations of unfamiliarity and economic regression in the Philippines and in the United States. Carlos's experiences with prostitutes, however, begin to attenuate his Manichean frameworks. His developing socialism unmoors his strict identification with Madonna figures as well as their paradigmatic opposition to "whores." For example, before he boards a ship from Manila to Seattle, Carlos meets a wealthy young man named Juan Cablaan who introduces him, for the first time, to a prostitute. Juan explains, "There are many girls like her in Manila...They came from the provinces hoping to find work in the city. But look where they have landed!"<sup>623</sup> At this moment, Carlos recoils from Juan as he begins to identify with the prostitute through the common exploitation of their peasant labor within a semi-feudal system by the middle-class—represented this time through a male character:

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<sup>619</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 189.

<sup>620</sup> In *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Raymond Williams describes the "residual" as that which "has been effectively formed in the past, but...is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present" (122).

<sup>621</sup> Williams, 122-123.

<sup>622</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 43.

<sup>623</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 92.



I began to run furiously away from [Juan]. When I reached my boarding house the men looked at me. I put my arms around a post and tried to ease the wild beating of my heart. I wanted to cry. Suddenly, I started beating the post with my fists.<sup>624</sup> Resonating with the titular notion that his utopia, “America,” is in the heart, the beating of the heart here points to both the essential circulation of struggle (heart beat) for socialism and the violent capitalist exploitation—a beating of sorts—of the female sexual laborer with whom he identifies. In response to the internal beating of his heart and his longing for socialism, Carlos begins to hit the posts or structure of capitalism that exploits the labor of his family as well as that of the prostitute.

In spite of this moment of articulated class struggle in the Philippines, Carlos almost immediately finds himself on the boat to America nostalgically longing for the Philippines as he moves further away from shores of Manila:

Long afterward I found myself standing in the heavy rain, holding my rattan suitcase and looking toward the disappearing Philippines. I knew that I was going away from everything I had loved and known. I knew that if I ever returned the first sight of that horizon would be the most beautiful sight in the world.<sup>625</sup>

The analeptic nostalgia for familial intimacy, which the Philippines represents for Carlos, once again signals another concrete utopia of gender and class consciousness and a renewed hope in socialist democracy. The shift of his attention from female sexuality to their labor emerges through his dystopian experience with another member of the middle class and his identification with the prostitute.

Carlos’s realization and valuation of prostitutes *as* laborers provoke him to dispense with his Manichean understanding of female sexuality. In contrast to his earlier peasant notions of women as either immoral whores or abstemious Madonna figures, the prostitutes with whom Carlos later becomes acquainted appear to him to be maternal rather than eroticized. This shift in consciousness, however, does not eradicate his Manichean approach toward gender as he continues to focus on women as *either* maternal *or* eroticized. And at the end of his first awkward sexual experience with a Mexican prostitute, she speaks in a parental manner of comfort to Carlos, saying, “There, now. It’s all over.”<sup>626</sup> Here, Carlos’s recognition of prostitutes as also maternal beings appears to undercut only to reinscribe his initial and residual Manichean sexualization of women. However, it is not until he begins to recognize prostitutes as exploited laborers that he perceives women as laboring equals to men and thus, according to his burgeoning Marxist worldview, as either bourgeois or proletariat. By bringing prostitutes—a previously omitted third term—into his dialectical understanding of women as either bourgeois or proletarian, he seems to focus less on their sexuality and more on their positions within class consciousness.

Carlos meets the prostitute Marian immediately following his run-in with the hitmen, hired by the big farmers, who literally crush his testicles after an organized union strike. The affinity Carlos feels with Marian renews his utopian aspiration as Carlos becomes aware of not only the severe capitalist exploitation of sexual laborers but also their contribution to his developing socialism. Similar to the Mexican prostitute Carlos

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<sup>624</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 93.

<sup>625</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 93.

<sup>626</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 160.

encounters, Marian's maternal qualities seem to be the focus of the narrative.<sup>627</sup> Moving beyond his primary fixation on women as *either* prostitutes *or* mothers, he once again fashions a maternal figure out of a prostitute in his narrative. In response to her suggestion, Carlos agrees to let Marian to "help," "work," and "care for [him]."<sup>628</sup> For Carlos, the interchangeability between prostitute and Madonna in the figure of Marian enables his understanding to dialectically progress beyond the Manichean distinction of female sexuality. Carlos's attempt to carve out a new, utopian space from his relationship with Marian—modeled, in part, after his family in the Philippines and, specifically, his relationship with his mother—suggests that his distinction between whores and Madonnas is a dialectical one that moves toward establishing a new familial, utopian socialist order rather than one which merely preserves a relic of the bourgeois, or even feudal, family unit.

Although Marian's sexual labor is by no means utopian, it supports Carlos's writing and thus communally contributes to the literary and social documentation of under-represented communities. In his developing socialist consciousness, Carlos validates the sexual labor of prostitutes as labor and reconsiders whores *as* Madonnas within his envisioned socialist community. Marian's partnership with Carlos suggests the inclusion of female laborers in his notion of a socialist, utopian "family." Furthermore, that Marian is a prostitute—who dies, in a clichéd fashion, from syphilis—and works in order to care for Carlos is nevertheless explicit from the narrative. The problematically evoked stereotype of the "hooker with a heart of gold" nevertheless universalizes Marian's gendered and occupational particularities so that she is imagined as a preeminent figure of compassion and social egalitarianism. The absence of her sexual labor is consistent with the overall narrative absence of labor throughout the novel. In the same vein, the absence of labor in the narrative universalizes already particularized laborers so that their struggles with inequality would seem to ideologically coincide with other struggles by social minorities. Moreover, Bulosan's illustration of labor as a phallic lack that is only representable by women further critiques the Popular Front marginalization of women and supports his aspirations for socialist gender equality.<sup>629</sup>

Like his fellow Pinoy workers, Marian attracts Carlos because of her personal history of struggling with poverty within the working class. When he meets Marian, his narrative moves analeptically to his memory of his sisters and mother, who had similarly suffered from intense labor in the Philippines but who also demonstrate the familial bonds that shape Carlos's socialism. Carlos states,

I looked at Marian's hands: it was obvious that she had done manual work. Her hands were rough; the fingers were stubby and flattened at the top. My heart

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<sup>627</sup> For Rachel Lee, the character of Marian appears to be an exception to Carlos's Manichean paradigm. However, Lee argues,

Similarly the novel's emphasis on Marian's desire to 'care,' which clearly involves her working as a prostitute, oddly conceals the fact of her labor and thereby refrains from establishing her as a legitimate working member of organized labor. Not surprisingly, then, Marian's work as a prostitute occurs offstage, whereas her handing her money over to Carlos and her dying in the hospital (i.e., signs of her 'care') are centrally played out. (28)

<sup>628</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 212.

<sup>629</sup> Many biographers have pointed out the Bulosan, himself, was too sick to perform manual labor during his lifetime.

ached, for this woman was like my little sisters in Binalonan. I turned away from her, remembering how I had walked familiar roads with my mother.<sup>630</sup> The synecdochic focus on Marian's rough hands point to the universal reification of labor: Just as Marian's hands stand in for her labor, Carlos's developing socialism enables the particularity of Marian's struggles to universally represent the struggles of his mother, sisters, and potentially all laborers. Such struggle marks the dystopian reality of labor exploitation from which Carlos continually "turn[s]] away" to reimagine a utopian vision of laborers. While Marian's actual labor is never documented, hers and Carlos's mother's are the most closely represented proletarian bodies in the novel.<sup>631</sup> Later, Carlos continues to universalize Marian's experience when he states that Marian reminds him of the girl he had previously met who had been raped on the freight train and with whom he had felt a "bond of fear and a common loneliness."<sup>632</sup>

Carlos's utterance that "[Marian's] heart was in my heart" resonates with an earlier statement Carlos makes about "the boundless affinity" that he shares with his brothers in the Philippines which had grown out of their poverty.<sup>633</sup> However, the socialist "family" that Carlos now imagines is not an exclusive, bourgeois unit—"that superstructure of civilization" which, Bulosan writes, "is gone, is on the market, is for sale to the highest bidder" within a bourgeois capitalist society.<sup>634</sup> Although Carlos does appear to nostalgically uphold his peasant family in the Philippines as a model for a new family that would reside in the "huge heart" of his socialist "America" at the end of the novel, it's unclear whether he wishes to reconstitute the nuclear family as such.<sup>635</sup> Notably, Carlos and his brother Macario flee to America precisely to evade the constraints of marriage and family within the stratified semi-feudal, semi-capitalist society of the colonial Philippines. In his life, Bulosan seemed ambivalent about the practice of marriage. Declaring that he was once married to a woman named "M." who, like the character of Marian, "giv[es]" [him] the opportunity to study and write" by supporting him, Bulosan later denies that he had ever been married. Bulosan writes to Mary E. Allen,

Did you ever get married? I never did, and I don't think I ever will. Marriage without a solid all-around structure is bound to crumble. I don't even know if I will go back to the Philippines, although once in a while I feel a kind of nostalgia for my native land.<sup>636</sup>

Bulosan's comparison of the inevitable failure of marriage with his nostalgia for the Philippines bolsters his perception of marriage and the atomic family as a nostalgic but outmoded social institution that "is for sale to the highest bidder."<sup>637</sup> Instead of a bourgeois family where the virtuous Madonna takes on domestic duties, Carlos establishes an unofficial, companionate "marriage" with Marian in which patriarchal gender roles seem somewhat reversed insofar as Marian is the earner while Carlos

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<sup>630</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 211.

<sup>631</sup> Although *America Is in the Heart* focuses primarily on peasant laborers in the Philippines and working class laborers in the U.S., male labor is surprisingly absent from the novel.

<sup>632</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 115.

<sup>633</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 10.

<sup>634</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *Sound Of Falling Light: Letters in Exile*, Ed. Dolores S. Feria (Quezon City, 1960) 77.

<sup>635</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 326.

<sup>636</sup> Carlos Bulosan to Mary E. Allen, *Sound of Falling Light*, 82.

<sup>637</sup> Carlos Bulosan to Dorothy Babb, *Sound of Falling Light*, 77.

defines the domestic sphere. In this marriage of sorts, money is pooled to promote the literary visibility of racialized, classed, and gendered individuals.

It is not without a certain degree of irony that Marian tragically dies from a hazard of her sexual labor shortly after she invites Carlos out to have what she facetiously calls “a *capitalist* dinner.”<sup>638</sup> While Carlos’s fleeting relationship with Marian points to the utopianism of his imagined socialist family, it nevertheless teaches him to recognize a prostitute as an exploited manual laborer, rather than her prostitution, within a capitalist system. After Marian’s death, he begins to understand the value of exploited, sexual labor but also begins to relinquish his fetishization of matrimonial sexual relations and the bourgeois family as paragon for his utopian America. Some time after Marian’s death, Carlos visits his friend Cabao who, to Carlos’s surprise, had married a well-known prostitute. Cabao influences Carlos’s perception of prostitution as he compares his wife’s work to the work of male migrant laborers: Cabao states, “She followed the seasons, the way Filipinos follow the crops.”<sup>639</sup>

### **His Socialist Education**

While Carlos does initially appear to describe women as either maternal laborers (such as his mother) or eroticized prostitutes in the novel, he begins to direct his respective scorn or empathy toward women (and men) as either bourgeois agents or exploited laborers of capitalism after he meets Marian. Later in the novel, Carlos makes the admission that he had felt some chauvinism toward women but his involvement in socialist movements had changed his attitudes toward women—particularly those whose labor is exploited by capitalism: When a white woman unexpectedly volunteers to organize a party for the Committee for the Protection of Filipino Rights (CPFR), Carlos states,

This I knew: Filipinos worked and lived in national terms, so that when they were maligned they thought their whole race was maligned. And so it was with me—with this slight difference; my deepening understanding of socialism was destroying my chauvinism.<sup>640</sup>

The term chauvinism, specifically “white chauvinism,” was used more often in the CPUSA to describe race relations than gender.<sup>641</sup> And yet, given the context of the statement and his experiences in the novel as a whole, Carlos’s chauvinism, in this instance, refers to his earlier attitudes toward other women, as well as his initial racial and nationalist allegiances. He gradually cedes merges these allegiances with his socialist ideology as he becomes conscious of the labor of women and non-Filipinos. Carlos’s deepening understanding of female labor struggles not only promotes his class consciousness but also supplies him with a vocabulary for parallel racial struggles during the Popular Front. Moreover, he attributes his development as a Filipino writer and a socialist to the financial and educational support of fellow laborers such as Marian. After Marian’s death, Carlos meets other manual and intellectual laborers—Dora Travers,

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<sup>638</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 215.

<sup>639</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 274.

<sup>640</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 287.

<sup>641</sup> See Earl Browder, “For National Liberation of the Negroes! War Against White Chauvinism,” *The Communist* 11.4 1932: 292-305.

Alice Odell, and Eileen Odell—who support him and enhance his image of the female laborer as a representative of his socialist utopia.

After Carlos confronts the failure of a national working-class solidarity in the United States after the discontinuation of *The New Tide*—a socialist magazine for which he works—Dora, Alice, and Eileen influence Carlos’s developing political advocacy of an international, rather than national, class struggle. As leftists (Dora is a professed communist while the other two are not), all three women introduce Carlos to Marxist and proletarian literature and bring his writing to its fruition. While each of these women takes on a maternal role in caring for Carlos in his bouts with tuberculosis, their devotion to the socialist cause is intimately linked to their care for Carlos. The evoked image of white female proletarians educating and supporting a Filipino socialist demonstrates the ways in which Carlos’s visions of racial universality emerge from feminist projects of universal gender equality. Furthermore, as he continues to develop his Marxist worldview through these three female figures, Carlos defies previous Manichean notions of female sexuality. Rather than fetishizing them as Madonnas or whores, Carlos describes their sexualities as integral to their characters: Dora reveals that she has had an interracial affair with Carlos’s friend Nick and intends to return “home” to the Soviet Union—“a land without racial oppression”—to give birth to their child.<sup>642</sup> Alice, whom Carlos describes as “attractive” and possessing “disturbing sensuousness”—which perhaps refers to his own socially forbidden attraction toward a white woman<sup>643</sup>—openly discusses her love affairs with men in the course of her migrant life throughout the U.S.<sup>644</sup> Carlos likewise describes his friend and educator Eileen with sexually-charged language: “She was tall, erect, and smiling...”<sup>645</sup> Carlos’s depictions of Dora, Alice, and Eileen seem to coincide with Alexandra Kollontai’s portrayal of the new communist woman:

Whereas, at the time when women of the old type, raised in the adoration of irreproachable Madonnas, made an effort to preserve their purity, to make a secret of their feelings and to hide them, it is one of the characteristic traits of the new woman that she does not hide her natural physical drives, which signifies not only an act of self-assertion as a personality, but also a representative of her sex. The ‘rebellion’ of women against a one-sided, sexual morality is one of the most sharply delineated traits of the new heroine.<sup>646</sup>

As Carlos tempers his Manichean paradigms of gender and recognizes female labor as integral to the socialist revolution, his universalization of the female laborer enables his own sense of racial universality as a Filipino writer who is, likewise, a crucial part of the socialist revolution. He thus envisions his international socialist utopia along the lines of gender and racial equality.

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<sup>642</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 227.

<sup>643</sup> Upon meeting Alice, Carlos states, “But touching her hand, I became self-conscious” (229).

<sup>644</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 228, 234.

<sup>645</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 234. In his letters, Bulosan is more explicit in articulating his attraction toward his friend Dorothy Babb who is represented by the character of Eileen. He writes to Dorothy, “I did not have time to tell you how wonderful you looked last week...And now I am writing this after many days of silence. When shall we have the freedom to talk and live and admire freely? Human values are sacrificed because of the bigotry of those who would try to smother us” (Bulosan to Dorothy Babb, *Sound of Falling Light*, 77). Bulosan and his protagonist Carlos articulate anti-miscegenation statutes as obstructions to the fulfillment of an interracial, international socialist utopia.

<sup>646</sup> Kollontai, 93.

While Dora and Alice each leave for their utopia—the Soviet Union—Eileen remains behind and teaches Carlos about communism and the perils of fascism. The education Carlos receives from Eileen establishes another utopian moment, or a glimpse of utopia, as he becomes aware of and devoted to an international class struggle—one that involves both the U.S. and its colonial Philippines. As he describes his time with Eileen, he analeptically recalls his sister’s parting request that Carlos return to the Philippines to educate her and back to his own present wish to impart “new enlightenment” (concerning social issues) to his village and the rest of the Philippines. Carlos refers to Eileen as “the god of my youth”<sup>647</sup>—a similar appellation to those he gives his brothers Macario and Amado.<sup>648</sup> Placing Eileen on a social par with his Filipino brothers, Carlos suggests that gender and racial inclusion are dynamic conditions of his socialist utopia.

As he does with Alice and Dora, Carlos identifies with Eileen and her struggles with poverty throughout her life. Carlos compares Eileen to the utopian America that he envisions: “Eileen’s frugality was also conditioned by the past...She was undeniably the *America* I had wanted to find in those frantic days of fear and flight, in those acute hours of hunger and loneliness. This America was human, good, and real.”<sup>649</sup> In his depiction of Eileen and, later, of another character named Mary,<sup>650</sup> Carlos’s empathetic characterization of the female victims of capitalism culminates in his explicit feminization and celebration of America at the end of the novel.<sup>651</sup> Carlos states in the last chapter that his “America” is a familial society “that grew out of the sacrifices and loneliness of [his] friends,” such as Marian and Eileen, “of [his] brothers in America and [his] family in the Philippines”—which would include his mother and sisters. Carlos hopes for the combined and uneven development or the “final fulfillment” of an America—a socialist utopia—that he has yet to experience.<sup>652</sup>

While Bulosan’s gendered “America” does seem to evoke the old, problematic trope of the land-, or nation-, as-woman, his “lady America” diverges from the context that feminist critic Annette Kolodny delineates. In contradistinction to Kolodny’s assertion that the feminization of land serves as justification for pillage and ownership, Carlos’s “America” describes a racially and gender inclusive, socialist utopia that cannot

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<sup>647</sup> Carlos states, “When I found Eileen I found the god of my youth. I can say that my insatiable hunger for knowledge and human affection were the two vital forces that made my days of great loneliness and starvation a frantic determination to live. In the back of my mind was the parting request of my sister Francesca—that I would go to school in America and return to the Philippines to teach both my sisters to read because they had had no chance in the village. But now it had changed, for I was beginning to think that if I returned to my native land, I would spread a new enlightenment to my whole village—perhaps throughout the Philippines” (236).

<sup>648</sup> When Macario is coerced into working when he is sick, Carlos states, “I felt like a little boy whose god has been struck down by evil winds” (288). Later, after he defends Macario in a fight between Amado and Macario, Carlos writes of Amado, “I had not only transgressed against a family tradition; I had also struck down one of the gods of my childhood” (304).

<sup>649</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 235.

<sup>650</sup> Carlos describes Mary as “one so delicate and molded into purity out of our hope for a better America” (303).

<sup>651</sup> This narrative conflation of exploited victim of capitalism and a celebration of a “human, good, and real” America coincides with C.P.U.S.A.’s emphasis on U.S. revolutionary origins and Marxist potential.

<sup>652</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 327.

be colonized by a particular nation of men.<sup>653</sup> The gender and racial inclusiveness of his utopia is substantiated in chapters 40 and 46 when Carlos has two momentary visions of his socialist utopia America.<sup>654</sup> The first is articulated through a memory that becomes a dream in which, upon his return to his family, his mother tells him that they finally have enough food:

[My father] took me to the kitchen where my brothers and sisters were waiting. My mother was spreading food on a low table, but when she saw me in my father's arms, she dropped the ladle in her hand and reached for me.

"We have *enough* food now, son," she said.<sup>655</sup>

An unconventional image of socialism, this familial image of plenty nevertheless indicates that feudalism is a residual component of Carlos's socialism. This dream which "was to condition so much of [Carlos's] future life," gesturing toward his socialist utopia, includes his sisters as well as his mother. The second vision is conveyed through an empirical moment in which Carlos enjoys a celebration with unfamiliar Mexican, Chinese, and Filipino men and women: In this instance, Carlos states, "A long time ago in Los Angeles, when we had been less articulate, my brother Macario had spoken of *America in the hearts of men*. Now I understood what he meant, for it was this small yet vast heart of mine that had kept me steering toward the stars."<sup>656</sup> The idea of America—as a socialist utopia where universality and internationality are conceptually inseparable—circulates throughout his heart and body and compels him to strive for its realization, "steering toward the stars." Emerging as a writer through his identification with the struggles of other racialized, gendered, and classed minorities, Carlos becomes a universal figure that represents an international, socialist utopia. In this passage, the "fraternity" among the men and women reminds him of the peasants in the Philippines: He states, "Where had I seen this fraternity before? Was it in Mangusmana among the peasants?"<sup>657</sup> Rather than subscribing to an imperialist logic in which the imagined nation-as-maternal-garden seems to correspond to a designated piece of land, Bulosan rearticulates "America"(-as-woman) as an imagined socialist utopia that is neither geographically specific nor exclusive to one particular nation since his utopia includes both the empirical U.S. and the Philippines.

Consistent with the essentialist rhetoric of Popular Front feminists, Carlos's rearticulation of the gendered (feminine) nation as a socialist utopia fails to meet Kolodny's post-civil rights era call "to place our biologically- *and* psychologically-based 'yearnings for paradise' at the disposal of potentially healthier (that is, survival oriented) and alternate symbolizing or image systems."<sup>658</sup> Bulosan's choice to feminize a utopian,

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<sup>653</sup> Based on Kolodny's study, Rachel Lee argues that the "female models"—that is, the Madonna-figures—"symbolize a democratizing principle that the male subjects enact" within a homosocial nation; this principle, in turn, excludes women from an "egalitarian brotherhood (of labor)" (36, 37). For Lee, this skewed gender dynamic is exemplified by the overt gendering of the nation in the last chapter in which America appears to the narrator and protagonist Carlos as "a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive [him]" (41).

<sup>654</sup> Rachel Lee, however, elides Carlos's mention of the heart's indiscriminate inclusion of men and women.

<sup>655</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 283.

<sup>656</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 314.

<sup>657</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 314.

<sup>658</sup> Kolodny, 159.

socialist America and model it after an alternative family unit indeed points to inherent problems in his gender politics. Far from radically disavowing gender essentialism, the progressiveness of his gender politics is nevertheless located in the apparent direction of female proletarians in raising Carlos's class consciousness. Instead of merely othering "America"-as-woman, he grows to identify with it, striving to contain the struggles of diverse people within his narrative and aspires to its socialism. Moreover, his validation of women as universal laborers shapes his socialist worldview concerning the international class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, thus affirming his own contribution as a Filipino to an anticipated socialist revolution. Attributing his socialist development to women, his socialism, in turn, universalizes the particularity of the female sexual laborer. In this way, Carlos sloughs off the archaic rhetoric of the bourgeois family to make room for another familial structure in his depiction of a socialist utopia. In the penultimate chapter, Carlos cedes his attachment to the bourgeois family as a utopian template when he parts ways with his brother Macario:

I knew it was the end of our lives in America. I knew it was the end of our family. If I met him again, I would not be the same. He would not be the same, either. Our world was this one, but a new one was being born. We belonged to the old world of confusion; but in this other world—new, bright, promising—we would be unable to meet its demands.<sup>659</sup>

The "we" to which he refers—his brother and himself—represents the family unit which he recognizes as an outmoded social structure of "the old world" through his dialectical understanding of prostitutes as laborers. At the same time, Carlos's alliances with other universalized particulars such as other racialized subjects emerge from his universalization of the female laborer and his identification with her: After Eileen has left him and shortly after he departs from his brother Macario, Carlos calls a Negro bootblack, a stranger to him, "friend," establishing a commonality of loneliness within a racializing nation.<sup>660</sup>

Although Carlos's socialist utopia is clearly not yet realized by the end of the novel, he nevertheless anticipates it and, in doing so, fully comes into his socialist politics and his artistic ability to advance it. The temporal looping between the narrative past, present, and future in the novel delineates what E. San Juan has called the dialectical "process of interaction between consciousness and external world."<sup>661</sup> Furthermore, the novel's temporal structure conveys the development of Carlos's alternative socialism—a socialism which envisions a utopia that includes all races and women. Carlos's recognition of and gradual identification with female laborers and communists enable him to imagine himself as a universal figure that can contain a socialist utopia in his figurative heart and exemplify it through shared struggles with other exploited people within the U.S. and its colony. Through his development, Carlos nevertheless comes to view the bourgeois family (which is held together by the Manichean distinction between Madonna and whore) as attenuated precursors to an international socialist utopia. Demonstrating the integration of Carlos's depiction of gender and his developing socialism, the nonlinear temporal form relates and clarifies the critical debates surrounding the novel's nationalist and gender politics.

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<sup>659</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 324.

<sup>660</sup> Bulosan, *AIH*, 325.

<sup>661</sup> San Juan, 94.



### Conclusion: The Critical Relevance of Bulosan's Reception

*America Is in the Heart* was published the same year that the Philippines was granted national independence from U.S. commonwealth status and a year after U.S. victory in World War II. In light of the contemporaneous events surrounding the book's publication, the question of whether the text champions American nationalism or Philippine anti-colonial nationalism is a crucial one. Since its publication, critics have interpreted Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* in an asymmetrical fashion that either ignores or emphasizes its rhetoric of American nationalism over its critique of democracy.<sup>662</sup> Along with *America Is in the Heart*, Bulosan's work written during the 1940s—such as his books of poetry *Letter from America* (1942), *The Chorus for America* (1942), *The Voice of Bataan* (1943), and his book of short stories, *The Laughter of My Father* (1944)—were all published and received as promoting the war effort and championing American democracy during and immediately following the war.

The publication of *America Is in the Heart* in 1946 also marked the height of Bulosan's career and a brief transitional moment in post-war American history when a certain amount of social criticism of American democracy was culturally permissible and even pervasive. In its immediate historical context, *America Is in the Heart* was well-received by critics and reviewers who, for the most part, accepted its embedded critique of racism as nevertheless affirming American democracy. The *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* sympathetically stated of the novel that "A very small part of all that is recorded in this personal history would be more than sufficient excuse for angry and bitter denunciations of the country that rejected and did its efficient best to break the author... That Mr. Bulosan himself can still find America in his heart is a triumph of the spirit—his spirit, certainly, rather than America's."<sup>663</sup> Other American book reviewers were not as willing to be self-deprecating.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>662</sup> When the novel was first published, some conservative reviewers ignored its critique of American democracy and, instead, praised its explicit celebration of the U.S. in the postwar era. In "Subversion or Affirmation: The Text and Subtext of *America Is in the Heart*" in *Asian Americans: Comparatives and Global Perspectives*, Eds. Shirley Hune, Hyung-chan Kim, Stephen S. Fugita, and Amy Ling (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1991), Marilyn Alquizola asserts that such reviewers perceived *America Is in the Heart* as a text that portrayed the successful assimilation of "good" Filipino immigrants into American society—a stark contrast to the wartime Yellow Peril image of the Japanese and Japanese Americans (204). On the other hand, contemporary reviewers such as Max Gissen for the *New Republic* emphasized the novel's critique of American democracy, stating that the book exposed "America first as a dream" and revealed "one of the most sickening social truths confronting a minority in the United States" (205).

<sup>663</sup> John J. Espey, "A Filipino's Triumph of Faith and Spirit: Is It Our Faults That the Bulosans of Our World Can Find America Only in Their Own Hearts?" *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, VII March 10, 1946: 3.

<sup>664</sup> For example, the book review, "An Embittered Bulosan Looks at America," for the *Chicago Tribune* 17 March 1946, regarded the novel favorably for its complex exploration of a Filipino's experiences of "brutality and disease, degradation and despair" as well as "courage and faith and decency, idealism and beauty." However, the reviewer John Abbot Clark concluded,

Unfortunately, however, thruout [*sic*] whole sections of this autobiography, one gathers the impression that America, in her treatment of minority groups in general and of Filipinos in particular, has all too often been little better than Germany under the Nazis. We don't like to believe that Mr. Bulosan believes that, either.

Forecasting present-day Bulosan criticism, contemporary reviews of *America Is in the Heart* either unhappily fixated on or altogether overlooked Bulosan's critique of racism and class discrimination in democratic America. Of the very few reviewers who recognized Bulosan as a "proletarian writer," William S. Lynch noted Bulosan's distinction from other such writers who "confuse comradeship with shrillness and who solve all problems by calling the other fellow a Fascist."<sup>665</sup> Lynch went on to assert, "To the vast and still growing stack of tracts on intercultural relations 'America Is in the Heart' is a valuable addition[,]"<sup>666</sup> but failed to comment explicitly on Bulosan's Marxism or avant-gardism. Bulosan's Popular Front context is crucial to understanding how *America Is in the Heart* is an attempt to deviate from Stalinist kitsch, ideological stagism, and subordination of race and gender<sup>667</sup> to the socialist revolution. The novel was written and published during a period when the CPUSA was "in crisis" after the replacement and expulsion of chairman Earl Browder for his heretical beliefs in the peaceful coexistence of capitalism and socialism<sup>668</sup> and his attempt to establish an autonomous American communism, consequently rendering the CPUSA "expendable by Moscow."<sup>669</sup> While pleading for the persistence of a Popular Front alliance in the face of the Cold War through its vision of a socialist utopia, Bulosan's novel advances the CPUSA's strategic distance from Stalin and goes as far as to coincide with alternative Marxist theories of those such as Ernst Bloch and Leon Trotsky. The novel likewise refutes Browder's claim that capitalism and socialism can peacefully coexist through its advocacy of an inclusionary permanent revolution. In his novel about the class and racial struggles of a Filipino laborer in the U.S. and his Marxist education through female laborers, Bulosan's alternative Marxism stresses the centrality of race and gender to his protagonist Carlos's class consciousness as well as his vision of a collective socialist revolution in both the Philippines and the U.S. Bulosan was not alone in his view: In *The Communist*, William Simons wrote,

For the Communist Party of the United States, the fulfillment of our oft repeated promises to give every possible assistance to the Filipino revolutionary movement becomes an immediate burning question...But organizing the Filipino workers in the United States does not solve the colonial problems facing us. Organization of colonial workers inside of the United States is no substitute for support to the struggles of the masses in the colonies. This support is the task not only of workers of colonial origin, but particularly of the non-colonial workers.<sup>670</sup>

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It will be a good thing all around when Carlos Bulosan and America get to know each other better. They both have a lot to learn from a longer and closer acquaintanceship.

<sup>665</sup> William S. Lynch, "Loyalty in Spite of All," *Saturday of Literature* 9 March 1946.

<sup>666</sup> Lynch, 9 March 1946.

<sup>667</sup> Critic Iring Fetscher suggests that while Lenin and Trotsky supported women's liberation, it was Stalin who deemphasized women's rights: "It is, of course, no accident that it was in the phase of the burgeoning Stalinization that precisely such concepts as women's liberation and sexual emancipation were shoved into the background. With the 'conservative' turn of Soviet pedagogy (against the opposition of Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's widow), of Soviet family law and the turn to 'authoritarian' communism, all the efforts to which Alexandra Kollontai, up to then, had given her main attention were bound to be viewed as 'undesirable'" (Kollontai, 110).

<sup>668</sup> Starobin, 55

<sup>669</sup> Starobin, 47.

<sup>670</sup> William Simons, "The Philippine Islands in the War Area," *The Communist* 11.7 (1932): 640, 646.

Failing to account for Bulosan's Marxist internationalism has led to asymmetrical (contemporary and present-day) critical emphases on Bulosan's American nationalism, Philippine nationalism, and his essentialist gender politics—all of which, I have argued, collectively constitute dialectical formations of Carlos's concrete utopias.

Present-day critics such as Susan Evangelista have cited the contemporary reviews and the rhetoric of American nationalism in Bulosan's books of poetry and fiction in their suggestion that Bulosan catered to wartime American nationalism in his work.<sup>671</sup> Consequently, such critics have regarded Bulosan's political and literary career as following a linear path, from more conservative American nationalism expressed in his earlier works of poetry to his support of the communist Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (Huk) Rebellion (1946-54) in the Philippines which he expresses in his novel about Huk guerillas, *The Power of the People* or *The Cry and the Dedication* (written in the 1950s and posthumously published). And yet, in a letter written to Florentino Valeros, Bulosan writes of his nationally and internationally successful book, *The Laughter of My Father*, that it was misconceived as a work that promotes American democracy and capitalism:

My politico-economic ideas are embodied in all my writings, but more concretely in my poetry. Here let me remind you that *The Laughter of My Father* is not humor; it is satire; it is indictment against an economic system that stifled the growth of the primitive, making him decadent overnight without passing through the various stages of growth and decay. The hidden bitterness in this book is so pronounced in another series of short stories, that the publishers refrained from publishing it for the time being. . .<sup>672</sup>

The economic system against which Bulosan rails here and in his novel is specifically the Philippine semi-feudal system of big landowners and tenant farmers under American colonial rule. Moreover, the strategy of political revision of his writing that is at work in this letter also pervades *America Is in the Heart* through the dialectical development of his autobiographical protagonist Carlos. In concert with Bulosan's insistence that his Marxist politico-economic ideas are articulated throughout his works, this chapter has argued that *America Is in the Heart* transcends its binary reception as an assimilationist American or a Philippine national text through its dialectical form.

In the last two decades, scholars such as Elaine Kim, Susan Evangelista, and Rachel Lee have predicated their critique of *America Is in the Heart* as an assimilationist text, at least in part, on its nationalist rhetoric. While underscoring the ambiguity of Bulosan's rhetoric of American nationalism, critics P. C. Morante and Marilyn Alquizola have argued in favor of Bulosan's radical (rather than assimilationist) politics. Alquizola writes, however, that in its immediate context, the book was received as an assimilationist text that affirmed American nationalism:

...a major publishing house such as Harcourt, Brace and Company was able to publish a book that was such a scathing critique of the United States because, on the surface of things, it ultimately affirmed the American dream. Such an affirmation was especially timely at the end of the Second World War, when American morale was high.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Susan Evangelista, "Carlos Bulosan: A Sociohistorical Biography," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* 44, nos. 1-4 (Jan.-Dec.1980): 262.

<sup>672</sup> Carlos Bulosan to Florentino B. Valeros, *Sound Of Falling Light*, 85.

<sup>673</sup> Alquizola, 202.

And yet, as Alquizola indicates, it is the same critique of American democracy or “‘pinko’ perspective” of *America Is in the Heart* that later placed Carlos Bulosan “under suspicion during the Cold War and McCarthy era of the 1950s.”<sup>674</sup> Although Morante documents Bulosan’s attendance at communist meetings and his communist sympathies, the nature of his association with the American Communist Party remains unclear.<sup>675</sup> Nevertheless, Bulosan was believed to have been “blacklisted” by the anti-communist brigade in Hollywood and thus could no longer find work as a writer in Hollywood or anywhere else.<sup>676</sup> In the 1950s, Bulosan performed publicity work for UCAPAWA in 1950 and in 1952, he began to edit the *UCAPAWA Yearbook*. In 1953, he was elected to be the Director of Publicity and Education of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). Bulosan was convinced that he had been redbaited by McCarthyism. In an undated letter in the early 1950s to his brother Aurelio (represented by the character of Macario in *America Is in the Heart*), Bulosan writes, “But I want you to realize that I am persona non grata today; I am even blacklisted in the writing field.”<sup>677</sup> Bulosan’s ambiguous association with communists in the United States affected his reception in the Philippines in the later 1940s where radical political writing was barred by the reactionary government of President Manuel Roxas. Bulosan was also interested but marginally involved (if at all) from abroad in the Philippine Popular Front of the 1940s although he never returned to the Philippines after migrating to the United States in the early 1930s.<sup>678</sup> Nationalist peasant groups such as the Hukbalahaps established well-organized headquarters in Pampanga by the end of 1942.<sup>679</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Bulosan became a supporter of the communist-led HMB peasant guerilla revolts of mid-to late 1940s and early 1950s. The settings and nationalist ideologies of *America Is in the Heart* straddle the Popular Fronts of the U.S. and the Philippines in which nationalism coincided with communism.<sup>680</sup> And in its immediate postwar moment of publication, the novel articulated a disillusionment with the U.S. double victory campaign in which racial inequality was to be fought abroad and at home through Carlos’s dystopian experiences with racial and class discrimination.

A month after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Bulosan wrote to P. C. Morante that since the publication of *The Laughter of the My Father* the previous year, I have changed in many things both political and literary since then: there is no time to go back now. But I surmise that you have also changed, being an artist

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<sup>674</sup> Alquizola, 203.

<sup>675</sup> Morante, 106; Evangelista, 21.

<sup>676</sup> Evangelista, 22.

<sup>677</sup> Courtesy of the Carlos Bulosan papers, University of Washington, Special Collections.

<sup>678</sup> Although the notion of a popular front alliance among leftist groups and the peasantry began circulating in the 1930s (Kerkvliet, 46), public declaration of a Philippine Popular Front was not made until the municipal elections of June 1940 when left-wing unions, the tenant organizations, the Communist Party including the socialists, the Independent Church (Aglipay), and some small groups of professionals organized themselves into a political coalition, called the “Popular Front” See also Alberto Manuel Bautista, *The Hukbalahap Movement in the Philippines, 1942-1952*. Diss. (Berkeley: University of California, 5 March 1954).

<sup>679</sup> Bautista, 63.

<sup>680</sup> Here, I am referring to the communist-led peasant movements in the Philippines which asserted nationalist objectives to drive out foreign imperialisms during the Popular Front era and to the famous slogan uttered by Earl Browder, head of the CPUSA until 1945, “Communism is twentieth-century Americanism.”

sensitive to your time. It is awfully hard for us who are artistically inclined, because the world to come will demand new ideals and attitudes. Perhaps our world to come was the one that went with the war: perhaps we can cope with the coming new world. I hope so. But we must be born again, I guess, to find a place in it. We must reconstruct our thinking and living in order to be of use in its realization.<sup>681</sup>

The messianic language in this letter and his “political change” toward an increasingly Marxist fervor culminated in the finished product of *America Is in the Heart* as well as his unfinished manuscript *The Power of the People; or The Cry and the Dedication* (1977, 1995) which concludes, like *America Is in the Heart*, with imminent revolution (which, in *The Cry and the Dedication*, is instigated by a group of Huk rebels). And yet even before his declared postwar “political change,” Bulosan was making the distinction between his empirical America and his utopian one: To a series which *The Saturday Evening Post* published to rally for national support of democratic peace during the war entitled, “The Four Freedoms” (1943), Bulosan contributed the article, “Freedom from Want.” Speaking on behalf of “factory hands, field hands, [and] mill hands,” he wrote:

But our march to freedom is not complete unless want is annihilated. The America we hope to see is not merely a physical but also a spiritual world. We are the mirror of what America *is*. If America wants us to be living and free, then we must be living and free. If we fail, then America fails.<sup>682</sup>

Bulosan’s cry for a socialist utopia in which those in America would be “freed from want” can be traced to early works before more explicitly Marxist texts such as *America Is in the Heart* and *The Cry and the Dedication*.

Based, in part, on Bulosan’s association with the C.P.U.S.A. (Communist Party of the United States of America), Alquizola has stressed the “subversive,” even “revolutionary,” nature of the novel’s critique of American democracy by perceiving the naive protagonist’s celebration of America at the end of the book as an ironic or “benign veil that disguises the subversive nature of its content” and would ensure its publication during wartime.<sup>683</sup> Furthermore, in defense of Bulosan’s anti-assimilationist politics, Morantte writes,

Carlos was not a Filipino-American. He was a Filipino, born in the Philippines, of Filipino Malay parents. He never in his life wanted to be an American. Shortly before his death in Seattle he wrote a friend: ‘I am not an American citizen. I never applied for it.’ There was in this statement a sense of finality in his firm conviction to remain Filipino.<sup>684</sup>

While the protagonist’s rhetoric of American nationalism in the novel seems to counter his critique of American democracy and Bulosan’s biographical convictions, the novel’s avant-garde form—its nonlinear temporal structure—negotiates this conflict by revealing Carlos’s Marxism. According to Bloch, while analeptic and proleptic moments in the narrative often contain utopian aspects, each moment “has not unloaded its true contents with which and toward which it is on its way. These (utopian) contents have not come

<sup>681</sup> Carlos Bulosan to P. C. Morantte, *Sound of Falling Light*, 27.

<sup>682</sup> Carlos Bulosan, “Freedom from Want,” *Saturday Evening Post* 6 March 1943.

<sup>683</sup> Alquizola, 207.

<sup>684</sup> Morantte, 95.

yet, other than in fragments, at best in installments of a more fulfilled existence.”<sup>685</sup> Through a series of concrete utopias, Carlos confronts dystopian, empirical moments of political regress with utopian moments of either the narrative past or present in order to envision and continually shape his social (ultimately socialist) utopia. The formal Blochian dialectic propels the development of Carlos’s Marxist and progressive gender politics and thus challenges the past, sometimes conflicting, critical evaluations of Bulosan as an (American) assimilationist, a Philippine nationalist, and a misogynist.

The Marxist internationalism expressed through his avant-garde form asserts and ultimately attempts to transcend both American and Philippine nationalisms. In a letter to P. C. Morante shortly after the end of the war, Bulosan writes:

Well, it is just as well that you did not go to the Philippines. Things are bad there at present . . . There are things for us to do in America, in the name of our country, of course, though the word ‘country’ has become obsolete. But this feeling is just the last residue of a nationalistic philosophy which we have acquired from our ancestors. . . but now the fight is for certain democratic principles, certain universal principles that belong to all mankind.<sup>686</sup>

What Bulosan perceived to be the antiquated politics of nationalism serve as dialectical precursors to his international, socialist utopia. The temporal looping and his gradually tempered Manichean frameworks appear to serve as formal and thematic devices that mark Carlos’s dialectical political progress from *pasyon* religious cultural notions toward a classless socialism. In contradistinction to the critique of Bulosan’s masculinist misogyny, I have asserted that the intertwining avant-garde form and internationalist Marxist politics express his support for women’s struggle for liberation particularly within the communist party: Carlos’s recognition female labor as integral to socialism enables him to realize his socialist politics at the end of the novel. Moreover, the problematically gendered America that is in Carlos’s heart suggests that, despite the “not-yet” of his socialist utopia, the core of his socialism contains the universal struggles, “sacrifices and loneliness” of international laborers. Already inscribed in Bulosan’s dialectical narrative of his political development, Carlos’s socialism “in the heart” finds expression in his writing.

### **Coda: Asian American Universalism: No Place for Assimilation**

In the same work in which Bulosan envisions a radicalized American universalism, he also gives us a glimpse into the genealogy of his literary influences:

I returned to the writers of my time for strength. And I found Younghill Kang, a Korean who had immigrated to the United States as a boy and worked his way up until he had become a professor at an American university. His autobiography, *The Grass Roof*, gave me an enlightening insight into the history of the Korean revolutionary moment. But it was his indomitable courage that rekindled in me a fire of hope.

. . . Then I came upon the very man—Yone Noguchi! A Japanese houseboy in the home of Joaquin Miller, the poet, who became the first poet of his race to write in the English language.

<sup>685</sup> Bloch, “Utopian,” 215, my parentheses.

<sup>686</sup> Carlos Bulosan to P. C. Morante, *Sound Of Falling Light*, 41.

Here at last was an ideal...<sup>687</sup>

Rather than “claim America” through a realist narrative about recuperating Asian American manhood, as Frank Chin later prescribed of cultural nationalist texts in the 1970s (including Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*),<sup>688</sup> Carlos identifies with “boys” who wrote experimental, avant-garde literature that figures gender more complexly—beyond the (white American) binaries of feminine and masculine. The rhetoric of universalism—a translatability of experience, not assimilation into the U.S.—is what binds Bulosan to these other two authors: “But it was his indomitable courage that rekindled in me a fire of hope...A Japanese houseboy...who became the first poet of his race to write in the English language...Here at last was an ideal.” The very pattern of the genealogy mirrors the dialectic between the racial particular (“a Korean” and “a Japanese houseboy”) and grander statements of universal affinity.

Before panethnic cultural nationalism, American universalism was the rubric under which early Asian American texts were written into existence. Early Asian American literature critiqued the convergence of capitalism and liberal American universalism during the period of Asian exclusion by offering Progressive, elitist bourgeois, or radical Marxist counter-universalisms. In these texts, the Asian protagonists demand the U.S. to make good on its democratic promises through both the rearticulations of Euro-American avant-garde forms and their reconstructive performances of American universalism in the works. Although Chin et al. cites Sui Sin Far and Bulosan as separatist, cultural nationalists and other writers (not mentioned in this study) as assimilationists in their anthology, neither assimilation nor cultural nationalism were tangible options for early writers who were socially and legally classified as “aliens ineligible to citizenship.”<sup>689</sup>

This study examines early Asian American literature up until the ideological divide between masculinist and mimetically realist, cultural nationalism and feminist and formally experimental, transnationalism (better known as the Chin-Kingston controversy) that marked the beginnings of Asian American studies. It is this binary divide that continually mutes the potential of reading early and later Asian American literary texts in their full complexity as they diversely figure gender, the nation, and formal experimentation. Despite their differences, Chin and Kingston both found a common project in attempting to carve out a separate, racially particular sphere of Asian American

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<sup>687</sup> Bulosan, *AIH* 265.

<sup>688</sup> In *Aiiiiieee!*, Chin et al. writes,

Language is the medium of culture and the people’s sensibility, including the style of manhood. Language coheres the people into a community by organizing and codifying the symbols of the people’s common experience. Stunt the tongue and you have lopped off the culture and sensibility. On the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he no longer is a man. The concept of the dual personality deprives the Chinese-American and Japanese-American of the means to develop their own terms. The tyranny of language has been used by white culture to suppress Asian-American culture and exclude it from operating in the mainstream of American consciousness. The first Asian-American writers worked alone within a sense of rejection and isolation to the extent that it encouraged Asian America to reject its own literature...Emulating whites, we ignored ourselves. Now we seek each other out. (Chin *xlvi*)

<sup>689</sup> Recent scholarship, such as Patricia Chu’s *Assimilating Asians*, has done much to dismantle this rather dated binary and recuperate texts that had been omitted or chastised as assimilationist by the cultural nationalists.

experience and rejecting the false universalism of white America. However, even at the moment of greatest cultural separatism and deliberate celebration of racial particularity, the possibility of a viable, democratic universalism still inhered in their literary projects: For example, the Asian American characters Tam and Kenji from Chin's *Chickencoop Chinaman*, "gallop[ing] around beating their butts" (however ironically) imitate the Lone Ranger, suggesting their recourse to a popular version of American universalism in their search for ethnic identities.<sup>690</sup> Universal feeling, rather than democracy per se, is fleshed out in the mythic ending of Kingston's *Woman Warrior* in which the captured Chinese poetess Ts'ai Yen beautifully and emotively matches her voice to the flutes of her Western barbarian captors—creating a song that is brought back to her Han descendants and "It translated well."<sup>691</sup>

Beyond a translation of universal emotions which—like the category of transnational Asian American studies—threatens to be limitless, Asian American universalism envisions spaces of unrealized democracy. Such aspirations respond historically to what continues to be a convergence of discriminatory American imperialism and ever-developing global capitalism. While examining Asian American literature produced during and after the cultural nationalist moment is beyond the scope of the study, what I hope has been demonstrated is the ways in which formal experimentation articulates the historical, sociological, and political stakes early Asian American literature: In each of these Asian American avant-garde texts, historically-situated rearticulations of Euro-American forms collaborate well with the sociological content of each work to articulate a genuine democracy that does not yet exist.

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<sup>690</sup> Frank Chin, *The Chickencoop Chinaman* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1981) 36.

<sup>691</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (New York: Vintage International Edition, 1976) 209.



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