

Disturbing Stereotypes: Fu Man/Chan and Dragon Lady Blossoms

By Audrey Wu Clark

Introduction: Tragic Half-Breeds/Cosmopolitan Saviors

John Gabriel Stedman, a Dutch military officer and author, concludes his 1796 narrative about his treacherous expedition to quell slave uprisings in Dutch Suriname by melodramatically pining after his quadroon slave Joanna. Shortly after his return to the Netherlands, he receives word that “this virtuous young creature had died by *poison*, administered by the hand of jealousy and envy, on account of her prosperity and the marks of distinction which her superior merit so justly attracts from the respectable part of mankind” (316). After “her lovely boy [also *his* son] was sent over the ocean to [his] longing arms” Stedman conveniently replaces her with a white Dutch lady “of a very respectable family in Holland” who “nearest approached [Joanna] in every virtue” (317). The conclusion to *Stedman’s Surinam* epitomizes the binary stereotype of the tragic mulatto and cosmopolitan savior that has been disseminated throughout the western literary imaginary for centuries. Exemplified in Stedman’s narrative, the abject, sacrificial, and (sometimes) “virtuous young creature” of mixed racial descent often saves the white male protagonist from being denied reintegration back into his native western society. Although Stedman’s narrative ends triumphantly with his empowering subjectification as a socially reintegrated, white Dutchman, his abjection of Joanna paradoxically bears the trace of his objectified subjectivity: That is, Stedman is empowered by what theorist Michel Foucault refers to as a (racializing) “micro-physics of power”—discourse “whose field of validity is situated in a sense between [visible, sanctioned institutions] and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces” (26). And yet, as Foucault points out, the subject/object or the body can only be “invested with relations of power and domination...if it is caught up in a system of subjection” (26) by the discursive micro-physics of power. Since racial discourse functions through the abjection of a racial other, Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection illuminates the way in which the racializing micro-physics of power both subjectifies and subjects bodies. Kristeva clarifies that the empowered subject is dominated precisely by its discursive dependence upon the abject—that which is ejected and considered to be the subject’s “waste”—for its seeming homogeneity. In other words, Stedman depends upon Joanna’s death and ejection from his life for his reintegration into European society. In this way, his abjection of the tragic mulatto nevertheless threatens the autonomy of his white, colonial subjecthood: Kristeva states, “...from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master... If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I [the subject] am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most

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sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object" (2, 3-4). Thus, in relying on abjection for its articulation, the subject not only becomes object but also abject. This harrowing threat to the (racially) dominant subject, in turn, vests the tragic mulatto with measured agency. Subjectified in her abjection, the tragic mulatto/cosmopolitan savior has remained a stereotypical trope throughout western literary and legal discourse.¹ Charles Chestnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), to name a few, all depict the social perils of miscegenation and racial passing from the perspectives of mixed heritage African Americans. By way of similarity and contrast, this article focuses on the ways in which mixed heritage Asian Americans are abjected and also subjectified by anti-miscegenation sentiment in contemporary Asian American fiction.

The threat that miscegenation has historically posed to the illusory homogeneity of American whiteness, specifically, was confirmed by such court rulings as the 1857 *Dred Scott Supreme Court* case. This particular ruling declared "no distinction...between the free Negro and mulatto and the slave." The 1896 *Plessey v. Ferguson* decision also "upheld racial segregation based on a single drop of black blood" (Kitch 116). Anti-miscegenation laws in the United States were not only directed against mixed heritage African Americans but also against Asians after the Civil War. Critic Sally L. Kitch writes, "Fourteen states, including many that entered the Union after the war, adopted or revised anti-miscegenation statutes to apply to 'Mongolians,' or 'Malays' in general or to the Chinese in particular. Gender was also paramount to western lawmakers as they determined that the 'blacks' white women were most likely to marry were Chinese men" (143-144). Other anti-miscegenation statutes were directed specifically against Asian women. Assuming all Chinese women to be prostitutes, the 1875 Page Law drastically diminished the immigration of Chinese women to the United States (Kitch 196-197).

Anti-Asian sentiment and the fears of Asian-white miscegenation have also historically been represented in film and literature through the stereotypical

¹ In *The Specter of Sex: Gendered Foundations of Racial Formation in the United States* (Albany: SUNY

The lore about mulattas' attractiveness to white men had a national reach, as evident in the 1853 opinion of Supreme Court Chief Justice Joseph Henry Lumpkin in *Bryan v. Walton*: 'Which one of us has not narrowly escaped petting one of the pretty little mulattoes belonging to our neighbors as one of the family?'...

The benefits of such a reputation and its attendant economic boon were, of course, illusory. The unintended consequences no doubt inspired the trope of the 'tragic mulatto,' which became a staple of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature and contrasted starkly with literary depictions of mulatto men as 'brave, honest, intelligent, and rebellious.' Reality tended to bear out mulattas' tragic destiny, especially as the Civil War deprived many ante-bellum gilded quadroons of both their white lovers and the resources and protection they promised. Many found themselves reduced to domestic work or forced to marry whatever black men would rescue them after white lovers disappeared of their ardor dimmed. Such marriages were also typically doomed. In 1864 alone, six young quadroon women were murdered in New Orleans by their black husbands in cases involving rivalries with other men. Many others committed suicide as the only apparent escape from the perils of racial 'passing' or an ignominious life in the black community. (134)

figurations of Asians as alien outsiders. Critic Karen Shimakawa cites these stereotypes:

Writing about filmic representations of Asian women in her essay “Lotus Blossom Don’t Bleed,” Renée Tajima notes that “there are two basic types: the Lotus Blossom Baby (a.k.a. China Doll, Geisha Girl, shy Polynesian Beauty), and the Dragon Lady (Fu Manchu’s various female relations, prostitutes, devious madams)” (309). As for Asian men, Tajima notes, “quite often they are cast as rapists or love-struck losers” (312). (16)

All of these stereotypes are manifestations of the longstanding binary image of Asians as the yellow peril and the model minority that continually functions to exclude Asians from white American society.² What happens when Asian Americans, specifically mixed heritage Asian Americans, are aware of and perform these stereotypes? By examining the characters of “Doc” Franklin Hata, his adopted biracial daughter Sunny Hata, Jerry Battle, and his biracial daughter Theresa Battle in Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (1999) and *Aloft* (2004), respectively, I argue that Lee’s characters performatively complicate and destabilize the gendered binaries of the Lotus Blossom /Dragon Lady and Charlie Chan (“love-struck loser”)/Fu Manchu (“rapist”) stereotypes.

In his chapter “Of Mimicry and Man” from *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha develops his famous concept of colonial mimicry that is a performance that both empowers and disempowers the colonial subject (colonizer). He defines colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable [colonized] Other, *as subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” as the colonial subject (122). However, this colonial mimicry or performance becomes a threat to the colonial subject’s assumed autonomy. Bhabha states:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. By ‘partial’ I mean both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’. It is as if the very emergence of the ‘colonial’ is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (123)

² Shimakawa states, “The destabilizing threat posed by this contradiction, in turn, produces spectacularly divergent results—images and representations, as well as legal rulings and governmental policies, that vacillate wildly between positioning Asian Americans as foreigners/outsiders/deviants/criminals or as domesticated/invisible/exemplary/honorary whites. Radically unresolvable, the tension generated in that social/historical contradiction results in the production of *racial stereotypes* of Asian Americans in representation” (15).

The colonized Other's imperfect mimicry of the colonial subject mirrors the colonizer's "partial" presence insofar as he depends upon the Other's abject performance for his authority. Rather than mimicking dominant social subjects as such, Lee's characters "imperfectly" perform and disrupt Asian American stereotypes to the same effect of challenging the autonomy of the white American culture that defines itself against such racial stereotypes. In addition to mimicking stereotypes or performing such abjection imperfectly, and thereby deauthorizing the dominance of white American culture in Bhabhaesque fashion,³ Lee's mixed heritage Asian American characters bodily represent the threat of miscegenation. If the "immigrant *body*, then, poses a particular kind of threat to the (literal and symbolic) 'American' body[,]" the racially mixed body is the fulfillment of that threat (Shimakawa 7). Moreover, the recognized mixed heritage Asian American performances of traditional Asian American stereotypes call greater attention to the social constructedness of the model minority/yellow peril binary and its iterations. Sunny Hata, Doc Hata's promiscuous and rebellious daughter in *A Gesture Life*, and Theresa Battle, Jerry Battle's witty and compassionate daughter in *Aloft*, are a composite of the tragic half-breed and cosmopolitan savior that discursively depict biracial women. Their gendered representations of the yellow peril and model minority nevertheless complicate these binary categories. Theresa's representation of the assertive, cosmopolitan savior (to her white father) starkly contrasts with the feminized model minority construction of the passive Lotus Blossom Baby. Sunny, on the other hand, is figured as both the predatory Dragon Lady—the typical, feminized representation of the yellow peril—and the victimized, tragic half-breed. By complexifying the binary stereotypes of Asian women and underscoring the contradictions of each side of the discursive coin, they attenuate the semantic validity of such problematic figurations. That is, if the discursive image of the model minority is characterized by obsequious passivity and the yellow peril is figured as insidiously predatory, then Theresa and Sunny exhibit the ways in which these racist figurations become interchangeable and arbitrary. While the single race characters, Doc Hata⁴ and Jerry, likewise disturb the binary stereotypes of Asian men, their menacing mimicry of white culture ("not quite/not white")⁵ reinscribes *other* (racial and gendered) binaries by

³ Examining various Asian American plays, Shimakawa argues that "Velina Hasu Houston's *Tea*, Jeannie Barroga's *Talk-Story*, Philip Kan Gotanda's *Yankee Dawg You Die*, and David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. Rather than an outright disavowal or rejection of stereotypical, racializing/nationalizing discourse, these plays critically reterritorialize the position of the 'abject' through mimicry, not necessarily to render Asian Americanness nonabject but to redeploy the threatening force of abjection. In other words...these works do not re-present the process of abjection so much as they *perform the abject imperfectly*" (21).

⁴ While I refer to Jerry, Sunny, and Theresa by their first names, I employ Franklin's professional title Doc Hata because it refers to his performance as a counterfeit doctor: In Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), Mr. Hickey scathingly points out, "...Doc Hata. I never understood why you're called that when it's obvious you're not a doctor" (11). His title also signifies the "yellow peril" stereotype that he also performs since "Hata is, literally,...a 'black flag,' ...to warn of a contagion within. It is the signal of spreading death" (224).

⁵ Bhabha conceptualizes colonial mimicry as a discourse that regulates and disciplines the colonized body (122); it also discursively "fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (123) that is divested of its naturalized authority since the mirrored reflection of the colonial subject is "not quite/not white" (131). Therefore, the "ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is

relying on the further abjection of their mixed race daughters. Their first-person, “knowledge-producing” narrations are symptomatic of their discursive power over their daughters.⁶ On the other hand, the mixed race female characters—Theresa and Sunny—not only destabilize gendered model minority / yellow peril stereotypes but also demonstrate that their identities are multiple, uncontainable, and not necessarily dependent on the reinscribed binaries of white / Asian and male / female.

Asian American Abjection and the Body

Various scenes in *A Gesture Life* and *Aloft* focus on Sunny’s sexualized figure and Theresa’s maternal body—both of which occupy an abject space in their fathers’ narratives. That is, they are constantly criticized or even disavowed by their fathers for performing their gendered stereotypes of abjection. In *Imagining the Nation*, critic David Leiwei Li characterizes the period following the repeal of Asian Exclusion (1965) as the period of “Asian abjection,” in which the Asian American has shifted from excluded “object” or Other to “abject” in the national imaginary. Li borrows from Kristeva’s psychoanalytic conception of the abject as the “dung” refuse from which the subject needs to separate in order to realize (and empower) itself” (Kristeva 1) explaining that, “[i]n this, the abject is understood as the part of ourselves that we willfully discard” (6). He goes on to clarify his concept of Asian abjection: “No longer the explicit Other to be disciplined, the Asian in the United States must be strictly contained in permitted quarters yet readily conflated with his or her ancestral nation” (7). Popular stereotypes of Asian Americans perpetuate their abjection by likewise containing and conflating them with Asia.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the ways in which socially abject bodies are subjectified / objectified through discipline, punishment, and normalization. He explains how the fifteenth-century capital punishment in France of quartering developed into the modern-day prison system in which illegal bodies are punished through separation, division, and surveillance (227). The Asian American characters of Lee’s novels demonstrate that, in a homologous vein, the Asian American body is subjectified and symbolically fragmented through racial stereotyping despite the repeal of Asian exclusion. Asian exclusion laws from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act onward and the anti-miscegenation laws directed against Asians (cited earlier) have aimed to contain and excise Asian Americans as alien in the United States; Asian Americans and mixed heritage Asian Americans are thus left to construct (perform) their own fragmented subjectivities out of figurative “dung.” As mentioned earlier, Doc Hata’s and Jerry Battle’s fragmented and unstable subjectivities rely on the further abjection of their mixed heritage Asian American daughters in *A Gesture Life* and *Aloft*. Nevertheless, they attempt to reconstruct or reintegrate the

almost total but not quite” (131). In other words, mimicry menacingly deauthorizes colonial authority.

⁶ Foucault famously writes, “We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (27-28).

symbolically fragmented Asian American body by (imperfectly) performing stereotypes of the model minority and the yellow peril.

Fu Man/"Chan" and His Multi-racial Objects

In fact, both Doc Hata and Jerry illustrate the continual slippage between the model minority and yellow peril in their narratives. In a confrontational moment between Sunny and Doc Hata during her rebellious teenage years, Sunny rants,

...all I've ever seen is how careful you are with everything. With our fancy big house and this store and all the customers... You make a whole life out of gestures and politeness. You're always having to be the ideal partner and colleague... You know what I overheard down at the card shop? How nice it is to have such a "good Charlie" to organize the garbage and sidewalk-cleaning schedule. That's what they really think of you. It's become your job to be the number-one citizen... You burden with your generosity. (95)

Here, Sunny, who is arguably more object than Doc Hata, nevertheless takes up the discursive role of the "daughter-judge"—part of what Foucault calls the "micro-physics of power."⁷ She angrily points out that his performance of the Charlie Chan stereotype is both productive (even manipulative—"You burden with your generosity") and objectifying.⁸ Despite the acknowledgment that Doc Hata problematically reproduces the stereotype of Charlie Chan, he performs it so well in his narrative that it prevents his assimilation.

Recalling his first few days at his new home in the affluent, largely white town of Bedley Run, Doc Hata describes his perfectionistic response to his racialization as a "noble Japanese" (134):

...Even when I received welcome cards and sweets baskets from my immediate neighbors, I judged the exact scale of what an appropriate response should be, that to reply with anything but the quiet simplicity of a gracious note would be to ruin the delicate and fragile balance. And so

⁷ Revising Louis Althusser's argument that subjectifying power is exerted by ideological state apparatuses, Foucault states, "Moreover, [the power of subjection] cannot be localized in a particular type of institution or state apparatus. For they have recourse to it; they use, select or impose certain of its methods. But, in its mechanisms and its effects, it is situated at a quite different level. What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces" (27). Moreover, as Sunny demonstrates, subjects-objects become agents of their own normativity: "We are in the society of teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power" (304).

⁸ Foucault states, "This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (25).

this is exactly what I did, in the form of expensive, heavy-stocked cards, each of which I took great care to write in my best hand. Each brief thank-you was different, though saying the same thing, and I know that this helped me gain quick acceptance from my Mountview neighbors, especially given my being a foreigner and a Japanese. And as I've already intimated, they all seemed particularly surprised and pleased that I hadn't run over to their houses with wrapped presents and invitations and hopeful, clinging embraces; in fact, I must have given them the reassuring thought of how safe they actually were, how shielded, that an interloper might immediately recognize and so heed the rules of their houses. (44)

Doc Hata reconfigures the model minority / Charlie Chan stereotype by making his "exact" obsequiousness much more subtle, socially acceptable, and ultimately manipulative. His "thank-you" cards are elaborate ways to transparently manipulate his inevitably barred assimilation into white American society. While his "not quite / not white" mimicry of white American suburbanites would seem to deauthorize their privilege, he nevertheless reaffirms the reality of his objectification as a "foreigner and a Japanese." Continuously "burdening with [his] generosity," his Charlie Chan performance slips easily into an insidious Fu Manchu act that likewise burdens his narrative.

Doc Hata's narrative is interspersed with haunting memories from fighting for the Japanese Imperial army during World War II. He recalls several moments in which he believes he shares emotional and physical intimacy with a Korean comfort woman named K, suspending the knowledge that she is a sex slave. He describes one moment from his skewed perspective:

She was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, or somehow forcing herself to, and she did not move or speak or make anything but the shallowest breaths, even as I was casting myself upon her. I kissed as much of her body as was bared. I kissed her small breasts, which seemed to spill a sweet, watery liquid. I gagged but did not care. Then it was all quite swift and natural, as chaste as it could ever be. (260)

This unidimensional love scene reveals Doc Hata's own problematic viewpoint and his inhabitation of the Fu Manchu (rapist) stereotype (261). The rape becomes more explicit when he returns to K moments later to find her crying, saying "*hata-hata, hata-hata*" (261) — signifying both his name and his role as a Fu Manchu figure that preys on vulnerable women. Earlier in the narrative, his superior Captain Ono, who is given exclusive rights to K's enslavement, appoints Doc Hata to look after her whenever he signals him with a black flag: "What he had determined as the sign, the black flag, was of course meant for me. Hata is, literally, 'flag,' and a 'black flag,' or *kurohata*, is the banner a village would raise by its gate in olden times to warn of a contagion within. It is the signal of spreading death" (224). Ono determines this assignation when Doc Hata submissively shuffles his feet: "I had not hint of an answer for him, and I shuffled my feet. [Ono] then looked somewhat pleased, while regarding me. 'Well it should be that then'" (223). Throughout the text, he signifies or takes on the guise of a spreading contagion (yellow peril) through his "Charlie Chan" obsequiousness.

“Depend[ing]...upon gesture,” (266) Doc Hata’s performative inefficacy paradoxically victimizes those around him; in this way, his abjection subjectifies him. For example, when K asks him to “mercy kill” her before the other soldiers find (and eventually dismember) her, he “disappoints” her and thus contributes to her chilling death: “Yet I could not shoot. I could not. Whether for love or pity or cowardice” (301). As his love-object, K becomes an abjectified foil to his own objectivity and therefore he cannot shoot her for fear of psychic self-erasure. His self-pity and cowardice continually lead him to abjectify and victimize other women, particularly his own biracial daughter Sunny, by alternately attempting to rescue and neglecting them.

Mary Burns, Doc Hata’s lover and neighbor in Bedley Run, tells him that he treats his daughter as “if she’s a woman to whom you’re beholden, which I can’t understand...you act almost guilty, as if she’s someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you’re obliged to do whatever she wishes, which is never good for anyone, much less a child” (60). Doc Hata indeed attempts to compensate for his lost relationship with K through his adoption of Sunny. He recalls the adoption process:

But I wanted a girl, a daughter—I was (as I think of it now) strangely unmovable on the issue—and in the end the agency woman called to say they had found one, without any further explanation. My desire for a girl was unknown to me right up to the moment the agency woman spoke of locating a boy for me, but I interrupted her immediately and explained how I’d always hoped for a daughter, the words suddenly streaming from my mouth as though I’d long practiced the speech. I found myself speaking of completeness, the unitary bond of a daughter and father. Of harmony and balance. (74)

He uses such phrases as the “unitary bond...[o]f harmony and balance,” which would seem to otherwise reference an intimate, even mystical, relationship between lovers, to describe his envisioned relationship with his adopted daughter. He continues to problematically displace his lost romantic relationships onto his familial relationship with Sunny. Moreover, the “unitary bond” of his identity seems to depend on his abjection of his daughter. For example, when she runs away, he spies on her but does not intervene as she seductively dances for both Jimmy Gizzi—a local n’er-do-well—and another man named Lincoln at Gizzi’s house party. “[C]amouflaged” by the darkness, Doc Hata comments on the scene:

I had never seen her move in such a way. I knew what her body was like, of course, from when she was a young girl, and later, too, when she’d swim or sunbathe at the house in a bikini, which was hardly a covering at all. She was always lithe and strong and sturdy-limbed, never too skinny or too softly feminine. I saw her as I believe any good father would, with pride and wonder and the most innocent (if impossible) measure or longing, an aching hope that she stay forever pristine, unsoiled. (114)

The emphasis on seeing “her as I believe *any* good father would, with pride and wonder and the most *innocent* (if impossible) measure or *longing*, an *aching* hope”

(my emphasis) smacks of an incestuous desire to maintain a pure, interfamilial blood line. Such a desire is doubly self-defeating and abjectifying since his daughter is adopted and not a mono-racial individual like Doc Hata (whose “pristine, unsoiled” interfamilial blood line is also questionable since he later reveals that he is an ethnic Korean adopted by a Japanese family). In this moment, his recourse to the voyeuristic gaze on Sunny’s seduction of Gizzi and Lincoln turns into a reverse primal scene in which the parent (instead of the child) actually observes his child engaging in sexual intercourse and is both pleased and haunted by its seeming violence:

...Jimmy Gizzi had undone his pants and begun lazily stroking himself, and Sunny began laughing at him, first in chortles and then maniacally, in a dusky tone that seemed as illiberal and vile as what he was compelling on himself. And it was then that I wished she were just another girl or woman to me, no longer my kin or my daughter or even my charge, and I made no sound as I grimly descended, my blood already trying to forget, growing cold. (114)

Doc Hata’s shameful desire that emerges as he witnesses this scene causes him to wish that “she were just another girl or woman to [him].” He then goes on to renounce his relationship with her in descending degrees of intimacy—“kin or daughter or even my charge.”

And yet, despite his renunciation of paternity to Sunny, he attempts to performatively resolve his own yellow peril racialization by quarantining, even incarcerating, Sunny and himself—his deemed “harmony and balance.” According to Foucault, the “carceral” extends beyond the apparatus of the prison into the “city” or the rest of society and operates through “‘carceral’ mechanisms which seem distinct enough – wince they are intended to alleviate pain, to cure, to comfort – but which all tend, like the prison, to exercise a power of normalization” (308). Notwithstanding the passage above, Doc Hata continually tries to “normalize,” contain, and even erase Sunny’s and his own sexualities. For example, he problematically involves himself in his daughter’s abortion later in the novel. His house also becomes an imprisoning mausoleum (in which he is almost burned alive in a fire) that is meant to preserve and figuratively contain Sunny and himself from the rest of the world. Despite his failure to further isolate Sunny by securing her as the successive owner of Sunny’s Medical Supplies,⁹ Doc Hata goes as far as to purchase a twin burial plot for both of them when Sunny is a child: “And it was an unusual decision as well, I realize, to buy one for such a little girl, but I wasn’t married or expecting to be—the other plot one buys being normally for a spouse—and I thought that it would be something like insurance, that we would always have a place for ourselves in the end, which no one could encroach or buy back or take away” (329). In explaining his decision, he once again conflates the roles of daughter and lover. Against his best efforts to symbolically contain his racialization as the yellow peril—“securing my

⁹ Hata states, “And it’s almost too much for me, too felicitous perhaps, to imagine the fantastic idea of what Sunny Medical Supply might be instead of half-emptied and shut, what kind of vital, resplendent establishment could have been built, not for pride or for riches but a place to leave each night and glance back upon and feel sure would contain us” (205).

good station here, the last place I will belong” even “though nearly every soul I’ve closely known has come to some dread or grave misfortune” (346)—Doc Hata concludes the novel with an acceptance of his inability to assimilate: After anonymously donating some of the money from the store’s foreclosure to the PICU fund of an acquaintance’s son and giving the rest to Sunny and her son Thomas, Doc Hata states,

Let me simply bear my flesh, and blood, and bones. I will fly a flag. Tomorrow, when this house is alive and full, I will be outside looking in. I will be already on a walk someplace, in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and arrive again. Come almost home. (356)

He ultimately seems to have accepted his dyadic racialization as a yellow peril/model minority figure when he unapologetically states, “I will fly a flag” (of “contagion”) while he still sacrificially excludes himself from the house that is “alive and full.” Nevertheless, the phrase “Come almost home” suggests that, in the end, he has perhaps understood himself as striking a performative balance between the binary stereotypes, “on the back” of his biracial daughter.

By contrast, *Aloft* concludes with Jerry Battle successfully containing or incarcerating himself and his extended family in his newly renovated house. He manages to “save” everyone in his household—his son Jack, daughter-in-law Eunice, their children, Theresa’s newborn son Barthes, her fiancé Paul, and Jerry’s girlfriend Rita—all except for his daughter Theresa, who tragically dies while giving birth to Barthes. Attempting to reconstruct the last few moments of her life for his speech at her funeral, Jerry remembers how he flew her as quickly as possible to the nearest hospital in his helicopter. And yet he is unable to publicly produce meaningful descriptions of his daughter:

And why not? I don’t know. Maybe it was old-time unreconstructed denial, or that oft-documented lazy-heartedness of mine, or else what might simply be a pathological fear of sadness. None of these of course is any good excuse, which I can mostly handle, except what does disturb is the thought that somewhere up there (I hope and pray, *up there*) Theresa Battle has had to pause in free mid-soar and grant pardon to an utter terrestrial like me. (340)

Failing to save his daughter, Jerry recalls “I was almost certain that her hand’s grasp on mine kept tightening with purposeful assurance and not that she was dying or already dead” (340). Theresa’s unconscious grip on his hand reverses his intentions by reassuring *him* of her well-being. Throughout the narrative, but particularly at the end of the novel, he commemorates his biracial daughter as a celestial, messianic figure—that is, both a tragic “half-breed” and a cosmopolitan savior. Here his “oft-documented lazy-heartedness”—his own Fu Manchu lasciviousness and Charlie Chan savior mentality—is “disturbed” by his daughter’s own Madonnasque position as his maternal savior. Like Doc Hata, Jerry both subjectifies and objectifies himself through the abjection of his mixed race daughter.

Although not an Asian American, Jerry partially orientalizes himself by proxy due to his marriage to his ethnically Korean wife, Daisy:

I'm to say 'Asian-American,' partly because they always do, and not only because my usage of the old standby of 'Oriental' offends them on many personal and theoretical levels, but also because I should begin to reenvision myself as a multicultural being, as my long-deceased wife, Daisy, was Asian herself and my children are of mixed blood, even though I have never thought of them that way. (29)

He places himself in a precarious relation to the other Asian Americans in the novel (i.e. his family). Although deeming himself a "multicultural being," he nevertheless bases his subjectivity on the objectification of his multiracial family by emphatically referring to his family as "them" (rather than "us," per se). But he also admits that "I'm one to leap up from the mat to aid all manner of strangers and tourists and other wide-eyed foreigners but when it comes to loved ones and family I can hardly ungear myself from the La-Z-Boy, and want only succor and happy sufferance in return" (18). He thus alternates between placing an "Othering" objective distance and canceling any distance between his family and himself by destructively failing to recognize their separate needs and offer them succor. Noticing his close association with his "Oriental" family, his father Hank crassly exclaims, "Jesus. How did our family get so damn Oriental? I guess you started it. Even Jack's kids—you'd think with that Nazi wife of his they wouldn't look like such little coolies" (172). Jerry unrepentantly replicates his father's offensive remarks about his wife's race and children's mixed Asian American heritage: He abjectifies his biracial children even when he proudly refers to his family as "an ethnically jumbled bunch, a grab bag miscegenation of Korean (Daisy) and Italian (us Battles) and English-German (Eunice) expressing itself in my and Jack's offspring with particularly handsome and even stunning results" (69). And yet, he remarks that his son Jack is particularly handsome *because* he passes as white:

I've often thought it's because he's very fair and Anglo-looking, tall and long-legged and with barely a lilt to the angle of his eyes. Such as it is, I believe he's always *passed*, any lingering questions quickly squashed by his model-good looks and good-guy demeanor, which have always attracted plenty of the popular crowd to the house, to my eye at least. I can't remember his once dating a girl who wasn't our classic American blonde (from the bottle or not), Eunice (you-NEECE) Linzer Robeson being the most impressive of the bunch, and easily the sharpest. (70)

Jerry makes the offensive admission here that Jack is popular, good-looking, and able to "attain" an Anglo trophy wife precisely because "he is very fair and Anglo-looking, tall and long-legged and with barely a lilt to the angle of his eyes."

Theresa, on the other hand, seems to pose more of a racialized problem for Jerry. He sardonically describes her as one of "the sort of midnight-eyed young women you see increasingly in magazines and on billboard, which to [Jerry] is a generally welcome development (being the father of such Diversity)" (77). Not

passing as an Anglo American, Theresa repeatedly claims and defends her ethnicity by criticizing her father's problematic racial politics: Jerry states,

Of course, my exceedingly literate, overeducated daughter Theresa (Stanford Ph.D.) would say as she has in the past that I have to mention all this because like most people in this country I'm hopelessly obsessed with race and difference and can't help but *privilege* the *normative* and *fetishize* what's not. And while I'm never fully certain of her terminology, I'd like to think that if I am indeed guilty of such things it's mostly because sometimes I worry for her and Jack, who, I should mention, too aren't wholly normative of race themselves, being 'mixed' from my first and only marriage to a woman named Daisy Han. (11-12)

He indeed "fetishizes" the non-*normative*, including his own daughter when he notices her newly pregnant body: "And she looks great to me, a little fuller everywhere, her skin warm with a summer glow" (76). His focus on Theresa's body resonates with his fetishistic description of his deceased wife Daisy:

Daisy was not voluptuous, which I liked, her long, lean torso and shortist Asian legs (perfectly hairless) and her breasts that weren't so full and rounded but shaped rather in the form of gently pitched dunes, those delicate pale hillocks. I realize I may be waxing pathetic here, your basic sorry white dude afflicted with what Theresa refers to as 'Saigon syndrome' (*Me so hor-ny, G.I. Joe!*) and fetishizing once again, but I'm not sorry because the fact is I found her desirable precisely because she was put together differently from what I was used to, as it were, totally unlike the wide-hipped Italian or leggy Irish girls or the broad-bottomed Polish chicks from Our Lady of Wherever I was raised on since youth, who compared to Daisy seemed pretty dreadful contraptions. (107-108)

Daisy's "shortist Asian" Otherness shamelessly attracts him and his savior/"Saigon syndrome": "I found her desirable because she was put together differently from what I was used to..." Jerry's lascivious "lazy-heartedness" (his own, however disavowed, Fu Manchu/Charlie Chan complex) comes to a head when he repeatedly attempts to rescue an emotionally unstable, female coworker (another disadvantaged "Other") named Kelly Stearns at the travel agency where he works. He does so, initially by seduction and then by intervening in her attempted suicide. All of his efforts result in getting an ironic "bitch-slapping" from Kelly's boyfriend whom he had given the diminutive nickname "Mini-Jim" (218).

He continually attempts to compensate for his ontological lack, or his castration complex, by rescuing women—particularly women of color—from their dire circumstances and seducing them. He recalls that when he is unable to prevent Daisy's manic spending frenzies, he engages in "good coarse sex" with his wife in the shower:

...and it might have worked had our little Theresa not opened the shower door and stood watching for God knows how long as I was engaged her mother in the doggie-style stance we tended to employ when things

between us weren't perfectly fine. (Note: I've always suspected that it was this very scene that set Theresa on her lifelong discrimination for whatever I might say or do, and though she's never mentioned it and would reject the notion out of hand for being too reductionist/ Freudian, I'm plain sorry for it and hate to think that knocking about somewhere in her memory is a grainy washed-out Polaroid of me starring as The Beast or The Rapist. (108)

Not only does his sexual act with his wife not "work" to resolve their marital difficulties, but it also frames a primal scene in which Theresa, as a child, surreptitiously looks on with stunned curiosity and in which Jerry acknowledges his own role, "starring as" the Fu Manchu-like "Beast" or "Rapist." Told from his perspective, rather than that of Theresa (who never explicitly mentions the memory throughout the novel), the primal scene exemplifies the Lacanian Gaze:

By distinguishing the eye's look from the Gaze, Lacan designates the latter to refer to the undoing of our scopophilic power by the materiality of existence (the Real) that always exceeds and undercuts the structures of the symbolic order. The Gaze as a third agent is, therefore, unlike any agent we would normally conceive, for it is crucially an agent without agency. It is the thing that rips open our illusion of subjectivity, our certitude as seeing and seen subjects. (Cheng 567)

In this moment, Jerry's "illusion of subjectivity" is "ripped open" by the uncomprehending, thus non-agential gaze of his young, racially abject daughter and he is thus objectified as the orientalized Fu Manchu figure that he so reviles.

Jerry's performance of his "yellow peril" lasciviousness continually leads back to his Charlie Chan-like emasculation throughout the narrative: He loses his wife Daisy to her manic suicide and is knocked down by "Mini-Jim;" his sexual acts with his "knockout" (51) Hispanic ex-girlfriend Rita (once he is able to win her back from the "wimp" of his high school days Richie) are repeatedly interrupted and symbolically undermined by his (mixed heritage) familial obligations (264, 340-341). Moreover, he admits that his increasing age leads him to compensate for his emasculation by flying and ultimately buying his admitted "*micropenis*" helicopter (4). The helicopter named "Donnie" that he purchases prevents him from seeing "the messy rest, none of the pedestrian, sea-level flotsam that surely blemishes our good scene..." (2). Jerry uses the same compensatory vehicle of denial to transport his daughter who is fatally suffering from leukemia because of her kept pregnancy from a leisurely joyride to her premature labor that results in her death. Failing to save his own daughter, he nevertheless succeeds in containing the rest of his family in his remodeled house. The novel concludes in a manner similar to *A Gesture Life*, in which the protagonist resigns himself to a life of "dreadful circularity" (*Aloft* 338), accepting his perpetual position as an abject alien on the "outside looking in" (*A Gesture Life* 356): "Now where's Jerry? Somebody says, the barely audible sound traveling just above and far enough away from me that I don't immediately answer. It's okay. No problem. They'll start without me, you'll see" (343). Jerry's final realization of his own Orientalized alienness departs from his previous biological notions of race. Theresa's cumulative efforts to educate him about his problematic

abjectification of Asiatics finally “save” him by aiding his recognition of his performance as a likewise disempowered Other. And yet, his recognition arrives at the expense of his daughter who, in her death, exemplifies both the stereotype of the tragic half-breed and the cosmopolitan savior.

Wielding Miscegenation: Dragon Lady Blossoms Strike Back

Theresa’s posthumous representation of the binary stereotypes of the fetishized cosmopolitan savior and abject tragic half-breed illustrates Kristeva’s conceptualization of the abject:

The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the

object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (Kristeva 1)

Like Bhabha’s concept of the “menace” of colonial mimicry, Kristeva’s notion of the abject is “radically excluded” (as figurative excrement) from the subject but also objectifies the subject by pointing to “the place where meaning” or the (more) dominant subject’s autonomy “collapses.” Through their enforcement of gendered and racial stereotypes, Doc Hata and Jerry abject their biracial daughters in order to subjectify themselves or establish their otherwise marginalized identities. As the fetishized, figurative excrement that Doc Hata and Jerry attempt to contain, Sunny and Theresa, in turn, paradoxically implicate their fathers’ objectivity and otherness. The former deconstruct and rearticulate the gendered and racial stereotypes of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan only to reconstruct other asymmetrical binaries of male / female, single race / mixed race, and Dragon Lady / Lotus Blossom Baby. The latter, on the other hand, destabilize the binary Dragon Lady / Lotus Blossom stereotypes without necessarily reconstituting other asymmetrical binaries. In describing the identity of the woman of color, Trinh T. Min-ha cites Kristeva’s statement that, “In woman...I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies,”¹⁰ as a point of departure to claim that,

Difference understood not as an irreducible quality but as a drifting apart within ‘woman’ articulates upon the infinity of ‘woman’ as entities of inseparable ‘I’s’ and ‘Not-I’s.’ In any case, ‘woman’ here is not interchangeable with ‘man;’ and to declare provocatively, as Kristeva does, that one should dissolve ‘even sexual identities’ is, in a way, to disregard the importance of the shift that the notion of identity has undergone in woman’s discourses.

Theresa and Sunny demonstrate their refusal to define their identities against men, particularly their fathers, through their critiques of their fathers’ performances of racialized and gendered stereotypes. In an explosive argument with her father, Sunny bitterly tells Doc Hata, “I don’t need you...I never needed

¹⁰ Trinh T. Min-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989) 104.

you. I don't know why, but you needed me. But it was never the other way" (96). At once, Sunny undercuts Doc Hata's patriarchal authority and reverses the paternal relationship by indicating that he "needed" her...it was never the other way." By "disturb[ing]" Doc Hata's binary "identity, system, order," Sunny's abjection becomes a form of "revenge" against him (Kristeva 4). As demonstrated in the preceding section, both Sunny and Theresa evade their fathers' attempts to contain or incarcerate their identities and manage to articulate their "infinity" identities by rupturing the Manichean stereotypes of the Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom that subjectify Asian American women.

Since both novels are told from the perspectives of the male protagonists, the distances from Theresa's and Sunny's points of view make their actions appear even more performative. In keeping with the asexual Lotus Blossom stereotype, her maternity ("Mother" Theresa) becomes her signature character trait as she insists on keeping her pregnancy despite its interference with her leukemia treatment. While she never explicitly displays her sexuality as Sunny does in *A Gesture Life*, her status as an unwed pregnant woman implies her sexuality and thus complicates her performance of the Lotus Blossom stereotype. That is to say, her subjectivity emerges in her imperfect performance of the Lotus Blossom stereotype. For example, Theresa's advanced liberal education and outspoken criticisms of her father's colonialist "Saigon syndrome" run counter to her fulfillment of the passive and submissive gendered model minority. Her imperfect replication of the stereotype therefore exposes its two-dimensional social constructedness.

At times, she performs the gendered model minority construct of the cosmopolitan savior as she continually aids her father in his pedestrian tasks. When she follows her father to return Richie's Ferrari, Jerry describes her as "sitt[ing] coolly at the wheel of [his] Impala wearing the Jackie O sunglasses..." (240). Her fashionable sunglasses, which she sports as she helps her father, signal a performance of cosmopolitan saviorhood that she exposes and yet still earnestly fulfills: Her father states, "With the light shining from behind her sunglasses I can see her eyes searching me, perhaps not so much looking for the desired answer but rather the glimmer of a character somehow more wise and generous and self-sacrificing than the one that I for some fifty-nine and fifteen-sixteenths years have come to possess" (315). In a single moment, her performative prop of her "Jackie O" sunglasses self-consciously flags and therefore levels the essentialist authenticity of cosmopolitan saviorhood—a trait Jerry nevertheless problematically assumes inheres in his daughter: "the glimmer of character somehow more wise and generous and self-sacrificing..." Nevertheless, Theresa's misinterpreted performance of the inauthentic cosmopolitan savior demonstrates the subjectifying "breakdown," according to critic Gloria Anzaldúa, of "the subject-object duality that keeps [the mestiza, or the mixed race woman,] a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality[,] such as authenticity and inauthenticity, "is transcended" (102). Through her imperfect and contradictory performances of the Lotus Blossom and the cosmopolitan savior, Theresa also exposes the sub-level binary of the feminized model minority stereotype as a racist, social construct.

Sunny similarly unveils the constructedness of the feminized yellow peril stereotype sub-level binary of the Dragon Lady and the tragic half-breed.

Performed without “coercion” (115), Sunny’s strip tease for Jimmy Gizzi and Lincoln (who eventually becomes the father of her child Thomas) is a self-conscious “Dragon Lady” seduction of the two men (and unconscious seduction of her voyeuristic father). When Jimmy begins to masturbate, she begins “laughing at him, first in chortles and then maniacally, in a dusky tone that seemed as illiberal and vile as what [Jimmy] was compelling on himself” (116). Instead of performing the Dragon Lady stereotype badly or imperfectly, Sunny’s performance is quite precise insofar as she succeeds in seducing her audience. And yet, her maniacal laughter performs several functions: While it further perpetuates the image of the cruel seductress, her laughter also locates her subjectivity in the self-consciousness of her performance as it compels Jimmy to masturbate. Moreover, the pervasiveness of her laughter during this scene contradicts Doc Hata’s efforts to contain Sunny, himself, and their sexualities. Finally, the excess of her laughter and the explicit display of her sexuality demonstrate her irreducible sexual difference from her father’s binary obsession with (Charlie Chan) asexuality and (Fu Manchu) hypersexuality.¹¹

Sunny continually complexifies the stereotype of the Dragon Lady by also taking on the racialized role of the tragic half-breed that is victimized by men. Before she permanently leaves home, Sunny informs Doc Hata that her African American lover, Lincoln, stabbed Jimmy Gizzi upon finding him raping her. Refusing to be a victim, she defiantly declares, “Nothing like that is ever going to happen to me again. I’ll kill myself before it does, I swear.” Her father, in turn, continues to victimize her by dwelling on what he perceives to be their failed (even reversed) roles as father and daughter. En route to taking her home and then to her scheduled abortion, Doc Hata is tempted to crash his car into a wall:

...I wanted to end us, inglorious and swift, just another unfortunate accident on Route 9, to leave a few lines hardly noticed in the local paper concerning a longtime Bedley Run resident and his daughter, with no survivors...But what happened of course was that I drove home and let her inside the house where we separated until the appointed exam, Sunny upstairs in her old room stripped of everything but the bed, and I down in the family room, listening to the records of Chopin and Mozart I had bought for her to use as models and inspiration. And while I was listening to those stirring, ambling notes I might have realized how frightening all this was to her, how overwhelming and awful, but I sensed instead only the imminent disgrace and embarrassment that would hang about the house like banners of our mutual failure. (340)

He divulges his narcissistic perceptions of his daughter in his murderous thoughts to end what he understands to be their “mutual failure” as father and

¹¹ Trinh states, “The point raised by this apparent indifference to a physical distinction between men and women is not simple repression of a sexual difference, but a *different* distribution of sexual *difference*, therefore a challenge to the notion of (sexual) identity as commonly defined in the West and the entire gamut of concepts that ensues: femininity-femaleness-feminitude-woman-womanhood / masculinity-maleness-virility-man-manhood, and so on. In other words, sexual difference has no absolute value and its interior to the praxis of every subject. What is known as the ‘Phallic principle’ in one part of the world (despite the dominance this part exerts over the rest) does not necessarily apply to the other parts” (103).

daughter. Earlier in the novel, Sunny articulates the manifold ways in which she has disappointed her father. She informs her father that he maliciously taunts her with her failures: "I'm saying you like having [the piano] around for what it says. About me. How I've failed... That's right. I've failed doubly. First myself, and then my good poppa, who's loved and respected by all" (31). In addition to her failure to become a concert pianist, Sunny ultimately fails at becoming the pure racial incarnation of Doc Hata's lost Korean sex slave K. Upon meeting his adopted daughter for the first time, he remarks,

A skinny, jointy young girl, with thick, wavy black hair and dark-hued skin. I was disappointed initially; the agency had promised a child from a hardworking, if squarely humble, Korean family who had gone down on their luck. I had wished to make my own family, and if by necessity the single-parent kind then at least one that would soon be well reputed and happily known, the Hatas of Bedley Run. But of course I was overhopeful and naïve, and should have known that he or she would likely be the product of a much less dignified circumstance, a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl. I had assumed the child and I would have a ready, natural affinity, and that my colleagues and associates and neighbors, though knowing her to be adopted, would have little trouble quickly accepting our being of a single kind and blood. But when I saw her for the first time I realized there could be no such conceit for us, no easy persuasion. Her hair, her skin, were there to see, self-evident, and it was obvious how some other color (or colors) ran deep within her. And perhaps it was right from that moment, the very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, the blighted hope in my eyes. (204)

Disappointed that his fantasy of feigning a biological relationship with his daughter is "blighted," he makes it evident here that Sunny's mixed heritage Asian Americanness is ultimately what fails to subjectify him. That is, he ironically treats her mixed race as a problem of racial inauthenticity despite his own attempt at creating such a biological conceit. Emphasizing the tautological structure of authenticity, Trinh states, "*Authenticity* as a need to rely on an 'undisputed origin,' is prey to an obsessive *fear*: that of *losing a connection*. Everything must hold together. In my craving for a logic of being, I cannot help but loathe the threats of interruptions, disseminations, and suspensions. To begin, to develop to a climax, then, to end. To fill, to join, to unify. The order and the links create an illusion of continuity, which I highly prize for fear of nonsense and emptiness" (94). Instead of holding himself responsible for his estranged relationship with his daughter, he appears to blame her mixed race—Sunny's "inauthentic" Asianness—for his "loss of connection" with her and ultimately himself. Doc Hata's rejection of her mixed heritage contributes to her racialization as a tragic half-breed.

Not bound by the problematic binary of racial authenticity / inauthenticity, Sunny wields her mixed race heritage as a form of agential subjectivity that articulates what Anzaldúa delineates as "mestiza consciousness": "...though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (102). For example, Sunny defiantly "breaks down" "unitary" paradigms of racial

authenticity and purity by continuing the legacy of racial mixing when she gives birth to her son Thomas (whose father is African American). When meeting him for the first time, Doc Hata observes him with a racial lens: “I think the boy must be hers, bestowed as he is with her high, narrowing eyes and her black hair, though it’s tightly curled, near-Afro, and her warm, nut-colored skin (though I wonder why he isn’t darker)” (208). His description of his grandson obsessively centers on his racialization as a mixed heritage Afro-Asian American. In *Aloft*, Jerry also racializes his mixed heritage Asian American grandson Barthes by referring to him as an effeminate, “sweet runt” (333):

Each time I’ll examine him closely, and I’ll note that his pixie face is distinctively un-Caucasian, not much of a beak to speak of, the eyes almost like stripes of skin, and the only thing that makes me pause for a half second is not that he doesn’t look anything like me, which is how it has to be, but that I can’t quite see his mother in him either, not yet, anyway, as he is an exact replica of the infant Paul’s parents have shown us in pictures from his baby album. (333)

His response to Barthes’s Asian features exemplifies the quintessential fear of the yellow peril—that national whiteness might grow extinct. Jerry’s racist and narcissistic fears are thusly realized: “his pixie face is distinctly un-Caucasian...[and] he doesn’t look anything like me...” While both Jerry and Doc Hata attempt to contain their racially mixed families in diverse, symbolic ways—in their houses, through parental overprotection, or even by purchasing twin burial sites—their racially mixed daughters figuratively “spread” the “yellow peril” through their mixed heritage Asian American offspring. Throughout popular and literary discourse (e.g. *Stedman’s Surinam*), mixed heritage women are often the fixations of multiracial fears of miscegenation because of their capacity to further produce mixed heritage children (who might not be able to pass as white). This discursive fear, in turn constructs them as binary objects of miscegenated tragedy and messianic subjects. And yet, as Sunny and Theresa demonstrate, the mixed race woman “constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than exclude” (Anzaldúa 101). Their racial empowerment is fueled by their performances that include, engage with, and defy racial stereotypes and their reproduction of mixed race children who would perhaps, in turn, performatively defy (the singular thinking of) their own racializations.

Conclusion: Disturbing Stereotypes

As a “full-blooded” Korean American woman, Theresa’s mother Daisy is also described as performing the Dragon Lady stereotype. Jerry recalls,

Daisy could always, please forgive me, float my boat, top my prop, she could always crank up the generators at any moment and make me feel that every last cell in my body was overjuiced and soon-to-be derelict if not immediately *launched* toward something warm and soft. In her way

she was a performer, as they say actors can be when they enter a room; something in them switches on and suddenly everybody is pointed right at them, abject with confused misery and love. (119)

As she performs the abjected role of the Dragon Lady, she paradoxically abjects those who are gazing at her, filling them with “confused misery and love.” In her conceptualization of Asian American abjection, Shimakawa cites Kristeva’s statement that “the process of abjection ‘does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges [the subject] to be in perpetual danger’” (9-10). In short, Asian American performances of abject stereotypes threaten the perceived dominant, homogeneous body of the nation by calling attention to the possibility that it too might also be abject. Jerry’s honorary Fu Manchu/Charlie Chan complex is a case in point. In certain ways, Theresa’s and Sunny’s performances resemble Daisy’s insofar as they play upon the discursive feminized yellow peril stereotype. However, the narrative emphases on their mixed heritages underscore more of an ironic distance between their “yellow face” performances and themselves. Defying patriarchal containment, the mixed heritage women of both novels performatively spread the yellow peril of their Lotus Blossom/Dragon Lady mélange by complexifying the binary stereotypes and reproducing mixed heritage children. That is, they articulate the proliferation of their sexual, gendered, and racial difference through their imperfect and “menacing” performances of Asian female stereotypes.

The collective performances of Asian American abjection by Lee’s characters expose the social constructedness of these racial stereotypes. Imperfect and abject performances of the Charlie Chan/ Fu Manchu and Lotus Blossom/Dragon Lady stereotypes continually deauthorize and threaten the dominant notions of a homogeneous, white nation that anti-miscegenation laws historically sought to maintain. Performances of stereotypes by mixed heritage Asian American women, in particular, deconstruct and de-legitimize the phallic binary of fullness and lack (and its iterations of male/female, hypersexual/asexual, authentic/inauthentic, single race/mixed race) that the Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom Baby stereotypes seem to promise gazing subjects. Both *Aloft* and *A Gesture Life* demonstrate that Asian American abjection universally signifies the phallic lack and powerful social imaginary of racialization that continues to shape our contemporary America.

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