

Redeeming American democracy in Sayonara

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Abstract: Affection is perceived as something natural, pre-existing Culture and, therefore, free from discursive constructions. However, insofar as reality is mediated, if not given existence by language, human relationships are inevitably fashioned by narratives. Romance fictions and in particular heterosexual, interracial love stories have been used in U.S. popular culture as a means of promoting American democratic values of racial harmony at home and abroad. This will be exemplified by analyzing James A. Michener's 1953 novel *Sayonara* together with Joshua Logan's 1957 film adaptation.

Key words: *Sayonara*; U.S. Cold War foreign policy; interracial love politics.

To the degree that the postmodern condition implies an unbridled consumerism, the cultural logic of late capitalism, pleasure for cash, and a product to gratify every possible impulse—if not, indeed, to construct the impulse in the first place—love is a value that remains beyond the market. While sex is a commodity, love becomes the condition of a happiness that cannot be bought, the one remaining object of a desire that cannot be sure of purchasing fulfilment. Love thus becomes more precious than before because it is beyond price, and in consequence its metaphysical character is intensified (Belsey 1994: 683).

It can be deduced from Belsey's words above that in the contemporary, postmodern world love, desire and passion occupy a paradoxical space. Traditionally understood as emotions inherent to human nature and, therefore, pre-existing and transcending Culture, it is also widely considered within literary criticism and cultural studies that these emotions are contextually 'fashioned', if not constructed as befitting the Western heterosexual concept of an affective relationship.

Particularly in U.S. popular culture or, as American scholar Christina Klein defines it, the 'middlebrow imagination' (2003), depictions of emotion have been used as vehicles not only to reflect, but also to support or even attempt to subvert cultural constructions related to social class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. So it follows, then, that romance fictions have been politicized for promoting certain ideologies related to marriage and the family, both as a metaphor for the Nation and the political values it was founded on

and claims to sustain. Such connections between romance fictions and politics are intrinsically related to Raymond Williams' concept of 'structures of feeling', by which the ideology/ies upholding power structures are re-enacted as regularized or normative patterns of feeling, most notably through normative affective relationships (Klein 2003: 7).

This paper will focus on the attempt to use an interracial fiction of love, passion and desire in the context of the Cold War to promote the United States in non-communist Asia as the defender of democracy, understood as a universal, political concept to be applied to all peoples regardless of their race and culture. This process, according to Klein, helped to promote a mainstreamized image the United States as 'a harmonious nation made up of people from diverse ethnic, racial, national, and religious backgrounds' (11). In other words, romantic fictions, amongst other middlebrow cultural artifacts, were an ideology of ethnic/racial harmony in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. This, in turn, was linked to the nation's promotion abroad as the guarantor of world democracy. In fact, the aim was, as stated by Caroline Chung Simpson, an attempt to redeem U.S. democracy (1998: 51). For my purpose, I will focus on two typical middlebrow cultural artifacts: James A. Michener's 1953 novel *Sayonara* together with its film adaptation directed by Joshua Logan in 1957 starring Marlon Brando, the Hollywood icon of American masculinity at the time.

In her seminal work *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (1993) Gina Marchetti succinctly describes how Asia was represented in Hollywood film (and, overall in American popular culture):

Hollywood has long been fascinated by Asia, Asians, and Asian themes. Mysterious and exotic, Hollywood's Asia promises adventure and forbidden pleasures. Whether in a Chinatown opium den, a geisha house in Japan, or a café in Saigon, romantic involvements and sexual liaisons unacceptable in mainstream Anglo-American society become possible. Erotic fantasies can be indulged, sexual taboos broken. However, any radical deviation from the mainstream is unlikely to be voiced openly because of the possibility of a poor box-office showing. Therefore, Hollywood's romance with Asia tends to be a flirtation with the exotic rather than an attempt at any genuine cultural understanding (1993: 3).

The characteristics mentioned by Marchetti are to be identified in both Michener's novel and Logan's film although both seem to reveal sympathetic attitudes towards the Asian Other and firm statements 'against racial intolerance' in the context of U.S.-Japanese relations in the immediate postwar period (125). This is rather ironic bearing in mind that, barely a decade before, the Japanese were the nation's archenemy to be exterminated as proclaimed by war propaganda. Such a contradiction is handled via a device typically used in Hollywood cinema which is also to be found in other popular cultural works: the depiction of parallel love relationships. While one of these liaisons particularly enhances the stereotypical image of the Japanese woman as the Madame Butterfly geisha willing to sacrifice herself for the love of a white man, the other may not have such a tragic end as Puccini's opera; it may even end happily (as is the case of Logan's film, unlike the novel). In these cases, the romance is usually depicted as a successful assimilation story of the Other:

Hollywood has often used the device of parallel love stories to achieve similar ends. In the case of the interracial romance, the two couples provide the tragic “punishment” for those who cross racial barriers as well as the liberal “happy ending” for those who can be assimilated into the American mainstream. The tragic couple acts ambivalently as both the voice of social critique and as confirmation of the racial status quo. The couple that transcends the social taboo against miscegenation usually provides a weaker indictment of racism, since their union, at the conclusion of the film, confirms that American society is the tolerant melting pot it claims to be (Marchetti 1993: 125-126).

The main plot of both the novel and film revolves around a love relationship between a U.S. Air Force major, Lloyd ‘Ace’ Gruver, and Hana-ogi, a Japanese celebrity from a very popular all-female theatre revue, the Takarakuza—referred to as the Matsubayashi in the cinematic text. This relationship runs parallel to that of Airman Joe Kelly, a man from Gruver’s unit, and the conventional Japanese woman whom he marries, Katsumi. The Kellys end up playing the role of the tragic lovers and, consequently, of the irremediable doom of interracial love, undermining the message provided by the Gruver / Hana-ogi romance, especially in the 1957 film. The story takes place at the time of the Korean War, coinciding with the last stages of the American Occupation of Japan. However, as both Marchetti and Robert G. Lee point out, neither World War II nor the Korean conflict occupy a central space in the texts. The film adaptation, in particular, is far more concerned with issues related to the Civil Rights Movement. The impact of Civil Rights upon U.S. society and the image of the nation projected abroad accounts for the different ending in the film, in which Gruver and Hana-ogi, albeit all kind of obstacles, stay together. In Michener’s text Gruver finally submits to the demands of his family and returns to the U.S. and to his American fiancée, Eileen Webster. Interestingly, when Michener was researching for his novel he was also working for the State Department supporting its policy of discouraging U.S. servicemen from marrying Japanese women. The changes in plot introduced by the film adaptation reflect not only the changes in U.S. policy towards these marriages, but also Michener’s own attitude: in 1955 he was to marry a Japanese American, Mari Yoriko Sabusawa, whom he had met in Japan (Chung Simpson 1998: 71).

As Caroline Chung Simpson underlines, it was during the 1950s that ‘the Supreme Court was increasingly asked to recognize and correct the injustices of black segregation in a democratic nation’, as exemplified by the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Topeka* decisive resolution (1998: 53). Issues concerning black desegregation caused anxiety regarding racial inequality and its contradictions with democratic values, a point in question to be used by America’s communist enemies. As far as other racial groups were concerned, the Civil Rights Movement was to be a troubled reminder of the recent history of Japanese Americans who, at the outbreak of war in the Pacific, were classified as potential enemies and relocated in internment camps. Stories of interracial romance were therefore useful means of conveying that, precisely because America was the guarantor of democracy, such relations could be possible—when mainstreamized.

If the 1957 film *Sayonara* mirrors the impact of Civil Rights and the subsequent change of policy towards interracial marriages, the novel, in turn, is also concerned with such issues in relation to a very specific case: the war brides. The War Brides Act of 1945 allowed U.S. military personnel to bring their European wives (mostly French and German) with their children to the United States as non-quota immigrants. The act was

amended in 1946 and 1947 by the Soldiers Bride Acts. The latter amendment allowed Asian American servicemen to bring over their Asian-born spouses. However, it was not until 1952 with the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act that non-quota visas were provided to wives and children of U.S. citizens and allowed the naturalization of Asian immigrants. It was precisely via this legislation that Japanese wives of U.S. servicemen began to establish themselves in American soil. In fact, their numbers increased from less than 900 before 1952 to 4,220 the same year the McCarran-Walter Act was passed (Chung Simpson 1998: 51; Lee 1999: 163; Klein 2003: 225). Consequently, it was not until 1952 that:

[...] for the first time in U.S. history, all Asians were allowed to become immigrants, and all Asian immigrants inside the U.S. were allowed to become naturalized citizens. Together, these reforms had as their ultimate goal the integration of Asian[s] [...] into the political and social mainstream of American life (Klein 2003: 225).

Bearing in mind the socio-political context of the time, *Sayonara*, the written and cinematic texts, aim to provide a 'structure of feeling' by which female Asian immigration was to be accepted and mainstreamized mirroring, thus, American liberal, democratic values while promoting the United States as the 'protector of the postwar global order' and the so-called free world (Lee 1999: 162).

The novel and film begin with Major Gruver, a highly considered U.S. air force pilot fighting in the Korean War, being sent to Kobe in Japan for a break as a result of stress provoked by flying. Gruver is a West Point man, a Southerner and a son of a four-star general—a hero of Guadalcanal. He is, therefore, a representative of conservative American values that were reinforced after World War II, placing at the centre the heterosexual nuclear family. What both texts do is follow Gruver's transformation into what Lee defines as a 'national racial liberal' (1999: 170), reflecting, in a way, the transformation that the nation was to accomplish according to the socio-political and economic needs of the Cold War era.

Initially, Gruver is against interracial marriages and is unable to understand why American men would want to marry, as he says in the novel, 'dumpy and round-faced' Japanese women. 'How can our men—good average guys—how can they marry these yellow girls? In '45 I was fighting the Japs. Now my men are marrying them' (Michener 1983: 11). His attitude is made even clearer when he is asked by chaplain Feeney to persuade one of his men, Private Joe Kelly, from marrying his Japanese girlfriend. The means by which he tries this is by showing Kelly the photograph of his fiancée, Eileen Webster, a Vassar girl and a daughter's general—the representative of the ideal American woman, especially for a military man. Kelly's reaction is to show Gruver, in turn, a picture of his own fiancée Katsumi:

He produced a small P.X. picture of his girl. I was embarrassed because this Katsumi was certainly no Madame Butterfly. She had a big round face, prominent cheeks and what looked like oil-black hair. If you'd never been in Japan you'd probably have taken her for an Indian or an Eskimo maybe. But if you've ever seen Tokyo, you'd recognize Katsumi at once. She was one of the millions of girls who could never be pretty, who did the heavy work and who dressed as if the only clothes in Japan were made from old flour sacks (16).

Ironically, Katsumi *does* end up playing the role of a Madame Butterfly in the novel and film. She is the epitome of femininity: submissive and completely devoted to her husband. Both commit suicide when the U.S. authorities order Private Kelly back to the United States without his wife. This takes place, as befits melodrama, just before the law is amended.

Not all American GI's shared Gruver's initial view of Japanese women. As he is driving into Kobe with his future in-laws, the Websters, he is aghast to see a number of American servicemen in the company of Japanese women, until he spots a Marine lieutenant with a beautiful Japanese girl coming out of an underwear shop:

She was slim and black haired and her eyes didn't slant. And she laughed. Somehow I had never thought of Japanese girls as laughing. But this extraordinarily beautiful girl laughed and tucked her parcel of nylon underwear beneath her left arm. Then, *like any American wife at a busy corner*, she grasped her Marine's hand and warmly smiled up at him (23-24, emphasis added).

What is revealed in comparing and contrasting these two passages from the novel is the transition of the Japanese nation through the depiction of its women. The country is transformed via the democratization of its institutions under the guidance of the American Occupation, in the same way that its people, in particular the women, are transformed in the manner of 'any American wife' due to the influence of American men. As Chung Simpson explains, the growing interest in the phenomenon of the Japanese war bride is, in fact, 'rooted in the late-1940s rhetoric of partnership between Japan and the United States, in which Japan was viewed as the passive recipient of American guidance and good will' (1998: 51). Moreover, the U.S.-Japan postwar political alliance was metaphorically described in terms of 'a domestic heterosexual arrangement' and of an 'ideological "romance"' which, subsequently, 'had the added benefit of naturalizing the dominant role of the American presence in Asia as a whole' (52). As Mrs. Webster, the wife of a general and Gruver's future mother-in-law aptly says, "Japan is now a free country. We must woo them to our side but we must also remember our position. And be firm" (Michener 1983: 34).

Gruver's initial opposition to Private Kelly's marriage gradually wears down when he sees how Katsumi turns out to be the perfect wife for him. Being the feminine archetype, she is submissive, obedient and meek, willing to sacrifice herself for the physical and emotional well-being of her husband to the point of self-effacement. This is exemplified when Katsumi undergoes eye surgery in order to look more American. Gruver is horrified with the result of the operation:

I gasped and Hana-ogi looked away. But Joe just stood there. He was about six feet from her when she turned to face him and he could see that what had been a glorious and typical Japanese face was now a *conglomeration* (172, emphasis added).

Despite Gruver's sympathy for the Kelly couple and particularly for Mrs. Kelly at this stage of the novel and film, the fear of America's hybridization is revealed in the 'conglomeration' of Asian and Western features that Katsumi's face has become. Interestingly enough, in the film Katsumi does not undergo surgery since she is

discovered in time by her husband who violently reprimands her for wanting to change her Japanese face. This is a clear indication of Kelly's obsession with the stereotypical image of Asian femininity his wife embodies. Moreover, the fear of hybridization is further highlighted by Katsumi's pregnancy when she commits suicide.

Thus, Katsumi's femininity is a foil to that of American women, in particular Gruver's fiancée Eileen. It is at this point where the liberal discourse both in the written and cinematic texts is especially contained. Eileen, as an American, speaks her mind and her outspokenness represents the threat of Western female sexuality. Eileen, as a surprise organized by her parents, travels with them to Japan to meet Gruver. They have not seen each other for over a year, and at one point in the narrative Gruver admits that he has been avoiding marriage: 'With jet airplanes I was comfortable. With women I wasn't (39). When Eileen and Gruver are together, she tells him that she is not prepared to be the kind of wife his mother is, left alone because his father solely lives for one thing, the U.S. Army: 'No woman wants to live anyway but body and soul with the man she loves', she argues, aware of Gruver's attitude (43). Although Eileen's reasoning is encapsulated within the discourse of romance—she is claiming that as a wife she wants always to be close to him—nevertheless it is an instance in which she asserts herself.

As from this event, Gruver begins to feel more strongly that Western femininity is, in fact, a threat to his masculinity and, equally important, to the essence of a nuclear family which, ideally, should have at its head the husband and not the wife. Gruver's fears are underscored when he perceives the similarities between Eileen and her mother. Certainly in the novel, Gruver continuously compares his own father—a four-star general—to Eileen's, reasserting his father's manhood in opposition to that of General Webster. In Gruver's own words:

[...] it was widely understood in Army circles that Mark Webster owed most of his success to this brilliant and energetic woman. I once heard my father say, when some of his classmates from '22 were visiting, "Mark Webster at the Point was the inevitable colonel. Absolutely impossible for him to go further. But a first-class wife came along and made him a general" (21).

That is, due to Mrs. Webster's bossiness (far more emphasized in the written text than in the film), her husband has achieved professional success. Although in the quote above Mrs. Webster is apparently described in positive terms, her femininity is a means by which her husband is emasculated. This is perceived by the GIs who are well aware that General Webster's memorandum forbidding them to bring in 'Japanese nationals' to the Kobe Officers Club has been prompted by his wife's anger at having to share the same space with Japanese women who have 'stolen' American men from her fellow female citizens:

[...] when we returned to the Club and entered the elevator, the general noted with satisfaction that his memorandum had been posted, but when he read to the bottom of the typed sheet he turned a bright purple, for someone had scrawled in pencil, "Signed, Mrs. Mark Webster" (31).

Gruver, on his part, is unwilling to become a "Mrs. Lloyd Gruver."

Consequently, Western/American affective relationships are contrasted to those between Japanese women and American men. Gruver begins to compare his parents' marriage and the Websters' with those of American GIs and their Japanese wives. When he visits the Kelly household waiting for Hana-ogi to appear, he reaches the conclusion that Japanese women simply loved their husbands for what they are, not for achieving certain purposes such as social and economic status. His observations reinforce the fears of American men towards American liberal women versus their Japanese counterparts who seem more than willing to fulfill their role as perfect housewives—the one women were supposed to adopt according to postwar ideology:

They [the Kellys] told me to sit on the floor and from that position I watched this couple in love and it occurred to me that I myself had never lived in a house where love was. My parents loved each other in the required way and I am quite sure that General and Mrs. Webster loved each other, *but it was always love for some ultimate purpose: army advancement, social position in Lancaster, children. Here I was visiting the house of love itself* (91, emphasis added).

The irony of Gruver's comment should not escape us. Michener's interracial love story *does* have an ultimate purpose: it advocates for an understanding between races and cultures as a means to perpetuate a particular image of the U.S. as the guarantor of democratic values, a nation where the process of racial tolerance is under way due to the incipient Civil Rights Movement. In the novel, the link between racial tolerance and democracy is further underlined by a particular incident. When Gruver's and Hana-ogi's liaison is discovered, Gruver is placed under house arrest by the U.S. military authorities. Despite surveillance, the lovers arrange a meeting in the typical Japanese restaurant where they first met. MPs burst in searching for them and Gruver shamefully hides in a cupboard, 'the heavy tread ... of polished boots' making him understand at that moment 'what an ugly thing fear was and why we had fought the last war against the Germans: we were fighting against the tread of heavy boots' (134). In other words, Gruver's and Hana-ogi's love affair is a vindication of the ideals for which World War II had been fought on the part of the U.S.: the free world and the self-determination of peoples, a world in which the horrors of ethnic cleansing perpetuated by the Nazi regime would never again take place. For obvious reasons, the war crimes perpetuated by the Japanese Imperial forces, particularly in China, are obliterated (although it is mentioned that Hana-ogi's brother was condemned as a war criminal and, consequently, hung). In the film version, where Gruver and Hana-ogi end up together, interracial romances serve another ideological purpose: Katsumi's and eventually Hana-ogi's representation of femininity upholds the roles women were ascribed to in Cold War America. After all, these two women manage to keep their men unlike their American counterpart, Eileen (Marchetti 1993: 134). As Chung Simpson explains, by 1957 when the film was released:

Japanese war brides were perhaps the most visible representatives of Japanese American life in the postwar period, although they did not always self-identify as Japanese Americans. Still they were often presented as emergent members of a new kind of Japanese American community, which was primarily attractive because the war brides were seen solely as compliant wives and mothers unfettered by the disturbing public history of internment. Setting into domestic life in the 1950s, with little fanfare, as unfamiliar national subjects who had formerly been citizens of an enemy nation, Japanese war brides soon became

meaningful figures in the discourse on racial integration and cultural pluralism. [...] The 1950s transformation of the Japanese war bride from an opportunistic and ignorant alien seeking to penetrate the suburban affluence of white America to the gracious and hard working middle-class housewife was an early exemplar for achieving the integrated future in America, a halcyon story of domestic bliss and economic mobility difficult to extract from the stories of long-time racialized subjects (1998: 49-50).

That is, the image of the Japanese war bride served as a warning to American women who had benefited from the legacies of first wave feminism and who, as a direct result of the war effort, knew the significance of economic independence. The troubled transition from the public sphere to the confinement of the suburban household is reflected in their depiction, particularly in the novel, as 'less feminine' in their assertiveness than Japanese women.

Although femininity as represented by Katsumi is regarded in far more positive terms than its Western/American counterpart, it is still too alien to be acceptable for Gruver. It is Hana-ogi's role to enhance his manhood both in the written and cinematic texts. Only in the film adaptation, however, are there indications that Hana-ogi will be mainstreamed, mirroring the transcendence of cultural and racial barriers that can be accomplished, supposedly, in American society. As Marchetti explains, Hana-ogi is initially placed 'between the active Eileen and the passive Katsumi' (1993: 135). She is the star of the Matsubayashi/Takarazuka theatre company, an all-female theatre revue, in which she is renowned for personifying male characters. Indeed, the first time that Gruver sees her she is in drag. Initially, then, she is introduced as a transgressive figure: a woman who is able to transcend gender boundaries—basically onstage—and, despite the strict rules she is submitted to by the Matsubayashi (the actresses are forbidden to date or marry) she is economically independent and holds a certain social status.

Hana-ogi could be considered is an all-representation of Japan, ranging from its most belligerent male-like image to the domesticated one of a defeated, occupied Japan, eventually seduced by the American way. In this respect, Gruver's comment on Hana-ogi's performance at the Matsubayashi/Takarazuka is quite significant: 'She was a Spanish bullfighter, a Venetian gondolier, a Broadway playboy and a Japanese samurai. She was always the man and she always looked devastatingly feminine' (Michener 1983: 85-86). It is interesting to notice that in the actual Takarazuka Revue, founded 1913, the performers specialized in men's roles—the *otokoyaku*—were to study males and thus:

[...] learn to understand and appreciate the masculine psyche. Consequently, when they retired from the stage and married [...] they would be better able to perform as "good wives, wise mothers," knowing exactly what their husbands expected of them (Robertson 1992: 49).

That is, despite their apparent subversion, *otokoyaku* like Hana-ogi were to know men in order to please them so as to fulfill the Japanese ideal of womanhood of 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryosai kenbo*) established in the Meiji period (1868-1913). Taking this into account, Hana-ogi's transformation in the novel and film into the traditional image of Asian femininity is hardly surprising, and particularly convenient for Gruver as representative of American masculinity and the United States in the Far East.

Moreover, dressed in drag, Hana-ogi shows contempt for Gruver, the kind that a wounded, defeated and, consequently, feminized nation would reveal. When, finally, the Major has managed to persuade her to meet, she appears before him as ultimately feminine in a kimono. Hana-ogi is therefore the vehicle by which Gruver satisfies his homoerotic desires, as reflected in his preference for male company in the army quarters rather than Eileen's when he sees her more and more as a younger version of Mrs. Webster. In fact, Gruver's friend, Mike Bailey—a Marine lieutenant— finds such an object of desire strange: 'I'd never have picked Hana-ogi. She's always so mannish' (107). Gruver's manhood is also re-established as he manages to strain his Japanese lover from her all-female environment, making her take the role of wife in their relationship. Following Marchetti, in the film adaptation Gruver 'puts her in touch with her "true" nature, that is, her desire for a "normal" domestic life and children' (1993: 135). In other words, through Gruver's/America's influence Hana-Ogi's/Japan's femininity flourishes and, consequently, her qualities as a 'good wife'/ideal political partner in the Pacific. This aspect is somewhat problematic in the novel where, in the end, both lovers separate and Gruver finally returns to the United States, following the desires of his father and the military establishment.

The parallel love stories of Kelly and Katsumi on the one hand, and Gruver and Hana-ogi on the other, function differently in both texts due primarily to differing endings. In both the novel and film Kelly and Katsumi commit suicide as a result of pressures from the Army; when Kelly is ordered to return to the United States without his pregnant wife, the only solution they see is love after death. In the novel, Hana-ogi, being made aware far more than ever of the difficulties to be encountered after the Kellys' suicide, leaves with the Takarazuka/Matsubayashi troupe to Tokyo, never to meet Gruver again. The liberal discourse is thus far more contained in the written text, although it does have the effect of sympathizing with the lovers' suffering so as to persuade the readership about the cruelty of racism, particularly when Japanese women are domesticated and willing to Americanize if conditions are propitious. The film, released once the immigration and naturalization laws had been amended and five years after the end of the Occupation, allows the pair of lovers to transcend bigotry. As Robert G. Lee has pointed out:

It is the Kellys' suicide and the subsequent recognition of the political significance of their own relationship that finally brings Gruver and Hana Ogi together permanently. [...] Having become a true woman via this transformative love, she becomes a candidate for the motherhood of the new nation. [...] Hana Ogi saves Gruver from himself, from his own exhaustion, self-doubt, and "Southern" racism, and from his crisis of masculinity through his heterosexual affair with her (1999: 171).

The film also includes an interesting subplot absent from Michener's original text related to Eileen which actually enhances the socio-political reading of the Gruver-Hana-ogi romance story. Eileen, who is interested in Japanese culture, becomes acquainted with Nakamura, a Kabuki actor. It is evident that both are attracted to each other, but there is no indication whatsoever that this will culminate in a romantic relationship. Except for a couple of handshakes, there is barely physical contact between them. As Marchetti very well explains:

In and of itself, any relationship between a man of color and an Anglo-Saxon woman is more threatening to the status quo than the obverse relationship. Within American popular thought, the Anglo-American female represents hearth and home, the continuation of white-defined and dominated culture. If stolen or seduced away from white men, she represents a challenge to white male identity and authority. Not only does she question the truism that white American culture is superior to all others, she also challenges male authority by asserting herself as a woman who chooses to look outside the confines of her own culture for sexual expression. Thus, this relationship makes problematic both the racial and gender hierarchy within American culture (1993: 140-142).

Asian masculinity, thus, is still poised as a threat as a result of the war experience and of contemporary political events in the Far East at the time, such as the expansion of Communist China's influence which led to American military intervention in the Korean peninsula. Interestingly, Nakamura as a Kabuki actor specialized in female roles (*onnagata*) is in this manner not merely emasculated but effaced as a male since the role was played by a Cuban-American actor, Ricardo Montalban, in yellowface.

To sum up, home politics and the international geopolitical picture enabled a change of attitude towards interracial romances between Caucasian American men and Asian women in barely the four-year span between the novel's publication and the film's release. Ultimately, the politics of Gruver's and Hana-ogi's love is exemplified in the film's final scene when both stage their union before the Japanese and American military press, as well as Hana-ogi's fans. Despite the difficulties, the public display of their affair reveals the possibilities offered by American society. This is achieved while maintaining, simultaneously, the status quo of the American, white, heterosexual male, ideally embodied onscreen by Marlon Brando. As Robert Lee underlines:

In this tale of Americanization, the Oriental woman was transformed from dangerously transgressive into a symbol of domesticity and a stalwart of restored postwar patriarchy. Meanwhile Asian men remained outside the American family, marginalized, invisible, and racially Other (1999: 162).

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