

About Paternal Voices in Adoption Narratives

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**Abstract:** In his article "About Paternal Voices in Adoption Narratives" Fu-jen Chen examines the emerging voices of fathers in adoption discourse. Breaking the reticence and challenging the stereotypical profile of birth fathers and the father overall, birth fathers in narratives resort to essentialism or victimhood, a cultural imagination in adoption discourse. Further, Chen examines adoption narratives by adoptive fathers arguing that their reluctance to call for a father-to-father relationship — either rivalry or alliance — indicates a sign of disavowal of both subjective splitness and the structural deadlock. Chen argues that in paternal adoption narratives writing does not emerge as a political subject. Using the example of protagonist of Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* Chen demonstrates a potential to develop into an ethical subject in Lacanian terms.

## Fu-jen CHEN

### About Paternal Voices in Adoption Narratives

In discourses about adoption, there is a stunning volume of maternal voices — mostly by adoptive mothers (as adoption experts or biographers) and birth mothers (as memoir writers). In the last decade, adoptees have become aware of a great demand and urgency to articulate their own unique life experiences. Those who call for an authoritative voice and an identity specific to the adoptee are mostly women. They are looking for their "birth families and those searching are most frequently looking for birth mothers, not birth fathers" (Balcom 228) and their stories "are almost always stories about motherhood," not fatherhood; about motherland, rather than fatherland (Melosh 245). Because the conversation about adoption has been dominated by women (specifically maternal figures), its major concerns are thus oriented towards womanhood, motherhood, and mothering. A father's perspective in adoption narratives is largely missing.

The interest in birth/adoptive fathers is consequent upon a rethinking of the role of the father in general. For example, in psychoanalysis or developmental psychology, fatherhood and fathering has again drawn attention after a long period of preoccupation with the role of mother. In the study at hand I examine voices of fathers in adoption discourses. In his 2003 *Birth Fathers and Their Adoption Experiences* Gary Clapton discusses the thoughts and feelings of thirty birth fathers in the United Kingdom from the stages of pregnancy and birth to their adoption and post-adoption lives and to their relationships with the adopted child as an adult. Disclosing once hidden, but ongoing feelings and thoughts of birth fathers, Clapton's study challenges the stereotypical profile of birth fathers and fathers in general. Clapton observes that there are two important features in the narratives of birth fathers: one is "the child's continuing 'existence' in their thoughts" and the other is the impact of "the birth mother and her place in the men's sequent lives" (150). In fact, the child and the mother remain in mind, and birth fathers suffer from life time feelings of guilt, loss, and prolonged grief. As for the father in general, Clapton emphasizes that fathering is more than an activity, more than the act of conception or financial involvement. As described by Clapton, there are biological or genetic elements of fatherhood and the father feels a bond with the child that can be formed without parenting activities or "social interaction" (186). Supporting the birth father's attachment with the child, Clapton's research findings echo today's revised attachment theory which posits that children are capable of developing attachments to both their parents, not merely a selective, maternal bond only (Lamb 199) and also developmental research that suggests "children are born with a drive to find and connect to their fathers, and fathers have the internal capacity, the *instinct*, to respond" (Pruett 2; italics in the original).

Interestingly, Clapton grounds his assertions on how alike birth fathers and birth mothers are: birth fathers have experienced adoption in a way similar to that of birth mothers. Like birth mothers, birth fathers also suffer naturally and the paternal bond to their relinquished child is as naturally and deeply rooted as that of birth mothers to the child. Like birth mothers, a great majority of birth fathers are inclined to seek contact and even develop subsequent relationships with the child. References to the birth mother often appeal to emotion, a term that is associated with women but shunned by men. In my opinion, "fatherly emotion" is a new notion in adoption discourse and the expressions of the birth father's emotional wounds have become forms of cultural currency. The demand for recognition of their emotional injuries does not weaken their political agency but, instead, it becomes a strategy to construct institutional authority and gain legal recompense. As Jennifer Travis states, "the narratives of male emotionalism ... suggest that the language of injury and suffering as well as cultural claims to pain are not only 'subaltern-marked' but often hegemonic in voice and effect" (17). Yet, Clapton's politics of identity might well fall into what Slavoj Žižek calls "the cult of victimology" (Žižek and Daly 140). Although he challenges the construction of emotion as feminine, Clapton's access to emotional territory does not aim at social transformation. Rather than undermining gender hierarchy within adoption, his inclusion of fatherly emotion might just reproduce the same underlying discourse. Traditionally restricted to the social dimension and seen as complementary to motherhood, fatherhood — as described by Clapton — embraces all benefits from the binary division of biological and social domains at the expense of further correlating natural, biological functions with attributes of

motherhood. The father's investment of emotion might temporarily win some local battles, but in the long run it will fail to be part of a larger, discursive re-construction of parental roles.

Similar to Clapton's work, Gary Coles articulates in his 2004 *Ever After: Fathers and the Impact of Adoption* the perspective of birth fathers who have been negatively affected and even traumatized by adoption. Protesting against the stereotype of the birth father as a "double-abandoner," Coles elaborates upon how birth fathers suffer from what Sue Wells calls "a double denial: emotional and cultural" (67). They are first denied expressions of their emotional wounds and next cultural, as well as legal support in the adoption process. In a similar vein, Coles appeals to emotionalism often with reference to the birth mother: while she has had earned her voice and rights, the birth father, in common with the birth mother, should also be integrated into the adoption decision, the pre- and post-adoption counseling, and any possible future reunion. Fathering in *Ever After* is gendered; that is, fatherhood is translated into traditional notions of masculinity. Masculine norms, according to Coles, although not exclusive to femininity or emotions, endorse a man's capacity to exercise "power" and "control." Competent fatherhood, thus, is embedded in his successful affirmation of manhood: "The 'real' man is one who solves problems and provides materially for his family in all circumstances" (Coles 27) and to relinquish a child for adoption is to be "denied an essence of [his] maleness" (101) and yield control over his life. Control/power, to Coles, is essential to a man's fatherhood, as well as a father's manhood. Although the father, as Coles envisions him, might be less restrictive and more intimately involved in the rearing of his children, Coles's equation of stereotypical masculinity to fatherhood neither weakens the power of traditional patriarchy nor considers nontraditional households in terms of ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation (see Oren).

To Coles, the loss of power/control caused by adoption might not only lead up to injured manhood and fatherhood, but risk the loss of selfhood and identity. Coles shows the "incomplete" lives the birth father and adopted persons are living (5, 70, 214), that there is something "missing" (97, 214), and that a "void" always remains (66, 69, 97). To resolve this identity crisis is to be "manly" (224), to become manly is to take responsibility, to take "control" back, and to regain a sense of "wholeness." In *Ever After*, reunions hold out the hope for healing, as well as wholeness and searching itself is an act that helps develop a sense of mastery over life for adoptees and birth parents. Coles's search is not so much for reunion with his son, as for his own "self-recovery" (222) and the core of his search is the "quest for wholeness" (230). In *Ever After* Coles records his own journey to healing, his search for recovery of self, manhood, and fatherhood. Near the end of the first section — his autobiographical account — Coles states that "searching for Kay [the birth mother], then James [his adopted son] has taught [him] that to be in control of [his] life is a positive experience" (70). He concludes that he is finally "leading a full life" (73). Within a biographical model bound by narrative coherence and self-enclosed totality, in *Ever After* Coles seeks closure for multiple losses in the hope of bringing forth a being of wholeness. Coles's desire for wholeness or, rather, his notion of an integrated self, is grounded on popular premises of psychotherapy: first, the ego becomes autonomous by achieving a harmonious balance; second, the autonomous ego, synonymous with "the strong ego" or "the well-adapted ego," maintains the optimal well-being of individuals through creating a mastery motivational climate. In this sense, the loss of mastery indicates the loss of self-cohesion — the breakdown between one's self and his social milieu. The treatment of such traumatic experiences is to regain a sense of agency and capacity in shaping one's coherent life narrative.

For Jacques Lacan, we as human beings are naturally nostalgic for wholeness, but wholeness is a fantasy by which we are captivated throughout life. Coles's view of adoptees and birth fathers as an authentic, closed community is to romanticize them as psychically non-divided, rhetoricalized, and what Todd McGowan calls "existing prior to the fall" (131). Slavoj Žižek explains that the subject cannot "achieve full ontological identity" and "always remains as 'a bone stuck in the throat of the signifier'" (*Conversations* 4). Individuals in the Lacanian context are "opaque to themselves and to each other (Kotsko 56), as fragmented or incongruous as any other in all aspects of class, race, gender, sex, and also adoption. Framed through a fundamental lack, absence, and trauma, subjectivity is constituted retroactively through a circular movement around an inherent deadlock. The subject emerges not when identification (or dis-identification) is made, but when it fails to be made. The perceptual failure makes sense of the identity of the subject in retrospect as Thomas Rickert

explains: "the subject's sense of identity is belated, being a retroactive achievement that effaces itself as the finger of time moves forward" (21).

The traumatic loss of "wholeness" is resuscitated by Coles as a fantasy or "pseudo-cause" to mediate the relation or fill the gaps between sociality and ontology. They do not recognize "a structurally determined lack as the necessary primal condition for the existence of the subject" and mistake everyone's structural and inevitable lack for their own accidental loss (of genealogy or cultural roots) (Verhaeghe 16). Traumatizing the loss of genealogical completeness, Coles emphasizes the benefits of searching: searching is "a health pursuit" and those "who come forward and search are the fortunate ones" and "are demonstrating an awareness of their adoption issues and a willingness to heal" (143). Although I agree with Coles in his criticisms of the fact that searching was once viewed as "an act of desperation" and "the mark of a psychologically unhealthy person" (143), I feel uneasy about his pathologization of the attitudes of reluctance to search for birth parents because to Coles a refusal to search amount to an unwillingness to heal. His son's refusal to meet him has always been seen by him either as a sign of the adoptive parents' control over his son or the mark of an identity crisis, signifying that he is incapable of embracing an "authentic" self (Wolman 105). However, contrary to Coles's expectations, reunions may bring new wounds instead of healing the old ones. Furthermore, as Denis Flynn asserts, adoption, to some, may just function as "an organizer, a focus for various anxieties to do with feeling unloved, rejected, damaged, undervalued — all things which equally may occur in non-adopted children" (208). In fact, "what a father transmits to his son," following Lacan, is not an idealized, narcissistic wholeness, but "precisely, castration" (Vanier 71).

Interestingly, a fixation on mothers (birth or adoptive) and a fascination with a sense of "wholeness" also feature prominently in the narratives of adoptive fathers. An absent encounter between birth and adoptive fathers is directly shown in the title of the book by an anonymous author: *Dear Linda: An Adoptive Father's Open Letter to the Birthmother of His Child*. The anonymous adoptive father aims to ensure the birth mother of his child that her adoption decision is an act of "love" that has "touched and enriched the lives of numerous people" and without her "selfless, courageous act," his life "wouldn't have acquired new meaning" and he wouldn't have "the noblest title of all: a father" (1). He writes no word to the child's birth father. Similarly, the absent father-to-father encounter persists in other personal accounts by adoptive fathers such as in David Demers's *China Girl: One Man's Adoption* in which the author spends the first half of the book in detailing his own childhood and describes self-indulgently his emotional deficiency. As a "monologue," *China Girl* occasionally sketches a few Chinese maternal figures — nannies in the orphanage or an old lady he met on the street — but there is no Chinese paternal voice heard, much less a father-to-father conversation. Jeff Gammage's *China Ghosts: My Daughter's Passage to America, My Passage to Fatherhood* is a memoir of writer's adoption of two daughters from China and Gammage records a myriad of contradictory feelings about his adoption experience involving a foreign country, adoption workers and agencies, adopted children, and the birth parents. However, the birth parental generation of his adopted child is represented by numerous maternal figures only. Moreover, care givers in the orphanage, social workers, and even a mysterious old woman in a family photo taken in Lanzhou all call for a matriarchal relationship to his adopted child. Any patriarchal kinship tie to China is disregarded. Once again, there is no father-to-father relationship.

In addition to the absent encounter between fathers, an obsession with narcissistic wholeness also dominates accounts by adoptive fathers. Although purported to be a memoir that documents a man's adoption of a little girl from China, Demers's *China Girl* appears entirely autobiographical, particularly as the author himself states that "my decision to adopt has a complex history that goes back to my childhood" (21). In the first eight chapters, Demers highlights that he was reared with great value in family and respect for parenthood — especially fatherhood. He claims to have suffered from an inferiority complex from childhood until later in life when he "retired [his] inferiority complex" (85). The memoir is much more concerned with the author's "deprived fatherhood" and "injured selfhood/manhood" than with his adopted daughter's personhood. Although also driven by a fantasy of complete or whole being, Gammage's *China Ghosts* — in contrast to Demers's attention in *China Girl* on lack — is oriented to excess. Gammage illuminates the fundamental fantasy of an obsessive subject. The obsessive views himself as "a whole subject" and one who is "complete unto himself" (Fink 122). At the beginning, Gammage confesses that "I never wanted children; I never saw the

need" and "with her [his wife] I was complete" (18, 19). Adoption is not to fill a lack of his life, but his wife's; indeed, after the adoption, his wife, in his eyes, "looks somewhat whole" and becomes "a complete entity of one" (119). But to Gammage adoption itself signifies something disturbingly excessive to his self-sufficient life. His decision to adopt a child from China instead of other countries is simply to reduce its excessive effects: a smooth and predictable adoption process and a clean break with birth parents.

Yet, Gammage soon finds out that "the secrecy that once made Chinese adoption seem attractive now works against [him]" (170). Gammage records how he is haunted by the very excess of transnational adoption. Exactly fitting into the obsessional structure of Lacan's diagnostic categories, the author is "a thinking subject" (Fink 122) not only nostalgic for the state of being whole, but conscious in order to prevent an encounter with the unconscious, an encounter with the Other's enigmatic desire by fulfilling the demands from the Other. Throughout the book, the phrase occurs: "I wonder." Gammage wonders about the past and the future of his adopted daughter, about her baffling origin, and her unforeseen future reactions to adoption. He also wonders at the emotional, psychological excess brought forth by many lines between "what we were told" and "they never tell you." He wonders what proper discipline for his daughter would be neither "too harsh" nor "too soft" (186) and what a proper response to the birth parents, the orphanage, and the Chinese government should be. His mood swings between anger and gratitude, between lack and excess. He also wonders about his daughter's mental and physical state: her silence, her hip joint, her scar, and other issues. All these "wonders" perturb Gammage for reminding him of his loss of mastery.

Adoption narratives by birth and adoptive fathers — characterized by the obsession with wholeness and the absence of paternal encounter — are regulated by the Lacanian "masculine" logic of sexualization (not about the biological sex): the claim can be made, according to Žižek, that "all x are submitted to the phallic function" and yet, at the same time, "there is at least one x, which is exempted from the phallic function" (*For They Know* 122-23, *Tarrying* 56). As a form of thought, masculine sexualization is a logic of exception and also a logic of universality: the exception proves the rule. A fantasy of non-castrated totality is a necessary condition for masculine sexualized beings to submit themselves to symbolic castration: an ideal of wholeness (or complete *jouissance*) is made possible through the very elevation of something into transcendental impossibility (e.g., god, the homeland, Nation, US-Americanness, Democracy, and so on) as a means of avoiding encountering the lack/excess. At the individual level, the masculine fantasy of completeness is a way to overcome one's splitness or division. Masculine sexualized subjects try to avoid the impasse constitutive of desire, acting as if desire (i.e., to be a real man/father or to have an intact self) will be possible only if not prohibited by their tragic loss or only if not the lack of (mis)representation. Such defenses actually serve as a fantasy to make the desire possible and mobile in the first place. In order to secure their desire, the subjects avoid confrontation with its inherent impossibility and transform the impossible Real of desire into prohibition: "Prohibition is easier to swallow than radical impossibility, when it comes to desire" (Coats 125).

At the social level, the totalizing mode of masculinity — which relies on a fantasy of a self-enclosed, consistent — yet, non-existent — symbolic context — attempts to mask or repress the constitutive incompleteness/inconsistency of the symbolic order by obfuscating the underlying non-symbolizable antagonism. Paternal adoption narratives tend to personalize and domesticate the very antagonism of adoption — in another words, class struggle — and displace structural class antagonisms into other forms of secondary antagonism (e.g., the structural antagonism is reduced to the ontological antagonism respectively to adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents: they are either unrecognized, misrecognized, or victimized). We are hardly attentive to what over-determines the very horizon of (domestic or trans-national) adoption. It is in contemporary capitalist and patriarchal societies that adoption operates. In birth and adoptive fathers' personal narratives, the absent encounter between them shows a sort of disavowal of both subjective splitness and the structural deadlock. They are reluctant to encounter each other because they refuse to face not only the division of subject (we are all split and no one is exceptional), but also the formal impasse: it is within and by the radically split Other (the capitalist world) that we are castrated.

Birth fathers and adoptive fathers might do more than personalize or domesticate the issue within the adoption circle with respect to conflicts or interests of adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth



parents. A more radical position could be taken: birth fathers can ask for more than greater flexibility of gender roles, more than mutual recognition or compensation from the Other, adoptive fathers can demand more than a life of wholeness, they can radicalize further the discourse of adoption not to define it as one bound to a group-specific narrative of suffering, but as one that can articulate a collective politics and launch a global assault on the system. Their particular demand should be elevated to a universal claim that "the particular injustice under which he is suffering is not completely distinct from all other forms of injustice" (Žižek; *Ticklish* 205). In other words, one's "specific 'wrong' [amounts to] a stand-in for the universal 'wrong'" (Žižek; *Ticklish* 205). However, such a political subject — who aims to bring the symbolic as a whole into question, rather than seeking inclusion within the existing symbolic — does not emerge in these paternal adoption narratives. Rather, these paternal figures mostly appear as guilt-ridden obsessives or cynics.

Obsessed with a sense of mastery and wholeness, they are haunted by continued guilt for giving up the child, for being absent prior to the adoption, or even for many unknown reasons. Such a feeling of guilt indicates their submission to desire of the existing symbolic, disavowing the surplus enjoyment of the superego concomitant with the act (either giving up or adopting a child) about which they feel guilty. They do not acknowledge the psychological truth that we do enjoy being guilty in a reflexive manner. Their irresponsibility for or even denial of *jouissance* draws themselves further into the desire of the symbolic realm. For instance, Gammage in *China Ghost* portrays his adopted daughter as one who is "so proud to be Chinese and so comfortable being American" (224). Gammage claims an essential ethnicity as a resolution to the problematic subjectivity of (transnational/racial) adoptees. His use of a genetic heritage propagates neo-racist ideologies which assert a biological basis for the "insurmountability of cultural differences" (Balibar 21). On the other hand, to seek inclusion within the existing symbolic, birth fathers appeal to politically correct and multicultural sensibilities. Such a cultural production of emotional injury in discourses of adoption may embrace the logic of the marketplace. Again, although cynical subjects see through the strategies of the reality and know full well that the symbolic fiction is just a fiction, they do not recognize that "the ideological illusion lies in the reality of what we do, rather than what we think" (Myers 67). Indeed, Gammage knows well the interests behind the economic-political-ideological operation, recognizing the fact that "poverty looks the same no matter what country you're ... in America, we throw money at problems ... in China, they throw people" (102). He insists that his adopted daughter "deserve[s] to grow up in the nation of her birth" (96) and "adoption is the ultimate selfish act — all about the parents getting what they want" (198). But for a sense of "balance," as well as "stability" and his preference for "having two children" (198), he and his family go to China to adopt their second daughter. Claiming to "come from a cynical journalist living in a cynical world" (113), Gammage's memoir does exactly what Žižek identifies: "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are still doing it" (*Sublime* 33).

Thus, what characterizes an ethical/political subject in the face of individual division and structural impasse? Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* demonstrates the protagonist's potential to develop into an ethical subject in Lacanian terms. *A Gesture Life* tells the story of seventy-year-old Franklin "Doc" Hata, a Japanese immigrant of Korean birth, who is perfectly assimilated to the wealthy suburban New York community of Bedley Run, and has just comfortably retired from his surgical supply business. Portrayed at first as an upstanding citizen and a model minority, Hata begins to reflect on his life as the novel progresses. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn of his tempestuous relationship with his adopted mixed-race daughter who disappeared from his life, his failed affair with a well-to-do suburban widow (White) whose affection he cannot return, and his forbidden love for a young Korean comfort woman during World War II when he served as a medic in the Imperial Army of Japan and her tragic death at the hands of his fellow soldiers shapes the trajectory of his life story. *A Gesture Life* is the first Asian American novel about adoption, featuring the protagonist, Hata, as both an adoptee and adopter: a native-born Korean, Hata was adopted as a child by a Japanese family and grew up in Japan, he emigrated to the U.S. as a young man and adopted Sunny from an orphanage in Korea in his late middle age. Here, I focus on Hata's paternal voice of the novel as an adoption narrative and his role as an ethical subject in the face of the unbearable lack/excess, the effect of which is the basis of the Lacanian understanding of the human existence and social reality.

In the novel the lack (of subject) and excess (of identifications) are demonstrated in aspects of unsettled nation, race, sexuality, gender, domesticity, and adoption. Also obsessed (like paternal

figures) with an identity undivided, non-lacking, rhetoricalized, and a "harmonious relation between a self and his society" (*A Gesture* 72), Hata himself is "almost, but never wholly, somebody" in the very lack/excess of his traits (Lee, Young-oak, "Gender" 157). First of all, while called "Doc Hata," he is never a completely, qualified licensed physician, but a paramedic in the Japanese army and a small-town medical supplier in New York. His name morphs from Jiro Kurohata, Franklin Hata to Doc Hata, which suggests his efforts to assimilate into his adopted national identities, from Korean to Japanese and from Japanese to American. But there is always a lack or a surplus in his assimilation. Proud to be part of "the greater destiny and the mandate of [his Japanese] people," Hata (identifying himself as a Japanese national) is questioned by Captain Ono about his dependence on "gesture" and the lack of "internal possession" (266) and at the same time, he also recognizes the excessive "artificiality of colonial authority" (Lee, Young-oak, "Gender" 150). Hata is "simultaneously colonized and colonizing subjectivities and neither one completely" (Chuh 16). Again, his pilgrimage to U.S. soil ultimately ends up as another failure.

In addition, Hata's uneasiness with the excess/lack is shown in his relationships with three women: Sunny K (the Korean "comfort woman") and Mary Burns. His adoption of "same-race" Sunny — in order to have "a ready, natural affinity" (204) and to create a family, the foundation of the US--American dream — proves to be problematic because Sunny's outlook appears disturbing. To him, her kinky hair and dark skin always point toward a lack of racial purity or a surplus of biological genealogy; in other words, her "mixed blood" of the Asian and African race tarnishes his primordial fantasy of purity and wholeness. Besides, in his sentimental language of adoption and father-daughter relationship "unacknowledged desires" are embedded (Jerng 62). Hata is frightened, ashamed, and disturbed by his unexpected encounter with Sunny's "sexual promiscuity" (Lee, Young-oak, "Transcending" 73). Even worse, her teenage pregnancy undermines his image as an ideal father and disturbs his "obsession with ideology about gender that associates a girl's purity and integrity" (Lee, Young-oak, "Gender" 151). Yet, Sunny is merely a substitute for K, i.e., "Korean." Hata does not love K so much as his own fantasy of female purity and chastity which symbolize a non-lacking gender identity. Ironically, K is raped by Hata and then dies at the hands of his fellow soldiers. K turns out to be the most frequently invoked trope of the lack/excess in the novel: the initial "K" for "Korean" signifies Hata's lack of continuity in the adopted nation; most of all, her atrocious death reveals the excessive inhumanity inherent in humanity. Hata's rape of K indicates that he is unable to love. To love or to be loved forces one to confront the very lack/excess in oneself and the other. Thus it is no wonder that at the peak of his love and intimacy with the White widow, Mary, he suddenly withdraws.

Haunted by his own adopted status and being obsessive with a non-lacking and fully representable identity, Hata refuses to see his failure as essential in the emergence of the subject and the big Other as one that is never an operative or functional totality. Because of his disavowal of the formal impasse of the Other and absorption of otherness into a narcissistic notion, Hata either mistakes people as imaginary ones — the other without Otherness — or fixes on the symbolic semblance. His estrangement from real women, his self-indulgence in equilibrium (e.g., his daily swimming routine), and his enthrallment to the Other's gaze (e.g., his commitment to gesture and his impressive house) — all demonstrate his compulsion not to encounter the excess/lack in self, others, and the Other.

Toward the end of the novel, however, several moments mark a turning point in the life of Hata. First, an accidental fire in his family room jeopardizes the stability of his life and imposes upon him a traumatic past and an examination of his relationships with the three women. Next, his daily swimming routine (that has maintained his equilibrium just as water quenches fire, its excess) proves also excessively destructive — Thomas, Hata's African American grandson, nearly drowns in his swimming pool. Most of all, holding his grandson's hand — although "Blackness" once stained his vision of purity and impeded his quest for wholeness — awakens him from his primordial fantasy of totality, completion, and harmony to experience for the first time in his life "a pure joy" (333). A new stance in relation to *jouissance* seems to emerge and a new subject position is implied. He becomes less captured in the Other's gaze and less desiring for the desire of the Other. While at the beginning of the novel Hata admits that "everyone here knows perfectly who I am" and my house is "generally known that of the homes on Mountview, one of the original streets in Bedley Run ... with its impressive flower and herb garden, and flagstone swimming pool, and leaded glass" (1, 16), he now begins to gesture, but not for recognition or approval from the Other. At the end of the novel, he sells his



house, the embodiment of his US-American dream, acts as an anonymous benefactor for a boy's hospitalization and refrains from controlling financially his daughter and grandson or from acting as a well-intentioned, yet overpowering, patriarchal figure. He ultimately undoes his fantasy of subjective mastery.

Ethics in Lacan's work is grounded in reference to the Real: the Real both as symbolic failure and as a positive point of surplus. The Lacanian subject involves first the recognition of failure and finitude and next assumes the failure not as "a state of loss" but as "originary," inverting the condition of impossibility/obstacle/antagonism into the very ground of change (see McGowan 195). This recognition of impossibility in the Other, as well as in ourselves helps us to remain mobile psychologically without being obliged to answer, fulfill, repress, avoid, enforce the demand from (or on) the Other. The Lacanian subject subjectifies the cause of his existence and reconstitutes his being in relation to the symptom that produces consistency to the subject and organizes his unique form of enjoyment — without the "need of an external master" (Žižek, *Parallax* 90). Hata's final gesture is shown in the last two paragraphs of the novel: "I'll have just enough to go away from here and live out modestly the rest of my unappointed days. Perhaps I'll travel to where Sunny wouldn't go, to the south and west and maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores. But I think it won't be any kind of pilgrimage. I won't be seeking out my destiny or fate. I won't attempt to find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead. 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 one or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and arrive again. Come almost home" (355-56).

His final gesture is "a refiguring of the very notion of gesture" (Cheng 570). Hata subjectifies the cause of his existence as "a life of gesture" and assumes the signifier — gesture — as pure *jouissance*, as a non-pathological pure desire, but not for "the comfort in the visage of a creator" (Cheng 356) — that is, not for a confirmation from the Other. He accepts the symptom as his own, identifies with the symptom up to a degree that he is the "gesture" (although does not believe in the symptom) and free to circle around on itself, but not for the lure of the object-cause of desire. He recognizes the fact that the object for which he has been searching only "comes into being through being lost, i.e., it is not given prior to its loss" (Žižek, *Enjoy* 75). In addition, the social reality is nothing but a symbolic order relying on a complex network of presuppositions — fictional and performative — and "the most elementary level of symbolic exchange is a so called 'empty gesture'" (Žižek, *How* 12). Thus, Hata's problem is not so much that his life is full of "gestures" or "no internal possession" (266), as that he is denied gesture by the symbolic Other (e.g., of Japan and of U.S.). The symbolic Other is unable to provide him with reassuring signifiers for his representation. Instead, he is demanded to reveal an impossible, authentic otherness. Such a demand leads to a demand that demands more demands and counters demands for demands upon or made by the other/Other.

In conclusion, while the neurotic subject always considers his/her failure at the individual level, the ethical/political subject should be able to recognize the asymmetrical relation between self and the Other and confront head-on the antagonism of the discourse of adoption exposing the lack/excess, the gap/impossibility in the Other (e.g., by encountering the other paternal other in paternal adoption narratives). Thus, rather than reducing antagonism into differences or defining the discourse of adoption as one bound to a group-specific narrative of suffering and rather than adopting self-enclosed, linear narratives of either victimization or salvation — paternal adoption narratives need to introduce the lack/excess intrinsic to any given system of representation and, in particular, structural inequalities which remain in the contemporary global economy. It is capital itself that creates the underlying field in which transnational or domestic adoption thrives. Paternal figures in adoption narratives — instead of making a particular demand — can articulate a universal complaint and launch a global assault on the system. The universalization of particular demands prevents us from falling into the trap of identity politics, from being conflated with a desire for consumption and a capitalist market while it is again capital itself that sustains postmodern identity politics.

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