

"Shall the Races Intermarry?"
Representations and Functions of Miscegenation in Sayonara
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The film *Sayonara* (Lang, 1957) directed by Joshua Lang, presents the viewer with what may at first be considered a socially progressive, heart-warming, yet tragic tale concerning interracial romance in American occupied Japan during the Korean War. The film focuses on three romances, two involving American soldiers and Japanese Women (Maj. Lloyd Gruver and the semi-androgynous Japanese performer Hana Ogi, and secondarily the relationship between enlisted man Joe Kelly and his Japanese bride, Katsumi) and a third more ambiguously defined relationship between an American woman, Maj. Gruver's ex-fiancée Eileen Weber, and a Japanese man, the mysterious kabuki performer known simply as Mr. Nakamura.

While Gina Marchetti correctly identifies the film as dealing with subjects of "gender, racial and national identities", and in itself a fruitful ground for discussion of these particular subjects and the ideologies that surround them, this criticism in and of itself seems to me only a portion of relevant discussion surrounding this particular film. Though I find myself in agreement with Marchetti's reading of the film, it is a critique based on the presence of certain ideological indicators. In this essay I should like to propose an addition to Marchetti's essay which while focus on the films specific role as an hegemonic and socially corrective agent, looks not through the sum total of Western value representations, but rather what it excludes, notably the absence of interracial love scenes. Furthermore, I wish to pay attention to the films backhanded repurposing of socially progressive themes, such as interracial romance, as a marketing ploy.

Gwendolyn Foster in her work concerning the post-colonial subject in cinema, entitled *Captive Bodies*, recalls the work of African-American film pioneer Oscar Micheaux in explaining the publicity campaign surrounding his film, *The Homesteader* (Micheaux, 1919). "Micheaux used censorship and fears of 'miscegenation', to lure audiences." Foster further cites Micheaux's own writing on his work to support this thesis; 'Nothing would make more people anxious to see a film than a litho reading 'SHALL RACES

INTERMARRY?'

Indeed, Michaux was also an acknowledged master of inverting the tropes of dominant, read white, cinema against their progenitors,, and it should be of no surprise that the very "white" film *Sayonara* engages in a similar enterprise almost forty years on.

Sayonara employs white male fantasies about the Oriental "other", specifically the other as represented by the Oriental woman and the titillating promises concerning her sexual subjugation to the white, specifically American, male.

There are two specific examples from the film and its promotional material that suggest this particular marketing strategy was employed in this film.

The first, is the absence, of any depictions of physical affection between the three groups of interracial lovers. In fact the only interracial kiss we see is the half-hearted and somewhat derisive kiss, by Maj. Gruver to Katsumi on her wedding day. The kiss, on the mouth no less, seems to me to speak volumes concerning the white attitudes toward Asian women. First, we must note that it takes place in a portion of the film where Maj. Gruver has yet to realize the "pleasures" of a Japanese woman, and before he is supportive of Kelly and Katsumi's relationship. The kisses location, on the mouth, an obviously more sexual location than the more respectful cheek, seems to indicate a general disrespect for the bodily integrity of Katsumi. The non-action of her new husband, Joe Kelly, seems to also express a passive attitude toward Maj. Gruver's action. Gruver's kiss not only symbolically inducts the foreign subject (Katsumi) into the realm of Western norms of sex and sexuality, but it does so from a position of authority, through Gruver's superior military rank to that of Kelly. It can also be read as a coded reference to the practice of Preme Nachte in occupied Scotland or Wales, whereby ruling English nobles reserved the right to take a brides virginity on her wedding night as a means to further subjugate not only the woman herself but also her husband. We see this practice dramatized in films such as *Braveheart* (Gibson, 1997).

Secondly, because the relationship of Maj. Gruver and Katsumi is not a sexual one, that is to say, they are not lovers, the kiss perhaps presents itself as more palatable to an audience that would not accept the exchange were it to happen between Kelly and Katsumi. Their sexual relationship, like that of Gruver and Hana Ogi and especially between Eileen and Mr. Nakamura are only hinted at, through non-sexual activities.

Though there may be a tendency to view the exclusion of interracial love scenes as symptomatic of an American culture that was not quite ready to accept such representations and further a studio culture which was still haunted by the fears produced by the HUAC affair, and in being so, took the apparent easy way out. But there remains another possible reading. That is, that the exclusion of such scenes owes itself to the titillating aspects of the "forbidden and transcendent nature of romantic love". This attitude is evidenced not only by the absence of interracial love scenes, despite, a "liberalization on the part of a film industry whose production code had strictly outlawed representations of miscegenation just a few years before, " but through the films advertising. A promotional poster for the film included in Marchetti's essay contains a 'pull quote' which reads, "I am not allowed to love, but I will love you if that is your desire." This quote, spoken by Hana Ogi and directed toward Maj. Gruver, further emphasizes not only the passivity and submission that the film attributes to Japanese women, but its inclusion in the films advertisement also speaks toward the marketing direction of the film. That is to say that the quote expressly plays to male fantasies surrounding the subjugated lover, or sexual slavery. This reading is advanced by the pose in which the films star, Marlon Brando and his marginally credited Japanese co-star, Miiko Taaka, are engaged. Brando is forcibly grabbing Taaka from behind, ostensibly in a gesture of burning desire, but the image can also be read to subtly convey fantasies of captivity and bondage.

Thus the combination of the films deliberate exclusion of real interracial love

scenes and its promotional materials implicit promise of such depictions play to Lacanian notions of the voyeur and gaze subject. Lacan sees the object of the gaze as engaging in a fragmenting of the total body image. Thus to extend this theory, the voyeur, or in this case the viewer, seeks to find the Lacanian dismembered object (the allusion to interracial sex) to identify with the actuality of interracial sex, thus creating desire. It is the imagined and implied sexual content of the film, the implied conquest of the other, represented by the Asian woman, rather than its direct representation that makes the film appealing to a white male audience.

Though this is really nothing new to advertising, using sex to sell a product, it is especially important in *Sayonara* precisely because the film would have you believe that it is a story of "defiant desire," when in fact it depicts as Marchetti correctly observes, "an ideologically conservative attitude toward race [gender and class] within a fantasy that purportedly condemns racism."

Bibliography

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