sion movie, Lien simply fades away as a ghost who has sacrificed her existence for the perpetuation of a post-Vietnam, American dream of domestic bliss rid of any ugly taint of racism or xenophobia. With Lien, the disturbing consequences of the Vietnam War and its impact on veterans also fade into the background, and the rejuvenated American patriarch reemerges in the fiction to exercise his prerogative to rule over women, children, and all people of color.

In *China Gate* and "The Lady from Yesterday," the Pocahontas and Butterfly myths converge to create a metaphoric image of Vietnam that legitimizes American rule. Seduced by the promise of the American Dream, a feminized Vietnam sacrifices herself for the possibility of future assimilation into the American mainstream. Thus, the myth endures and continues to function not only as a romantic justification for traditional female roles within the patriarchy but also as a political legitimation of American hegemony internationally.

6

White Knights in Hong Kong

Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing and *The World of Suzie Wong*

The myth of romantic love and the myth of the romantic hero are inextricably intertwined in Hollywood fiction. These two popular myths often come together in stories that feature the rescue of a woman from the confines of a stifling family situation, romantic relationship, or job. When set in Asia, the romantic hero functions as a white knight who rescues the nonwhite heroine from the excesses of her own culture while "finding" himself through this exotic sexual liaison. Although these films may promise a social critique, they actually deliver a conservative adherence to the racial and gender status quo.

The figure of the "white knight" has its roots in both the myth of romantic love and the myth of the antiestablishment romantic artist. Romantic love promises spiritual transcendence, emotion winning out over social stigma, while actually delivering female passivity, domesticity, and a rationalization of women's subservient role. Hollywood's romantic hero, like Byron, Rousseau, Goethe, and his other late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ancestors, also champions the belief in individual transcendence in the face of a closed, corrupt, aesthetically, morally, and emotionally bankrupt bourgeois society. At the same time, this myth presupposes a male artist in pursuit of a female muse. This "genius" may pity the poor and oppressed, but he has no need to do anything about the conditions he deplores. Although both myths are about breaking taboos and crossing social boundaries, neither myth allows for social change. The fantasy promises the pleasure of imaginatively breaking conventions while maintaining the inevitability of the dominant culture's right to rule.

The exotic figures prominently in both myths, because it allows for the exploration of these taboos at a distance from daily life, where any potential threat to the social order will be negligible. For Hollywood, Hong Kong has long been one of those privileged exotic locations. Like Paris, Casablanca, or, more recently, Saigon, it is a city that promises romance, adventure, and a pleasurable respite from the boredom and constraints of the everyday. It can be argued that, even for Hong Kong residents, Hollywood's version of their city promises the same mystery. The Hong Kong of these films is Hollywood's Hong Kong, constructed out of the American imagination and decidedly unlike even the Hong Kong film industry's vision of its own city.[1]

The myths of romantic love and the romantic hero surface in two post-World War II melodramas set in Hong Kong. *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (Henry King, 1955) and *The World of Suzie Wong* (Richard Quine, 1960) use Hong Kong's exoticism to shore up these myths. However, not only does Hong Kong provide a distant location to explore the forbidden in relative safety but it also provides a space for the examination of more topical issues. It is a place where a postwar American identity can be defined against an emerging Asian communism and the decay of European colonialism. This is a cold war Hong Kong—poised between post-1949 Chinese communism and the decay of the British Empire. As such, it provides an ideal place for America to assert and legitimize its presence in Asia as an "enlightened" Western power opposed to British colonialism and promising a neocolonial prosperity in the face of socialist leveling.

In fact, Hong Kong provides a place where all sorts of social and ideological oppositions can be played out in fiction—East-West, Communist-capitalist, white-nonwhite, rich-poor, colonizer-colonized, European-American, Asian-American, progressive-conservative. Within the context of the Hollywood love story, moreover, all these oppositions can be addressed using the cinematic vocabulary of that fundamental opposition between male and female. By using the romance to examine these other ideological sore points, Hollywood can make any boundaries between nations and races appear as natural as the differences between men and women. Relationships between nations or races can be seen as the male-female romance writ large, with its patronizing sentimentality and inherent inequality left intact.

Both films open with elaborate wide-screen crane shots of the Hong Kong skyline, immediately situating their stories within a world of both sampans and skyscrapers. The opening long shots themselves visually prepare for the conflict between the foreign and the Chinese, between the modern and the traditional, while, at the same time, promising the exotic and, via established cinematic conventions, implying the romantic and erotic.

Set against this backdrop of Hong Kong exoticism, each film uses romance as a metaphor for racial harmony and intercultural understanding. Although the romantic relationships seem doomed because of the British colonial establishment's racist condemnation of Asian-Caucasian intermarriages, love transcends all social taboos and misunderstandings. Needless to say, these fantasies are extremely contradictory. Love may triumph over social stigma, but each narrative upholds that stigma by exacting a price for criticizing accepted social practices.

In each film, in fact, the romantic relationship is carefully held in check by a narrative that consistently refuses to unquestioningly champion a racially tolerant society. The fate of each couple is linked to or contrasted with images of disease, death, corruption, destruction, and decay. Although *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* ends tragically with the hero's death and *The World of Suzie Wong* ends somewhat happily with the couple reunited at its conclusion, neither film allows love to conquer all.

The dearest price for romance, in fact, is paid by the films' female protagonists. Each narrative favors a reading that makes William Holden (who plays the male lead in both films) the vehicle of his lover's salvation and the institution of heterosexual marriage the ultimate hope for womankind. Even though each film calls for racial tolerance, neither questions gender inequality or the right of their heroes to tear the heroines away from their own cultures and independent life-styles.

Based on the semiautobiographical novel by Han Suyin, *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* opens in 1949. Dr. Han (Jennifer Jones) is a young, Eurasian physician at a Hong Kong hospital overwhelmed by refugees from mainland China. A colleague takes the overworked Dr. Han, a widow, to a party given by one of the members of the hospital's board of directors.

There, she meets unhappily married Mark Elliott (William Holden), a journalist. Despite warnings that a relationship with Elliott might lead to gossip and damage her reputation, Han Suyin lets Mark pursue her. She describes her attraction to this American to herself and to others as a struggle between her European and Chinese "halves." The European "side" favors it, while the Chinese "side" is appalled by it. Eventually, Han Suyin gives in to Mark.

However, Mark is unable to get his estranged wife's permission to divorce, and the scandal ruins Dr. Han's career. Fired from her job, she moves out of the hospital dormitory with one of the orphaned children she has cured and goes to live with some well-to-do Chinese friends. There, she learns that Mark has been killed while on assignment in Korea. The film ends with Dr. Han's return to the couple's favorite trysting spot behind her hospital where she has a final rendez-

Figure 12. Han Suyin (Jennifer Jones) and Mark Elliot (William Holden) embrace at their favorite trysting spot high above the urban sprawl of Hong Kong in Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing *(1955). Still courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.*

vous with Mark's spirit (personified by a voice-over and hazy glimpse of his image).

In *The World of Suzie Wong* (based on Richard Mason's semiautobiographical novel about his life in Hong Kong during the Korean War), Robert Lomax (William Holden) goes to Hong Kong to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. At his seedy hotel, he befriends a young prostitute, Suzie Wong (Nancy Kwan), who becomes his muse, posing for him on a daily basis. Gradually, Robert discovers how truly pitiable Suzie is—illiterate, orphaned, sexually abused as a child, brutalized regularly as a prostitute. After Suzie is dumped by an upper-crust British alcoholic with marital problems, Robert's heart finally melts, and he and Suzie become lovers.

Even the discovery that Suzie has an illegitimate baby does not interfere with their romance. However, money does. Robert's paintings fail to sell, and he cannot afford the financial burden Suzie poses. Rather than let Robert lose face, Suzie disappears. Ironically, his paintings begin to sell at the same time, and Robert's former girlfriend, Kay (Sylvia Sims), her eye now on a successful artist rather than a bohemian bum, urges Robert to forget about Suzie.

During a severe rainstorm, Suzie turns up in front of the hotel. She begs Robert to help her rescue her baby from the flood threatening to wipe out the hilltop slum. Despite their efforts, the baby dies. At the infant's funeral, Suzie and Robert reconcile and walk off together as a couple.

The plot lines of *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong* reveal a profound similarity in Hollywood's formulaic treatment of interracial romances between Caucasian men and nonwhite women. Both films broach, dramatically play out, and narratively resolve the same ideological issues by invoking some of Hollywood's favorite myths: the myth of the white knight, the myth of femininity, and the myth of the Orient. Through these myths, Hollywood takes up issues of race, ethnicity, and sexual identity, explores narratively the ideological contradictions they imply, and masks those contradictions by using cinematic conventions.

The White Knight

In *Femininity: The Politics of the Personal*, Barbara Sichtermann observes,

> As girls growing up, nearly all their dreams to do with love and sexuality and their emotional and physical future contain a *knight in shining*

> *armour*. Instead of "knight" I could have written hero, or Prince Charming for that matter. At some point a shining figure is supposed to burst into the girl's world and transform everything.[2]

Stepping out of medieval romantic quest tales and into the present day, the heroic knight promises salvation from any number of woes ranging from simple lack of self-esteem, boredom, and sexual frustration to poverty, oppression, or the stifling confines of the family. As Sichtermann points out, the heroine is absolved by her passivity of any guilt related to the sexual nature of the fantasy. The knight spies her, finds her worthy, and scoops her up. She need not lift a finger.

The myth of the *white* knight circulates within a Western culture that has continuously defined itself against what it has identified as the nonwhite other from the Moor or the Jew of the medieval imagination to the black, Asian, or Hispanic of today. Thus, the myth operates to perpetuate not only gender inequalities but racism as well. Clearly, the knight's "whiteness" signifies his moral purity, his unquestionable natural right to carry the heroine away without being accused of abducting her.

He has legitimized white rule by saving womankind in general from what the myth characterizes as the *dark* aspects of sexuality, associated in the racist imagination with the nonwhite male antagonist. Chivalry, which developed as the European nations found it increasingly necessary to define themselves as superior to African and Middle Eastern cultures, has always acted as a way of assuring Western moral righteousness by pointing to its own enlightened treatment of the "weaker sex." The white knight's gender and racial superiority and concomitant moral imperative to rule are thus simultaneously affirmed.

In *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, both Mark Elliott and Robert Lomax function as white knights. (The William Holden star persona may, as a consequence, be forever linked to this modern-day romantic hero traipsing about righting wrongs in the Third World. In another film made around the same time, *Satan Never Sleeps* (1962), Holden plays a white knight priest in China saving the locals from the perils of communism.) Both Suzie Wong and Han Suyin must be saved. Although the nature of their distress varies, both clearly need the saving grace of the white hero's love.

In both films, Holden represents a very modern white knight, a peculiarly American, almost antiheroic version of the stock type. Elliott and Lomax are expatriates, who, like Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* to cite another well-known Hollywood example,[3] live abroad both to escape from and find themselves, to flee and search for their identity as Americans. In both films, the heroes, through their interracial

love affairs, come to grips with their American dreams of melting-pot equality. In *The World of Suzie Wong*, for example, Robert physically battles a brutal, working-class British sailor and verbally attacks Kay's, her father's, and his alcoholic friend Ben's (Michael Wilding) attitudes toward Asians. In *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, too, Mark has ample opportunity to show himself superior to his British contemporaries because of his liberal attitudes toward race. Because of this, when the real ideological workings of these films kick into full gear and they begin to shore up attitudes supporting white supremacy, that racism can always be softened by this comparison between American and British attitudes.

Moreover, the moral right of America to take over from the British in Asia becomes imaginatively rationalized through Holden's characters' growing sense of themselves as American. In *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, Mark, even though he is only a journalist, dies on the battlefield as the predominantly U.S.-supported UN troops fight the invading North Korean Communist forces. In *The World of Suzie Wong*, a fortune-teller's prediction that Suzie will grow old in America seems to suggest that the couple walking away from the camera at the film's conclusion is also walking away from Asia toward an American future.

In addition to this crisis in national identity, both films also present their heroes with another identity crisis that must be resolved, that is, a crisis in their identities as men. In *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, Mark is plagued by the off-screen presence of an estranged wife living in Singapore who refuses to give him a divorce. In addition, Suyin's commitment to her career as a doctor always threatens the relationship with the possibility that she will give up her love affair with Mark to pursue her vocation in China. In *The World of Suzie Wong*, Robert finds his male ego challenged by Kay O'Neill, whose active pursuit and attempts to control both his love life and career could mean a symbolic castration at every turn. Also, Suzie's success as a prostitute haunts Lomax, who cannot make a living as an artist, and threatens his self-definition as a "real" man able to provide for his woman.

However, in each film, the Caucasian woman remains independent and potentially dangerous, while both Suzie and Suyin give up their independence in the name of love. In playing the Caucasian women off against the Asian women, Hollywood can affirm male identity against the threat of the Western "new" woman, perhaps influenced by an emerging feminism or the memory of certain gender barriers relaxed while the men were away during World War II. The films present these characters as calculating, suffocating, and thoroughly undesirable enemies of "love." In fact, part of what both Suzie Wong and Han Suyin

are saved from in each film is the threat that they may become like their Western sisters. Thus, the films can uphold both the gender and racial status quo by depicting Asian women as more truly "feminine," content at being passive, subservient, dependent, domestic, and slaves to "love." The films implicitly warn both white women and women of color to take the Western imagination's creation of the passive Asian beauty as the feminine ideal if they want to attract and keep a man.

In both *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, the heroines' love affairs save them from the potentially defeminizing threat of economic independence. Although prostitution may be a dubious career at best, Suzie Wong must give it up as her only means of support in order to keep Robert. In Han Suyin's case, the effect of her love affair with Mark has consequences far more deadening to the emerging independence of the postwar woman in America or abroad. As S. N. Ko points out in his essay, "Under Western Eyes," Mark Elliott's main function in the film is to woo Suyin and to "'save' her from a life dedicated to saving others."[4]

Throughout the course of the film, Suyin moves from the operating room, where she is first introduced, to her friend's guest room, where she sets up housekeeping as the adoptive mother of a little orphan girl. In the final scene of the film, she is shown at the lovers' trysting spot on a hill, governed by a single phallic tree set against an empty, mountainous horizon, where the modern Hong Kong skyline cannot be viewed. The ending visually returns Suyin to her rightful place within the domestic realm and nature, where women are women and men are men.

Moreover, Han Suyin has been saved from another threat to her femininity (and, therefore, to Mark's masculinity). That is, she has been saved from China, from the threat of communism, and from any gender leveling the new political order may advocate. Suyin wavers throughout most of the film between her devotion to Mark and her desire to return to mainland China to work as a doctor. By the film's conclusion, however, Suyin has definitely chosen America over China in the cold war as well as romance, "saving" her from the possibility of a Communist future.[5] Despite Mark's death at the end of the film, Suyin never is seen wavering from her decision to stay away from mainland China and remain with her adopted refugee daughter in Hong Kong.

Suzie's salvation in *The World of Suzie Wong* is even more literal, clearly affirming Western liberalism's claim to be able to criticize itself and press on for the good of "humanity." In the climactic scene in which a flood causes a landslide in the slum where Suzie's baby lives, Suzie seeks out Robert's help. Both struggle in vain to save the baby, and, through this lost battle, Robert, in fact, manages to save Suzie

from the last emotional link she had with the slums of Hong Kong. At the baby's funeral, Robert and Suzie reaffirm their love, and she is effectively "saved" from returning to the world of prostitution, which led to this initial, tragic, failed domesticity. She is "free" to begin again under the protection of her white knight. Robert has a moral right to fulfill this role. As the "enlightened" American artist, he is positioned above the hypocrisy of the British (i.e., the sailors and Ben, who either brutalize or exploit Suzie) and the cruelty of the Asian male (the baby's unseen, but villainous father). Patriarchal, white, and American moral prerogatives, therefore, all neatly come together as the couple walk off into the distance at the film's end.

These fantasies of salvation are ideologically really more complicated, however, then they at first may appear. Although the assertion of American and male prerogatives is apparent in both Mark Elliott's conquest of Han Suyin and Robert Lomax's winning of Suzie Wong, Hollywood also casts these tales in the mold of the "woman's film" genre. They are stories about the vicissitudes of male desire, female sacrifice, the sexual double standard, the pain of social stigma for women, and a number of other themes associated with Hollywood films designed to appeal to female viewers. The white knight fantasy is a female fantasy. It represents a desire to be swept away from a sexless, quotidian existence, to have all one's problems solved by a stronger will, to escape from poverty and despair through the agency of a male hero.

In *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture*, Mary V. Dearborn notes that interracial and interethnic unions between Caucasian men and nonwhite women form an important theme in American fiction written by women of color.[6] Although this union is often used to explore the dual oppression they feel because of their race and their gender in a white, American, patriarchal society, these writers have also fantasized about these unions as idealized "melting-pot" romances. In these cases, the relationship with the white male protagonist promises freedom of choice, material prosperity, and a Cinderella-like transformation of the ethnic female protagonist into an "American" herself, an accepted part of the larger society who has found her American Dream through romantic love.

That this aspect of the fantasy worlds of *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong* may appeal to female viewers, particularly to those marginalized by their class, race, ethnicity, or nationality, seems likely. The promise of the white knight erases the pain of racial and class differences, while affirming the promise that the man will provide materially and give his bride the benefit of his superior social standing.

Han Suyin and Suzie Wong act as points of identification for the female viewer to be drawn into this fairy-tale domain of the white knight cloaked in the trappings of the modern world. In both films, these female protagonists are stripped of their independence in the name of love and find themselves dominated by white men in a gesture of romantic expression that ostensibly flies in the face of bigotry. Through this contradictory play of gender and race, Hollywood manages to draw in viewers otherwise marginalized by the film.

Creating the "Orient": The Female Body as a Site of Cultural Struggle

In *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said notes that although it would be wrong to look at the Orient as an idea without any material foundation, Europeans' ideas about Asia have more to do with Europe's definition of itself than with any genuine attempt to understand any other culture. Said states, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate or even underground self."[7] Logically, Said's argument can be extended to include America, which has also used the "Orient" as a convenient gauge for a contested and divided self-identity.

In *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, the heroes' own questionable national and gender identities, eventually buttressed by their romances with Asian women, are paralleled by the heroines' divided identities. Part of the narrative thrust of each film, in fact, revolves around the hero's attempts to define the heroine's "true nature." Through this role, each constructs his vision of the Orient in the person of his ideal lover and, in so doing, defines his own racial, gender, and national role.

The profession of each male protagonist allows each film to hide its ideological vision of the Orient under the guise of "artistic realism" or "objective reportage." As a journalist, Mark Elliott takes a supposedly professional, dispassionate view of the world around him. Thus, when Suyin decides not to leave Hong Kong for Communist China, it grows out of both her love for Mark as a man and a tacit acceptance of the American political position he represents. Her choice seems rational because of Mark's own willingness to give up his life reporting on the actions of the UN troops in Korea, dying in a struggle against Asian communism. He has created through his journalistic pseudo-objectivity but actual partisanship an Orient that Suyin accepts as authentic. Her acquiescence to Mark's political vision rationalizes the film's own cold war position for the viewer.

Similarly, as an artist, Robert Lomax creates the Orient through his paintings, while hiding behind the ideological ploy of simply "recording" Hong Kong life on canvas. Through his art, in fact, he creates an idealized vision of a maternal, "authentic" Suzie, hidden under her street-wise exterior. That only a Western artist could see beneath the surface of the Hong Kong slums is taken for granted. It is America's prerogative to come to Asia to reveal but actually create the Orient.

In both films, the Orient, which Mark and Robert create, is represented by their lovers, whom they force to conform to a Western patriarchal vision of both Asia and femininity. This Pygmalion fantasy of creating a woman as an idealized "other" has long been a favorite Euroamerican tradition, and it surfaces in both films as part of the mission of the white knight not only to save but to transform his beloved. Several similar scenes in *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong* underscore the dramatic force behind Mark's and Robert's insistence on defining the "essence" of the Orient by trying to manipulate their lovers' appearances.

When Mark picks up Han Suyin for their first date, she appears wearing a Western cocktail dress and evening wrap. He voices his disappointment and asks Suyin to change. She refuses and offers to make a present to Mark of the Chinese frock she had worn when they first met. This flippant but mild affront to Mark's masculinity marks Suyin's ability to stand up for herself, to wear whatever clothes she likes, to brazenly question her suitor's masculinity when he appears overly interested in her attire. However, this "Western," assertive side of Suyin quickly disappears later in the evening. The couple's celebration of the Moon Festival on a floating restaurant in Aberdeen brings out Suyin's "Chinese" side in her insistence on following Chinese superstitions.

Not surprisingly, Suyin appears in Western dress (a swimming suit) on only one other occasion in the film—the scene on the beach in which Mark makes love to her for the first time. Putting the issue of ethnic identity momentarily aside, the exposure of Mark's bare chest and Suyin's body contours lays to rest any question of Mark's masculinity or Suyin's femininity. Suyin's seduction at the beach silences the issue of proper gender roles completely, and in subsequent scenes questions of ethnic and racial identity dominate.

During the couple's rendezvous in Macao toward the end of the film, when the issue of Suyin's ethnic appearance resurfaces for a last time, Suyin is attired in a Chinese evening dress. Mark remarks, "I want all my friends to say, 'Who is that beautiful Chinese girl Mark Elliott is with?'" Although Suyin tries to assert her own identity, correcting him by saying "Eurasian," her choice of dress and acceptance

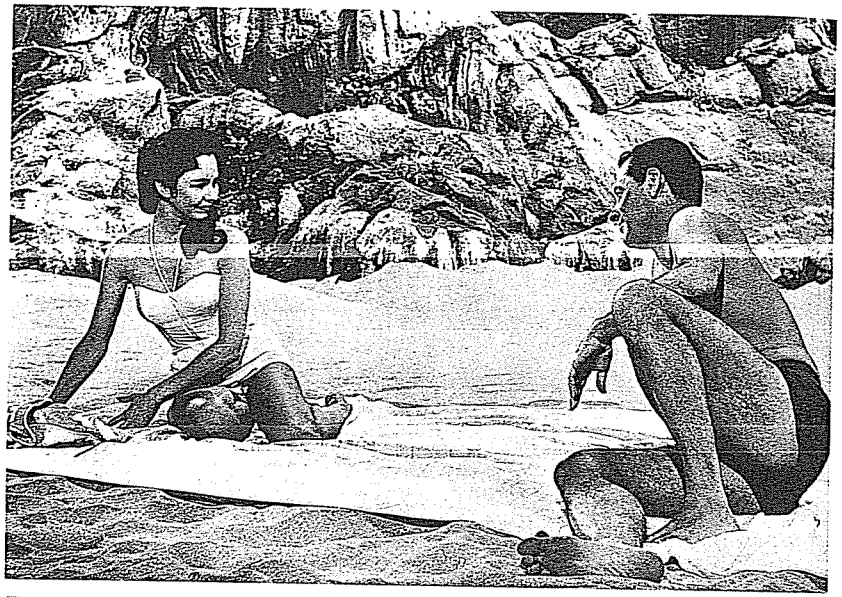

Figure 13. Han Suyin and Mark Elliot in swimsuits leave no doubts about their "true" gender identities in Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing. *Still courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger.*

of her role as Mark's mistress attest to his ability to define both her gender and her race. In so doing, he has also safely guarded against any sexual or cultural blurring that may have threatened his dominant position. The film leaves no question about his right to define and maintain Western conceptions of difference.

The issue of dress and appearance also surfaces in *The World of Suzie Wong*. Like Mark, Robert is upset when his lover appears in Western attire. Although Suzie dresses in very revealing, tight, Chinese-cut dresses (cheong sam) throughout most of the film, Robert says nothing and simply accepts Suzie's attire, even though it clearly marks her as a prostitute.

In fact, the film makes it quite obvious that Suzie's sexual displays encourage Robert's muse. Before Robert paints Suzie for the first time, for example, he watches her dance with a sailor in the hotel bar. The camera centers on her in midframe, with her legs clearly on display. She provocatively plays with her hair and the sailor's hat as Robert looks on. The next shot shows Robert at his easel. He calls for Suzie—not for sex, as she thinks at first, but to pose for him. The spectacle of her sexuality, which could potentially give Suzie a castrating power over Robert, is transformed into Robert's project to paint the exotic. Thus, it does not threaten his identity either as a man or as a Westerner.

However, when Suzie arrives at Robert's, later in the film, in a European frock purchased by her British lover, Robert becomes enraged. Once again, the camera displays Suzie's body as visual spectacle by tilting slowly from her blue high-heeled shoes, up her legs, past her flower-patterned bag and dress, to her small, veiled hat. She smiles offscreen, looking for Robert's approval. He disappoints her by angrily snapping, "You look like a cheap European streetwalker." Robert then takes Suzie to his bed, strips her down to her black lingerie, and throws her European frock out the window. Grabbing the little hat, he continues, "You haven't the faintest idea what real beauty is!"

Clearly, Suzie's desire to define her own identity, to move up in the world by assimilating into Western society, horrifies Robert. Whereas her sexuality can be contained within her Chinese exoticism, it threatens when it takes on Western trappings and a potential independence. Suzie steps outside her bounds as a woman and as an Asian, and Robert violently, passionately, puts her back in her place. Robert insists on his prerogative to define "beauty," that is, to define Suzie's dress and identity. The film's commitment to the myth of the romantic artist as above petty social strictures, as a genius who can reveal the "truth," as a passionate defender of the Western right to create the Orient, places Suzie's own futile attempts at male approval, assimilation, and self-definition at a clear disadvantage.

Beneath all this high art posturing, moreover, is the simple male pleasure of the striptease. Any threat Suzie's sexuality may pose is stripped away with her clothes. Her exposed body can titillate the viewer without guilt, since she was disrobed as a "punishment." The film allows the viewer the pleasure of lascivious interests coupled with an ostensible claim to moral superiority.

Later, Suzie accepts Robert's right to define her identity when she agrees to be painted in a traditional Chinese costume. Dressed in the white (ironically, the color associated with death and mourning in China) finery that Robert has purchased for her, she kneels to him and takes on the attitude of a traditional Confucian bride, kowtowing to her master. Robert has defined "beauty," "femininity," and the "Orient" as a Western patriarchal fantasy of white male domination. His artistic license has revealed the virginal Chinese bride beneath the Westernized prostitute. The line between the Orient and the Occident, China and America, spectacle and observer, creator and creation, female and male, is made natural under the cloak of romantic love and sealed with a kiss. Their sexual union does not blur but, rather, shores

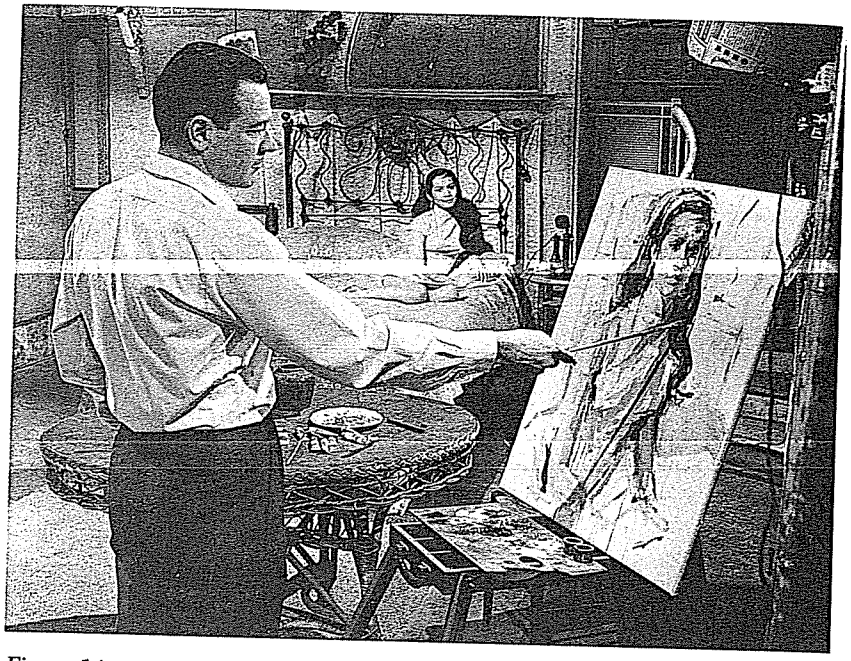

Figure 14. Robert Lomax (William Holden) creates the "Orient" in his idealized portrait of the prostitute Suzie Wong (Nancy Kwan) in The World of Suzie Wong *(1960). Still courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.*

up differences that might otherwise threaten Western patriarchal power.

In both *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, the heroes' ability to define their lovers' identities is rationalized by the initial presentation of the heroines as confused, divided personalities in need of this sort of romantic relationship to sort out their lives. Indeed, Han Suyin's Eurasian identity perhaps disturbs the ethnic and racial status quo more than Suzie's simple desire for Robert's approval and acceptance. Suyin's divided identity can never totally be subsumed by Mark's desire to make her his "Chinese" mistress.

Another character in a position similar to Suyin's provides a moral foil for the heroine. Suzanne (Jorja Curtright), like Suyin, is Eurasian. However, unlike Suyin, who prefers to pass for Chinese and live as a respectable widow, Suzanne dyes her hair blond, passes for English, and has a series of love affairs with well-to-do married Englishmen. Like Suyin, she challenges British bourgeois morality by upsetting the prohibitions against both adultery and miscegenation. However, unlike

Suyin, Suzanne plays the game by trying to pass for European and by keeping her love affairs secret. Interestingly, Suyin's love affair ends tragically, while Suzanne, presented ambiguously as both a welcomed friend of the heroine and as a hypocrite and opportunist, does not suffer for her transgressions. Thick-skinned, Suzanne has fit into the system, while Suyin remains an outsider. Mark's and Suyin's contempt for British colonial social conventions serves to place their love affair within a different order. They symbolize a new, idealistic liberalism, while Suzanne represents an older colonial hypocrisy, underscored by her own unexplained parentage. Thus Hong Kong colonialism is presented as morally bankrupt and decadent, whereas American liberalism emerges as a "natural" way of fixing and displaying difference, of affirming an old racial and sexual hierarchy under a new veneer of free expression.

Suzie Wong is similarly introduced as a confused soul in need of a more fixed identity. Whereas the question of Suyin's identity revolves around gender roles and race, Suzie's identity crisis is primarily rooted in issues of sexuality and class. She first meets Robert riding on the Star Ferry, which connects the Kowloon Peninsula to Hong Kong Island. Her claims to be "rich" and a "virgin" seem suspect, belied by her body movements, speech, and overall behavior. Soon, Robert realizes that the Mei-ling he encountered on the ferry is simply a persona created by the troubled and exploited prostitute Suzie. Suzie, then, is first presented as a child-woman, playing games to escape her brutalized existence.

Through his portraits of her as well as through his paternal and romantic interest, Robert reconciles the "virgin" Mei-ling with the "whore" Suzie. In Robert's paintings, Suzie becomes a Madonna holding her infant, a traditional beauty dressed in virginal white. Robert portrays her as an idealized Asian face severed from its environment in paintings that isolate Suzie visually from the Hong Kong slums. Just as Mark "saves" Suyin by creating a persona of the devoted, submissive, exotic, and erotic "Chinese" girl, Robert lifts Suzie from the gutter by creating an image of pure, maternal, dependent "Oriental" femininity.

If the "Orient" is seen reflected in these heroines, then it, too, metaphorically is presented as divided, contradictory, self-deceiving, childlike, and in need of the strong, paternal hand embodied by these American heroes. Both *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, then, define not simply the identity of individual women but the essence of an entire continent.

Neither *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* nor *The World of Suzie Wong* can be looked at as a clear, uncomplicated presentation of a par-

ticular or fixed ideology. Although both favor readings that ultimately uphold a dominant white, male, bourgeois ideology, enough gaps remain to draw in marginalized viewers. Hollywood's white knights do have their appeal to female and non-Western viewers, since they represent social advancement, assimilation, and the promise of the American Dream.

To recognize both the pull of these fantasies as well as their ability to subordinate many of the viewers drawn in by them, neither race, gender, ethnicity, nor class can be taken as isolated categories for analysis. If, on the one hand, issues of race and assimilation were taken in isolation, for example, both *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* and *The World of Suzie Wong* might be celebrated as liberal calls for racial harmony and tolerance. On the other hand, if gender issues were paramount, Han Suyin might be held up as a model of the emerging "new" professional woman of the postwar era and Suzie simply condemned as another incarnation of the Hollywood child-woman or "whore with the heart of gold" favored on American screens since the silent era. If, however, the films were treated only as cold war parables, the insistent, patriarchal discourses that shore up American identity as well as male privilege would be lost to the analysis. The figure of the white knight endures because of these narratives' ability to flexibly take into account a variety of ideological positions for a heterogeneous audience.

7

Tragic and Transcendent Love

Sayonara and *The Crimson Kimono*

Within the body of Western literature depicting romantic love, parallel pairs of lovers with opposed fates play a key role—for example, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. In *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, unresolvable ideological issues brought up by Cathy's relationship with the dark, brooding foundling Heathcliff (e.g., issues concerning class, race, incest, and the excessive qualities of women's sexual passion) are displaced onto a younger generation where they find a certain equilibrium and sense of closure. If the excessive passions of the first tragic couple promise the transcendence of social taboos in death, then the second, younger couple allows for the possibility of a more earthly transcendence of cultural norms through their romance.

Thus, these narratives offer a dual perspective on the sexual taboos with which they deal. Death allows the first tragic couple to criticize society without changing it. This provides a sense of the inexorable workings of fate rather than a genuine plea for reform. The second couple, however, absorbs the social criticism of the first, weakens it, and allows for its accommodation within a slightly modified social order.

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