MULTIPLE VOICES IN FEMINIST FILM CRITICISM

Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch, editors

University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis
London

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Published by the University of Minnesota Press
2037 University Avenue Southeast, Minneapolis, MN 55455–3092
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Multiple voices in feminist film criticism / Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch, editors.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8166-2272-8.–ISBN 0-8166-2273-6 (pbk.)
1. Women in motion pictures. 2. Feminist film criticism. I. Carson, Diane. II. Dittmar, Linda, 1938– . III. Welsch, Janice R.
PN1995.9.W6M82 1994
791.43'015'082–dc20 93-13743
CIP

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Contents

Preface ix

Introduction
Linda Dittmar, Janice R. Welsch, and Diane Carson 1

Part I. Perspectives

In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism
B. Ruby Rich 27

Feminist Film Theory and Criticism
Judith Mayne 48

Feminism and Film History
Patrice Petro 65

Psychoanalysis and Feminist Film Theory: The Problem of Sexual Difference and Identity
Janet Walker 82

Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Female-Oriented Melodramas of the 1950s
Jackie Byars 93

Image and Voice: Approaches to Marxist-Feminist Criticism
Christine Gledhill 109

15. Brandon French also called attention to this aspect of the film in her chapter on *Marty* in *On the Verge of Revolt*, 84–91.

16. The promotion for *Marty* cost just a little more than the film itself—$350,000 compared with $343,000. Author's interview with Delbert Mann, Los Angeles, March 3, 1986; author's interview with Walter Seltzer, Los Angeles, March 4, 1986; *New York Times*, September 11, 1955, and September 14, 1955; "The Promotion of *Marty*," *Time*, March 19, 1956.

17. Promotion included featuring the wedding dress in the summer issue of *Modern Bride*; *Seventeen* magazine's selection of the film as the picture of the month for July 1956; and schemes for drive-ins to offer their screen areas for real weddings to take place before picture showings. MGM pressbook for *A Catered Affair*, 12, 15–17, USC Cinema-Television Library. Other reviewers echoed Cook's concerns in "*Catered Affair* at Victoria," *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, June 15, 1956; for example, Bosley Crowther, "Screen: *A Catered Affair*," *New York Times*, June 15, 1956; "*A Catered Affair*," *Cue*, June 16, 1956.

18. Legion of Decency ratings, in box 9, folder 10: *Bachelor Party*, clippings, 1954–57, of the Paddy Chayefsky Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society; articles on the struggle with the MPAA over *Bachelor Party* ads in *Variety*, April 10, 1957; *Variety* (daily), April 27, 1957; MPAA files on *The Bachelor Party*, AMPAS.

19. Philip Hartung, "Long Night's Journey into Day," *Commonweal*, April 12, 1957: 35.

20. For example, *Cue*, April 13, 1957; *Variety* (daily), February 15, 1957.

Contradiction and Viewing Pleasure: The Articulation of Racial, Class, and Gender Differences in *Sayonara*

Gina Marchetti

Over the last twenty years or so, feminism has foregrounded the issue of gender for film scholarship, making this type of analysis an acceptable part of the discipline. However, feminist film scholarship has too often ignored the important ways in which race, ethnicity, class, sexual preference, and other differences figure in analyses of gender. The fact that gender difference never exists in a vacuum is sometimes lost in studies that treat gender as the single determining factor within film analysis. As Jane Gaines has pointed out in her essay "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory," the isolation of gender relations blinds feminist film criticism to other kinds of oppression:

> Since it has taken gender as its starting point in the analysis of oppression, feminist theory has helped to reinforce white middle-class values, and to the extent that it works to keep women from seeing other structures of oppression, it functions ideologically. . . . The dominant feminist paradigm actually encourages us *not to think* in terms of any oppression other than male dominance and female subordination.[1]

Sayonara (directed by Joshua Logan, based on a novel by James A. Michener, 1957), for example, could be looked at solely in terms of its treatment of gender differences; however, that reading would miss the complicated way in which the text treats gender in relation to class, race, and nation. Since *Sayonara* expressly deals with issues of gender, racial, and

national identity, the ideological operations of the text, the ways in which it both takes up and denies social inequalities, can be seen even more clearly to be determined not by gender alone.

Sayonara: From War to Romance

Sayonara deals with a love affair between Major Lloyd Gruver (Marlon Brando), a pilot serving in the Korean War, and Hana Ogi (Miiko Taka), a star of the all-female musical company Matsubayashi. Other interracial relationships parallel this principal one—for example, the relationships between Gruver's Anglo-American fiancée, Eileen Webster (Patricia Owens), and a Kabuki performer, Nakamura (Ricardo Montalban), and between an enlisted man serving under Gruver, Joe Kelly (Red Buttons), and his Japanese wife, Katsumi (Miyoshi Umeki).[2]

Sayonara makes a statement against racial intolerance within the context of postwar U.S.-Japanese relations. Like *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, *Japanese War Bride*, *Cry for Happy*, and other films featuring interracial love affairs in postwar Japan, *Sayonara* uses romance as a metaphor for interracial/intercultural understanding. As such, it can be seen as another entry in a long Hollywood tradition of social problem films that use melodrama and romance to concretize (but also personalize, individualize, and often trivialize) broader social or political concerns.

At first glance, *Sayonara*'s sympathetic treatment of interracial romance appears to be a move toward increased liberalization on the part of a film industry whose production code had strictly outlawed representations of miscegenation just a few years before. When looked at more closely, however, the film presents a far more contradictory picture of race, culture, and sex than might first appear to be the case. In fact, *Sayonara* features a series of narrative transpositions that serve to obscure a good deal of the film's apparent social criticism. Through these narrative twists, the film manages to voice and then ignore ideological contradictions by transforming them into more distant, but related, problems. According to Roland Barthes's analysis of classical realist narratives in *S/Z*,[3], plots are usually driven forward by a series of such transpositions, which create narrative interest, obscure ideological contradictions, and lead to an eventual narrative closure that promises to resolve both narrative and, symbolically, ideological conflicts in one movement.

Sayonara begins this narrative process with war, which stands in this text as the extreme form of cultural, national, and racial intolerance being criticized. A title reads "Korea 1951," setting the tale during the Korean War. Although *Sayonara* seems to ask to be read as an antiwar film, the reality of the Korean War and the controversy it generated are quickly dismissed.[4] Early in the film, Gruver, apparently disillusioned with American involvement in Korea, mumbles that one of the pilots he shot down that day had a "face." This is the film's only real reference to the actual morality of war, and, rather than take the Korean War as a historical event in its own right, the film instead chooses to only quietly question war in general by allowing Gruver to comment on the humanity of his enemy.

Further, *Sayonara* very quickly places the Korean War at an even greater distance. During a medical exam, a doctor announces that Gruver will be transferred to Kobe, in occupied Japan, at the request of his future father-in-law, General Webster. Leaving Korea behind, narrative interest moves to Japan, to a *post*war setting, where issues involving war, morality, and the nature of the enemy have an even greater temporal and emotional distance. The narrative problematic also shifts from war to romance, obscuring the issue of war in the process, but still making the romantic relationships involved understandable only through a reference to war and the definition of racial otherness.

However, the Korean War is not the only "structuring absence"[5] that kicks *Sayonara*'s plot into operation. In order to understand the impact the film had in 1957, it seems necessary to look at the operation of ideology within the text against the backdrop of American history and the pressing social issues of the day.

Although *Sayonara* begins as a statement on war, peace, and American militarism, it very rapidly shifts to the issue of race and sexuality. More than either Korea or World War II, civil rights is closest to the emotional heart of the film and, certainly, more recently on the minds of its 1957 audience. In "*The Searchers*: An American Dilemma,"[6] Brian Henderson notes that although John Ford's *The Searchers* deals with relations between Native Americans and white settlers, the power of the text and the problems it treats relate more to the controversy surrounding blacks and civil rights in the mid-1950s than to Native Americans and the threat of interracial sexuality in the post-Civil War era. *Sayonara* seems to have a similar relationship to the civil rights movement. Like Ethan Edwards, Lloyd Gruver is a southerner, a military man, who represents conservative southern values. Supposedly, both characters are meant to stand for a South in transition. Still, neither film deals with racism in a contemporary context.

However, even though the reference is oblique, this preoccupation with issues of racial separation and sexuality actually blurs *Sayonara*'s antiwar message. By dealing with race and war simultaneously, the text sidesteps any direct confrontation of either issue. Instead, it teeter-totters between both issues.

Moreover, *Sayonara* complicates even this issue. At one point, Gruver chastises his subordinate Kelly for threatening to give up his American citizenship in order to marry Katsumi. Kelly then challenges Gruver's love

for Eileen: "Perhaps you don't feel as strongly about your girl as I do about mine." At this point, the text twists away from the theme of racial tolerance to a questioning of gender identity and heterosexual romance. If American identity as "good, pure, righteous, and white" had been put in doubt by Hiroshima, the Korean War, and the civil rights movement, then it had been put in doubt, too, as male by the entry of women into the American work force in unprecedented numbers during World War II. If *Sayonara* is about racial tolerance and understanding, it is also about keeping women in their "place" as wives and mothers.

Romeo and Juliet in Japan: Transcendent Love and the Ideology of Romance

Any critique *Sayonara* may make of war, racism, or militarism is very firmly held in check by the text's very conservative treatment of romance. Within Western thought, from stories of courtly love during the Middle Ages to nineteenth-century bourgeois Romantic notions of love as the key to personal salvation,[7] there has been an important link between social criticism and the dually forbidden and transcendent nature of romantic love. Standing outside laws and conventions that forbid it, romantic love acts as a corrective to social norms that are seen as restrictive, irrational, inhumane, intolerant, or hypocritical. However, even though the notion is linked to social criticism, it also quiets that criticism by placing it in the realm of individual eccentricity. Rather than calling for sweeping social change, romantic love calls only for a bit of tolerance. Further, since romantic love is so often linked to death and tragic ends of various sorts, that social critique is usually viewed as a hopeless cause even before the tale begins.

Romantic love also has its profoundly conservative side–a side keenly felt in *Sayonara*. Linked to the "natural" expression of deeply held feelings, romantic love makes a case for heterosexual coupling, and usually marriage, as the fulfillment of all desires and needs. Even more than national or racial boundaries, patriarchal ideology mystifies gender lines as beyond culture, "genuine," ahistorical, and immutable. If *Sayonara* questions national and racial boundaries on one level, it also affirms and solidifies very conservative notions of gender identity and sexuality on another.

In fact, perhaps more than anything else, *Sayonara* deals with the definition of heterosexual love and places it indirectly but clearly opposite homosexuality, which the text presents as alluring, but ultimately "unnatural" and "perverse." The threat it poses to traditional, patriarchal definitions of gender manifests itself in three ways: (1) through the expression

Any political critique is held in check by a conservative treatment of romance.

of female sexuality outside the realm of male control, (2) through the questioning of the definition of masculinity and its link to war and the military, and (3) through the challenge Japanese theatrical conventions involving cross-dressing pose to gender boundaries.

By introducing Gruver as a man in moral crisis because of a barely voiced suspicion that the Korean War is unjust, *Sayonara* implicitly places Gruver's identity as a man in crisis. Until he meets Hana Ogi, Gruver appears to be drained of power, of masculine potency. Instead of openly saying this identity crisis is linked to male identity and war, however, *Sayonara* puts the blame on women–namely, Gruver's fiancée, Eileen. For example, she confronts him directly about his future plans and asks him why he is not more passionate about their relationship: "Haven't you ever felt like grabbing me and hauling me off to a shack somewhere?" Clearly threatened by Eileen's questions, Gruver defends traditional marriages, the military, and sexual restraint.

The scene that immediately follows features Kelly and Katsumi's wedding, with Gruver in attendance as the best man. Unable to speak English, quiet and still, Katsumi stands in marked opposition to Eileen. Gruver

speaks to Katsumi quietly and slowly, as one might to a child, and, at the conclusion of the ceremony, he kisses her lightly on the mouth. Katsumi smiles and blushes. Unlike Eileen, Katsumi is not openly sexual, but passive, dependent, and childlike.

The film holds Katsumi up as a paragon of female virtue. Later, she is shown performing her domestic tasks—cooking, serving guests, bathing her husband—cheerfully and quietly. Her devotion to Kelly is all-consuming and unquestioning. At one point, Katsumi even contemplates self-mutilation, a questionable eye operation, in order to please her husband by "fooling" the authorities into thinking she is white. Kelly beats her for this stupid idea, exercising his control over her body and her identity. Gruver steps between them and quiets Katsumi paternalistically by telling her "not to do it again." Despite the unpleasantness, he clearly envies Kelly his devoted wife.

If *Sayonara* calls for tolerance on the part of the viewer to accept this interracial marriage, the text also seems to be warning American women to take a lesson from Katsumi's passivity and devotion. After all, Katsumi keeps her man, while Eileen loses hers. Moreover, although *Sayonara* attempts to criticize racism, the film, as it shores up traditional gender definitions, also sticks to accepted stereotypes about Asians, particularly Asian women, as passive, childlike, and servile.[8]

Structurally, the text situates Hana Ogi between the active Eileen and the passive Katsumi. As the narrative unfolds, however, Hana Ogi moves away from the independence and sexual expression represented by Eileen to the more traditional, servile, domestic role represented by Katsumi. The film presents Gruver as "saving" Hana Ogi from the excesses of her own culture, which permits women in certain circumstances to live apart from and independently of men. Gruver puts her in touch with her "true" nature, that is, her desire for a "normal" domestic life and children.

Although Katsumi does represent the "ideal" woman, there is another side to *Sayonara*'s vision of Japanese gender relations. If Katsumi stands for the everyday domestic aspect of Japanese sexual conventions, then Hana Ogi represents the larger-than-life theatrical world of Matsubayashi, where ordinary gender definitions do not apply in the same way, a world that is coded as "perverse" within the text. Likely based on the Takarazuka Young Girls' Opera Company,[9] Matsubayashi is a musical theater in which all the roles are played by women.

Hana Ogi plays the star of Matsubayashi, famous for her portrayal of male roles. When Gruver first sees her, Hana Ogi is on her way to the theater, dressed in boyish drag, wearing knickers, a turtleneck sweater, and a felt hat with a long pheasant plume. She dramatically stands out from the other women, who are dressed in kimonolike uniforms of various colors. A fan gives her a white cock, which further accentuates her association with a transgressive, but beautiful, androgyny. Gruver is mesmerized. He stands in awe of the ultimate personification of forbidden love; not only is Hana Ogi a member of an enemy nation, a different race, and part of a theatrical troupe that absolutely forbids its members to marry or even date, but she is also in drag, a male impersonator who conjures up an even more forbidden homoeroticism.

However, the transgressive potential of Gruver's romance with Hana Ogi very quickly ebbs. After a sequence in which Hana Ogi, always in drag, silently rejects Gruver's advances on a daily basis, she finally agrees to meet her persistent admirer at Kelly and Katsumi's. When Gruver enters the room where she is waiting, he is dumbfounded. Kneeling at a low table, eyes downcast, dressed in a woman's kimono, Hana Ogi's gender has visibly changed. No longer coded in the text as "male," as an androgyne, she has become a woman, and it is not surprising that this scene should mark the beginning of Gruver and Hana Ogi's love affair.

Hana Ogi both apologizes for her rude behavior and for hating Americans. Here, gender change and submission to American authority coincide. If the film is ostensibly an indictment of American racism and militarism, then, very conveniently, the tables turn in this scene. Just as the woman apologizes for stepping outside her gender and snubbing the advances of a man, the nation also symbolically apologizes for what the film supposedly seeks to condemn in American society, that is, racism and intolerance. By projecting bigotry back onto the object of prejudice, the film's critical bite softens yet again.

Conveniently, Gruver's love affair with Hana Ogi restores three important power hierarchies that the text had placed in crisis—between the East and the West, nonwhites and whites, and women and men. It is somewhat ironic that Gruver learns racial tolerance through the sexual subjugation of a woman, who sacrifices her independence for his enlightenment. The didactic point of the narrative blurs, and the viewer may begin to wonder if, by putting Hana Ogi back into her proper "place" as a woman, Gruver is not also symbolically putting the racial and national other into its "place" as subordinate to white America.

Hana Ogi performs her last musical number in the film dressed as a Japanese bride mounted on a white horse. Visually, even before Gruver appears to talk her into marriage, he has won her, "saved" her from the "perverse" celibacy and androgyny of the Matsubayashi stage. In the climactic scene that follows, Gruver tells Hana Ogi that they have an obligation to have children, and when, at the film's conclusion, Hana Ogi makes a statement to some reporters about her future, she reiterates this by saying emphatically that she feels she and Gruver must have children.

The issue of the Korean War never resurfaces. The survival of Hana Ogi and Gruver's romance brings all narrative and, symbolically, social

conflicts and contradictions back into balance. Narrative closure reaffirms gender, racial, and cultural norms with little variation.

Loose Ends: Subplots and Unsolved Social Conflicts

Although the social criticism promised by *Sayonara* really fizzles out in the resolution of the main plot line, the film's two principal subplots involving interracial romances remain more problematic. Kelly and Katsumi's constant harassment by racists within the military and eventual double suicide point to a possibly more biting denunciation of American racism, military injustice, and class bias. Similarly, Eileen's realtionship with Nakamura indicates that the gender questioning squelched by Gruver's pursuit and conquest of Hana Ogi may not have been completely obliterated through the operation of patriarchal ideology within the text.

The two relationships present unanswered narrative questions. The first revolves around why Kelly and Katsumi commit suicide, while for Hana Ogi and Gruver death never comes up as a possible solution to their dilemma. The other narrative question involves whether Nakamura's relationship with Eileen is platonic or not. Through these two unresolved dilemmas, the narrative opens up a certain space for a possible ideological interrogation of class and gender shut off by the main plot.

Throughout *Sayonara,* Kelly is coded as "working class"—that is, an Irish ethnic from the East, an enlisted man under the command of Gruver. In contradistinction to Kelly's working-class roots, Gruver represents the aristocratic old South, West Point, military privilege, and power. Kelly openly questions the military hierarchy and vocally critiques its institutionalized racism. However, his criticisms are never actually articulated as "antimilitary" or "antiwar." He remains personally loyal to Gruver, his immediate superior, even after Gruver rather viciously opposes Kelly's marriage, calling his fiancée a "slant-eyed runt." As Gruver changes from a virulent bigot to a supporter of interracial romance, the military, too, symbolically "cleans its house."

Flamboyant and theatrical, Gruver and Hana Ogi are placed at a considerable distance from the more mundane problems facing the working-class couple, Kelly and Kasumi. Clearly, Gruver, despite his relationship with a Japanese woman, still has certain privileges that Kelly does not have—namely, money. Although never expressed as such in the text, it is implied that Kelly and Katsumi are doomed because they simply do not have the financial resources to go against the system and live out their lives as a slap in the face to bigotry and racism. Gruver and Hana Ogi do have this privilege.

Conveniently, *Sayonara,* conservatively articulating the truism that forbidden interracial love leads to tragedy, allows the working-class couple to sacrifice themselves to make the drama of the upper-class couple more poignant. Narratively, then, the double suicide makes aesthetic, if not logical, sense. It also keeps in play an ideologically conservative attitude toward race within a fantasy that purportedly condemns racism.

Eileen's relationship with Nakamura also opens up certain ideological complications closed off in the rest of the film. She loses her "man" implicitly because she is not as "feminine" as Japanese women, but her relationship with Nakamura opens up some potentially subversive possibilities for reading gender as other than eternally fixed and for looking at interracial sexuality in a different light. 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 stands for hearth and home, the continuation of white-defined and dominated culture. If stolen or seduced away from white men, she implicitly represents a challenge to white male identity and authority. Not only does she challenge 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.

Sayonara indicates that Eileen is fascinated by Nakamura because he is a Kabuki performer, a "male actress," able to play both female and male roles. Just as Hana Ogi magically transcends gender boundaries in Matsubayashi, Nakamura performs with the "grace of a woman and the power of a man." However, *Sayonara* keeps this couple at a distance from each other as well as the viewer. Although clearly enamored of Nakamura, Eileen takes every opportunity to proclaim her love for Gruver. The exact nature of the relationship remains obscure. Certainly, too, the fact that Nakamura's part is played by a Latin (Ricardo Montalban) rather than an Asian actor further removes the threatening racial aspect of the fantasy, while keeping a certain exoticism at its core.

Despite this, the fact that a romance between Nakamura and Eileen is even hinted at opens up the possibility for another reading of the strictly conservative rendering of gender roles the film presents in its main plot. By choosing a relatiohsip with a man of another race and an "enemy" nation, Eileen asserts her autonomy in a way that Gruver could never accept. Moreover, the free gender movement and sensuality that the Kabuki theater promises also allow for the potentially disruptive expression of female desire. All these possibilities, however, are only hinted at and then dropped. Through this marginalization of alternate class and protofeminist discourses, *Sayonara* remains quite conservative in its treatment of both gender and class differences.

Conclusion

Romance ironically makes *Sayonara* a profoundly conservative film despite its seemingly genuine plea for peace and racial tolerance. Moving from war to race and subsuming both issues within the sexist ideology of romance weds a call for change to the reaffirmation of male–and, by implication, American–domination of the racially, ethnically, and sexually Other.

While contradictions within the text open up possible alternate readings, these possibilities are marginalized within subplots. However, these contradictions must not be trivialized. Although ostensibly a critique of racism sugar-coated by a Romeo and Juliet love story, *Sayonara*, also exists as a historical document that illustrates how the dominant ideology deals with social and cultural change by both acknowledging and squelching it. The text implies that Gruver and Hana Ogi ultimately live happily ever after as man and wife, but the rumblings of class and gender inequalities heard within the film's subplots cannot be wrapped up as neatly.

In terms of feminist film criticism, this analysis of *Sayonara* points to the importance of understanding the complexity of Hollywood's treatment of gender. Going beyond a view of patriarchal ideology as simply molding women's thought to conform to a society that takes male domination as a given, this type of analysis helps the feminist film critic look at possible sites of resistance within Hollywood texts, sites of potentially subversive pleasures, as well as sites where new alliances across class, ethnic, and racial boundaries can be explored.

Notes

1. Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory," *Cultural Critique*, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 61, 66. Emphasis in the original.

2. Another interracial relationship between Captain Bailey (James Garner) and Fumiko (Reiko Kuba) is also featured in *Sayonara*; however, it is not in any way foregrounded within the plot.

3. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

4. In 1948, Korea, which had been under Japanese rule, was divided at the thirty-eighth parallel. In 1950, after the withdrawal of American troops in the south following the withdrawal of Soviet troops in the north, North Korea, supported by the newly established People's Republic of China, crossed the dividing line in an attempt to reunify the country. United Nations troops, predominantly American, came to the aid of the Republic of Korea in the south. President Truman was able to manage UN involvement because the Soviets were boycotting Security Council meetings at the time. The Cold War mindset that surfaced after World War II now found concrete expression on the battlefield. Eventually, a truce was reached under Eisenhower, and the country remains divided along the thirty-eighth parallel to this day. Controversy surrounding the war came from various sources: some thought it was illegal because no formal declaration of war ever existed, others condemned any United States involvement in foreign civil wars, and still others thought it unwise to support the notoriously corrupt South Korean government, believing unification under the Communists to be inevitable. The U.S. Left, assailed by the HUAC hearings and all the concurrent problems associated with the Cold War domestically, was unable to organize any clear opposition to the war.

5. The editors, *Cahiers du cinéma*, "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," in Bill Nichols, *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), 493–529.

6. Brian Henderson, "*The Searchers*: An American Dilemma," *Film Quarterly* 34 (Winter 1980–81): 9–23.

7. See, for example, Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon, 1969).

8. John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

9. Ian Buruma, *Behind the Mask* (New York: Meridian, 1984).