The Other, the Namesake: Cosmopolitan Onomastics in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

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As Jacques Derrida writes in *On the Name*, "when a name comes, it immediately says more than the name: the other of the name and quite simply the other, whose irruption the name announces."[1] The other arrives in her name first, then. Put another way, the name—the proper name, in this case—is a dispatcher of otherness. A sign for somebody not yet fully present, the name is at once a deferral of presence and a cultural approximation thereof, for, while standing in for this other, her name also draws me into the heat of her proximity. She is not here—not yet—but her name tells me about her already. It narrates a story that makes up for her absence, and that story in turn evokes other presences by retelling their stories, naming their names.

This onomastic intertextuality, novelist Chang-rae Lee suggests, operates not only within particular traditions[2] but also across them. As such, it is an important vehicle of our time's expanding cosmopolitan culture. The other's name is not only a repository of otherness. In saying or listening to this name, I learn not just things about others, their traditions, and communities. "In the other's name" I also learn fundamental things about myself and the selves surrounding me. This is how I find out that the other's name concerns me, names me too as it were, evokes and invokes me and my world. The other's name summons up her presence, does remain fundamentally a signifier of otherness, of what continues to be different from me. But at the same time I feel that it is this very

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difference that constitutes me, takes part in the social manufacturing of my own self and warrants my bonds with my kin and kind. The "roots" of my self no less than my self's ties into other selves my side of the self/other cultural divide are not "original," *ab quo* phenomena but, Lee stresses, offshoots of an affinity with others across the divide, with that which I am not but proves nonetheless woven into what I am.

Names are, I argue, salient markers of this affinity. They concurrently enact and point to this *constituting proximity* or closeness over those natural or native gaps, borders, and generally liminal spaces where other and self still preserve their distinct profiles while drawing nigh and bordering on each other, revealing each other's symmetries and compatibilities, exchanging representations and cultural paradigms, talking to each other and borrowing each other's talk. This is, we shall see below, a *distinctive* affinity in that it does not jeopardize the distinctiveness of self and other. The name builds a bridge to the *other* side, which the other crosses not to assimilate me but to help me come to terms with myself. The name brings the other so close and she gets so intimately involved in the routine of my being that she becomes my namesake: I bear her name, yet we are not the same; *our* name designates, again, an affinity but not an identity, names another at the same time that it whispers my own name. That is to say—as I am in this essay—that my nominal bond with the other does not weaken my local ties and allegiances. Quite the contrary, it enables and strengthens them. My namesake lends me a language in which they can be best couched, a paradigm capable of contextualizing and clarifying them.

Alongside American authors as distinct from one another as Paul Auster, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, and Alice Randall, Lee has dwelt insistently on this cosmopolitan problematics of names and naming. Invoking Whitman and his work, his 1995 stunning debut *Native Speaker* inscribes itself symbolically into the Whitmanian tradition of self-invention and reinvention amidst and through others.

This multiply cosmopolitan inscription by which the Korean-American writer takes up an *other* writer, Whitman, and Whitman's own imaginings of otherness continues into Lee's 1999 bestselling novel *A Gesture Life*, my main focus in what follows.[3] Here, the intertextual affiliation is further compounded—or perhaps elucidated—onomastically, in and through the other's name as Lee traces the mythology of accommodating, hospitable Americanness past Whitman's hyperbolic self back to Benjamin Franklin's individualism. Franklin and Whitman, in this order, in this chronology and ordering, historical no less than ideological, of the prime American self story: this is the culturally and politically charged sequence that Lee's novels in turn put together, with *A Gesture Life* carrying on *Native Speaker*'s critical genealogy of late 20th-century American self making and makeover fantasies—as it were, in Benjamin Franklin's name. Where the first book focuses chiefly on the plenitudinal and multitudinal self, the second goes back to its liberal-individualist premise and historicizes it by asking, if not in so many words, how solid this standalone, self-reliance premise is for actual self-reconstruction, for an American-becoming scarred by contemporary history.

It is this assumption that *A Gesture Life*'s protagonist, Franklin Hata, mulls over early on in the novel. "Being alone," he ruminates, "is the last thing I would wish for now, which is probably strange, given how I've conducted most all the days of my life. Save the time that Sunny spent with me, I've known myself best as a solitary person, and although I've been able to enjoy the company of others, I've seen myself most clearly when I'm off on my own, without others in the mix" (68). "This may seem," he goes on,

> "an obvious mode for most, but I think a surprising number of people prefer to imagine themselves through a filter of associations and links . . . There is nothing inherently wrong with this. Indeed, there was a time when I held my own associations quite close to who I

> was, in the years leading up to and during the Pacific war, when in the course of events one naturally accepted the wartime culture of shared sacrifice and military codes of conduct. But then I eventually relinquished those ties for the relative freedom of everyday, civilian life, and then finally decided to leave Japan altogether, for the relative—though very different—liberties of America." (68)

In the U.S., Franklin completes his confession, "in my town and every town, especially when you reach my age, you sadly find that the most available freedom is to live alone. There is an alarming surplus of the right. And though everyone accepts this, it's unclear to me whether anyone truly prefers it so" (68).

Living alone, more generally defining oneself as an independent, "discrete" entity of the polity is, Franklin realizes, a principle, if not *the* principle of American *communality*, of nationhood (community) and communities alike, holding sway as it does "in my town and every town." This is, conspicuously, a paradoxical principle whose contradictions his new immigrant life has been struggling to work out, the double bind of his self-refurbishing, refounding project. This project, he "gestures" at, or names, in his own name by giving himself Franklin's name—the name of a Founding Father, a founder of the nation as well as of a dominant if admittedly contradictory modality of the national self, coagulated around the cardinal "gestures," social calisthenics, and discourses of autonomy, independence, initiative, self-proving isolation and trials, thrift, frugality, and discipline. From Franklin's own *Autobiography* to Lee's Franklin, passing through the defining moments marked by transcendentalism, Whitman himself, then Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* series, Jack London, Mary Antin, Sandburg, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, all the way to Robert Coover[4] and Eva Hoffman,[5] these routines and discourses have spun a "Grand American Narrative" of sorts.[6] While earlier authors tended to contribute new chapters to the Franklinesque tale of

national selfhood and thus further legitimate it, more recent writers dispute its American Dream mythology. Especially after *The Great Gatsby*, whose take on this narrative speaks to both reliance on the self-reliant paradigm and disquieting second thoughts, artists and thinkers respond more and more ambivalently to what they seize increasingly, and critically, as the narrative's ideology. This ambivalence too plays into Franklin Hata's musings and is largely responsible for the irony and the ironic fate or overall "gesture" his life comes to embody following (and in spite of) the radical gesture of emigration to the land of putatively unfettered remaking. Discussing this biographical irony, critics have pointed out its symbolically onomastic moorings. They have also observed that the irony is forefronted in the hero's name itself, more precisely, in what Benjamin Franklin's name does *not* designate in his namesake's: a triumphantly autonomous self-invention story unfurling in an American present unencumbered by either personal or collective histories.[7]

This overhaul of the self fails, or meets with limited success, for reasons that have to do with the inescapably affiliated status of the self and, deriving from this status, the intertextual, cross-narrative makeup of all stories of this nature. Undoubtedly, neither the self nor the new story it sets out to write for itself on the American soil obtains in a vacuum. Neither starts with a clean slate—it cannot be its own origin. Quite the contrary: both obtain by brushing up against others and their own selves and stories, past or present. Reinvention is contingent, much though it fancies itself as free-floating self-origination independent of those others no less than of the self's own pre-history, in this case, Hata's "pre-Franklin" life as Jiro Kurohata—worth mentioning here is that his former first name, Jiro, means "second son" in Japanese (in a way, this is what he is to his Japanese foster parents) while, as we shall see later on, Kurohata anticipates Franklin Hata's business. (Campbell, "Jiro"). Nevertheless, under another's name and in that *other* name, in the name of the creed he

thinks that name encapsulates—the American philosophy of self-governing, *un*affiliated, individualistic metamorphosis—Jiro strives to become an other. His dream is not to be an other like Franklin or other Americans literally but an other with respect to the self and other selves like himself he scrambles to leave behind in those burdening stories safely stored away or at the very least uninvolved, he assumes, in the spinning of his post-Japan, American story.

Yet as soon as he associates himself symbolically with another and gives himself Franklin's name, he plunges into a world of political and narrative associations; he *affiliates* himself. He cannot write his new story, and thus rewrite himself into a novel self other than in another's name, and this rewriting is culturally binding, ties him into another world, history, and stories. No matter how he pictures Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Franklin's America—no matter how Franklin Hata reads the namesake's name—an affiliation, a relation have been set up, and they undercut the other, unrelated relation or story the self sets out to write for himself. "Others" cannot but be "in the mix" (68) as he "relates" his story in more than one way, that is, as he constructs (and detects) its relative nature, hence his own "relative" freedom as a citizen, as a self no less than as a self-creating, self-narrating individual. The other may be a source of empowering, regenerating discourses about what we are or how free we could be. Still, the very fact that I must rely on his relation or story to project this freedom for myself existentially and narratively limits my reinvention and my self alike, makes them *relative*. Far from inhering in "being alone," in the self-sustaining solitude where the self-writing self gives itself a "second chance," self-revamping does presuppose a "filter of associations and links." It is, in other words, a necessarily communal project; it hinges on Hata's relation to what he has been no less than to those with whom he is now without being like them culturally, ethnically, and racially. This undertaking turns, in brief, on cosmopolitan relatedness, which enhances

rather than "relinquishes" the self's "ties" and "links" (68), past or present, with those close or remote to him. Unlike the Franklinesque America Jiro Kurohata had dreamed of, true America is no connection-free, narratively "untainted" Eden, but a *relative*, narratively and ideologically charged cosmopolis. Therefore, in this America, he attempts the existentially, culturally, and narratologically impossible.

His failure is no less instructive for that. Franklin Hata may have failed, but, I would maintain, the author manages to uncover the underpinnings of his character's defeat, of the onomastically symbolic contest in which Jiro ultimately wins over Franklin. This is precisely why this victory is not absolute. Albeit indirectly, a lesson—a cosmopolitan message—emerges, tactfully formulated by Lee. This lesson, this critical "gesture" or ethical gesticulation, points to a sort of "relative" contract, to the multiply binding, symbolic, cultural, ideological, and narrative contract Jiro enters as soon as he calls himself Franklin. This compact is not visible, or not visible to Jiro-as-Franklin right away, but Lee makes it legible for us, reads it, as it were, between the lines of his hero's story. This is how this story, a monologue in more than one way, becomes dialogical, engages with itself to reveal its own cultural, political, and textual ramifications.

The layered ambivalence of relatedness and relativity, to begin with, is part of this unwritten agreement. In all fairness, the lengthy passage reproduced above suggests that Franklin Hata is not totally unaware of this stipulation. He senses that America's liberties—and first and foremost the very Franklinesque freedom of self-making, in his case, self-remaking—are relative. On the one hand, there is only so much one can do, or, redo, remake rather, for one never starts from scratch. The presumably clean slate is always marked by others too, not only by one's personal past (self), throws one already into the realm of otherness where "relativity" lies in relatedness. Herein, the self's "autonomous" reconstruction, advertised in Franklinesque terms as it may be, is actually a

cosmopolitan enterprise, cannot but occur via "associations quite close to who" and to where Franklin Hata no longer is. Association rather than autonomy is the rule of the self-making game: the "alarming surplus of the right" renders the right suspect and, with a new paradox, consequently unreliable, in short supply. Then, "it is not clear to [him]" either whether American society de facto functions by exercising this right at the expense of other, "communal" or "associative" rights and modes of social life, whether, as he says, "anyone truly prefers it so" (68-69).

The founding Franklinesque myth notwithstanding, we associate and relate, always more or less than we would like, always *other*wise. This happens because it is usually others who relate us to symbols and images (they think) represent us accurately, speak for us as in *Native Speaker*, in the silence in which our voice has not been heard and our face has not shown itself yet. Voiceless and faceless, we are envisioned, "figured out" by others before we show ourselves in their midst—in their "mix," as Franklin Hata says. If the cosmopolitan self in general and his self in particular is a work-in-progress unfolding of necessity in *alter*-native, multiply non-native contexts, the "other" actors and actresses of this existential and cultural drama can both hurt and help him. They help insofar as they provide the overall setting and players for the reinvention script, although they do it, as we have noticed together with the main protagonist himself, in ways that remain deeply noncommittal, ambiguous. They hurt as long as they have already cast him in a role at odds with the part Franklin Hata seeks to adjudicate on the American stage in order to re-cast himself. Like *Native Speaker*'s Henry Park, he is assigned a subaltern status. Derived from it is the "stigma" of an "Other to the (European) American self," the role of an Asian American extra in the national performance. In short, what undermines self-remaking is others making, "Orientalizing" him into their own "Other" based on what they think his face and voice, his "visible difference" means.[8]

Alone Franklin Hata certainly is, but his solitude is rather theoretical in that others *are* "in the mix," see and hear him, relate to him and construct him, involve him in a cobweb of visible and invisible relations that tie him down and hinder the "narrative" mobility he thought Benjamin Franklin's land and name would afford him. If Franklin Hata is "alone," his solitude is not his namesake's self-nourishing independence but deceiving isolation, loneliness constructed by others' gaze and imaginings; on these representations, he and his own self-representation (story) do depend. He is not alone in Benjamin Franklin's upward-moving story, in that narrative and social posture theoretically available to anybody, but in a story of prejudice and misconceptions that, low-key as they may be, hamper the story he meant to write.

That is to say—and critics like Young-Oak Lee have said it—his "solitude" is fraught with and cancelled out by ideology, also like in *Native Speaker*, an ideology of Americanness. This ideology operates on two although intersecting levels. On one level, it takes up the generous if misguiding form of Franklin's America, that Grand, generic, and transcendent narrative of which we all can be part regardless of individual circumstances if we commit ourselves to the ethic of hard work, self-improvement, and frugality. On another level, though—the level of Franklin Hata's everyday dealings with the residents of Bedley Run, where he moved after the war—this narrative, itself ideological, rhetorically geared toward precise social effects, proves fairly contingent in that it often does or does not pan out depending on the contingencies of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. It is on this level that Franklin Hata *is made*, rather than makes himself, into that other that jeopardizes his own remaking project insofar as "others" have already decided, for him, what kind of other to himself he should be. That is to say, in and precisely due to the complications of Benjamin Franklin's America, "Jiro" remains, in a sense, Franklin Hata's "truer" name. Unnamed yet firmly nestled in the Japanese

name, a past of multiple trauma lives on. In another sense, though, Jiro "gets over." Yet this does not happen, as he hoped, in Benjamin Franklin's name, or, more accurately, it does not happen as he imagined it would. His new, reinvented life is another success story only in part, on the surface, as a sum of epidermal "gestures." It does bear out the namesake's narrative but chiefly economically as Franklin Hata becomes the successful owner of the local Sunny Medical Supply and well-respected member of the local community. The respect too is rather formal and distant, another social "gesture" without substantial consequences. Nor is his relation with white Americans like Mary Burns more consequential. To most, he is a reassuringly unthreatening presence, a reliable citizen living in a vintage two-story Tudor revival house that Liv Crawford of Town Realty has set her eyes on.

The role played by realty and realtors in the book suggests that not so much a home, beautifully maintained as it may be, Franklin Hata's house is primarily a piece of real estate, counts as property value for itself and surrounding properties. Likewise, the owner is not a neighbor to those properties' owners but a monetary reassurance rather. In fact, townsfolk do not relate to him and what he actually is as neighbors but rather through him to what they own. Through "Doc Hata," they relate to "realty," and in turn he counts and is "counted" (on) as no more than a name for an "impressive" property. Those who have "known" and "got a fix" on him are not able to see him at all. Having reduced him to a "quantity," to a condition of uniform, unqualified sameness in their preexistent epistemological catalogue, they simply do not make him out. This is why Franklin Hata is right to suspect, à la Ralph Ellison's hero, that socially speaking he has "develop[ed] an unexpected condition of transparence here, a walking case of others' certitude" (21). Somebody else's predictable other, he is written off as human presence, absented. He is one more time "alone" yet not in the self-

empowering, "unqualified" solitude in which rebuilding one's life—Benjamin Franklin's story—can begin. As we have noticed, this solitude is qualified, shaped by the others' *othering* gaze. If he "belongs," he does it under the scrutiny of this ambivalently "discriminating" look, which qualifies and disqualifies him concomitantly as a community member. So in a way he belongs to this classifying eye itself, to the eye that takes for granted, constructs into "certitudes" things and people and so misreads them, fails to perceive them at all by taking them for what they are not. He may be a fine home and business owner, a well-thought-of proprietor, but the neighbors' eye appropriates him as a propriety index only—he is highly regarded as a home owner who spends a lot of time improving his property as well as upholding, as a "business and civic elder and leader" (136), as Liv says, the rules of decent communal living, the propriety conventions. He takes upon himself, in fact, to be, in those others' "mix," a "citizen and colleague and partner" (135), makes his "job to be the number-one citizen" (95). He makes his "whole life out of gestures and politeness" (95), one big "polite" gesture and devotion to civility honoring the place and its citizenry. Also in Liv's words, he freely "submits" to the place he has come to, agreeing that "feeling at home in a place" is his own "burden" (135).

Hard as he works to "earn" this feeling, he nonetheless remains on the "outside looking in" (356), unaware of the nature of his true burden. Much as this has to do with the present, with what he thinks he needs to do to earn his neighbors' "respect"—gaze (see Lat. *respicio*), way of looking, *ethical* "regard" and treatment—this responsibility concerns (etymologically, "looks back" onto) the past. It pertains to what Jiro was and to what he intends to overcome as Franklin so he can finally "come home" to Bedley Run (376), make himself at home in Benjamin Franklin's name. Notably, nobody in town wants to call him Franklin but Doc Hata (45), another way of Lee's underscoring "Jiro"'s symbolic

resilience. Unquestionably, "Doc Hata" is the onomastic version of the excluding, vaguely patronizing gaze. Others name and thus (mis)identify him by giving him a name "other" to the one he has chosen. At the same time, Lee implies that the onomastic badge of change, the self-renaming and self-reinventing under Benjamin Franklin's name must be equally earned, must occur ethically. True, Benjamin Franklin himself would encourage onomastic initiative, bestowing a changed name—the name of change—on oneself as a volition act and agency token, yet again Lee tells us that one cannot give oneself new names and lives other than in the others' mix, that these things and the freedom we associate with them are obtained *in relation*, in cultural-existential associations. In other words, "Franklin" must be *given* to Jiro. Hata must be named—baptized and changed, made into a new man—by another. Franklin is by no means an inappropriate name, yet it has not been earned. Nor has others' refusal to use it rendered it useless. But naming—self-naming—has not gone through the ethical channels and territories of alterity, has been a self- rather than others-bestowed gift.

But who is this other who at last gives Franklin his name? Or, what kind of "other" is he? The neighbors would not and cannot call Franklin by his self-given name because that would imply a genuine welcoming and understanding "rapport," an adequate reading of his self, and that has been forfeited by their own formal if "not *un*welcoming" gestures. An authentic gesture presupposes a true relation, and that has been displaced by the "realty" approach to place and sodality. Nor can a true welcome to a new place, life, and name come from Franklin Hata's sole "relative," Sunny. For one thing, Sunny is not a blood relative, which is also relevant, as we will see immediately. For another, his dealings with Sunny, Mary Burns, and women generally are colored, indeed pressured into failure, by his other burden: the burden of the past and the past self he came to America to get away from. But it becomes obvious that this "getaway" life is unethical, another

reason why his new name is not socially recognized and cannot do much for him. As long as he leads this life, that is, as long as he does not assume his biography's entirety instead of just its recent segment, his new biography—his new life-writing—cannot get under way. Arguably, he tried to jumpstart this process by adopting Sunny, but he does not manage to set up a true relation with her because the African American Korean girl reminds him of the "lowly" quarters of his kin, that is, of his Korean background.

It turns out, indeed, that Jiro Kurohata is Korean Japanese, a native of Korea, and his "real parents . . . wished as much as I," he tells Kkutaeh, "that I become wholly and thoroughly Japanese" (235). So they gave him up for adoption to the Kurohatas, a Japanese couple who raised him as a Japanese, and it is as such that he served in the Imperial Army during World War II. Kkutaeh, whose name was also forced upon hers, and whom Jiro shortens to K, was also Korean and among the sex slaves on a Burma Japanese military base where Lieutenant Jiro had been posted as a medical assistant. Jiro's dealings with women had always had an uncomfortable edge to them and got forever complicated, tainted, guilt-ridden, on a certain level blocked by his relationship with K. Before Sunny yet setting up Franklin Hata's failure with her, K charged him with "gesturally" unethical behavior. Infatuated with her while she and her companions were being sexually tortured by dozens of Japanese soldiers daily, he was incapable of doing anything for her and did not refrain from having sex with her regardless of the circumstances. Adding insult to injury, he invited her to play, despite the horror she had to go through, a "pretend game" of sorts, which made up phantasmatically—"superficially," immorally, on the skin of things and in the shadow of actual gestures and stances—for what he was unable or unwilling to do for her in reality. For a while, it looked as though a connection, albeit feeble, was not impossible, across the harsh divide of the war. A certain cosmopolitan premise seemed to be there and help K and Jiro

reach, if provisionally, some common ground despite the abyss between them. The premise laid not only in their common "legacy" and "background," and in the Korean "ethos" (233) inhering in what they share by birth, an ethos to which Captain Ono kept referring disparagingly, but also in a trans-native ethos of cooperation and collegiality undergirding Korean and Japanese cultures alike. On both sides, though, this ethos was tentative, never a full-fledged notion. K's father, for instance, believed that "whether Chinese or Japanese of Korean we were rooted of a common culture and mind and we should put aside our differences and work together" (249); yet at the same time he resented non-Asian "influences," denied K a basic education, and ultimately sacrificed her to save her brother. In his turn, Jiro backed up the "pan-Asian" vision of K's father. "This is," he told K, "exactly our Emperor's mandate, . . . to develop an Asian prosperity, and an Asian way of life" (249), and, ironically enough, only a few pages thereafter, the sadistic Captain Ono would lecture Jiro on the "Pan-Asian prosperity as captained by our people" (268).

The rhetoric of this "regional" cosmopolitanism was delusional at best. And so was the broader fantasy that, also temporarily, seemed to provide a respite from contingent horror. Drawing from the Western novels K's father loathed, Jiro conjured up a surrogate world in which K and he could meet and imagine a common a future. K was not totally unresponsive. "I wish," she told him, "that we could read one of those novels you mentioned. . . . A story set in another land and time in history, with completely different sorts of people. . . . Maybe you can describe the stories to me, and we could pretend we were in their lives, those European people in the novels, involved in their particular problems, which I am sure must be compelling" (249). With a fleeting allusion to Madame Bovary's "problems," Lee had Jiro agree with K and carry on with his pipedream story. Jiro nourished the vain hope in some kind of "nearness," "correspondence between us, an

affinity of being" by "pretending to be other people, like figures in a Western novel, imagining how we could somehow exist outside of this place and time and circumstance" (263), and K did not decline to play the game. Yet she refused to pretend it was not a pretend game, a fantasy kind of "gesture" that substituted itself for ethical action as much as the "Asian way of life" was, she also pointed out, no more than "Japanese life" (249) and female "volunteering" stood for sex slavery.

K is the name of an impossible, hence aborted association, an associative model that undercuts Jiro Kurohata's—later Franklin Hata's—attempts to "associate" himself with others. With another irony, Jiro fulfills K's prophecy by expatriating himself into the world of the Western narratives they were chatting about back in Burma, yet his new name fails to sanction the desired new life. His past is still with him, pulling him back, preempting the fresh start under the self-given name and in the name of the hopefully redeeming relationships with Sunny, Mary Burns, the Hickeys, Liv, Ronney, and others. In their mix, his worst nightmare comes true as novel situations and crises reenact symbolically his wartime inaction and superficial response to others and their ordeals. The symmetrically pro forma acknowledgment by his Bedley Run neighbors is thus the mirror image of his past treatment of others, and so is his rejection by his own "daughter." From her, a "relative," he cannot get, we understand, what he denied to his K(in). His redemption cannot come from or of this kin(d), from or in this kind of relationship. Yet it is not far from it either. To put it otherwise, it does come from Sunny, from Sunny as another K, whose life Franklin Hata attempts to change and does change to a notable degree but without sublating it into the kind of "association" he denied himself, if on another level, in his brief encounter with K. The more we learn about his past, the more Sunny's unqualified yet staunch rebuke qualifies his past, constructs itself as a censure of his past and present existential "gesticulation." She senses the symbolically proxy,

vaguely redemptive role she is supposed to play unawares in Franklin Hata's life, in his self-refurbishing/self-vindicating drama, and turns down the part. This is why Jiro cannot rename and remake himself in relation to her. His new name and lease on life cannot come from her for she is at once too close to him biographically, as a Korean and "daughter," adopted like him into another family and culture, and too remote, a "child" separated by her "father"'s unspeakable past insofar as she is K's stand-in.

Concurrently too loaded and too tenuous to work, this relation is nevertheless the template for another one, more indirect but more fruitful, with Thomas, Sunny's young black Korean son. More African American than his mother and more American than his "grandfather," twice removed from the latter's horrific past, from his position of heightened otherness Thomas gives Franklin Hata another opportunity to take stock of himself and his misconceptions (including racial misconceptions), to touch somebody's life for the sake of that person. Thomas no longer is the symbolic substitute for another not here and not present (K). In his dealings with his "nephew" and multiple other, Franklin Hata does not suspend this other's presence to reconnect himself with this other's other, K, with whom he did not have the courage to be fully, ethically. Significantly, the boy "allows" Franklin Hata to share in his life and quite literally change (read: save) it, which was something Franklin/Jiro did not find the strength to do for either K or Sunny. More importantly, Thomas is the one who, at last, calls him Franklin (276), releasing him from Jiro Kurohata's clasp—from the spell of his name, that is. For, we find out earlier in the novel, "Hata is, literally, `flag,' and a `black flag,' or *kurohata*, is the banner a village would raise by its gate in olden time to warn of a contagion within. It is the signal of spreading death. My adoptive family, I learned right away, had an ancient lineage of apothecaries, who had ventured into stricken villages and had for unknown reasons determined to keep the name, however inauspicious it was"

(224-25). Captain Ono alluded to Jiro's name to "belittle" the name bearer (225) while K "crie[d]" it out, uttered it to both unburden herself and cry herself to sleep, if "fitfully," "saying over and over very quickly what sounded most peculiarly like *hata-hata, hata-hata*" (261), but also to appeal to Kurohata himself and so burden him with the responsibility for her life and death.

K, Ono, and "other specters of history" (353) keep Franklin Hata hostage in Jiro Kurohata's name and world. He cannot journey into other name and life without a nod from another, without a relation, an "association" into which otherness is effectively and productively embedded. Thomas is precisely that kind of relation. He is perfectly positioned between past and present, the former's spectrality and the latter's flesh-and-blood immediacy, between continuity and discontinuity, between the Kurohata-the-apothecary or World War II medical assistant and the Bedley Run medical supply store owner, in brief, between what he has been and cannot deny or disown, on the one hand, and, on the other, that which he might still become, in Benjamin Franklin's name and in the proximity of those close and not-so-close to him. In this challenging vicinity, in this relation in which Thomas is both a signifier of otherness and a relative ("Thomas" means "twin"), in and through whom other reveals himself in all his kindness and wise innocence as Franklin Hata's truer and closer kin, Lee's protagonist can finally write his Franklinesque story. Only, it goes without saying, this story is nothing he imagined. In writing it, he does not "get away" from Jiro—one more time, identity reconstruction must revisit and incorporate the past. Thus, the relation with Thomas enables another one, another relation and story, as K "finally come[s] back for [him] (286). But she no longer returns as a censure. She does not embody any more an allegory of doomed future life, another "life of gestures" (299) in response to others, a worldly conduct both K and Sunny reprimand him for and for which, albeit no more ethically, his unkind American

neighbors pay him, in kind. Another kind of repayment or reward, another kind of story become possible only after Thomas enters his world: a story where the past, the past world, and the world in general are not sanitarily roped off, narratively excised or set aside in order for the story's hero and narrator to make himself at home in a better world and home, but a story in which the whole world, its others, Koreans, Japanese, and Bedley Run residents alike can be at home. To this home and this cosmopolitan realization Franklin Hata can finally come—in his namesake's and his own name, this time around—by assuming his entire life, by constructing his story ethically. As he comes full circle and recollection seeps into the ongoing narrative and ruminations, "Franklin" finally impacts on "Jiro" and a future becomes possible, in Bedley Run and elsewhere in the world, ever and ever again: "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 or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and round and arrive again. Come almost home" (356).

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *On the Name,* trans. and ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), 89.
2. See "Naming, Representing: Postmodern Onomastics," the second chapter of my book *Memorious Discourse: Reprise and Representation in Postmodernism* (Madison. Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 86-124.
3. Chang-rae Lee, *A Gesture Life* (New York: Riverhead, 1999).
4. See Chapter 2, "Cold War Fairy Tales: Robert Coover's Social Romance," of my book *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 2001), 55-66.
5. For a discussion of Eva Hoffman and Mary Antin, see the first chapter of *Memorious Discourse,* 53-75.
6. On Coover and the "Grand American Narrative," see Paul Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), especially 51 and 121.

7. See Young-Oak Lee's article, "Gender, Race, and the Nation in *A Gesture Life*," *Critique* 46. 2 (Winter 2005), 153. The critic acknowledges his debt to Sau-Ling Wong for "associating the name 'Franklin' to Benjaminjamin [Franklin]" (158, note 1). In Chapter 6 of his book, *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2006), David Cowart also talks about the name of Chang-rae Lee's hero.
8. Young-Oak Lee, "Gender, Race, and the Nation in *A Gesture Life*," 153. In his discussion of Asian Americans as "others" to self-projected national identity, Lee quotes David Leiwei Li's *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

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