The Fortunes Study Guide

The Fortunes by Peter Ho Davies

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Ho Davis, Peter. The Fortunes. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

The Fortunes is comprised of four interconnected short stories that examine themes like fortune, women, identity, names, and ownership through the lens of the Chinese American experience. Author Peter Ho Davies uses a historical basis for the first three stories while the last is entirely fictional. The first story, Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad depicts an orphan Ah Ling, who came to America at age fourteen having been sold to a laundryman, Uncle Ng. His late mother a Chinese prostitute and his father an unknown Western man, Ling was biracial and struggled to assimilate to 19th century America. Ling worked for Ng, but he desperately wanted to strike it rich and earn enough gold to be wealthy. His colleague at the laundry service was Little Sister, a young Chinese prostitute who worked as a courtesan for Ng's customers. Ling was infatuated with Little Sister, though she would not sleep with him unless he paid her. Ling was soon employed by Charles Crocker, a laundry customer and a titan of the railroad industry. He hired Ling to be his live-in laundryman and manservant. Ling was overjoyed, and he spent his first gold coin on a session with Little Sister and quit Ng's employment. Little Sister revealed to him that she was Ng's daughter and that he used her prostitution to earn money. Ng was shocked at the matter of fact attitude of Little Sister and Ng both at what they saw was a matter of business and profit. Little Sister was eventually sold to another man. With Crocker, Ling was often used as a representative of his race. Crocker had something of a taste for Chinese goods, people, and prostitutes. Ling was happy to be near him and earn money and respect, but gradually he realized that Crocker was using him for his language skills and his appearance to be a kind of buffer between himself and the Chinese workforce he hired to create the Transcontinental Railroad. Ling tried to negotiate between Crocker and striking Chinese workers. Conversing with the workers, Ling realized that he felt at home with them. He left his job with Crocker and worked on the railroad line and later as a bones collector, cleaning and sending the bones of Chinese men back to their villages in China, as was custom. Ling did work his way back to San Francisco and was reunited with Little Sister, who now called herself "Madame Celeste," now an owner of a brothel. She let him sleep with her for free, and they were happy to be together again.

The second story, Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese, details the life of Anna May Wong, the first famous Chinese American film actress. Anna grew up the daughter of a laundry owner in Los Angeles' Chinatown. She loved going to the cinema, first to disappear in the dark theater and then because she loved the art of acting. Anna pursued her dream to become a film actress despite her strict father's disapproval and beatings. Anna's persistence—and her ability to seduce older directors, actors, and producers—helped her gain fame. Anna received many starring roles in female Chinese characters, though they were only ever seductresses, villains, mistresses, and prostitutes. Anna struggled to find substantive roles, which was difficult when many Chinese characters were being played by white actors in so-called yellow face. Moreover, the Hays Code restricted the depiction of interracial romantic couples

onscreen unless both characters were of the same race. Since there were no male Chinese actors at Anna's level, she was boxed out of these roles. Anna decided to take a trip to see her father in his village in China since he had moved back a few years earlier. Anna was able to pitch this as a documentary, and a cameraman, Newsreel Wong, accompanied her. Anna found China to be both comforting and perplexing. In Hollywood, she was a rarity, but in China she felt adrift in a sea of anonymity, especially when she could not speak Mandarin. Her films were not as well-received as she thought they would be. Critics felt that she was being exploited by taking roles that depicted Chinese women in a negative light. Anna's reunion with her father was emotionally moving, though she knew she could never stay there with him because she would be seen as just a daughter, not a remarkable woman with a solid career. The story follows Anna's career after she returned to America. She tried to get better parts, which meant smaller parts, and she fell out of the limelight. Meanwhile, World War II began, and the Chinese were seen in a sympathetic light again. Anna settled into a quieter life, though she assisted with benefits to help the Chinese. She felt that she could see some of her mannerisms in the international leader Madame Chiang's expressions, which made Anna think she had contributed to how the Chinese thought an American woman would behave after seeing Anna act.

The third story, Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant, is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator who was a friend to Vincent Chin and a witness to his murder in 1982. Vincent Chin was a 27 year old man who lived in the Detroit suburbs. Chin was the adopted son of an older, Chinese American couple who could not conceive. The narrator grew up with Chin and was a friend of his. He was there on the night Chin was murdered by two white men who thought he was Japanese and therefore a target of their antagonism against Japanese automobile imports supposedly stealing jobs. The narrator detailed the events that night on what was supposed to be Chin's bachelor party. The men got in a confrontation with Chin which led to him being hunted down in the neighborhood. The narrator reflected on his guilt from that night and the lingering questions he still had, the possibilities he thought about after the case became a landmark case in the pan-Asian civil rights effort. The narrator would sometimes reinvent key details of the story halfway through and was thus unreliable. Still, the murder and its aftermath impacted the way he saw America. Above all, he wanted to stay anonymous, never revealing his name.

The fourth and final story, Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation, follows a writer, John Ling Smith, and his wife, Nola, as they traveled to China to adopt a Chinese baby girl. John and Nola had difficulties with conceiving a child without genetic abnormalities, and they had to terminate two pregnancies. John made his living as a writer of literary fiction and as an instructor of writing at a college. John, the biracial son of an American pilot and a Chinese stewardess, suffered an embarrassing moment when someone confronted him about using the wrong translations for Chinese words in his fiction. John was able to survive the scandal, but he felt as conflicted as ever about the pressure he was under from his publisher, his colleagues, and the university to embrace his Chinese heritage and write almost exclusively about that. John made a good living cranking out pulpy novelizations of the Kung Fu TV show universe. Nola suggested that they look into adopting a Chinese baby girl, since China's one-child policy left China with an excess of baby girls. This had created the Chinese adoption industry. John and Nola arrived in

China for the adoption. They were part of a group of American foster parents. They were required to tour China and see certain landmarks as a condition of adopting a Chinese baby, as well as a hefty adoption "donation" to be paid in cash to the orphanage. The night before Gotcha Day!, the adoption day, John felt restless. He had been having trouble sleeping. He left his room and went down to the hotel bar. John thought about how the other foster parents envied him for his heritage and his appearance, since he would be able to look right next to his daughter. John felt frustrated at the position people were putting him in on the tour, that he should know Chinese when he did not know any and that he should know certain things about Chinese history and culture. John knew they only meant well, but he felt uneasy about the adoption process and how it felt like a transaction, as if he were buying a baby girl to own. A conversation with a Chinese prostitute, Pearl, at the bar showed John that Chinese women could be trapped here. Maybe his buying a Chinese baby felt like an exchange of business, but leaving her stranded here would likely be much worse. On "Gotcha Day!" morning, every other foster couple or parent got paired up with their baby except John and Nola. Napoleon, the young woman who acted as their guide, told them that the girl they were going to adopt, Mei Mei, was sick and they would go get her at the country orphanage later that afternoon. At the orphanage, John and Nola are given a baby they know at once is not Mei Mei. They are told that Mei Mei died earlier that morning. At Nola's request, they go to see Mei Mei's corpse. They are then forced to choose a new baby to take with them. John and Nola accept the baby they were given. In the hotel lobby, John and Nola see Pearl. Pearl gave them her blessing to adopt the child, and then John and Nola took their new daughter upstairs. John suggested they name their baby, "Pearl," and Nola agreed. They wondered about life will be like for their daughter. As Nola and Pearl slept, John thought about how Pearl was getting the gift of a clean slate and an opportunity to become who she wanted in America because of the promise of its possibility.

Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad: Pages 1 - 57

Summary

The novel begins with the first story, Part I: Gold - Celestial Railroad. The story is told in the past tense, third person limited point of view. The section opens with a quote: "Beset by labor shortages, Crocker chanced one morn to remark his houseboy, a slight but perdurable youth named Ah Ling. And it came to him that therein lay his answer," from the book "K. Clifford Stanton." The story is divided into several smaller segments.

The first segment provides the context for the story. A Chinese immigrant, Ling, was riding in a train with his employer, Charles Crocker. A historical figure from the 19th century, Crocker was one of the Big Four barons in the American railroad industry and was responsible for the Central Pacific Railroad and the Southern Pacific Railroad. The author situates the story more than two years after President Abraham Lincoln's assassination, meaning after 1865. Ling reflected on Lincoln's coffin being transported by rail and watched his boss sleep. He remembered how Crocker bought him new clothes when he became his manservant, that he tucked a gold coin into his vest pocket. At the time, Ling felt that this made him rich.

In the second section, Ling hoped that he would be able to catch a glimpse of Gold Mountain, a name for both San Francisco and the mountains stretching across the western part of North America. Ling thought more about Gold Mountain and how his quest to find gold had not been fruitful. He remembered how his relatives in China, Big Uncle and Aunty Bao, sent him to America to find gold. They were the parent figures in his life after his father and mother died. His family lived at sea, smuggling opium and pimping women to western men. Ling's mother had been one of their prostitutes but died after childbirth. His father, a western man, paid off Big Uncle and Aunty Bao to raise Ling. At fourteen, Ling was sent to San Francisco to make a fortune, his passage paid for and employment and lodgings arranged. Back on the train, Ling watched snow swirling outside the railroad car and thought about his growing unease working for Crocker.

In the third section, Ling clarified that he had been in Crocker's employment since 1865, making this part of the story in 1857. When he first arrived in San Francisco, Ling worked for a laundryman, Uncle Ng, who dabbled in gambling and opium. He also left Ling alone quite often, which Ling did not really mind since he did not have much respect for Ng. The other resident of the house was a woman called Little Sister, a prostitute employed by Ng as an add-on service of the laundry house. Little Sister taught Ling the ropes in the laundry business in the morning after she got up. He was instantly infatuated with her, and it bothered him to be there when she was entertaining men. In the early morning, Ling watched Little Sister bathe, his room offering a secret view. Ling was also taken with the bustle of the busy streets. He would often make

deliveries for Ng. Along the way, the "ghost boys," or white boys, would ridicule him and harass him.

In the fourth segment, Ling settled into his life at Uncle Ng's. He did the laundry in the morning and made deliveries in the afternoon, filling the time by spending time with Little Sister. Ling was frustrated that he was not prospecting for gold, but Uncle Ng, who had sought gold himself once during the rush of 1849, told him to be patient. It was said that Ng had "seen the elephant," meaning seen all there was to see, the mother lode (21). Ling compared himself to the ghosts and their success. Ng explained that now he had made gold by attracting business, especially from rich men who paid to sleep with Little Sister. Ling was horrified, but Ng said that "Gold is gold, however you make it," referencing how he once found a gold flake in a gentleman customer's clothing he washed (23). Ling remembered how his mother had left him a child's cap in the shape of an elephant, but it had gotten lost. This memory made Ling think more about elephants. Later, in Crocker's service, he realized that the massive trains were the closest he had come to an elephant. One day, Little Sister revealed that she knew Ling had been watching her bathe the whole time. Little Sister said she would never have him, a Chinese man, in her bed. She told Ling that she hated her own people, especially men, for selling her into prostitution so they could have someone work lower than them in America. She told Ling that she would not have his business, but he was determined to be rich enough to be with her. He said he would come back for her once he made it big and that they would return to China. Little Sister laughed and said she had no desire to go back.

The fifth segment explains how Ling was first introduced to Crocker. Ling first met Crocker when he was a customer of Ling's laundry services. Ling was fascinated by the large man who exuded authority and power. Crocker was impressed by Ling and offered him a job as a live-in laundryman and manservant. Ling was overjoyed at this offer. He told Uncle Ng about the good news, but Ng turned sentimental and said he had meaning to adopt Ling as his own son. Ling said he had a father, but Ng laughed and asked him who had his father sold him to: "The man who sold you to me?....Or the one who sold you to him? Who sells a son? A daughter maybe, but not a son" (33). Ling expressed his desire to be rich, but refused Ng's suggestion that he wanted to to own Little Sister. Bitterly, Uncle Ng gave his consent for Ling to work for Crocker, telling him that he would be back. Ling used the gold coin Crocker had given him to purchase Little Sister's company. Little Sister did not seem too happy about the situation and kept the gold coin that Ling hoped she would give back.

In segment six, Ling began working for Crocker and was trained by an Irish maid, Bridey, who was leaving to get married. Ling was secretly resentful of doing "women's work," as Little Sister called it, which is what he hoped to escape from when he left the laundry business. He told himself that the job would just be temporary until he could go seek gold, but having a decent income made him want to stay with Crocker. Throughout this time, he continued to purchase visits with Little Sister. Meanwhile, Crocker used him for odd requests, like having Ling try to trick potential hires into thinking the Chinese were on good terms with Crocker by making him run through the lobby over and over again, thinking people would not notice he was the same person and not several

different Chinese men. He told Ling that he was a "credit to your race," which Little Sister picked apart and told Ling that that was not the compliment he thought it was (44). She wondered sarcastically how he would be able to spend that "credit." Now, back in 1857, Crocker was having labor disputes with the Chinese workers.

In section seven, Ling got in an altercation with some racist white people when he tried to intervene on behalf of a Chinese man being bullied. These men pulled Ling's hair violently. Ling finally decided to give up the traditional long braid known as the "queue" and cut his hair to be shorter, as in the western fashion. Crocker approved and took Ling to get better, more tailored and professional clothes. Little Sister suggested that Crocker could hire or, or that she could live with Ling as his wife. Lying together, Little Sister and Ling tried to envision a future. Little Sister had told him that she was pregnant and that the baby could be his. Ling felt uneasy about being the child's father, of being a father in general, and suggested abortion or another method to end the pregnancy. Little Sister told Ling that she had lied to him, that she was not sold by her father to Ng. Her father had not taken her with him to America but sent for her to make more money for him. She revealed that her father was Ng, something that shocked Ling. Later, Ling confronted Ng, but he discussed the matter as if it were business and not abnormal to sell your daughter into prostitution. Ng and Little Sister had both said it was for the good of their family back home. Ng defended his actions, and he told Ling, "If you'd ever had a family, you'd understand," his last words to Ling since he died months later of either a drug overdose or debts (55). Ng also told Ling that Little Sister was bought by a man; it was implied that she might have been sold to pay Ng's gambling debts. Ling avoided Chinatown after that, and he heard a rumor that Little Sister committed suicide, some said by plunging a chopstick in her heart, others said she died in childbirth. Later, Ling noticed a headline about "The Chinese Question," and he went to a rally people held against the Chinese. Ling, being half white and half Chinese, was able to get through the meeting unnoticed. He was disturbed by what he heard there and the hostility toward the Chinese.

Analysis

The hero is Ah Ling, a young man who came to America when he was just fourteen. Ling grew up in the chaotic environment of sea traders. His mother died when he was an infant, Ling's father, a white man, paid a couple off to raise him. They in turn sent Ling to San Francisco. When Ling arrived in San Francisco, also known among the Chinese as "Gold Mountain," he was quite naive. Indeed, Ling's journey of maturation allows the author (Peter Ho Davies) to trace how the promise of America can blind people.

Ling's motivation to find gold and do it easily fits into the novel's theme of fortune. Here, Ling learns about how to acquire gold is not as easy it looks. Ever focused on wealth and striking it gold in America, Ling was unsatisfied working at Uncle Ng's laundry house, the only attraction being the prostitute Little Sister. He felt the work was degrading. Even though he was infatuated with Little Sister, Ling still left to work for Crocker, fascinated by the larger-than-life, powerful man. Yet he returned to Ng's

several times now that he could finally buy a session with Little Sister. She had previously refused to sleep with him without pay. Little Sister was very business minded and discussed partnering with him to create a new business venture. Little Sister was one of the many people to point out to Ling that even though he felt important around Crocker, his employer was taking advantage of him. Long after Ling became Crocker's manservant, he still did his laundry for him because Crocker liked having him do it, a nod to his fetish with China. It was women's work, as Ling frequently thought of it, but by being close to Crocker, Ling felt powerful in tandem, and he was well paid. Yet Little Sister saw through the cracks in Crocker's support. When he called Ling a "credit to his race," Crocker was giving him a backhanded compliment (44). Little Sister told Ling that it was meaningless because he could not spend the so-called credit. Little Sister also helped Ling stop seeing fortune, meaning wealth, in such simplistic terms. She looked at her prostitution as a commodity. The final conversation she has with Ling devastates him. He knew her father had sold Little Sister into slavery, but Ling did not make the connection that Ng was her father. Ling was horrified, but Little Sister passed it off as a matter of business. Confronting Ng, Ling was shocked that Ng talked about selling his daughter into prostitution was a matter-of-fact way to earn business, nothing personal. Yet Ng told him that Ling would understand the attraction to earning money to send back home if he actually had a family.

The theme of women is shown in Little Sister's storyline. Through his conversations with Little Sister, Ling started to see how women and daughters were often seen as something to be owned by someone and farmed out as labor, especially for low-paying jobs like laundry or in prostitution. Even when Little Sister said she was pregnant and Ling might be the father, Ling tried to back out of it and recommend an abortion. He did not want to own a child, especially not a daughter. Little Sister seemed at times bitter, sad, and practical. She complained to Ling that Chinese men only brought women to America so there would be someone lower than them. The theme of Women ties in with the theme of Ownership here. Ng insulted Ling when he told him that nobody would sell a son, only a daughter. Ng himself wanted to adopt Ling, but Ling refused because he had big ambitions to go far with Crocker. Still, Ng recognized that Ling wanted to own Little Sister. Ling had not seen it quite that way, but it was true. Ultimately, when Ling came back to confront Ng, Little Sister was gone. She was sold to a high-paying customer. Ling was stung by this, but Ng obviously only saw Little Sister as a product that could bring him a profit (likely his gambling debts). At the same time, Ng reminded Ling that he wanted to buy and own Little Sister himself. Ling had not seen himself that way, but Ng's comment had truth to it he had to acknowledge.

Ling's experiences in America display the novel's theme of identity. Ling was singled out by Crocker because he was Chinese. As Ling saw after being employed by Crocker, the man had a taste for the chinoiserie style, an aesthetic style inspired by Chinese art that was found in many wealthy homes. It becomes clear throughout this story that Crocker has something of a fetish for the Chinese. Ling would like to think that he was employed for his good work, and that seemed to be true since Crocker praised him often, but Ling had a unique gift that Crocker could use to his advantage: his Chinese identity. Crocker was able to use Ling's language skills and appearance to help him negotiate with the massive Chinese workforce on his railroads. Later, Ling would reject his Americanized

job and join the railroad line, hoping to be close to his heritage, but in this early part of the story, Ling was still trying to assimilate and be taken seriously as an American. Ling had a special quality about him that allowed him to do this; Ling was biracial and could sometimes pass for white. Cutting off his queue after a traumatic episode of bullying, Ling felt like his journey to becoming an American was more complete, and Crocker noted something similar. He also hoped to lose his accent and become fluent in English. Yet Ling struggled with this something of a gift to be able to live both as a white American and as a Chinese man in whatever way the situation required. Even though he thought this was an advantage at first, later Ling will rethink this ability since it constantly drove him to the point of not knowing who he really was and where he actually belonged. At this point in the story, his identity was unstable because he did not claim it as his own.

This section of the novel also introduces the theme of seeing the elephant, an expression that shifts in meaning throughout the story and is examined thoroughly in the Quotes section of this guide. Ling first heard of this phrase when he was working at Ng's laundry service. It is an expression that stuck with him, and thinking about elephants becomes a preoccupation for him.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is Ling naive?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Ling and Little Sister's views on money and business.

Discussion Question 3

How do the concepts of possession and ownership come up in this section?

Vocabulary

flocked, pendulous, prospecting, brothel, queue, brandish, scathing, insolent, daguerreotype, prodigious, umbrage, punctilious, ballyhoo, filial

Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad: Pages 57 - 100

Summary

Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad picks up again in section 8 in present day (1857) with Ling riding on Crocker's train. At that point, a workforce of ten thousand Chinese men were working for Crocker on the "Celestial Railroad" as they called it, and it was in large part thanks to Ling's influence with Crocker. Now, however, the Chinese workers were striking for equal compensation and benefits as with the white workers. Ling was in an awkward position trying to negotiate and translate between the two groups. Ling longed to tell Crocker that he was half white, but he felt like he never could lest Crocker thought he had misrepresented himself as Chinese. Crocker woke up. The train had paused to take on more water. The train was stopped in Bloomer Cut, a famous cut of mountain where a train could snake through and one track of Crocker's Transcontinental Railroad. Ling wondered about the Chinese workers who had died in a tragic accident in nearby Alta when a sudden avalanche buried them. Ling had heard about them through Crocker, who was amused that the men had been frozen standing up, but Crocker did not know the details, they did not matter to him. Ling reflected on once seeing a dead body come through the laundry on his passage over to America. Ling plead with the captain not to bury the body at sea. The train continued on through Cisco, Utah. As the train moved along, Ling saw the Chinese railroad workers outside watching the train go by.

He thought of Little Sister. He had never seen her again, though he continued to visit prostitutes, never the same girl twice. He heard that "going to see the elephant" was slang for going to a brothel. In particular, he remembered one Irish prostitute who threw him out once she saw he was half Chinese. Ling convinced himself it was Bridey, the Irish woman who had his job before he did, but then he thought maybe he could not tell her apart from other Irish women just like the prostitute could not tell him apart from other Asian men. Crocker had taken him along to a brothel once, one that specialized in Chinese prostitutes. The brothel was managed by a famous whore, Madame Ah Toy. While Crocker visited one of the women, Ling stayed and talked with Madame Ah Toy. She spoke freely, challenging Ling's confidence in his position with Crocker, comparing Ling to the women who were owned by someone else as objects or a "pet" as she called him. She told him that biracial men like him were always trying to be two men. Ling asked about Little Sister, who Madame Ah Toy did not seem to know, and about pregnancy, which she replied that she would never let herself get pregnant. Ling felt awkward around Mrs. Crocker, but she told him that she knew about her husband's infidelities and that she was comforted at least that it was with Chinese women, who she deemed clean and discreet, women with whom he could never fall in love. Returning back to 1857, the train arrived at Summit Tunnel, the location where the striking Chinese workers were stationed. This area is part of the Donner Pass in Donner, California.

In the ninth section, Crocker, his foreman, Strobridge, and a changeman, Kurtz gathered to negotiate with the Chinese workers. Crocker instructed Ling to translate between Crocker's party and the half-dozen Chinese workers. Ling found himself struggling to pacify both parties and often downplayed some of the harshness of each camp's language. One man spoke up in broken English and told Crocker that they were not working to make him fatter, that they wanted money, too. The tunnel they were building (the Summit Tunnel) had then digging but not striking gold, just air. They want to be rich. Crocker then told them that he will not give them food if they do not work. Crocker was flustered and angry; he would not be intimidated, and he asked his men for armed backup.

The tenth section concerns itself with the transformation of Ling's allegiances toward the workers. Back on the train, Ling considered the workers' demands. They did just want more pay; they wanted to be compensated the same as the white workers. The main difference was that the white workers did not pay for lodging and food because it was considered part of their salaries while the Chinese workers had to pay for those benefits. Ling then realized that Chinese men were not hired because they were equal to the task but instead because they were cheaper labor. Ling went outside and watched the workers in their camp. He remembered how they had looked at him, Crocker's manservant, as a kind of phenomenon, a wonder not unlike westerners looked at Chang and Eng, the famous Siamese twins in the traveling Chinese freak show. Ling had met them when Crocker, entranced yet again by the Chinese, dragged him to the show and insisted on going backstage after it was done. Crocker introduced Ling by saying: "Allow me to present my manservant, Ling. Ling, my manservant. Quite a prodigy in his own right" (77). Ling was stunned because he had never been introduced by Crocker before. The twins seemed dismissive and skeptical of Ling, and they said that they had heard of Crocker's so-called "Chinese army." They mock Ling and suggest to Crocker that he should tour Ling around the country by train.

Now, back on the railroad, Ling slipped outside to spend time with the workers. He asked them more about their lives, and they said their lives were about digging. They explained that they were digging from the east and the west to get to the center of the mountain. Some of the men were superstitious about digging one straight line because they said that the devil traveled in straight lines. Their work was dangerous and could include avalanches, falls off the cliff sides, blasts that could rip apart their bodies, landslides, and other hazards. The men invented gods to pray to for protection. Ling asked if they felt proud of their work, and the men seemed indifferent. Ling stood by the tunnel and gazed in. He got back on the train and spoke briefly with Crocker, who assured him of the great achievement of the railroad. In fact, they were near the location of the ill-fated Donner party, the early pioneers who turned to cannibalism and died while trapped trying to go west. Crocker remarked how now, with the railroad, the railroad would save lives and that it was historic. Ling watched him, aware that Crocker seemed older than he appeared, especially drunk.

In the eleventh part, Ling was back on the train. He contemplated spirituality. He had always been affected by stories of the dead, including back to when Lincoln was shot. Ling wondered about the passage of the body after death, how Lincoln's body had

traveled through the country. The next morning, Ling told Crocker he was resigning. Ling said he wanted to resign and work on the line with the Chinese workers. By then the striking Chinese laborers had returned to the job. Crocker thought that Ling was just trying to get a raise, but Ling said that was not it. Ling agreed with him that he treated the men too harshly, but Crocker got Ling to admit he had never treated him badly. He remarked on Ling's pride, something he did not expect him to have. Crocker said, "Talk about seeing the elephant!" (87). He dismissed Ling, and Ling packed up his things and left to join the men on the line. Later, Ling watched Crocker pass him without acknowledging him as if he were invisible. The train pulled away, and Ling was with the workers.

The twelfth section wraps up Ling's narrative. As the years passed, Ling grew his hair back in the queue style, and he considered the question of seeing the elephant, wondering if he had truly seen it all. The workers gradually accepted him. After railroad work died out, Ling was hired as a bone-scraper, meaning he retrieved the bones from Chinese corpses and sent them home to relatives in China so the men would be buried back home, not in foreign America. Ling found the work suited him. Ling eventually made his way back to San Francisco. Over time, Chinese laborers become resented as Americans believed they stole jobs. Even though the country owed its railroads to these workers, the Chinese made enemies among white groups looking for work. He contemplated the last time he saw Little Sister, who was now calling herself Madame Celeste and said she was glad to see him: "Well, if I ain't seen the elephant!" (95). She had a man with her, Sam, and he befriended Sam when they both gambled. She told Ling that she got her name, Little Sister, from the Chinese translation: Mei Mei. She revealed that the baby she was pregnant with did not survive. Now she had children of her own, half white. Ling slept with her one last time, and she joked that the elephant was another name for a penis. They laughed, happy to be together.

Analysis

At this point, Ling has been traveling with Crocker having been employed for him for more than two years. Crocker used Ling as a tool to help him negotiate with striking Chinese workers. Ling was more reflective about Crocker, noting how the man did not seem to really care about the workers. He never knew the specifics of circumstances in which the men died or how they died, such as with the avalanche. This forced Ling to consider who he really was, a search that fits into the novel's theme of identity. In this section, the reader again sees Ling's naïveté. When he and Crocker went a brothel owned by a famous Chinese courtesan, Madame Ah Toy, Ling felt above her in some ways. In her conversation, though, Madame Ah Toy revealed how perceptive she was, provoking Ling to reassess his situation. Madame Toy told him that he was Crocker's pet, just like she was an object to men. This recalls the novel's theme of Ownership. Ling did not quite see it until Madame Toy's comment, but he was indeed an object for Crocker to own. Similarly, the traveling Siamese (conjoined) twins mocked Crocker's who said, "Allow me to present my manservant, Ling. Ling, my manservant. Quite a prodigy in his own right" (77). The twins played up the idea of Ling being a spectacle, something for Crocker to show off. Indeed, Crocker's attitude toward Ling seemed to be

viewing him less as a person and more of something to boast about to others. This ties into the novel's theme of Ownership, too.

Speaking to the theme of identity, Madame Ah Toy was able to clearly see Ling was biracial and told him, "Half-breeds are always trying to be twice other men" (69). Madame Toy's observation is uncanny and is true for Ling, who found himself adrift as both a Chinese and an American whose appearance makes other people co-opt him for whatever they need him to be in the moment. To try to earn as much as a successful white man, Ling would do whatever Crocker asked, even if it was degrading, like a test of strength to demonstrate how capable Chinese workers would be, or running in and out of a building several times to make an impression that Crocker had many Chinese people working for him. Swept up in the possibility of being a part of Crocker's power, Ling would go out of his way to do anything Crocker asked, even if it was humiliating. However, when he met the Chinese workers and tried to intervene on their strike, Ling felt sympathy for them. He realized their demands, mainly to not be forced to pay for food and lodging since the white workers did not have to, were not unreasonable. Moreover, he felt drawn to their spirituality and belief system when they described spiritual protection. Yet one could argue that Ling's decision to abandon Crocker and join the workers was something of an overcompensation as well. Whereas before he would do anything to earn an income worthy of a white worker, Ling now must do the most backbreaking, dangerous work that Chinese Americans were doing. This extreme swing indicates that Ling chose his Chinese identity above all else and doubled down on his commitment.

The story ends with Ling and Little Sister's reunion. This section recalls the theme of names. From early on in his time in America, Ling had wondered what Little Sister's real name was, but she would not tell him, always throwing him off the track or outward denying it. In the final segment of the story, Ling met Little Sister again and found that she was calling herself Mother Celeste now that she ran a brothel of her own. In so doing, Little Sister assumed a name befitting a woman of maturity and business. Her name was no longer a reference to anyone else. Whereas before, "Little Sister" positioned her in relation to another person as their little sister (even though Ling knew she was older than him), here Madame Celeste stands on its own as a name. In fact, Madame Celeste connects her to the celestial bodies in the sky. It is an image that will come up in the next story as Hollywood celebrity Anna May Wong discovers what it means to be a "star," or, if not, another kind of celestial body. Little Sister also revealed the truth. Her name really was "Little Sister," which in Chinese was "Mei Mei." Ling thought he would never be able to find her again because he did not know her real name, but Little Sister said he knew it the whole time, but he did not realize that. Years earlier, Ling had asked Madame Ah Toy if she knew a girl called "Little Sister." Madame Ah Toy's coy response was, "Sure....They're all someone's little sister" (69). The name "Mei Mei" will reappear in two of the other stories in "The Fortunes." First, Anna May Wong took the stage name Anna May but used the Americanized "May" instead of "Mei." In the final story, John and Nola were set to adopt a baby girl named Mei Mei. "Celeste" also appeared as a name an American foster parent couple used for their Chinese daughter. John thought dismissively that it was a stereotypical Chinese name.

In the final pages, Ling might have finally gotten his conclusive answer for what it meant to "see the elephant." Madame Celeste greeted him by saying, "Well, if I ain't seen the elephant!" (95). Especially since leaving Crocker's employment, Ling had puzzled over the expression, never finding one meaning that totally fits. Later, in the last scene, Madame Celeste told Ling that "elephant" was a slang term for a man's penis. The author might have chosen to end the story by wrapping up Ling's mystery of seeing the elephant. Since there is no conclusive meaning behind the term, "seeing the elephant" could be molded to mean whatever someone wanted it to mean. Ling's time in America had been a quest to find gold, but really it was anchored in his quest to understand this expression. Mysterious and in English, the phrase's origin was hard to track down for Ling. He needed to create a meaning of his own for it as he tried to understand what it entailed. In the final scene with Little Sister / Madame Celeste, Ling realized that there was no set meaning. Madame Celeste's joke proved as much. Just as Ling sought to create meaning for the expression, he found meaning in his life among the woman whom he loved and their companionship, even if it was brief. Madame Celeste could finally see their relationship as not being about trading goods. She did not charge him. Their relationship dealt in the currency of respect and love, not in an exchange of currency anymore.

Discussion Question 1

How do Ling's behavior and choices embody Madame Ah Toy's observation that, "Half-breeds are always trying to be twice other men" (69)?

Discussion Question 2

How does Ling's feelings toward his employer, Charles Crocker, change over the story and to what do you attribute the transformation?

Discussion Question 3

Based on Ling's story, what do you interpret to be the meaning of the expression seeing the elephant?

Vocabulary

consternation, celestial, caper, euphemism, prolific, sinuous, bluster, disparity, chicanery, bone scraper

Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese: Pages 101 - 138

Summary

The second story in "The Fortunes" is titled Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese. The story is told in third person limited perspective alternating between events in present tense and prior events in past tense. The story is structured into named (e.g. "Riveting") fragments organized in a mostly linear fashion. Some of the fragments are short, just a paragraph or two, while the strongest stretch to three or four pages. The section opens with the quote, "The truth is always exciting. Speak it, then. / Life is dull without it" by Pearl S. Buck (103).

The story opens with the segment, "Riveting," by describing a young woman in 1926 who helped break ground for Grauman's Chinese Theatre. She starred in a film, "The Thief of Baghdad," with one of the theater's backers, Douglas Fairbanks, two years earlier. The next day after the opening of the theater, Variety said she was a "riveting beauty." She was 21 years old at the time.

In "Fifty Million Frenchmen," the events are now in 1935. Hollywood is still a seat of racism for Asian actors and attitudes. The heroine of this story considers how people loved to laugh at Asian jokes, such as "Fifty Million Chinese Can't Be Wong." The actress Carole Lombard dropped fliers with that joke, a reference to a Broadway musical, around the MGM lot. On a ship bound for China, the heroine entertains guests with jokes about the song.

In "Darkness, Invisible," the heroine bought her first movie ticket at age ten using the tips she earned as a delivery person for her father's laundry business. She lived in Los Angeles. She cut school and walked for miles until she could go to a theater where nobody knew her, only after going many blocks without seeing another Chinese face. She saved the ticket and included it in her scrapbook. She loved the anonymity of the dark theater. When her father found out, he forced her to kneel so he could hit her with a broom. She kept going and went to any theater she could, even Spanish theaters. She forged notes to get out of class, and she was whipped by her father and her school when they found out. Gradually, she became to love not just the anonymity of the theater, but also the actors onscreen. She practiced their expressions in the theater and at home.

The section, "Orientally Yours" takes place back in 1935, the heroine, Anna May Wong, signs autographs for passengers on the ship. She writes "Orientally yours" before her name. A woman clothed in furs asks her to sign her copy of Pearl S. Buck's "The Good Earth," telling Anna that she heard Buck wanted her for the role. Many of the passengers are captivated by Anna, even the Chinese who populate the steerage decks. At night, Anna considers her Chinese name, Wong Liu Tsong, which means

"Frosted Yellow Willow." Her father had once asked her what her stage name, "Anna May," meant, and she told him "Me." Now she is on a ship bound to visit her father in his home village in China, where she has never seen before.

In "Rubbernecks," Anna remembers her father's stories of how white tourists, "rubbernecks," traveled through Chinatown fascinated by Asian culture at the turn of the century. When she was eleven, Anna saw a film crew shooting in the city. She was fascinated by the lead actress, Mae Murray, from whom she later adapted her name, "May." Just two months later, Anna, taller than most girls her age, began to be featured in newspaper advertisements modeling fur coats through a connection she made with a laundry customer. She wished to give the money she earned to her father, but he rejected her, calling her a "disgrace" who did not "know no shame" (110). He also compared her to a whore, saying that he was not a pimp. Anna knew shame, but not from acting, from doing the degrading work in the laundry business. He also hated seeing her put on makeup and scrubbed her face off roughly with a cloth: "Our business is cleaning! How do you think it looks if the laundry girl is dirty?" (110). Anna's mother explained that he never wanted a girl. He wanted a boy, and when Anna was born, he did not come home for days.

The section, "Ten Doors," describes more about Anna's childhood. Because of rules about where laundry services were located, Anna and her family lived one block north of Chinatown, in a neighborhood populated with Mexicans, Irish, and Eastern European immigrants. Anna felt she grew up in both Chinatown and America. She once said, "Everyone comes to Los Angeles to be a star....I was born there, but you could say I still came farther than most" (111).

The section titled "The Role of a Lifetime" concerns itself with when Anna was passed over for the role of a lifetime, O-lan, in the film adaptation of "The Good Earth," for a white actress. It was a humiliating defeat. Everyone always told her that she was perfect for the part, being a Chinese female actress. She knew she would not get the role when they cast a white actor, Paul Muni, as the male lead. Hollywood casting was subject to the Hays Code, which forbade the depiction of interracial relations in films, even if both of the characters were played by white actors wearing yellow face. Anna was told that she was too Chinese by the producer. At parties and in public, Anna brushed it off and made light of the diss, masking her pain. She decided to take the trip to China as a response to the public humiliation. Her father had moved back to China two years ago and now lived with his first wife and son. He was always ashamed of her career, and when she stayed in New York to act in a Broadway play instead of coming home for her mother's funeral, the rift was too much to overcome. She advocated for her younger sister, Mary, also an actress, to be her understudy, but without them both, the show would have to close. Mary went home for the funeral. Anna hoped she and her father could reconcile. She pitched the trip as a documentary, and the Hearst Metrotone News agreed and sent a cameraman to meet her in Shanghai.

The title of the section, "See, See, See" refers to when Anna was nicknamed the C. C. C., "The Curious Chinese Child," by movie crews shooting in Chinatown. At thirteen, she was grouped with a crowd of Chinese extras. She earned seven dollars and fifty

cents. She gave seven dollars to her father, who for once did not beat her with the broom. Later, Anna went to see the movie, but she did not see herself at all. She had invited her friends, but she could not pick out her face among the other Chinese extras. Just three years later, at age fifteen, Anna had her first credited role in a film, "Bits of Life," by Marshall Neilan, who called her, "A credit to your race" (115). Neilan was also her first lover.

The section, "Pre-Code," refers to the restrictions Anna faced in Hollywood. Anna was not often cast in romantic roles even before the restrictive Hays Code because of prejudice in America, in particular the southern states. Every time she was cast in a romantic part, something, such as a scream or even once, the sound of a gong, would interrupt her character from kissing a male character. She played secondary characters, always named something like "Dragon Lady" or "Butterfly," and usually a femme fatale seductress. Her first starring role was in "The Toll of the Sea." Back on the ship, Anna writes in her journal that she had wanted to play O-lan because she was a mother.

In the section, "Critical Reception," reviewers gushed over Anna's performance in "The Toll of the Sea," saying she was "naturally Chinese." It was the first Hollywood feature movie to be shot in Technicolor (117). Nobody thought Technicolor would last, but it did and even made it into popular lexicon. A passenger on the ship referred to a Technicolor sunset.

The section titled "Female Parts" describes Anna's mother. Anna's mother rarely left their house in Los Angeles. Anna thought she was scared to go out, but she later thought it was because respectable wives were not supposed to show themselves in public. Her mother had married Anna's father when she was sixteen; he was nearly thirty years older than her. After her mother's death, Anna took care of her brother, seventeen years her junior. Women were a minority to men in Chinatown. One time her mother watched her practice acting at home in the mirror. When her mother had been killed by a car, Anna was in disbelief, wondering why her mother had been in the street in the first place. She blamed her father for keeping her locked away. Maybe, Anna thought, if her mother had gone out more, she would know to look out for cars.

The segment, "Ancestor Worship," explains Anna's father's background. Anna's father was born in a gold camp in America. Anna liked to think her grandfather had come to America to find gold just like she sought fame. But her father corrected her, saying her grandfather was a merchant, not a gold digger. He said Leland Stanford, the industrial tycoon, started his business in the same camp. Now, though, it was a ghost town.

"The Gold Cure" segment describes a treatment Anna had when she was a child. Anna was usually never sea sick, but that night she feels dizzy staring at the big, open, starry sky. When she was in her teens, Anna had a nervous breakdown that left her prone to depression the rest of her life. Once, when she was just a child, a Chinese doctor scratched a gold coin up and down her arm until she bled. This was to put gold in her blood to cure her. What really cured her was her father finally accepting her career choice. Her father tried to marry her off, but no Chinese man would have her. Her mother said that perhaps marriage was not her fortune. Anna's father finally agreed to

let Anna appear in "The Thief of Baghdad" when Douglas Fairbanks, an actor, director, and producer, paid him a visit at the laundry. He said he would look after her. Anna later slept with Fairbanks.

The section "$" addresses Anna's business prowess. Anna was very business minded, always being sure she was paid for appearances. She sent out her clothes to another laundry, which frustrated her father. He would not take her money, but he did allow her to pay for her siblings' educations. The only exception was that she would not pay for her half brother's education because he had told their father to stop Anna from disgracing their family with her acting. Her mother sent him an advertisement Anna appeared in, he wrote back saying he wanted to order the watch advertised on the other side of the newspaper. Anna resented him and that her family sent money back to her father's first wife and children in China. Now, Anna packed a Hamilton Tonneau white gold watch to give to her half brother.

In the section, "The High Hat," Anna styled herself as a flapper with signature bobbed hair. Her second lover was a man twenty five years her senior, the director Tod Browning. He supplied her with money, and she called him "Daddy." She then moved onto Douglas Fairbanks, twenty two years older than her and extremely wealthy. She did not consider herself a gold digger, partly because she did not want to be married.

In the section "Siamese," Tod Browning told people that Anna did not want to be only famous: "She wanted to be white. I told her she was going to have to settle for being famous for being Chinese" (125). Even still, Anna was passed over for Chinese roles, such as a Siamese twins role that was later shared by the two Hilton daughters, Daisy and Violet.

The section "Scrapes" describes Anna's experiences with pregnancy. Anna became pregnant through sleeping with Browning. She got pills for an abortion—a "flusher"—from a whore in Chinatown. Anna seemed to want to be a mother, though, later appreciating the sound of children playing on the ship.

In the section, "Queue," Anna's earliest memory was seeing her father cut off his queue, the long braid that was traditional for Chinese men. He did it because the 1911 revolution no longer required men to wear their hair as a queue. She wore braids herself when she was a girl. When she was a child, her father would make her go to an after school program to learn Chinese. She skipped it often.

The section titled "Costars" details Anna's struggles to find a male Asian costar. There were no famous Asian actors at the time, which made it hard for Anna to find lead roles. Instead, she acted in many films with famous white actors of the day, including Orson Welles, Laurence Olivier, and Lon Chaney. She also frequently mixed with the artistic crowds of the day, meeting Sinclair Lewis, Zora Neale Hurston, and Somerset Maugham. The press speculated that she was romantically involved with many celebrities, men and women. The ban on interracial marriages in California prevented her from marrying a white man, but at the same time she did not want to marry a man of her race. This made her the perfect mistress.

The section "Truth and Beauty" focuses on Anna's tendency to lie to the press. There was so much speculation and interest in Anna's love life that she sometimes started each press conference by saying, "It's not true!", which became her catchphrase later on (129). Fans would chant her name just to hear her say it. She would tell reporters that she had a lot in common with them because "My family business was dirty laundry too" (129).

The section, "The Foolish Things," is set on the last night on board the ship. The passengers ask Anna to sing for them. They request "These Foolish Things," a song said to have been written for her by Eric Maschwitz, a screenwriter and lyricist and Anna's former lover. She says she could not quite recall the words, a lie. The lyrics are tender but quite intimate. She sings "Half-Caste Woman" by Noel Coward instead, a song she often sings in cabaret.

The section, "Abroad," details Anna's previous trip abroad. The last time her career was stalled, Anna took another trip, to Europe. The trip helped make her. Her eyes were opened to Europe's opportunities, and she starred in her first role where she kissed a man on screen. She loved Europe. She said she could find "absolutely no race prejudice there" (131). She was caught on camera kissing the famous German actress, Marlene Dietrich. She was a rarity as there were very few Chinese in Europe at the time. Her haircut became famous, known as the "Wong haircut," and her skin the "Wong complexion," both of which women emulated. The Europeans found her exotic both as Chinese and as American. American reporters were mesmerized by her newfound British accent. This led to more film roles in "talkies," or films with sound, as they felt she lost her "Chinese" accent. She lied about her age often.

In the section, "Newsreel," Anna meets her cameraman in Shanghai. He tells her his name was also "Wong." He tells Anna to call him "Newsreel," since people call him "Newsreel Wong." Anna privately thinks it is strange that a cameraman had a stage name, but she knows it is better than "Phil Ming," the tongue-in-cheek nickname the grips had for her friend, cameraman James Wong Howe. At her first interview, Anna was asked about her relationship status. She clarified that she was single, saying, "A flower need not love, but only be loved," one of her lines from the film, "Daughter of the Dragon."

In the section, "Native," Anna's language skills are addressed. Anna only spoke Cantonese, not Mandarin or Shanghainese, so she has a translator accompany her. Newsreel films Anna at famous Shanghai landmarks and attractions. Anna sees more Chinese people than she ever has in her life. It makes her think of her anonymity as an extra when she was a child. Now, she is glad her expensive, stylish clothes help her stand out. Still, Anna buys traditional clothes and tells the camera she was going native. She blends in better after that but is still lost when people try to talk to her in Mandarin.

In the section, "Life and Art," although she is initially well received by the Chinese press, Anna is criticized by the Nationalist critics for her portrayal of stereotypical Chinese characters, in particular a prostitute in "Shanghai Express." At a film banquet, Anna is called "Shameless...Lewd. A disgrace to Chinese womanhood. A yankee puppet" (136).

Anna explains they were the only roles she could get, but saying it was just acting does not measure up with having a cameraman on her all the time. Anna tries to tell them about how she turned down a role of a seductress in "The Good Earth." Her sister, Mary, took the role instead.

In the segment titled, "Spirit Away," a tour guide at the Ming tombs outside Peking tells Anna to throw a rock on the curved back of a stone elephant for good luck. Newsreel tells her it was actually for fertility.

Analysis

The second part of the "The Fortunes" tells the story of Anna May Wong, the first famous Chinese American actress. The story is structured into small, titled fragments. The way that the story is framed suggests that what the reader reads is part of a biography or profile of Anna concentrating in particular on her documentary about going to see her father in China.

Anna struggled with her celebrity status and, in particular, the racist casting of the day. Anna's difficulties are indicative of the novel's theme of Identity. Anna realized that her draw was she was a Chinese actress, a talented one with a charming, witty personality onscreen and off. This helped her stay in the public image, especially as she was notoriously deceptive about sharing her feelings with the press and sometimes downplaying her pain. Anna set fashion trends around the world, such as women adopting her hairstyle and, in Europe, painting their face to get her complexion. She was given lead roles in famous films of the day. Yet Anna could not totally break through the restrictions of her time. Many white actors and actresses played Asian characters. One of the main obstacles was the Hays Code, which regulated Hollywood casting so that an interracial couple could not be depicted onscreen. Since there were no male Chinese American actors at Anna's level, she was passed over for these roles since she would violate the code if she was the female character in a couple with a male character who could only be played by a white male actor since there were no Chinese male actors in Hollywood. For Anna, her identity was so tightly regulated and boxed into her ethnicity. She also failed to crossover into portraying white female characters, too.

The greatest snub of Anna's career was losing the lead part of O-lan in the film adaptation of "The Good Earth" to a white actress, Luise Rainer, who later went on to win the Academy Award for her performance. This casting decision haunted Anna and was a public humiliation. Years later, she will be remembered for this disappointment. The casting snub fit into the obstacles Anna faced because of her identity. She was praised for looking exotic and was forced into playing stereotyped roles, like that of the Chinese seductress or mistress. Anna was happy to get those roles, but when she was in China, she received a lot of pushback from Chinese Nationalist critics who accused her of smearing China's name and playing into the stereotypes about Chinese women being whores: "Shameless...Lewd. A disgrace to Chinese womanhood. A yankee puppet" she is called (136). Anna argued that those were the only roles available, that she had even turned down a bit part in "The Good Earth," but it did not make a

difference. Anna would have thought they would be proud of her ability to break through and act no matter what. She was disappointed to learn the critics did not feel that way. Again, Anna struggled to define her identity for herself, something that she could not quite do.

The rejection also brought to mind Anna's troubled relationship with her father, a difficult part of her life that reflected attitudes about Chinese women. Her father, a Chinese man who had moved to Los Angeles and set up a successful laundry business, was very controlling. Like the critics, he wanted to define his daughter's image as pristine and innocent. He felt Anna brought shame to her family and herself, ever mindful of Anna's ability to be married off. Mr. Wong even scrubbed makeup off her face until her skin was raw because he thought it made her look like a prostitute. Here, the novel's theme of Women is explored. Anna wanted to be famous and wanted to act out of a genuine love for the art, but she was reduced to taking roles that, while career making, played up Western fantasies of Asian women as exotic, something to fetishize over. Thus, she was branded into this image of the Chinese seductress. Mr. Wong's behavior toward Anna demonstrates the difficulty Chinese women faced. Anna's mother admitted that she blamed herself for having a girl. Mr. Wong wanted a boy, and when Anna was born he did not come home for days. He all but disowned Anna, especially after she did not come home for her mother's funeral. Anna was disobedient from her earliest days, proving to her father that he could not control her as if she were something he owned and could use as a commodity. The irony, of course, was that Anna was very successful as an actress and offered to send money home to her father. Once she had her first part on film as a child, she gave most of her paycheck to her father, who for once did not beat her. Anna demonstrated her earning potential in that way.

The theme of Names is also present in this part. Anna adopted her stage name of "Anna May Wong." Her given name was "Wong Liu Tsong," which means "Frosted Yellow Willow." The title of this part is, "Your Name in Chinese," a phrase that will reappear later in Anna's story. In this section, Anna met the cameraman assigned to her documentary, a Chinese man called "Newsreel Wong." Both bonded over their shared last name, though Newsreel told her that it was one of the most common last names in China. Anna was familiar with different racist jokes that played on the last name "Wong." She will think of these over the course of the story.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the factors that hold Anna back from getting better parts?

Discussion Question 2

How would you characterize Anna's relationship with her father?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss how Anna's feeling of "anonymity" compares in America and in China.

Vocabulary

rivet, pneumonic, forge, vogue (n), snub, notoriety, reconciliation, matinee, sardonically, exquisite, flapper, anti-miscegenation, conciliatory, heft

Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese: Pages 139 - 176

Summary

The section, "Dan," takes place in Shanghai, where Anna meets the Chinese actress Butterfly Wu, who calls herself the "Empress of Cinema" (139). She also meets Mei Lanfang, a famous Chinese actor who plays female roles. Later, Wu was said to laugh when her rival, Ruah Lingyu, committed suicide supposedly because of vicious coverage of her unhappy love life in the press.

The section, "Intermission," is set in an open-air cinema. At the cinema, Newsreel tries to translate the Mandarin for Anna, but they are scolded. Anna says they should leave at intermission.

In the section, "Footage," Anna asks Newsreel more about filming, and he reveals that he never sees the footage but rather sends it off to editors. Anna is somewhat put off by not being able to see herself on film.

"Make Love to the Camera" explores Anna's growing relationship with Newsreel. Anna flirts with Newsreel until they decide to sleep together. He tells her that he has never seen any of her films. He is her first Chinese lover.

The section, "Marlene," refers to Marlene Dietrich, the first woman Anna ever slept with. When Anna told her this, Marlene said it was her first time with a Chinese person. They decided to keep their affair secret. Marlene was not as bothered as Anna when rumors got out that they were involved. Anna wondered later if the lesbian rumors were why she could not find marriage.

In the section, "Annas," Anna hears that there are whores back in Chinatown who fashioned themselves after her and called themselves some variation on her name, Anna May Wong. One time, a man and his friend stopped Anna because they thought she was one of the Anna knockoffs. Anna asks Newsreel to take her to the side of town where prostitutes do business. Anna thinks, wryly, that she is famous for playing one, so she should do her research. When they get to the neighborhood, Anna notes that there are so many foreigners and so many white prostitutes. Newsreel tells her they are Russians and that they are popular with Chinese men.

In the vignette, "Dim Sum," Anna forgets that a microphone is on and accidentally insults the delegation form Hong Kong. Newsreel has to hail her a cab so they can get away from the angry crowd, who had shout horrible names at her. Anna visits with her friend, an actor who costarred with her, Warner Oland. He played the part of her father, Fu Manchu, in the film "Daughter of the Dragon." He still called her his daughter. Oland was the star of the Charlie Chan series, playing the titular role even though he was a

white actor. Anna hopes he could put in a good word for her with the authorities while she is visiting her father. Oland is known for being a drunk and fills his tea cup from a flask while they meet for dim sum. He discusses film gossip with Anna. Oland lets her complain about the casting choice for "The Good Earth." Oland thinks that the actress cast in the lead role will win an Academy Award. Anna says that it should be her award, but Oland tells her that the white actress will win for acting Chinese whereas Anna is Chinese so it would not be as big a deal or award worthy. Anna tells him that he is a star, but he says they do not cast stars in yellow face and that so many European actors are hired to play those parts. He tells her that stars do not act, they play themselves, such as Gable is Gable.

The section, "Celestial Body," refers to how Anna thinks that she is neither a star nor an actress, but rather something in between instead. She feels confused over who she is supposed to represent; perhaps she is expected to represent all of the Chinese people. If she is not a star, she has to be some other kind of celestial body, like a moon, she wonders.

The section titled, "Yellowface," explains more about how white actors played Asian characters in Anna's time. Anna tells Newsreel about some of the truths of the industry, how white actors who played Asian characters had to wear sticky tape to make their eyes slant. Newsreel remarks how when Anna stood next to a white actor, she made him Chinese. He tells her that she was the actors' yellow face. Anna's friend Jimmie once told her that the Chinese were responsible for cinema because a railroad tycoon, Leland Stanford, had hired Eadweard Muybridge to make a photographic study of horses running. Muybridge pioneered the science of chronophotography, which influenced Thomas Edison's kinetoscope, leading to the founding of cinema. Jimmie said that without Stanford, there would be no cinema, but without the Chinese-built railroad that made him rich, Stanford would not have hired Muybridge. Thus, without the Chinese, there would be no cinema.

In the section, "China City," Anna's father had moved back home to China two years earlier after Old Chinatown was demolished for Union Station. Anna tried to persuade him to stay and could not help but feel abandoned. She told him about the new China City that was being created in Los Angeles, but he did not see why he would move there when he could go home for the real thing. His parting words to her were, "Don't worry....This way you won't have to come to my funeral," a reference to how she did not come home for her mother's funeral because she was in a Broadway play (153).

The section, "Face," deals with Anna's dreams that she has no face the night before she sees her father. Anna thinks of her character in the "Daughter of the Dragon," who threatened to disfigure her rival, the white heroine. She remembers how the actor Vincent Price had once told her that villains were the best parts because it felt so good to be bad.

In the section, "Rails," Newsreel points out the railroad. When they are on the trail, Newsreel tells her that the railroad they are on was laid by the same Chinese workers who had laid the transcontinental railroad in America. Anna thinks about how the train

and its sounds remind her of movies. Newsreel teases her that she is mixing up life with the movies. Anna tells him that, "It's different....My life is movies" (155).

The section, "Home," refers to Anna's visit to her father's home village. Anna embraces her father when he comes to meet her, but the film does not take so they have to do it again. Her father asks of Mary and says that she is most like their mother. Mary is clearly still his favorite daughter. Anna introduces her father and Newsreel, who shares the same last name. She stays for ten days. She gives the watch to her half brother. Her father asks her to stay and says he intends to marry her off, perhaps to Newsreel, he suggests. Here in the village, her father is looked on as a king having made so much money through his laundry business in America. Anna briefly considers moving here. He asks her if she is homesick, and she admits that she is. Their emotional conversation is caught on camera. At the train station, Anna later apologizes to Newsreel about her father's suggestion that she marry him, but then Anna realizes he was married. She tells him it was no wonder he thought she was a slut.

In the section, "Public," Anna and Newsreel are in Shanghai again. Anna invites Newsreel to accompany her to the famous Public Garden in the International Settlement. She wants to see the English lawn, which is supposed to be pristine, and the sign, "NO DOGS OR CHINESE," beside it. She wants to get a shot of her flaunting beside the sign. No footage of the trip exists, if it even took place.

In the section, "Wong," Anna jokes about her last name. When they part at the docks, Anna and Newsreel joke about their last name, Wong, the turn on so many jokes, like "Wong time, Wong place." Anna takes Newsreel's pocket square. As the ship pulled out, she calls after him, saying, "Fifty million Chinese can't be Wong!" (160).

In the section, "Half-Caste Woman," Anna sings for the passengers the first night they are on the ship back to America. Later, Anna wonders what it would be like to jump overboard. She considers her life before deciding that she had been spurned by her country and spurned by a man. She will not kill herself for either.

The section, "Gong," describes the turbulent trip back to America. It is a rocky voyage at sea. It storms for four days straight. Anna spends the time in bed, feeling the strange weightless sensation each time the boat rose on a wave. The dinner gong summons her out each night.

The section, "Home Again," finds Anna's ship returning to America. As the Hoover ship travels to port in San Francisco, Anna considers Angel Island, where many Chinese had been detained over the years, some set back only having seen Gold Mountain (San Francisco) but never touched it.

The section, "Dreams," illustrates how Anna's celebrity fades over time. Over her career, Anna would go see her own movies in theaters. Anna liked to sit in the front by the organ and watch the audience's reaction when they saw she was in attendance. However, as time went on and her parts in movies got smaller, fewer and fewer people noticed her. In 1936, she went to see Leni Riefenstahl, a German actress and director of

"Triumph of the Will," a propaganda movie for the Nazis. She had been friends with Anna when she went to Europe. Anna envied Leni's patriotism.

The section titled, "And the Winner Is..." describes the early Oscars ceremonies. Luise Rainer won the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1936 for "The Great Ziegfeld" and in 1937 for "The Good Earth." Rainer stayed home in her pajamas the second time because she did not think she would win. Someone called her after her win was announced, and she came to the ceremony in her pajamas. Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the Chinese Nationalist leader, said she could not believe that Rainer was not Chinese. The Rape of Nanking took place between 1936 and 1937.

"Bloody Saturday" addresses the trauma back home in China. Newsreel would become famous for taking one of the most famous photographs of the 1937 bombing of Shanghai. The picture is of a crying baby, bloodied, in the bombed ruins of the railroad station. When Life magazine reprinted it in October, it was estimated that 140 million people will have seen the picture. Later, it will be credited as helping to turning Western public opinion against Japan. Some later said that the picture was staged or manipulated. The fate of the orphan baby, called a "warphan" by childless Madame Chiange, is unknown (167). The next year, MGM releases "Too Hot to Handle," a film about a newsreel cameraman stationed in China who fakes footage of an aerial attack. The movie starred actors Clark Gable and Myrna Loy.

The section, "Fathers," describes Anna's father as he ages and dies. Anna's friend, Warner, died after making his eighteenth Charlie Chan movie. He went on a bender and ended up in his native Sweden where he died of pneumonia. Anna's father lived in China only one more year after Anna's visit. He was called home to Los Angeles after the Japanese invade China. He will die in 1949. Anna buried him with her mother. Sometimes Anna would go to the waiting room at Union Station and think of her childhood growing up there when it was Old Chinatown. As time passed, Anna's affair with Douglas Ullman fizzled out. He had called her "Sum Ting Wong" while critic Walter Benjamin said that her name unfolded like "a moon-filled blossom in a cup of tea" (168). The character Charlie Chan endured, though, with a new yellow face actor, Sidney Toler, taking the role.

The section, "The Understudy," focuses on Anna's sister. In 1940, Anna's younger sister Mary hung herself. Rumors said that it was because of her stalled acting career. Anna thought she always wanted her roles, but her father said she always wanted to be her, Anna. Her father said he would never forgive her for encouraging her, and Anna agreed. Anna remembered how her sister had taken her part by going home to their mother's funeral when she was on Broadway. Mary once asked Anna how she could act if she had to sneeze or cough or thought she might break character when she was supposed to be acting. Anna told her that she took it one second at a time. Anna suddenly remembered that Mary had suspected their mother might have committed suicide and wondered why she would.

The final section is titled, "Exclusion." After her trip, Anna starts to take "better" parts in lesser movies. China was an ally by then. She appeared at fundraisers and donated her

income for China relief. On New Year's in 1941, standing beneath a sign saying, YOUR NAME IN CHINESE 10¢, she would give names to tourists while a calligrapher wrote them in Chinese. Someone asked her what her name meant. She said, "Golden Peach" (172). Anna became a public figure in America, honored for her heritage, but when Madame Chiang came to America in 1943, Anna was not invited to the benefit rally Hollywood Bowl, which 30,000 attended, including famous actors and actresses. Anna saw it as a snub, but she did not complain. She went to a restaurant in Chinatown instead. She was a regular there, and she ordered chop suey, an American Chinese dish.

Anna died in 1961 at age 56. She was looking forward to her comeback in the role of Madame Liang in "Flower Dream Son." She never married and was childless, though she played a mother on screen and her younger brother, Richard, lived with her. She had seen Newsreel one more time, in September 1945, when he took a photograph of her next to Madame Chiang reading a newsreel account of Japan's surrender. Madame Chiang stayed in America after her husband died. James Wong Howe, a cinematographer, was the first Chinese American to win an Academy Award. He had told her once that "Life's a heckuva lot simpler behind the camera" (174).

Anna believed that they were now known as "Chinese American" thanks to the revolution in China. America begrudgingly accepted them, but, more important, the triumph of communism over General Chiang's American-backed government meant that China was now closed to them. Anna believed that in the newsreel, she could see Madame Chiang emulate some of her characteristics and mannerisms that she saw on Anna onscreen. '"Why that's me,' she'll think. 'There I am after all'" (175). This closes Anna's story.

Analysis

Anna May Wong's story continues in the second part of "The Fortunes."

Anna's trip to see her father is the core of her story. As a testament to her strained relationship with her father, Anna's staged dramatic reunion with him had to be reshot again and again. Anna stayed for ten days. Her experience in the village, Anna was seen as a marvel and celebrity. She surprised herself by feeling at home there. At a wedding, Anna's father explained his good reputation in the village. He said that is what the Chinese do, "We go to Gold Mountain, get wealthy, come home. It doesn't matter how you make money. I tell them I was a big-shot merchant, not a laundryman. There I was nothing, here I live like a king" (157). This sentiment echoes Little Sister's practical thoughts on becoming rich, that it did not matter how you earned gold or became rich. The important thing was that you did it. Over the four stories of "The Fortunes," acquiring wealth taps into the novel's theme of Fortune. For Mr. Wong, making a fortune was important to be respected back home. He situates his identity in relation to a narrative he rewrites. In his narrative, he was a merchant, not a lowly laundryman cleaning and pressing the clothes of people who could afford to outsource the work to a man who was invisible. As Mr. Wong put it, "There I was nothing, here I live like a king"

(157). Earning a fortune was first and foremost in Mr. Wong's mind. Mr. Wong asked her to stay. Mr. Wong also told Anna he hoped to marry her off to a Chinese man, even suggesting Newsreel as a candidate. Earlier, her mother had said it might not have been her fortune to marry. If she stayed in China, Anna would buck Hollywood, which had rejected her. But she concluded, "There, she thinks, I'm still a star, if a little tarnished; here I'm a daughter" (157). In Hollywood, Anna still had her fame. In China, her accomplishments would be forgotten and she would slip back into her identity reduced to being a daughter. Anna chose to go back to America instead.

The final segments of Anna's story detail her life after returning home to America. As white actors and actresses saw their careers blossom, Anna became more selective about which parts to take. Her sister, Mary, committed suicide. Anna remembered the conversation she had with her once about keeping one's composure while acting. Anna's advice was to just focus on each second until you got to the end of the scene. "That's acting, darling. That's art. It's why what's unbearable in life–loss, heartache, despair—is bearable on the screen: because we know the picture will end," she told her sister (170). This sentiment hit on a recurring theme in Anna's life and especially the trip to China; life and the movies were often interchangeable for Anna who, after all, pitched a documentary about her trip to see her father in China. She did tell Newsreel once, "It's different....My life is movies" when he told her she was mixing up life with movies (155). Indeed, her good friend, Warner Oland, told her that she was a star and that stars do not act, but play themselves. Anna saw this as meaning that the parts she played, often seductresses or mistresses, meant she was playing herself. This helped Anna reevaluate her career when she returned to America and started being more selective about what parts she played. For Anna, though, the magic of film was that it offered people a way to live out the messier parts of life, like sorrow and despair, heartbreak and loss, on screen through the actors and actresses depicting the story. Cinema, then, offered a cathartic experience since the audience could lose live through the characters on screen, whose troubles would have a definite end. Mary's death highlighted the suspicion Mary had that their mother committed suicide throwing herself in front of a car.

A new figure on the international radar was Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, who was the wife of the Chinese Nationalist leader, General Chiang. The Madame was known for her diplomacy, but she notably boxed Anna out of most events, including huge Hollywood rallies for China, which had by then become an ally of America. Anna was often brought out to headline benefits. On New Year's in 1941, Anna stood beneath a sign that read YOUR NAME IN CHINESE 10¢, where she would invent Chinese names for people with a Chinese calligrapher there to write out the characters. The title of this second part of "The Fortunes" is "Your Name in Chinese." Anna's journey from Wong Liu Tsong to Anna May Wong is a circle. Anna initially shed her Chinese name to take an Americanized stage name, one that seemed to do her no measurable good. It did not make it easier for Americans to see her as one of them. The philosopher Walter Benjamin had said her name unfolded like "a moon-filled blossom in a cup of tea," though he mistook it to be Anne May Wong (168). Benjamin's observation encapsulates the way even with her first two name being Westernized, Anna was still ultimately seen as a foreigner with the inclusion of her last name. Yet in the final pages, she leaned on the novelty Americans had for Chinese names, even though she made them up, like

"Lotus Moon, Lucky Flower, Sage Tiger," her calligrapher teasing her with, "Are you naming people or restaurants?" (172). Anna seemed to recognize the irony that at that point, Americans would not know the difference. This episode contributes to the novel's theme of Names.

In the final pages, Anna realized that the closing of China made her and her peers "Chinese American," not necessarily America's embrace of them. Even though Anna was denied a close relationship with Madame Chiang, Anna saw that in her gestures caught on film, Madame Chiang seemed to be mimicking some of Anna's signature expressions and mannerisms. Anna concluded that Madame Chiang learned how to act American because of watching Anna in films. "Why, that's me....There I am after all," Anna thought (175).

It is notable that Newsreel became well known for a famous picture he took of a baby, bloody and crying, in the destroyed ruins of the Shanghai rail station after it was bombed in 1937. When the photograph was reprinted by Life magazine that October, it was estimated that it had been seen by more than 140 million people. The photograph was eventually credited for turning Western opinion against Japan. Yet some alleged that it was fabricated or staged. The fate of the baby, the "warphan" according to Madame Chiang, remains unknown (167). The orphan echoes other characters who are orphans in "The Fortunes," such as Ling, Vincent Chin, and the Chinese baby girl adoption service. The idea of being parentless contributes to both the orphans' sense of identity as well as the possibility that they could be purchased as a form of ownership.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mr. Wong's idea of fortune compare to those of other characters in "The Fortunes"?

Discussion Question 2

How does Anna's career fit into Warner Oland's theory that the stars do not play characters but play themselves?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss how Anna's name helps or hinders her career.

Vocabulary

dubious, gallantry, loftily, coif, stricken, ruefully, gong, detained, filigree, froth, aerial, vacated, unrequited, ticker tape

Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant: Pages 177 - 204

Summary

Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant is told in the first person voice of an unnamed narrator. The story is presented as a monologue of sorts, and the narrator frequently addresses the reader. The section opens with the quote, "There was funky Billie Chin and little Sammy Chong..." from "Kung Fu Fighting" by the singer Carl Douglas.

The events of the story are anchored in the historic 1982 murder of twenty-seven year-old Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man who was beaten into a coma by a worker of the nearby Chrysler plant in a Detroit suburb and his stepson. The narrator situates his story as having taken place nearly three decades later, meaning his present day is between 2002 and 2012. He fully expects the reader to not be familiar with the crime, or if so, only in passing. Throughout the story, he will say things such as, "If you remember at all, if you were around in the eighties, say, what you remember is a Chinese guy being beaten to death in Detroit by two white auto workers who mistook him for a Japanese" (179-180). The narrator grapples with this legacy and talks about how he avoided any participation in memorials or commemorations. He reveals his connection to that crime: he was Vincent's friend who was with him that night. The narrator clarifies that he and Vincent were with white friends at a strip club and muses about how the criminals did not know if Vincent was Chinese or Japanese and that he might not have known, either.

The narrator then goes into more detail about Vincent's life, alternately correcting misconceptions and introducing his own. Vincent was at a strip club because it was his bachelor's party. He had liked strip clubs, and this was supposed to be his last time before he got married and would quit. The narrator was working on earning his CPA at the time. The narrator seems to want to erase the image everyone applied to Vincent, that he was "a model citizen of the model minority. Saint and stereotype" but really, he had a taste for strip clubs and was ready with fifty smoothed-out singles to spend that night (181). Later, he would be turned into a martyr for his generation. The narrator reflects on his own ambiguity. Could he have saved Vincent? Should he have died along with him? Was he even his friend since he ran away from the crime?

He explores the differences between the two friends. Vincent had been born in China and was adopted whereas his family was from Taiwan. Vincent and his family lived in Highland Park, a predominantly white part of the Detroit area. He became friends with the narrator in high school when he moved out to the suburb Oak Park, where the narrator had been living with his father. His father owned a grocery store in Chinatown but decided to invest in an electronics business that was more successful. Vincent was a successful track athlete in high school, an irony the narrator notes given that later,

Vincent could not outrun the criminals. He reflects on Vincent's name, which means "winner."

The initial ruling was that the father, Evans, and his stepson, Pitts, pleaded manslaughter on the basis that the victim, Vincent, had thrown the first punch. They got away with probation and $3,000 in fines each plus court costs. The judge had been in a Japanese POW camp during World War II. Chinese people could not testify against whites at that time.

Vincent had been the one to tell the narrator to run, only he had said "Scram" in English. He ran out of the strip club and through the neighborhood, but he when he ran back, Vincent's head had been severely injured by a baseball bat. The narrator cradled his head. Before he slipped into a coma, Vincent said "It's not fair" in Chinese (186). A blow to Vincent's chest broke a jade green elephant charm his mother had given him to wear. Vincent lingered on life support for four days before his mother took him off to allow him to die.

At the funeral, the narrator could not look at Vincent's mother or his late fiancee, Vicki. The narrator remembers Mrs. Lily Chin, Vincent's mother. Lily went on to be a symbol in the Asian American civil rights movement that grew out of Vincent's murder. She was like a second mother to the narrator, who in fact was motherless after his mother died of cancer when he was a child. Lily had been from Canton, China, and came to America to marry a Chinese American man. They could not have kids. It took ten years before they could adopt Vincent from Hong Kong, and by that time they were older parents. Vincent always resented his parents' hard work ethic because he felt like they wasted their lives in his father's laundry business and never had any fun.

After Vincent's death, a group of Asian Americans created an activism group, the American Citizens for Justice (ACJ). Together they helped Lily reopen the case. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino, they were journalists, lawyers, church leaders, and prominent local business leaders. Their coming together marked the beginning of a pan-Asian political movement in America. They held their first meetings in the Gold Star restaurant where Vincent had worked. The narrator attended but kept quiet, just observing how people described the event as if they had been there, and their accounts did not match up with his witnessing the crime. Lily said she wanted justice for Vincent, but it was clear that attendants wanted justice for the hardship they had endured, too. At the restaurant, the narrator watched the koi fish swim in their tank. They were supposedly good luck, at least better luck than the other fish, like the bass and tilapia, that were destined to be cooked.

The group pursued reopening the case and made it into a federal case. The advocates started to aggressively reframe the murder as a hate crime. One of the main motivations assigned to the defendants were frustration with the competition for Japanese cars. Evans, the father, was working at Detroit's Chrysler plant. He was a superintendent there when Pitts was laid off. People believed he had animosity toward the Japanese for stealing jobs in the auto industry. Lacey, a stripper at the club, believed it was a racial charged murder. Evans tried to claim that Vincent was the racist one since he

supposedly tipped a black stripper poorly. The narrator believes that maybe strip clubs make all men racist. He thought about Lacey, an unremarkable white woman, often. She later testified in the case on Chin's behalf, but the defense tried to discredit her given her occupation.

The narrator reflects on how the worst part of racism is that sometimes people might be right, that sometimes the stereotype might be true. The narrator admits he contemplates whether or not Vincent's murder would have been any less of a hate crime if Vincent actually were Japanese. Part of what had made the case so powerful was Evans' assumption, shared by many Americans (and, he admits, even some Chinese Americans), that Vincent was from one country instead of another because all Asians looked the same to him.

The narrator considers Vincent's words that set Evans off: "I'm not a motherfucker" (193). The word "motherfucker" bothered Vincent since family was important to him and the implication behind that word crossed the line. Vincent knew nothing about his birth parents, and his mother and father meant the world to him. His adopted father had died just a year ago before the crime.

He meditates about whether or not he was Vincent's friend after all. Even though he was his friend, he did not always like him. With Vincent's confidence, good looks, and upcoming marriage, the narrator felt overshadowed. Plus, he followed Vincent's advice to "scram." What kind of friend was he if he abandoned Vincent in such a hostile situation? He considers the question: "He was my friend. Bud did I like him, or was I just like him?" (195).

In the reopened case, Evans was supposed to serve 25 years under the new federal case, but it was later repealed based on questions about Lacey's testimony. She was unreliable, the defendants said, and Vincent and other witnesses' testimony was challenged too on the basis of a possible bias since they had a Chinese American lawyer. The federal conviction was overturned on an appeal. Evans was supposed to pay restitution after a civil suit, but he did not.

After the case, Lily was so distraught that she left America to move back to China. She lived there for twenty years but came back to America for cancer treatment and died there. She was known as the "Asian American Rosa Parks" (198). She frequently thought about how if she had not adopted Vincent, he would still be alive.

As for the narrator, he drifted around America as a finance specialist and accountant, even working for a Toyota dealership at one point. At various points, he had been asked to participate in funerals, anniversaries, conferences, and rallies that came out of the murder, but he always refused, preferring his anonymity. He befriended Vincent when he started at their Oak Park middle school. He felt sorry for him. People called them names like Ling-Ling and Sing-Sing (after the famous Siamese conjoined twins) and Ching and Chong. He and Vincent tried to rebrand themselves as Billie and Sammy after the cool Chinese characters in the famous song, "Kung Fu Fighting." He ponders

how Vincent said "I'm not a motherfucker" and did not include the narrator as if he had "We're not" (200).

Evans might have said "It's because of little motherfuckers like you," but accounts differ (200). The narrator says that Evans was deceived by cross-race bias, the idea that different races apply biases toward another race. With Asians, the narrator argues, this is even more profound since people think all Asians are the same or are interchangeable based on similar appearances. The narrator thinks about what he could have done and could have said. He is plagued by thousands of "what-ifs" from that night. He remembers how he and Vincent had talked of normal things outside the nearby McDonalds before Evans and Pitts tracked them down. He recounts their conversation but then admits that maybe they did not say those things after all. He might have made it all up.

The narrator reflects on his life since that time. He has not purchased an American car in thirty years. He has never gone to a baseball game. He has only been to a strip club one other time when the trial was in Cincinnati. He looked around the crowd and wondered what might have been. If Vincent had not been murdered, would he have been one of these men? He notes an Asian woman stripping to "Turning Japanese" and later, "China Girl." He felt uncomfortable and hoped that she did not notice him, but she did. She came up to him and asked him his name. He said "Vincent" and asked if she was Chinese or Japanese. Her response was "Whatever you want me to be, baby" (204). She thought more about it and said, "All-American, baby. We're all American here" (204). He bought her a drink.

Analysis

The third story in "The Fortunes" is the only one told from the first person perspective. The narrator remains unnamed. His decision not to reveal his name is significant and contributes to the novel's theme of "Names." One reason why the narrator goes unnamed is that, through his narrative, he seemed to indicate that he savored the anonymity of being unknown. He referenced times when he was invited to benefits and memorials, and he always refused. Yet his narrative style, frequently addressing the reader directly, suggests that he is discussing Vincent Chin's murder with someone who is not familiar with the case. They presumably do not remember him as he did not acknowledge that they recognized him.

The narrator's decision to remain unnamed is inherently tied into the theme of Identity. He believed that the racism behind Evans and Pitts' murder of Vincent was so egregious because they could not tell if he was Japanese or Chinese. The idea that Chin's appearance did not distinguish his ethnicity and that the Americans did not seem to care either way contributed to the sense of anonymity the main character felt when he was unnamed. He could be any Asian man. This anonymity bothered him, though, when he saw an Asian stripper who would not give him a straight answer to his question of whether she was Chinese or Japanese, dismissing it with "Whatever you want me to be, baby" (204). The narrator understood: because her appearance did not distinguish

her ethnicity, the stripper allowed herself to become whatever the customer wanted her to be. Perhaps only the narrator in the strip club that night would understand the irony of the stripper dancing to both "Turning Japanese" and "China Girl," two identities that are directly contradictory, except for white Americans who did not seem to care, as long as she fulfilled their desire to see an Asian woman strip.

Similarly, the narrator went to the rallies and planning meetings for American Citizens for Justice, the ACJ, a "pan-Asian" advocacy group. Even though the narrator went, he never spoke up even though he had some feelings about the direction they would go in. He blended in with everyone else, including people from Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino heritage, and could fade into the background, as invisible as if he had never been at the strip club on the night of Vincent's murder. This anonymity recalls Anna May Wong's similar feelings when she was a part of a crowd of Chinese extras on a movie set and, later, in China, when she was surrounded by people who looked like her, which was not her experience back home in America or on vacation in Europe. Here, the narrator took comfort in the stripper's conclusion that she was all American, that they were all American there. The narrator noted, "It felt like something to cover ourselves in, that word, its warm anonymity," even though the narrator knew it would never be that easy, to just be seen as American, because of his appearance (204).

The theme of Fortune appears in this section. Vincent's parents were unable to conceive a child, so they decided to adopt. It took them ten years to adopt Vincent from an orphanage in China. Lily Chin, Vincent's mother, would later feel guilty for adopting Vincent. If she had not adopted him, she reasoned, then he would not have been murdered here in suburban Detroit by people who were hostile toward him. One meaning for "fortune" is luck, and Vincent's mother believed he was unlucky. If Vincent had been adopted by another couple, Lily believed, he would not have met the same fate. The narrator seemed less sure about fate, believing perhaps that racism existed everywhere. His response was to both reject American culture and reject his Chinese heritage as much as possible, such as never attending a baseball game or buying an American car, aiming to trace his identity right down the center, slipping into whatever identity he or others needed at the time.

The line of poetry from poet Emily Dickinson, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant," appears within the text of this story, but it also appears as one of the quotes after the novel's title page (199). In the context of this story, the narrator was called upon to read this line of Emily Dickinson's poetry in tenth grade English class, much to the amusement of snickering peers who called Vincent and the narrator Ling-Ling and Sing-Sing, after the famous pandas Nixon took home from China. The line also appears in the title of the story, "Tell It Slant." The "slant" could be interpreted in one way as a reference to slanted eyes, a way that many Americans viewed Asian American's eye shape. In the second story, Anna told Newsreel how white actors would have to wear a kind of sticky tape to shape their eyes in a way that could pass for the Asian characters they played in yellow face. Once, a plastic surgeon offered to "fix" Anna so her eyes would look Caucasian and she could play European roles (152). Anna politely declined and said, "It's a bit more permanent than sticky tape!" (152). Certainly, this was how the narrator

interpreted it as a kid. However, pulling back from just the word "slant," one interpretation of Dickinson's line is that one should tell the truth, but do not tell it entirely directly. The narrator certainly embraced this idea. He periodically would introduce an event, a fact, a line of dialogue, and then reveal that it had not happened that way after all. For example, at one point he said, "If I had a gun I'd shoot you right now, I told Evans while we waited for the ambulance, but I didn't, of course" (200). His testimony, his account of the events, cannot be taken as entirely true. The narrator might be spinning the truth a bit to play with his audience, and he also might be making a point that in some respects, the truth does not matter. People rewrote Vincent Chin to be an all-American, innocent young man. In the words of the narrator, "They made him out to be a model citizen of the model minority. Saint and stereotype. But think. That night he must have had fifty bucks in smoothed-out singles on him—"Tips, baby!"—so what exactly was he working so hard for? Two jobs to pay for two lives, maybe" (181). The narrator knew that Chin needed to be idealized in order to make people care about him beyond his community. Truth, then, is relative, and often subject to lies. The narrator's constant, contradictory statements undermine his credibility while also mocking the reader. The narrator might believe that the truth did not matter to people anyway. They would believe what they want to believe about the murder.

Discussion Question 1

How does the narrator exemplify Emily Dickinson's line of poetry, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant"?

Discussion Question 2

Does the narrator conclude that anonymity is a positive or negative thing?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the narrator never reveal his name?

Vocabulary

malapropism, import, ultimatum, switchblade, scram, melamine, empowering, vulnerability, emphasis, prejudicial, paunch

Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation: Pages 207 - 245

Summary

This final story in "The Fortunes," Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation is told in the third person limited perspective in the present tense. The events of this story are told linearly, not as if the main character is reflecting on them at a later point. The quote that opens the story is from Mao Zedong: "The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning...The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you" (207).

The story opens in the early morning of "Gotcha Day!", the day a group of American foster parents will meet their adoptive Chinese daughters. The story's hero, John Smith, is having trouble sleeping. His wife, Nola, sleeps next to him. Some of the parents who are part of the group like the term "Gotcha Day!" while others find it problematic. Alice, a single mother, says it makes her uncomfortable, as if her daughter-to-be, Gertie, is an object that is part of a transaction. Nola criticizes Alice to John for using her daughter's new name right away instead of the traditional name the child was given. Nola and John's baby is named "Mei Mei," though they intend to rename her "Anna Mei." John does not like the term, "Gotcha Day!" because he feels it sets them up for a trick or surprise. Which he supposes they have already endured.

Thinking about their past, John remembers the difficulty they had conceiving. In their midthirties, John and Nola had settled into their life as a couple. John was a writer and on the writing faculty of a college. His publisher always pushed him to write more stories inspired by his Chinese heritage. John had an unfortunate experience early on in his teaching career when someone confronted him at his reading by telling him the Chinese he used in his book was wrong, that the translations did not match up, such as using the word "baby penis" when he meant "penis." John was embarrassed; he knew he was a diversity hire and that his background helped him keep his teaching position after the reading. John had blamed his Chinese mother for the misunderstandings. John also toyed around with a project about the Chinese American actress, Anna May Wong. To make money on the side, John wrote pulpy novels set in the old TV series "Kung Fu" universe. John knew the publishers hired him for his background, and it allowed him to transgress the politically correct attitude in his own era. He wrote using his mother's last name: John Ling. He told his colleagues he was working on a novel about the Vincent Chin murder.

John and Nola, who was Irish American, were happy together and not actively wanting children until Nola got pregnant. Nola had to abort the baby after they discovered it would have a birth defect. Nola, who had previously been ambivalent about motherhood, wanted to try again. Again the fetus showed signs of genetic mutation, and

John and Nola had to abort the baby again. The genetic counselor told they they were just very unlucky. The loss released a bitterness inside them. John tried to suggest going on a trip, which made Nola think of adopting a Chinese daughter. John agreed.

Now the narrative returns to the present. It is 1:51 in the morning. John is lying in bed with Nola when the phone rings. John is exhausted from not sleeping. As part of the adoption, the parents go on sightseeing tours so they will know more about their adopted daughters' heritage. Now they are in Guangzhou to pick up their daughters. Their guide is a young woman who calls herself Napoleon to make it easier for English speakers. Her name is Ng Poh Lian. Most of the parents find it awkward to call her that, so instead they call her "Miss Ng" or "Poh Lian" (215). She is pregnant, which is somewhat uncomfortable for the parents, many of whom had difficulties conceiving. John wonders about the fate of her child. If it is a girl, she will likely have to be given up for adoption under China's one-child policy. That is where American foster parents came in, adopting the unwanted daughters. John feels an urge to touch her stomach and feel the baby, but he does not after Nola told him it was uncomfortable for men to do that when she was pregnant. John feels like his past was happening simultaneously, which he attributes to a "Chinese disorientation," since he is reeling not only from China's size but from the fast-paced modernization juxtaposed with the country's ancient history (215).

The second night they were there, John tried to sleep, but the hotel phoned their room to see if he needed anything, implying a prostitute. John tried to work on a new "Kung Fu" book. He never slept on planes and was struggling with fatigue. He reflected on his parents' marriage. His father, John Smith Sr., had been a pilot when he met his mother, a stewardess. His father was white while his mother was Chinese. John thinks about how his life with Nola, just the two of them as a married couple, was about to change forever after the adoption. John is somewhat annoyed that Nola is already in mom-mode while he wanted to have sex while they still could as just husband and wife. On the plane, John thought about how he had been teased for his heritage growing up. He mused about the question people often asked him, "Where are you from?" (219). He never quite felt at home with other Chinese he knew. In San Francisco's Chinatown, which Nola insisted they visit to get in the mood, John felt uneasy.

Now it was 2:23 in the morning. Lying in bed, John knows he will never get to sleep, so he gets changed and goes downstairs. He looks outside and watches a plane fly through the night sky. His mother had told him that he was a child of the jet age and that he would never exist if his parents would not have met thanks to modern, international travel. She was the black sheep in her wealthy, traditional family, both for having a job and marrying a white man. His mother had been happy when he told her that he was adopting a Chinese girl. His mother had been somewhat racist at times while his father, whom John frequently referred to as "The Captain," was a more casual racist, often saying racist expressions or remarks playfully. He would often make jokes poking fun at the Chinese. John thinks that nobody owned jokes like that, but they seemed to be prevalent everywhere.

John considers Nola's desire to see Chinatown alongside the efforts other parents were making to learn Chinese culture. Some took lessons to learn how to make authentic Chinese food. Others were learning Chinese. (John himself did not know much Chinese at all.) Many parents read literature like Pearl S. Buck's "The Good Earth." Nola noted that Buck started the first Chinese adoption program after she gave birth to a child with a genetic disorder. Over the years, many people, including Nola, had expectations for what John was supposed to know about Chinese culture. Many did not know basic facts about China, and people frequently confused Chinese and Japanese people, as well as Koreans and the Vietnamese. John's childhood friend Ken's dad got a job in Silicon Valley, leaving John the only Asian kid in his class. Now, though, the foster parents are much more politically correct, though they still assume he knew Chinese. John thinks about the thousands of dollars, known as lucky money" he and Nola have to bring in cash on the day of the adoption. John feels uneasy about the monetary transaction element of the adoption. The children are known in Chinese as "lucky ones," but John thinks they were adopted because rich Americans could afford it.

Over the years, John experimented with trying to be more Chinese, such as hosting a Chinese New Year's party. The party did not go well. He tried to explain what each dish meant traditionally, but someone mocked him about fish balls served at the meal. Now he was ashamed that the white foster parents knew more about Chinese culture than he even did. It reminded him of going to a Chinese restaurant and people would ask him what dishes were good. John had a list of things he would not let himself do since he was Asian American, such as play ping-pong, wear glasses, play the piano, drive an imported car, and so on. John secretly wanted to scandalize the other foster parents by resisting the cliches, by saying that he loved chop suey, an American Chinese dish. Since his mother never cooked traditional Chinese dishes, American Chinese food was his comfort food. Nola urged John to write about his anger and disorientation, but he bristled when she said it would be real and honest because he thought that meant he was never authentic, whatever that meant.

John goes to the hotel bar. He knows that the other foster parents resent him. One made comments about how he could appear in public with his daughter and they would look right together. He realizes that all of their efforts to learn more about China was some kind of compensation for the one thing he had that they did not: an appearance that would help him look the part of a dad to a Chinese girl. Other parents had to wait a year or even two to be accepted for the adoption. John and Nola only waited nine months, which he felt was shorter probably because he was Chinese. Norman and Amanda are even less liked than John and Nola because they are "preferential adopters," meaning they could have children but chose to adopt. Norman tells everyone he could not see bringing another child into the world. Norman's righteousness bothers the others, such as his support for China's controversial one-child policy, which all the parents were benefitting from, if John was honest. John is bothered that the Chinese only want to keep their boys, not their girls, and that the girls should not be forced to be connected to the country that shunned them. They are only asked to do it because they looked Chinese, different from their white peers. When asked, Napoleon said she thought it was a good thing. She said more Chinese girls for the Chinese American boys to date. Everyone was shocked that John had never dated a Chinese girl.

John knows a consequence of China's gender imbalance is the likelihood of more prostitution. At the bar, John watches prostitutes work male customers and the phones to find new customers. John is fascinated by one woman in particular. He takes out his copy of Mao's "Little Red Book" and reminds himself how he has never been attracted to Chinese women. He buys the woman a drink. He convinces himself he is only doing research. She tells him her name is Pearl. He tells her he does not want to sleep with her. He just wants to talk to her. She orders a Napoleon cocktail, and John has the same thing. He tells Pearl that he is adopting a Chinese girl, and she says he was too late (implying herself). She asks him about what kind of life his daughter would have in America, but when he tells her about soccer camp and Disney World, he sees she is on the verge of tears. Pearl tells him a tasteless joke and asks about his race. He says he was half Chinese through his mother. She jokes that it was his mother country. She announces that time was up. She says he should have slept with her because he could have gotten her pregnant and made a child some other American could adopt. He is taken aback, but she says it was just a joke and that it is easy to get an abortion in China. He thinks about how his mother said she might move back home to Singapore now that his father had died two years ago. He hopes she would stay in America now that she will have a granddaughter.

It is almost five in the morning. John thinks about the things he would save his new daughter from, like the smog and pollution in China and communism, by adopting her. Wandering the streets, John thinks about how his wedding ring might distinguish him from the Chinese because they favor a very bright gold whereas his was duller. He thinks about how when he was in America, everyone sees him as Chinese, but here in China, people think of him as white. He looks around and considers the "finding place," a term applied to the places where Chinese baby girls are abandoned and then found by the orphanage. He admits to himself that he is secretly hoping for something like that, that a woman would give him a baby and he would feel chosen as a father.

Walking around the neighborhood, John sees a bird singing in a cage and remembered the songbird market in Beijing. The sun rose around him, and the streets gradually sprung into life. Back at the hotel, John crawled into bed to snuggle with Nola. He remembered the tour and seeing the Great Wall. John thought about how so many Chinese people in America do not end up as couples, men and women who do not marry.

Analysis

The final story in "The Fortunes" is about a couple, John Ling Smith and his wife, Nola, as they travel to China to adopt a baby girl.

John Ling Smith was half-white and half-Chinese, just like Ah Ling from the first story. His identity as a biracial man in contemporary America was as tricky as it was for Ling more than a hundred years ago. John found that in America, his career was often pushed to be more reflective of his Chinese heritage. When he was growing up, John felt awkward about his Chinese heritage and suffered through slurs that white

classmates gave him and his friend, Ken. His Chinese New Year's party was a failure, and he could not quite sell his guests on the experience considering he was unfamiliar with the customs and food himself. Yet in his career as a writer, John felt pressure to embrace his Chinese heritage. He was pretty certain that he was a diversity hire at the college, and he believed he survived an embarrassing public humiliation where someone called him out on misusing Chinese words in his fiction because the university had recently been involved in a harassment suit. His publisher pushed him to take on projects related to his heritage, but John was comfortable writing pulpy novelizations in the classic "Kung Fu" TV show universe under his mother's last name, John Ling.

In China, John realized that he did not fit in, especially because he did not speak any Chinese. Still, other foster parents would turn to him for advice on questions they expected him to know because of his heritage. John resented this expectation, especially because he knew the one thing he had that the other parents did not was recognizably Asian facial features.They envied him that he would be able to be in public with his daughter and nobody would think it was unusual because he looked like he could be her dad. John was bothered by how many of the foster parents tried to take up Chinese, learn traditional dishes, and learn as much about Chinese culture as possible so their daughters would be connected to their heritage. John knew that they were overall being sincere, but it rang hollow for him considering this was not his experience growing up. He told Nola they were only doing this because their daughter had Asian facial features. If she were white, it would not be the same.

Thus, John experienced the duality of his identity. In America, he was taught he should embrace his culture, to the point where he felt it was important enough to include Chinese words to sprinkle in his fiction for authenticity, even though it exposed him as a fraud. His identity was something to celebrate, albeit something he felt forced to mine for material lest he be considered a traitor to his background. This is in contrast to the other characters in "The Fortunes." Even though in the contemporary era of John's story he is taught to embrace his racial heritage, John still felt racism and he still felt pigeonholed like Anna May Wong did, as if his only value as an artist could be to bear the burden of representation of an entire race of people. It was no wonder he enjoyed the pulpy "Kung Fu" project. Not only was it quite lucrative, the series allowed him to be as flamboyant as possible with traditional racist attitudes toward the Chinese. The sensationalized format allowed him to explore this racism as much as he liked. Plus, it was lucrative and kept him and Nola afloat after she left her job and his literary fiction died down.

Other themes explored in this section include Women, Fortune, and Ownership. A major difference between this story and previous stories in "The Fortunes" is the implementation of China's one-child policy, which stipulated that couples could only have one child, and the adoption industry that grew up around that. John felt uncomfortable purchasing Mei Mei in cash, neat, crisp bills nonetheless. He did not like looking at the adoption as a transaction, that he would be using cash to purchase a child. He did not want to feel like he was owning a daughter. This discomfort has parallels in Ling and Little Sister's story. Ling felt uneasy about the idea of Little Sister, or any Chinese girl, being sold into prostitution as if they were a commodity to be

purchased even though he later patronized Little Sister's services by buying time with her.

John realized what this was doing to women and female children. He saw that the gender discrepancy would lead to prostitution, such as with Pearl, the prostitute he met in the hotel bar. Pearl's parting joke to John, "You should have fucked me....You could have gotten pregnant, left little orphan for some other American adopt. Joke!" is cruel and morbid (238). Yet Pearl made a good point. Everyone assumed the daughters were just unlucky to be born to two parents who already had a child. Pearl suggested that, actually, these babies could just be the children of international travelers who hired prostitutes and left. The Chinese daughters adoption industry had twisted around the idea of Chinese baby girls not being wanted. Now parents could adopt an unwanted girl and bring her to America for a new life. In some ways, being a Chinese girl was never better knowing there were so many parents in the West who wanted to adopt them. These are the "lucky ones," a nickname that recalls the novel's theme of Fortune. They were lucky enough to be chosen and paired with affluent, meticulously selected American parents. John resisted this idea of fortune and luck, though. John felt that these babies were lucky, sure, but only because there was a market for people in America to pay thousands of dollars and be vetted to complete the process. As for what happened to the "unlucky" women who stayed behind? They might become Pearls, a workforce of Chinese women sold to men who paid to sleep with them. Pearl might joke around about the adoption, but John could sense a sadness that undercut the bitterness she exuded. Thematically, women are shown to still be seen as something to purchase.

Discussion Question 1

How do John and Anna face similar expectations to embrace their Chinese identity in their careers?

Discussion Question 2

How do John's opinions about the adoption industry subvert the idea of the Chinese girl adoptees being lucky?

Discussion Question 3

How does twenty-first century adoption of Chinese baby girls compare to women of Little Sister's generation being sold into prostitution?

Vocabulary

itinerary, malapropism, bogusness, commiserate, toggle, forbearance, quota, premonition, acquisition, beneficiaries, extoll, nacreous

Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation: Pages 245 - 264

Summary

When John wakes up, Nola is agonizing about what she should wear the day she would meet her new baby. The group has a nervous breakfast and then gathers in the room where the adoption will take place. As Napoleon matches each baby with their parents, John and Nola look on. Napoleon goes through the list and finds John and Nola. She tells them that their baby, Mei Mei, is sick with a fever and that she will phone around to find out more information. John tries to comfort Nola and act like everything is all right, but he wonders to himself how sick the baby really could be given that the other babies are coughing or fussing. The other couples file out, giving John and Nola looks of pity. John and Nola are alone with Napoleon, who makes several phone calls. Eventually she tells John and Nola that they will go to the orphanage in the country to get Mei Mei.

Back in the hotel room, Nola is distraught and has a headache. John, grateful for a distraction, volunteers to go to the pharmacy and get some Tylenol. John cannot read any of the characters on the boxes in the pharmacy. They remind him of the labels on fireworks, and he thinks about how strange it was that Chinese fireworks are used on America's Independence Day. With the clerk's assistance, John finds the Tylenol and bought it. On the way back to the hotel, John goes to a Starbucks knockoff. He notices how so many businesses are American or American knockoffs. He finds it ironic, but the espresso really beats the hotel coffee.

He realizes that he is not going in the right direction to get back to the hotel and scrambles to figure out how to find it again. Waiting to cross the street, John is touched by seeing a mother and her young daughter interact. The mother notices he is American and tries to say she is pleased to meet him in her broken English. She is self-conscious about her English, but John tells her she was a good speaker. He finds his way back to the hotel. Back with Nola, John is concerned about her, but she says she is fine and John realizes she probably only asked him to go run the errand so she could be alone. They have sex, and John says it made him feel better. John dresses for the orphanage trip and takes along the diaper bag, clothes, and toys, including the plush toy elephant. He also packs the $3,000 cash they need to pay for the baby (their "donation" to the orphanage). John and Nola board the tour bus to get to the orphanage. Napoleon introduces them to their driver, Ah Ling, and John realizes he would need to be tipped.

The orphanage is a chaotic scene, with nurses and workers everywhere. The director brings out the baby, but John and Nola know right away it is not the baby they were supposed to adopt, Mei Mei. John insists that it is not the right child and takes out a photograph of Mei Mei that shows her distinctive beauty spot that the baby in their arms does not have. John puts the envelope of money away and tries to find our more about where Mei Mei is. He never wished he could speak Chinese more than in that moment.

Napoleon tells them the truth: the baby had died that morning. John and Nola are devastated. Nola tells the director and Napoleon that she wants to see Mei Mei even though she is dead. They are led to a small doctor's office, passing a laundry room where toddlers folded clothes. Reaching the examination table, John and Nola look at the dead child. John realizes that all this time he had been afraid of the baby, that she would make him less real and authentic. He bows his head and silently asks for her forgiveness. Nola says, "Okay" and they go back upstairs (257).

Back in the director's office, Napoleon tells John and Nola that they have to make a decision to take this new baby or not. They could have the new baby for less. The director is very upset and worried she would be asked questions if they do not take the baby. The director leads them through the ward to the baby from earlier. She also tells them they can take any baby in the ward. John and Nola decide to take the new baby. They tell the director that they cannot choose a different baby. John realizes that they all want to be chosen: Nola choosing John, John choosing Nola, and together both of them choosing this baby. John thinks that that's part of the reason why he loves Nola: because she, a white American, chose him, a biracial man. Napoleon tries to negotiate with the orphanage director who says that John can have a boy orphan because he was Chinese. John dismisses this and says they are taking the new baby. Even though he is bothered by this notion of choosing one baby over the other, John and Nola commit to the new baby. Back in their hotel room, John and Nola play with their new child. John shows it the elephant toy and says, "See the elephant!" (260). Napoleon reminds them of the next day's itinerary wherein they will go to the station where they will catch the train to Hong Kong to file immigration paperwork at the U.S. consulate. They are due to fly home a few days later. Napoleon confesses they are her last group before taking maternity leave.

Later, in the hotel lobby, John sees Pearl. Pearl stares at the baby and then tells John, "Okay....Take her....Take her home" (261). Nola asks him who the woman was, and he says nobody. That night, though, he suggests the name "Pearl" for their baby. Nola agrees. They wonder who baby Pearl will grow up to be and trade confessions about what they wanted to be when they grew up. Nola says Olivia Newton-John, and John says he wanted to be an astronaut. John thinks about how Pearl could be the first Chinese American astronaut to land on the moon or even Mars. Lying in bed with Nola asleep beside him, John daydreams about what Pearl would see if she looked back on the earth from space. Maybe she and her fellow Chinese adopted daughters would grow up to lead the world in industry. Ultimately, John decides nobody can tell the future. John thinks about how he was happy to be awake while everyone else was asleep. He is standing watch over his family like one of the terracotta warriors of the famous Terracota Army of more than 8,000 terracotta figures that were found buried in a tomb with Qin Shi Huang, China's First Emperor. They were discovered only in the late 1970s. John and Nola had seen them on the tour. John wonders about whose face he would carve if he were making one of the warriors. He decides that this would be the first thing he will tell Pearl when she asks about China.

Analysis

The novel concludes in the final section of Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation.

John and Nola were understandably traumatized when the other foster parents were paired up with their new daughters and their Mei Mei is nowhere to be seen. John was instantly suspicious of Napoleon's explanation of a fever, but he let it go and just tried to put on a steady attitude. Inwardly, John was shaken. At the orphanage, the scene was chaotic. John and Nola instantly realized that the baby the orphanage director handed them was not Mei Mei. Throughout that experience, John realized the paradox between luck (and fortune) and choice. The orphanage director acted like all of the babies were the same. Perhaps more insulting was the idea that John and Nola would not be able to recognize that the new baby was not Mei Mei. In fact, Mei Mei had a distinctive beauty mark that helped distinguish her from the new baby. This is a subtle reference back to Vincent Chin and the unnamed narrator's ability to operate in a position of anonymity around other people because of the idea that all Asians looked alike, and their individual heritage was erased. But the new baby was not Mei Mei.

Seeing the still corpse of the daughter he was supposed to have, John realized how the baby had instilled fear in him, that by adopting her it would make him feel less authentic. Back upstairs, John was thrust into an unimaginable position, to pick a baby from the orphanage, any one, or, if he wanted to, he could wait and get a boy orphan the next day since he was Chinese. The option to choose was numbing for both John and Nola. John felt bewildered by the idea that he could make or break the future of a child. He and Nola chose to go with the baby they were first handed. It seemed that that baby was lucky in a much more sobering way. She was chosen to have a new life in America only because Mei Mei died. Her future was a mix of fortune and free will, with John and Nola choosing her.

The orphanage director's behavior shed light on the underbelly of the adoption industry. John noted the cheap smell of baby wipes, the crowding, screaming, bouncing, and how the children looked like they were in cages. The reader gets the sense that to the orphanage, the children are almost indistinguishable, that parents can select a child based on whatever arbitrary criteria they use for the selection. John felt grateful that in some ways, the new baby was already chosen, however random it might have been, so he did not have to try to choose a baby from the ward. The orphanage director was also very put off and alarmed, worrying that if John and Nola did not adopt the new baby, she would be faced with questions. The bureaucracy suggests that sometimes things get lost along the way, that it really would be conceivable that a new baby could be swapped out for another one without anyone really noticing, partly because there were so many baby girls looking for homes.

Pearl's remark to take the baby "home" was wistful and resolved (261). Pearl acknowledged that this would never be the baby's homeland, that her home will and should be America. John was so inspired that he named the baby "Pearl," a name that recalls Pearl S. Buck, author of "The Good Earth." In the final moments of the story,

John considered the awesome gift of possibility for Pearl. She could be anything, an actress, an astronaut, a business leader. He and Nola truly were giving her a chance at a new life. "The Fortunes" has previously explored this theme in other stories. Little Sister taught Ling that you can earn a fortune in America, but you have to work hard. You cannot just expect gold to come to you. In other words, you have to earn it. Anna May Wong earned her fame and fortune through forging her own path. She could be seen as an American success story, but she got that way because she worked at her career. America offers these characters a way to create an identity and future they want on their own efforts. John had previously thought that he was rescuing baby Pearl from communism as much as smog and life in restrictive China. Yet John knew that it was up to Pearl to create her future. America was the gift she procured through both luck and choice. It would be up to her to carve out an identity of her own, an image that recalls John's fascination with the terracotta warriors. John loved the idea of possibility that the warriors presented. He envisioned the moment of creating a terracotta warrior's face, how he could be anyone. John thought about how the warriors were painted with distinctive facial expressions. They were a unit of many, but they were still unique. John closed the story with saying this would be the first thing he would tell Pearl when she asked about her home, that China was built on an army of warriors, but ones celebrated for their individuality that made them identical and all the same.

Discussion Question 1

How do the concepts of being fortunate and lucky contrast with choice and free will in the orphanage scene?

Discussion Question 2

What does Pearl mean when she says, "Okay....Take her....Take her home" to John and Nola with their baby (261)?

Discussion Question 3

What do the terracotta warriors represent for John and baby Pearl?

Vocabulary

neutral, panoramic, trussed, precaution, opprobrium, effusively, frigid, indecent, hoist, fate, megalomania, fleeting

Characters

Ah Ling

Ah Ling is an historical figure. Ah Ling is the child of a white man who visited China and the Chinese prostitute he sleeps with. His mother having died young, Ling is sold to a nomadic people who live on the sea. Ling is raised among prostitutes and opium trade. When he goes to America, he is sent to find a fortune. He becomes obsessed with gold and amassing wealth. He is first employed by Uncle Ng, a laundryman running a small side business with the prostitute, Little Sister. Ling eventually becomes employed by Charles Crocker, a wealthy Irish American man responsible for America's railroad expansion. He takes Ling on as a personal laundryman and eventual manservant. Ling delights at the role but later realizes he is betraying his people.

One of the signature traits of Ling's character is his naïveté. Ling comes to America thinking it will be easy to strike it big and become wealthy. Little Sister, Uncle Ng, and Crocker all show him in different ways that becoming wealthy and earning money is not an overnight guarantee. All of these characters have a similar attitude that money is money and there is no such thing as dirty money; how you earn money does not matter as much as earning it. Ling feels uncomfortable as he gradually realizes that he, and the Chinese workers he was responsible for hiring, is being exploited. Ling is happy to be in Crocker's service, but remarks by Madame Ah Toy and Little Sister make him reconsider his place as Crocker's manservant.

Ling is also naive when it comes to business. It is difficult for him to believe that a woman can be sold and purchased as a commodity, but at the same time, Ling uses his money to buy time with Little Sister. He tells Ng he does not want to own Little Sister, but their sexual relationship is a transaction. Ling is horrified when he finally realizes that Ng is Little Sister's father. He does not understand how either Ng or Little Sister are okay with the arrangement, but both see it as a business. This teaches Ling that earning a fortune can happen, but it is not always a neat and simple way.

Little Sister

When Ling arrives in San Francisco, he is taken in (sold) to Uncle Ng, a laundryman and notorious gambler who made his fortune in part through gambling but also by selling a young woman, Little Sister, for prostitution out of his laundry house. Ling is immediately impressed with the beautiful and captivating Little Sister, who does not seem much older than him, really. Little Sister is enigmatic and has regular customers. Ling wishes to sleep with her. Yet one of the hallmarks of Little Sister's personality is her practical opinions on business. Little Sister does not give her services away for free and refuses to sleep with Ling until he can pay her, and even then she keeps the gold coin he gives her whereas he thought she would give it back. Little Sister is frank about money. She tells Ling that it does not really matter how the money is made, just that it is

made. She sees through Crocker's so-called compliment to Ling that he is a credit to his race. Little Sister wonders how he can spend such credit. Ling is horrified when he learns that Ng is Little Sister's father. He could not believe that a father could profit from her daughter as a prostitute. Little Sister is more matter of fact. All women who come to Gold Mountain (San Francisco) are whores, Little Sister said. Chinese men brought women here so they could feel higher than someone rather than being considered less of a man due to their race. Shortly after, Little Sister is sold off to a man.

Ling meets Little Sister again in the final scene of the story. She has now taken on the name "Madame Celeste" and started a successful brothel of her own. She seems much more confidant and happy, Ng having died long ago. She sleeps with Ling, but she does not charge him. Ling says he could not find her because he did not know her real name. Madame Celeste says yes, he did know it. It really was "Little Sister," a translation of "Mei Mei," her Chinese name. Ling attributes her transformation into a more confident woman as part of her business savvy. Madame Celeste earns her fortune, but she does so now on her terms.

Charles Crocker

Charles Crocker is an historical character from American history. He was an Irish American man who was instrumental in the expansion of America's railroad system. In this story, Crocker 's work is chiefly concerned with establishing the First Transcontinental Railroad, also known as the Pacific Railroad. Ling is drawn to Crocker's enormous figure and personality. Crocker is a powerful man, capable of compelling a crowd to his wishes. He is confident and not afraid to show his strength through threats of violence to quell the striking Chinese workers. He is a successful business man in part due to his shrewd business choices, such as hiring thousands of Chinese workers to work cheaply. At first, Ling feels flattered to be around Crocker and his own status as his manservant.

At the same time, Crocker is not without flaws. He has a blindside when it comes to his fetish for Chinese culture and people. Ling is delighted to be chosen by Crocker to be his manservant, yet seeing the elaborate collection of chinoiserie (dishes and furniture done in a Chinese style) and Crocker's visit to a Chinese brothel helps Ling see that Crocker valued him, but perhaps because he fit into Crocker's infatuation with China. Crocker often leans on Ling's race in an exploitative way, such as forcing Ling to demonstrate his strength to his business partners as an argument for hiring strong Chinese workers. One time he even gets Ling to come backstage at a Chinese traveling show to meet a pair of Siamese (now called conjoined) twins. Crocker is fascinated, but he sees them as a spectacle and when the twins mock him openly, in particular for his employment of Ling, Crocker does not quite get the humor and leaves.

Ling eventually realizes that Crocker's business practices are questionable if not downright unethical. He may wish to amass a Chinese workforce, but Crocker does not see the laborers as people, finding it funny that some of them died in an avalanche and being unable to recall how many people died in an accident. Crocker released Ling from

his employment at Ling's request. In their closing conversation, Crocker asks Ling to agree that he never treated him poorly. Ling agrees, but it is not enough for Ling to be well paid. Ling feels Crocker should be just as good to his Chinese workforce.

Anna May Wong

Anna May Wong is an historical figure. She is credited as being the first major Chinese American actress. She is most active in the 1920s and 1930s and played famous parts in Hollywood movies. Anna grows up as the oldest daughter of a Chinese man's second marriage. She lives with her family just one block north of Chinatown in Los Angeles. Anna's father is extremely strict. When Anna starts to sneak off to movie theaters, skipping class, her father beats her. When she wears makeup, he scrubs her face raw to get it off. Anna goes on to star in many films, with some of her success attributable to being the mistress of several influential white male directors, producers, and actors. Anna carefully cultivates a playful, flirty personality for her public image, letting gossip give her free publicity. Even though she gets parts, Anna is boxed out of more substantive roles thanks to restrictions like the Hays Code, which prevented interracial romantic relationships onscreen. If both actors are white or both actors are Chinese American, it is okay. However, there are no male Chinese movie stars at the time, so Anna does not qualify for these roles, and European or American white actors play them in yellow face. Anna is famously snubbed when a white actress gets the coveted part of O-lan, the female lead in the film adaptation of Pearl S. Buck's "The Good Earth." Anna is stung by the diss, and it is a slight that lives on after her death as part of her biography.

In the present timeline in the story, Anna is taking a trip to her see her father in his homeland in China. She is able to convince a movie studio to fund the trip and turn it into a documentary. She is met by a man known as Newsreel Wong, a cameraman who has seen none of her movies. They begin a short affair as Anna tours the country. She is surprised that she is not more warmly received, the critics vilifying her for encouraging negative stereotypes of Chinese women being loose and prostitutes. Her reunion with her father is emotional, but Anna heads back home to America where she lives out the rest of her life taking smaller but more compelling roles and watching China become more favored in America.

Anna often downplays her emotions, frequently making jokes or lightening the mood with some humor. This seems to be a defense mechanism as much as a strategic career choice. Anna realizes that she is seen as a charismatic and exotic woman. Using humor to reframe losses, like not getting the part in "The Good Earth," shows people that she does not let anything get her down. However, she does not take many strong positions, which might be one reason why people only saw her for her race at face value and not for the complex emotions she feels inside as she struggles to claim her identity and navigate a career in a field hostile with very limited opportunities for her. One might also be able to see her fame as a way to recapture the praise and admiration that she could never get from her father. Anna never gets approval from her father in any way. She seeks out validation to get the praise she never could, such as the

gratuitous visits to movie theaters screening her films. She would watch the audience and then act like it was a surprise that she was there, hoping to be flattered. This is a dominant drive for Anna's character and could explain why she takes stereotyped parts. If nothing else, these famous roles made her into a star beloved by many all around the world, receiving a rush of attention and praise that could erase her father's disapproval, if only fleetingly.

Newsreel Wong

Newsreel Wong is an historic figure. He was a cameraman in the early to mid twentieth century. Newsreel, whose real name is Hai-sheng, accompanies Anna May Wong in her trip to China to film the footage for her documentary. Newsreel is somewhat closed off and does not speak much. Anna decides to seduce him, and he becomes her first Chinese lover. Anna sees him as somewhat of a challenge. He has not seen any of her films, but he is willing to go along with the affair, though later Anna realizes that he is married. Newsreel is protective of Anna. He helps her get out of a tight situation with a crowd.

Later, Newsreel will go on to take one of the most significant photographs of the century. The photograph, known as "Bloody Saturday," depicts an orphan baby screaming while covered in blood and sitting in the hollowed out remains of the Shanghai South Railway Station, which had been bombed by the Japanese. The picture was seen by more than a hundred million people by fall 1937, and the picture was credited in helping turn Western public opinion against the Japanese, and the moniker "warphan" was introduced first by Madame Chiang and later popularized. Some said it was staged. Newsreel's photograph connects to other stories in "The Fortunes": John and Nola's adoption of a Chinese baby girl and of Vincent Chin, also an orphan of China.

Unnamed Narrator

Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant is told in the first person voice of an unnamed narrator. The unnamed narrator is a good friend of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man who is brutally murdered in a hate crime in 1982. The narrator had grown up with Vincent. They are a rarity in their Detroit suburb. At the time of Chin's murder, tensions are high between Detroit autoworkers and the Japanese, whose imported cars are threatening the American industry. Vincent gets caught in the crosshairs when two men, Evans and Pitts, assume he is Japanese and beat him to death.

The unnamed narrator seeks distance from the events. Apart from participating in a pan-Asian civil rights group, the narrator seeks to almost erase his place in history but not being part of rallies or memorials. His feelings are clearly bitter, and yet he realizes the truth is not simple. He does not remember everything from that night, and what he does remember might not be accurate anyway, which he readily acknowledges. The narrator seems to reject both his Chinese heritage and his American identity and slips into a quiet life out of the public eye. He chooses not to reveal his name, letting himself

be thought of as an anonymous canvas for the reader to project his or her attitudes toward the narrator's race.

Vincent Chin

Vincent Chin is an historical figure. At age twenty seven, he is beaten to death on the night before his wedding when two men, Evans and Pitts, a father and stepson, get into an altercation with Chin at a strip club where Chin is having his bachelor's party. The men think he is Japanese and take out their hostilities toward the Japanese on him. At the time, tensions are strained in Detroit where automobile manufacturing jobs are threatened by Japanese imported cars. The men track Chin down outside the strip club and beat him into a coma with a baseball bat. Four days later, his mother takes him off life support.

After his death, Chin becomes a martyr. His death hits home for so many Asian Americans who know what it is like to be on the receiving end of hatred and prejudice against them. The narrator of the story notes that Chin is romanticized. He knew him and suspects that Vincent was not the clean-cut, all-American boy that the public make him into. However, Chin's death strikes a nerve, especially when Evans and Pitts get off with little sentencing. Out of Chin's murder, an advocacy group is born, pushing pan-Asian advocacy into the larger civil rights efforts in America.

Lily Chin

Lily Chin is an historical figure. She is the mother of Vincent Chin. She and her husband cannot conceive, so they adopt Vincent, a process that takes ten years. The narrator grew up knowing her as "Mrs. Chin," and she was a maternal figure for him since his mother died when he was young. After Chin's murder, Lily becomes a visible face of the pan-Asian civil rights movement. The narrator suspects that her formidable presence and broken English only add to her influence. She became known as the "The Asian American Rosa Parks" (198)

John Ling Smith

John Ling Smith is the main character of the fourth story, Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation. John is the son of a white American air pilot and a Chinese stewardess, who were happily married and had John. Growing up, John does not feel in touch with his Chinese heritage, especially because his mother seems to have left her culture and language behind. When he becomes a writer of literary fiction and is of some renown, John takes a job as a teacher at a college. He suspects he is only being hired as part of a diversity quota, and this fact might have helped sustain him when he is publicly shamed for using the wrong Chinese words in his fiction. He feels exposed as a fraud for not seeming authentic. He makes money on the side as a writer of pulpy novelizations for the TV show "Kung Fu." He is married to Nola, a woman whom he met in graduate school. Nola wanted to be a poet, but she ends up working in a school. They try to conceive a

child, but have to terminate the pregnancy because of a birth defect. The tragedy is repeated again. They decide to adopt a Chinese girl, and their trip to China is the main setting of the story.

In China, John feels conflicted. In America, everyone wanted to write him as Chinese, but in China, he is seen as white. In his career, John is pressured to write about topics related to his Chinese heritage, as if that is the only thing interesting about him, his selling point. In China, he feels helpless, especially because he cannot speak Chinese. Meanwhile, the other foster parents expect him to know phrases or details about Chinese culture, which John does not. John struggles with a similar career experience as Anna May Wong, both being pigeonholed as Chinese artists, not as artists irrespective of their race. John enjoys writing the novelizations for the same reason he likes American Chinese food: it subverts the idea that he has to be politically correct or in search of an authentic experience.

Pearl (baby)

Pearl is the daughter of John and Nola. She is adopted in China as part of the unwanted daughters adoption service. One of the themes of "The Fortunes" is luck and fortune, and Pearl certainly is lucky, albeit not for the best of reasons. When Mei Mei dies, Pearl is chosen, at random or selectively, by the orphanage director and initially presented as Mei Mei. John and Nola instantly realize that the baby is not Mei Mei. Yet John and Nola choose her anyway, despite the orphanage directors' frantic cries to choose any baby they like. Thus, Pearl is both lucky, in that she was chosen as the replacement baby passed off as Mei Mei, and chosen, a blend of fortune and fate and free will, the ability to choose one's own destiny or, here, have John and Nola choose her.

In the hotel room, John suggests naming their new daughter Pearl, inspired by the prostitute he talked to in the hotel bar (though John does not tell Nola the specifics). Pearl's name also references Pearl S. Buck, author of "The Good Earth," a book that appears in some of the stories in "The Fortunes," most notably Anna's. John and Nola wonder who Pearl will grow up to be. The gift they will give her is a fresh start and a new life in America. In John's mind, Pearl could become anything she wants. The barriers are there for her to tear down.

Symbols and Symbolism

Gold Coin

Ling received his first gold coin from Charles Crocker, his employer. Ling was obsessed with earning gold. He believed his mission was to come to America and earn gold and amass wealth. Ling decided to spend his coin by hiring Little Sister for her services as a prostitute. Ling surrendered his coin and hoped he would get it back, but Little Sister would not give it back to him. This showed Ling that Little Sister understood their encounter as a transaction, something to earn money off of, not just sleeping together as friends or lovers. Little Sister always had a mind for money and looked at the world as a way to be her own boss. She and Ling talked about starting a business together. She eventually did go on to found a successful brothel.

Chinese queue

Traditionally, Chinese men wore their hair in a queue. The queue involved hair trimmed closely on top with a long braid down the back. In Crocker's eyes, Ling became more of an American when he trimmed his queue, which had put him in an awkward position in a moment of bullying. This was one way that Ling hoped to assimilate, and combined with his biracial appearance, it helped him become more conspicuous in America and less easily identifiable as an outsider. Anna's father also wore his hair in a queue. Anna noted that watching him cut of his queue was her earliest memory.

Bones

Ling was hired to take the bones of Chinese workers out of their corpse, clean them, and send them home to China. It was undoubtedly grim business, but Ling liked it well enough. This was a tradition in Chinese culture, to send the bones of the deceased to their families. Ling felt closer to his heritage by doing this, and he also felt like he honored the dead who had made sacrifices in the name of American progress. Symbolically, the bones show that even though a man might die in America, his true spiritual home was back in China.

Jokes

In many stories in "The Fortunes," characters make jokes or repeat jokes. These jokes, which John acknowledged likely had no traceable origin, reinforced enduring stereotypes of the Chinese, ridiculing the language (such as the last name "Wong," which both Anna and Newsreel share), the food (the idea that Chinese food—and Chinese prostitutes—are not filling), and appearance, and accents, such as broken "Chinglish." Whereas John is more bitter about the jokes, Anna tried to use humor to her advantage. She seemed to know that giving Westerners this humor was giving them

what they wanted. Anna constantly makes jokes mocking her race and the racist stereotypes people have of Asians, such as signing her autograph as, "Orientally yours" (107). It seemed as though humor was a defense mechanism for Anna. In the third story, the unnamed narrator frequently repeated off-color jokes that Americans made about the Chinese. This is also picked up in John's story as well. His father would make the same kind of jokes even though his wife was Chinese and his son biracial. By the time John's story is set, in the new millennium, these jokes are considered politically incorrect, yet they instilled lingering stereotypes in America. Even John does not know quite what to do with them, trying to make fun of them with Nola, who rejected the humor.

"The Good Earth"

Novelist Pearl S. Buck's 1931 novel, "The Good Earth," became an instant bestseller and has since become a classic. Anna got passed over for the role of al lifetime, the female lead, O-lan, to a white actress. Due to restrictions from Hollywood's Hays Code, Anna was not able to get the role, even though it was a Chinese character, because an interracial couple could not be depicted as being romantically attached on screen. There were no well-known Chinese male actors at the time, so Anna would have had to played across a white male lead in yellow face. The code prevented this, though Anna suspected that she was not given the role because of racism as well. As her friend Warner Oland, a white man who played the Chinese character of Charlie Chan, told her, Luise Rainer would win an award for acting Chinese. Anna would not have won an award because she was Chinese. Indeed, Rainer did win the Academy Award. This snub was famous and became part of Anna's biography long after she died. Being passed over for this role, Anna was a martyr of sorts for the difficulties Asian American and minority actors faced in Hollywood's early days—and even today. "The Good Earth" showed up later in the novel. John named his newborn daughter "Pearl," an echo of the prostitute he met in the hotel bar, who was also named Pearl.

Chinese Food

American Chinese food is very different from traditional Chinese food, as John noted. These Western dishes, such as General Tso's chicken and sweet and sour chicken, are mistaken by many as authentic cuisine. In "The Fortunes," three main characters were impacted by Chinese restaurants in America. Toward the end of her life, Anna used to frequent Chinese restaurants. She was a regular at one in particular, and she had her own table. Her favorite dish was chop suey. She knew that it had no connection to the cuisine her father and mother would have experienced in China, but she appreciated the irony of eating the Americanized dish. It also gave her a degree of anonymity. She could sit in the restaurant and nobody would notice her. In the third story, Vincent Chin worked at a Chinese restaurant, the Golden Star, before his murder. After his murder, the newly formed pan-Asian civil rights group, the American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) met in the Chinese restaurant where Vincent worked to plan their course of action. The narrator easily blended into the background. Even though he felt compelled to speak up,

he said nothing, letting Lily take the lead. He was alarmed but also pleased that nobody seemed to know who he was in the crowd. Nobody recognized him as a witness to the murder. He experienced that same anonymity that Anna felt around many other people who looked like him. In the fourth story, John talked about how Chinese American food was a comfort food for him because his mother, though Chinese, did not know how to prepare traditional Chinese dishes. John noted how he was often asked what was good to order when he went to Chinese restaurants with white friends, as if he would know because he was half-Chinese even though the food was more American than Chinese.

Prostitutes

Prostitution is a recurring theme throughout "The Fortunes." From the first story, in which Little Sister was sold into prostitution by her father, to the final story, when John wondered about how the gender discrepancy in China would likely encourage prostitution, Chinese women are often cast in roles as strippers, mistresses, brothel owners, and prostitutes. In the third story, Vincent Chin was killed after a confrontation at a strip club where he had gone for his bachelor party the night before his wedding. The unnamed narrator noted that Vincent often when to strip clubs, a habit at odds with the clean, all-American martyr after his murder. He seemed familiar with one of the strippers, Lacey. The narrator described how Lacey had said that Vincent was nice, and she agreed to testify. However, her testimony was called into question when the defense lawyers used her profession to make her seem unreliable. There was a rumor that she was not wearing any underwear during the trial. Years later, the narrator went to a strip club and saw an Asian dancer stripping to "Turning Japanese" and "China Girl." This made the narrator very uncomfortable, but she came over to him after she was done with her set. When he asked if she was Japanese or Chinese, the stripper, Cindy, said she could be anything he wanted, ultimately saying that she was all-American. The narrator accepted the answer and bought her a drink. His unease was partially due to not being able to tell her heritage and then her answer that he could just pick a race for her. Thus Cindy's act brought up how Asian women were only playing the part of whatever men wanted them to be. As seen in the first story, men fetishized Asian women, such as with Crocker's visits to a Chinese brothel. Anna was often cast in the role of the Asian seductress or mistress. When Anna went to Shanghai, she asked to go to the part of town where prostitutes gathered. She was surprised that many of them were white, likely Russians, as Newsreel explained. For the Chinese men, these white women were exotic just as Asian women were in America. In the final story, John met a prostitute, Pearl, who fell into the same role, trying to play up a broken accent as if to read his desires and embody them. John was uneasy around Pearl, but he was also fascinated. He had never slept with a Chinese woman because he thought it would be too familiar. Thus, Pearl represented the exoticism he also associated with Asian women.

Elephants

The expression "seeing the elephant" recurred throughout Ling's story. The expression meant many different things for many different people. Ling, though, focused most on the idea of an elephant. He frequently envisioned the heart of the saying, the elephant, remembering a time he had seen an elephant in the past and contemplating the majestic beauty of the creature. By the end of the story, Ling accepted that the meaning behind the expression was ever changing, shifting to meet the needs of the speaker. The origin of the saying, and however the word "elephant" came into it, was lost. Therefore, he could make it into his own meaning to serve his needs. In the fourth story, John brought a plush toy elephant to China to give to his new daughter. He told her at one point, "See the elephant!" an echo of the expression that was so much a part of Ling's life.

Cash

The unnamed narrator of the third story noted how Vincent had brought dollar bills to the strip club to tip the strippers, evidence that Vincent was quite familiar with how strip clubs worked. In fact, the narrator worked as an accountant, including at a Toyota dealership. Later, John and Nola were required to bring $3,000 in cash to the orphanage as a "donation" in exchange for the baby. The orphanage specifically asked for the bills to be crisp and new. John kidded around and said maybe they could just go buy opium instead. Nola joked around that maybe they asked that so they could spread them all over and roll around in them. Though he played it off with a sense of humor, John felt uneasy about the money. He preferred not to think of adopting his daughter as a monetary transaction. At the orphanage, the director took John more seriously when he made a motion to put the cash back in his pocket, as if he had the power in the situation through money. Compared to Ling and his gold coins, the later stories showed how much currency had changed.

Terracotta Warriors

As part of the tour of China, John and Nola got to see the tomb where the Terracotta Army was housed. This marvel was not discovered until the 1970s when Chinese farmers stumbled upon it. The tomb housed more than 8,000 miniature terracotta figurines that were said to symbolize the army of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, whose remains were buried there as well. The figurines were said to represent Huang's army and protect him in the afterlife, not unlike Egyptian pharaoh's tombs. John was fascinated by this army. He wondered how each figurine could seem different. The visit made him think about how each child is born into this world with the opportunity to make a life of his own, to seize the opportunity he is given. Nola wondered who their daughter, Pearl, would be when she grew up. John felt that the terracotta warriors embodied the fresh start she was given. On another level, the massive army of terracotta warriors echoed the efforts of thousands of Chinese workers who made industrialization and

railroad expansion possible in America. Both were laborers who made the big dreams of powerful men possible.

Settings

Uncle Ng's Laundry House

Ling's first employment when he comes to America is with Uncle Ng, a Chinese American man who owns a laundry business. Ng also runs a small side business with Little Sister's prostitution. The laundry business is quite an operation, with many vessels to wash the laundry in and stacks of clothing everywhere. Ling often craves to leave the laundry and go on errands, which is how he meets Crocker. Little Sister, though, is confined to the laundry house and her courtesan territory and rarely leaves. The laundry house is significant in "The Fortunes" because it becomes a motif for the rest of the novel. In other stories, characters laundry businesses, such as Anna May Wong's father. In the fourth and final part of the novel, when John and Nola visit the orphanage, John sees how the orphan girls fold clothes as part of the orphanage's side business doing laundry services. Therefore, the laundry house represents how laundry became an enduring, significant industry for the Chinese and Chinese American people.

Gold Mountain (San Francisco)

San Francisco is known as "Gold Mountain" to many Chinese. Ling comes to America and settles in Gold Mountain in Chinatown. Ling is obsessed with gold after his foster parents in China instill a thirst for gold, fortune, and wealth. When Ling procures a gold coin, he is captivated by it and thinks it makes him rich. His first purchase is to buy time with Little Sister. He wants her to return the coin, but she keeps it, ever aware of her services being a business. Advertised as Gold Mountain, San Francisco represents the promise of the new world, America. With that name, San Francisco should have been a place to strike it rich. Instead, every character that Ling meets earns their wealth after hard work. Even Crocker, an incredibly successful American railroad tycoon, does not earn his wealth easily, albeit in large part thanks to the labor of Chinese workers. Later, Anna May Wong notes how the Chinese have often been detained on Angel Island. Anna notes to herself, "It's as close as many of them have come, she knows: able to see Gold Mountain but never touch it" (164). Gold Mountain, if it contains gold, has to be found the hard way, with obstacles and sacrifices, and even then, fortune is not guaranteed.

Detroit Area

The unnamed narrator and Vincent Chin both grew up in the Detroit suburbs. They were one of just a few Asian American kids and stuck together. Vincent lived with his mother after high school. At the time of Chin's murder, Detroit was undergoing a significant shift in the workforce. Detroit was (and continues to be) America's city for the automobile industry. However, after the turn of the century, Japanese cars like Hyundai threatened to destroy auto manufacturing jobs in Detroit. American workers lost their jobs to the

competition, which aggravated racial tensions between the Japanese and Americans in the area. Evans, the man who killed Chin, worked at one of the plants, as did his step son, Pitts, though he had been fired earlier (and quickly picked up work again, the narrator notes). Evans' frustration spills out into a violent hate crime when he beats Chin to death, thinking he was Japanese. In this story, Detroit represents the way animosity and hostility between white Americans and Asian Americans was not limited to just a few insults or slurs but could potentially escalate to murder.

China

China haunts each of the main characters in "The Fortunes." In America, many of the Chinese American characters are only known through their identity as Chinese in work and life, but the characters are often confused about how China fit into their lives. For example, some characters feel a strong connection to their country, like Anna's father and Vincent's mother. They both move back to China at some point, though they eventually return. Two characters experience a journey back to China. For Anna, China represents an opportunity to start over and reinvigorate her struggling career, just like a trip to Europe helped boost her public image and make her more in demand. She hopes that the trip to China will do the same thing. Instead, it is emotionally challenging. She is not as warmly received as she thought she would be. She often feels out of place, especially because she speaks no Mandarin, only Cantonese. When she reunites with her father in his small village, she feels reluctant to leave. She considers and almost agrees to stay there with him, where he was considered very rich from his success in America, and marry a Chinese man, but she knows her career was back in America. Anna also feels anonymity in China. It reminds her of when she was an extra in movies early in her career. She was hired to be an extra for Chinese characters in the background. In China, Anna gets lost in the feeling of invisibility in a crowd of other people who looked like her. Anna feels that same feeling. In America and in Hollywood, Anna and her career are built on standing out because of her heritage. In China, she is like everyone else.

Just like Anna, John feels out of place in China. His father being white and his mother Chinese, John is biracial. His appearance is interpreted different ways by different cultures. In America, everyone sees him as Chinese, but in China, everyone sees him as white. John never learned a Chinese language and is unable to speak or understand Chinese in crucial moments of the story. John feels uncertain about being in China. The subtitle of his story is "Disorientation," a feeling John experiences deeply, and also a play on the outdated term, "Oriental." He feels alarmed by China's rapid progress juxtaposed with the ancient traditions and culture that still clung on in the modern era. John feels like he does not quite belong in China, but not entirely in America, either, even though he grew up there. Thus, for characters in "The Fortunes," visiting China highlights the at times uncomfortable feeling of being both American and Chinese but not considered Chinese in their ancestral homeland while not being considered American in their home country.

Donner Summit Pass

The Donner Pass was located in mountainous Sierra Nevada area of northern California. It was originally the site of the Donner family tragedy, in which members of a pioneer family were snowed in for the winter, took refuge in a cave, and turned to cannibalism to survive when the food ran out. In Ling's story, Charles Crocker and his associates arrive at the Donner Summit to deal with some Chinese laborers who were threatening to strike for equal rights as white workers. Ling talks with the men that night. The men are charged at the moment with digging out a tunnel through the mountains, the pass. It is extremely labor intensive work, and very dangerous. In their work on the railroad, Chinese laborers had died by avalanche, accidental explosions, landslides, and more. They tell Ling that they are digging the tunnel out from both ends so the devil would not find them; in their religion the devil could travel through straight passageways. Ling is so taken with their story and their passion that he decides to leave Crocker's employment and join the line with the other Chinese workers.

The Donner Summit Pass, and Crocker's First Transcontinental Railroad, lays the groundwork for future stories in "The Fortunes." The Chinese labor force that made the railroad possible were referenced throughout the novel. In Anna's story, for example, a Chinese film colleague tells her that even though Thomas Edison was celebrated as the father of cinema, it was actually Eadweard Muybridge, a photographer, who was responsible for cinema. He was commissioned by a famous industrial tycoon, Leland Stanford. Stanford hired him to make a video of a horse to see if it lifted all of its legs off the ground while trotting. This led to Muybridge's pioneering work in cinematography, laying the groundwork for Edison. Anna's friend believes that without Stanford, who had made his fortune from the railroad business built on the backs of Chinese workers, there would be no cinema. Thus, without Chinese workers, cinema would not have been possible. The Donner Summit Pass was a significant milestone in the First Transcontinental Railroad, and it would not have been possible without the Chinese workers.

Themes and Motifs

Fortune

"The Fortunes" explores the theme of fortune on two levels, first, fortune as wealth, and second, fortune as luck.

The first story shows how Ling, Crocker, Ng, and Little Sister all earn a fortune of some kind. Ling comes to America hoping to earn gold. He is obsessed with this quest, yet he is naive when it comes to business. He is horrified to learn that Little Sister's prostitution earns Ng an income. Little Sister, though, sees profit as profit. It does not matter where it comes from. Ling later sees that Crocker is similar. He views hiring the Chinese workers as a business decision. The Chinese laborers are cheap, except when they strike. Ling cannot help but see Crocker's wealth in terms of the human cost, so he leaves his employment. Throughout the years, Ling earns money through all kinds of different ways, but when the story closes, he find more wealth in reuniting with Little Sister than in amassing a great fortune. Anna May Wong initially takes whatever parts she can get as an actress, even if they are demeaning. Her father tells her in China that he is a king in the village because he is wealthy from his work as a laundryman back in Los Angeles. He tells her that he says he was a wealthy merchant, not a laundryman. It does not matter how he earned a fortune, only that he did. Yet by the end of her life, Anna has earned more respect than she did when she was not as selective in taking substantive parts. She realizes that her fortune will be built on roles of her choice. In the final story, John considers how his daughter, Pearl, is given the promise of a new life in America. However, he realizes that she would have to earn it on her own. America, then, offers characters a way to become wealthy, but it is not guaranteed and requires hard work.

The novel also explores the idea of "fortune" being connected to luck. This concept is most often tied to adoption. Vincent Chin came to America by way of adoption for a Chinese American couple who could not conceive. After Vincent's murder, his mother, Lily, blames herself, thinking that if he was not adopted, he would not have been murdered here in America. The narrator is less sure about this. He seems suspicious of Vincent's supposed bad luck, perhaps because he sees that racism exists everywhere, in China and in America. The adoption of Chinese baby girls is tied in with luck. The chosen babies are known as the lucky ones. John feels that this overshadows the truth, that they are only lucky because an industry exists wherein wealthy American foster parents can pay enormous sums of money for the option to adopt (purchase) a Chinese girl. Yet the experience at the orphanage subverts John's idea. The baby they adopt, Pearl, was adopted by them through both a cruel turn of fate—Mei Mei dying—and choice when John and Nola decide to choose the baby they were handed rather than pick another one. Pearl, John seems to agree, is definitely lucky and fortunate.

Women

Throughout the stories of, "The Fortunes," Women proves to be an important theme that explores how gender imbalances affect Chinese and Chinese American females.

In the first story, Ling is horrified that Little Sister's gifts—prostitution—are a business, one that benefits Ng and their family back home. Little Sister repeatedly says that women have it worse off, and yet she also views her profession as just business, not something to get emotionally attracted to. Yet Ling realizes that he wants to spend time with Little Sister, or, as Ng astutely observes, own her, too. Ling meets Madame Ah Toy, the famous courtesan, through his employer, Crocker, an Irish American man with a fetish for Chinese culture, workers, and women. This puts Ling up close to witness the way Chinese women are objectified. Madame Ah Toy runs the brothel, but even though she is a woman, her employees all hate her anyway since she owns them. Again, the idea of women being a commodity, something for people to own, sell, and buy, weaves through "The Fortunes" in Anna's story. So many of the Chinese parts she plays are seductresses who represented the fascination men have with Chinese women. At home, Anna's father treats her as if she is something he owns. Thus, when she disobeys him, he beats her and in one case scrubbed her face raw to get the makeup off. He wants to tightly control his daughter's image and career. When Anna visits China, she asks to see the areas where prostitutes gather in Shanghai. Anna has heard rumors that the women there fashion themselves after her since her image as a Chinese female actress represents what many Western men think of when they think of Chinese women. Anna encountered this before when a man mistook her for a prostitute who mimicked Anna's mannerisms and style. Anna is shocked, then, to see that so many prostitutes in Shanghai are Europeans. Here in China, though, men see white women as exotic.

The narrator of the third story finds the connection between Chinese women and objectivity disturbing in his encounter with Cindy, an Asian prostitute he sees dancing to both "Turning Japanese" and "China Girl." He asks her if she is Japanese or Chinese, and she says whatever he wants. This horrifies him because it confirms what he suspects: a taste exists out there for some men who want to buy time with an Asian woman. Cindy knows the business well enough by now that she realizes that men will not be able to tell the difference of where she really comes from, so she just plays into whatever fantasy they are buying. Her reassurance that she is all-American gives the narrator more comfort. In the final story, an entire industry has grown up around unwanted Chinese baby girls and the rich Americans who can afford to adopt (buy) them. John feels the strange juxtaposition between the idea that the adoption is such a great opportunity, but it it is one that is only possible thanks to American white privilege and affluence. Underneath it all, China's shunning of its daughters reinforces the reality Little Sister lived more than a hundred years before John's story. It is a positive story, for the American parents to adopt these daughters, but the Chinese government is benefiting from it, too, by charging enormous sums and then mandating that parents have to come adopt their baby in person after seeing the sights and pumping tourism money into the economy. The girls escape, indeed, but their adoption and the

fundamental principle its founded on allows China to dispose of its baby girls in a cycle of profit. John feels uncomfortable about this until he talks with Pearl, a prostitute, at the hotel bar. John sees up close Pearl's poorly disguised despair. John acknowledges his mixed feelings about adopting a Chinese baby girl, but he also accepts that the reality is better than leaving her here to become a prostitute like Pearl.

Identity

With its focus on the Chinese American experience across time, "The Fortunes" explores the theme of Identity through characters struggling to negotiate their dual backgrounds.

Ling's struggle to claim an identity sets the tone for the rest of the novel. Ling comes to America eager to become American and find gold to amass wealth. Yet he finds his employment with railroad tycoon Charles Crocker is dependent on his identity. Crocker both encourages and discourages Ling from assimilating. Ling cuts off his queue, a traditional Chinese hairstyle for men, and works to lose his accent and become fluent in English. However, Crocker, who has a taste for Chinese culture and people, desires to keep Ling as his Chinese pet whose real value is in negotiating with Crocker's Chinese workers and providing a sympathetic look that Crocker is empathetic to the workers' demands. Ling feels drawn to the Chinese workers, though, and abandons his post in what could be seen in a hard reversal on his claimed identity. Ling then emulates the other workers and studies their spiritual beliefs. By the end of the novel, he has figured out a way to stay connected to his roots while still living in America. It helps that he is half white, half Chinese, which allows him to move between both worlds because his appearance could be interpreted as either white or Chinese. Ling does feel self conscious of this duality, though, and never tells Crocker he is half white because he feels Crocker would think Ling misrepresented himself as Chinese.

Anna May Wong has difficulty choosing one identity over the other. Her acting career is built on roles for Chinese characters, albeit ones that depict stereotypes of Chinese women, in particular mistresses, prostitutes, and seductresses. These are the only parts open to her given Hollywood's restrictions on the portrayal of race and relationships on screen. Before going to China to visit her father, Anna is proud of her career. Her trip to China, though, puts things in a new light after Nationalist critics scold her for taking parts that stereotype Chinese women. Anna feels helpless. It is not enough for her to be a famous and successful Chinese actress other Chinese women can look up to. She is supposed to speak for and represent her race as a whole, a difficult task in the early days of cinema when Anna's race is a novelty but also a stumbling block. Later in her life, Anna will control her identity in more positive ways. She becomes involved in benefits and fundraisers to help her home country. She begins to take smaller roles, but more selective ones that do not lean on the stereotypes anymore. Ultimately, Anna defines her identity as a compromise between the two worlds of her public image and her inner beliefs about pride for her home country.

The unnamed narrator of the third story recognizes that identity is something that contributed to the murder of his friend, Vincent. Two men beat Vincent to death because they thought he was Japanese. This experience shows the narrator how identity can be applied to another person by another party. The narrator feels that is difficult for white Americans, and even Asian Americans, to be able to determine an Asian person's heritage from appearances alone. This means that others, like Evans and Pitts, the men who murder Vincent, to apply whatever identity they want to an Asian person. The narrator secretly ponders if racism is bad only if it is wrong. For example, the men think Vincent is Japanese when in fact he is Chinese. The narrator wonders if it would have been considered as egregious a hate crime if they were right and Vincent was Japanese. He recognizes , though, that the reason the murder took on another level of intensity and hurt was the disregard for Vincent's true heritage, the implication being that if it did not matter to Evans and Pitts, that meant they saw all Asian Americans as the same. In the concluding scene of his account, the narrator recounts a conversation he has with an Asian stripper, Cindy. He asks if she is Japanese or Chinese, and she says whatever he wants her to be but then settles for saying she is all American. Her initial response confirms the narrator's worst fears. Westerners can apply whatever identity they want to an Asian person. For women, this meant they can pass for the heritage a man desires. Her conclusion that she is all American and that they were all American now offers some comfort to the narrator that the blanked term of American could hopefully describe everyone.

In the final story, John Ling Smith, the son of a white American pilot and a Chinese stewardess, feels the uncomfortable dichotomy that other characters in "The Fortunes" feel. John is a writer of literary fiction of some significance. His publisher, colleagues, and the university pressure him to embrace his identity and focus his work on topics related to his Chinese heritage. John obliges, though he feels more at home taking the extreme opposite approach in the novelizations of the TV series, "Kung Fu," that he cranks out, employing as many stereotyped ideas as the show encourages. John feels pigeonholed as a Chinese writer and not so much as a Chinese American or just American writer, which is awkward because he was not really raised with his Chinese culture encouraged or developed. For example, he does not speak any Chinese, which leads to an uncomfortable experience when someone confronts him at a reading and points out how he misused Chinese words. This threatens John's image as an "authentic" Chinese American writer, and he avoids termination only because he is a diversity hire and the university had to settle a discrimination suit the previous year. In China to take his daughter home, John feels out of place. In America, people co-opt his identity to serve their expectations of him as a Chinese writer. In China, everyone sees him as white, an outsider, because of his appearance and inability to communicate. He finds the fellow foster parents' attempt to learn about their daughters' Chinese heritage forced, but it really shames him deep down because he knows he does not know these things because his upbringing did not include this same education. Ultimately, John sees his identity as a gift he can give his daughter. His status as an American allows her to get a fresh start and another chance at life.

Names

From Little Sister to Pearl, names are a central theme in "The Fortunes."

Ling is fascinated with Little Sister, the prostitute employed by Ling. He feels her name is wrong, though, that Little Sister could not be her real name since it seems so generic. This is one of Ling's first experiences with American-ized names, and Little Sister's name feels inauthentic to him. After Little Sister is sold off, Ling wonders about her destiny. Asking Madame Ah Toy if she knows a woman named Little Sister, Madame Toy laughs it off as they are all little sisters in America. Once he is finally reunited with Little Sister, Ling says he could not find her because he did not know her real name. Little Sister tells him this is her real name, that Mei Mei, her Chinese name, translates as "Little Sister." She rebrands herself as "Madame Celeste." This transformation speaks to Little Sister's shift from a relational name, she is someone's little sister, into a woman whose name stands alone.

Anna May Wong claims her identity in a similar way. The name of her section is, "Your Name in Chinese." To pass as American, she adopts the stage name Anna May Wong. Anna hopes this will help her assimilate, but she is still known primarily as a Chinese actress. Later in life, Anna will appear at a party and give people "Chinese" names. However, the names she chooses are trite, not real Chinese names at all, such as Lotus Moon and Sage Tiger. Her calligrapher partner asks her, "Are you naming people or restaurants?" (172). Anna is leaning into the ignorance Americans have of Chinese names, and people are delighted by it. The joke is on them, but Anna makes light of her culture yet again to confirm Americans' stereotypes of Chinese people.

The third story is told by an unnamed narrator. The narrator chooses to remain unnamed perhaps for several reasons. First, it allows him a degree of anonymity. He protects his privacy this way. Second, it proves a point. By remaining unnamed, the narrator becomes whoever the reader wants him to be. He is Chinese American, but one of the lessons of Chin's murder is that for many people, an Asian person's heritage can be bent to serve their own purposes. Vincent's last name is Chin, for China, but of course Evans and Pitts do not stop to ask because it does not matter to them. Vincent becomes a canvas to project their racism and anger onto, and as his appearance does not give his heritage right away, Vincent becomes a generic Asian man to his murderers. He is both anonymous and manipulated to serve their needs. In the same way, the narrator goes unnamed because he knows people do not remember him from the murder. He could be, then, any Asian man depending upon who wants to identify him however they want. The narrator is just one of the masses, he thinks, indistinguishable because to many people, all Asians are the same.

In the final story, John chooses the name "Pearl" for his daughter after his encounter with a prostitute named Pearl. He believes he can honor her that way, given that Pearl helped him understand more about the experience of women in China. By naming his baby Pearl, John is able to symbolically give her the fresh start that her namesake

cannot have. The name is also a reference to Pearl S. Buck, author of "The Good Earth."

Ownership

Ownership is a core theme in "The Fortunes," most often in relation to women and girls being sold to become an object or commodity.

Ling's final conversation with Little Sister before they part for several years rattles him. Little Sister reveals in a matter of fact way that Uncle Ng is her father. Ling is in disbelief, and his outrage angers Little Sister. Ling does not see that Little Sister views herself as a commodity, just as her father does. Ng's philosophy meshes with Little Sister's. When Ling confronts him, he says he has sold Little Sister off to "Someone who could afford the bride price," making Ling think Little Sister would go for the same price needed to cover Ng's gambling debts.

Earlier, Ng proposes adopting Ling, but Ling is set on taking up Crocker's offer of employment. Ling says he has a father. Ng throws that belief back in his face: "The man who sold you to me?....Or the one who sold you to him? Who sells a son? A daughter maybe, but not a son" (33). In this conversation, Ng calls his bluff. He knows Ling desires Little Sister and says she would come along with the laundry business package deal if he lets Ling adopt him. "The girl....You would own her too, of course," to which Ling replies, "I don't want....to own her" (34). Ling feels that he loves Little Sister, but their sexual experiences are transactional, with Ling paying for her time. He does purchase her, then, for however long a session is with her.

Ling has trouble seeing himself as an object, too, but of course Ng is right; Ling is welcomed into Crocker's service thinking he is doing his race proud. Madame Ah Toy tells him he is just as much an object as she is, calling him a "pet" (69). This conversation helps Ling start to see that he is being used as an object by Crocker. By quitting as Crocker's manservant, Ling becomes his own man, living and dying on the income he creates himself.

John's story, the fourth in "The Fortunes," examines this idea of ownership explicitly. John feels uneasy about the Chinese adoption industry. It bothers him that they have to purchase a daughter, spending thousands of dollars in fees and a "donation" known as "lucky money" on "Gotcha Day!". John is uncomfortable thinking about how his daughter will be lucky to be adopted, but only on because John and Nola are well-off Americans who can afford to purchase a daughter. The Chinese adoption industry paints it as a positive chance for lucky daughters to be able to afford a way out of the country. John, though, sees this as a distraction. These daughters are unwanted, but they are unwanted because of China's one-child policy. They are rescued, but China also makes a profit off the daughters, even from the regulation that they have to be adopted in China. This is marketed as a way to connect the parents with their child's heritage, but it also floods money into the tourism industry. Meanwhile, these daughters are adopted—sold—so someone else can own them. The girls get to escape the country, with, as

John notes, its smog and strict communist regulations and limited opportunities for women, but it happens because an industry grew around the service, one that profits off rich Americans all because of a policy that deems them unwanted. It is a somewhat circular concept. The one-child policy creates the opportunity for these daughters to be sold so the country can profit off of them. The reader might wonder, then, if the one-child policy is philosophical or actually motivated by business.

This astonishing set up benefits the daughters and the American foster parents and is a role reversal from Ling and Little Sister's time. Whereas before girls were sold into prostitution in Gold Mountain, aka San Francisco, on a regular basis, now in John's time, Chinese girls are also purchased and owned, this time by foster parents. One of the main differences, though, is Chinese Americans felt unwanted by Americans over time. Now, though, Chinese girls are wanted so much so that American parents pay enormous sums of money and trip expenses to adopt them. For perhaps the first time, these Chinese girls are wanted purely to give them another chance at life in America, not to work as prostitutes like Little Sister, but purely for love. Yet underneath the adoption the implication remains: China may deem these girls "unwanted," but they have created a lucrative industry to profit off their adoptions to capitalize off their strict one-child policy.

Styles

Point of View

"The Fortunes" is comprised of four interconnected, lengthy short stories. The author uses perspective and point of view in a different way for each story.

The first story, "Gold: Celestial Railroad" is written from the third-person limited point of view, meaning that the narrator knows the thoughts and emotions of one main character, in this case Ling. An example of this would be when Little Sister mentions to Ling that she is pregnant, and she implies that he might be the father. Ling can only speculate based on her actions and words. The point of view is limited, so while the reader gets an inside look at Ling's thoughts, whether Little Sister is lying or not is unclear because she never clarifies it for him. Indeed, Ling never finds out if she was really pregnant. The author's choice to use a third-person limited point of view in this section is telling. Ling can be quite naive, even at the end of the story. He is prone to romanticizing people with bigger personalities, such as Little Sister and Crocker. Crocker is a larger-than-life man, and there are some things Ling still does not know about him. For example, Ling suspects that Crocker has something of a fetish for Chinese women, and people, like him, because of things he says to Ling as well as his significant collection of chinoiserie. Because the reader does not know if this is true or not, Ling's gradual awakening to this idea takes course over the story as he is first enchanted with Crocker and later conscious of his own place in Crocker's menagerie. Likewise, Little Sister retains her secrets throughout the novel. Ling gets to know her over time, and even at the end she remains something of a mystery to him. When he first meets Little Sister, Ling is infatuated with her. Later on, though, she reveals more to him about her past, simultaneously welcoming him into her life while still leaving him feeling like he knew her less than ever. Little Sister is a puzzle Ling cannot totally solve, but things in her past that she has hinted at and opinions she has expressed have informed his worldview.

The second story in "The Fortunes" follows Anna May Wong, credited as being the first major Chinese actress in the west. This story also follows the third-person limited perspective through Anna May's point of view. At the same time, the tone is somewhat detached. The structure of this story is divided into titled sections, the shortest being less than one page while the longest as much as three. The style seems almost biographical, as if the language is describing Anna's life like a newspaper obituary or feature story would. The point of view describing Anna's emotions is a bit detached this way. The author's choice might be to limit how much the reader—and presumably Anna's audience—understands about Anna's emotions and thoughts. In a way similar to the first story, this narrative choice presents Anna's inner life through a somewhat distant way. We know Anna, but we do not quite know everything about her. She retains some of her mystique this way. The point perhaps is that the reader can never truly know Anna beyond her popular image, widely known facts, and speculation.

The third story in "The Fortunes" is told from the first person perspective of the unnamed narrator, the friend of Vincent Chin's who was there with him the night he was murdered. It is fitting that the voice is in the first person because the traumatic murder required the perspective of someone close to Vincent. The narrator expresses at various times remorse, guilt, resentment, defeat, and bitterness. This represents the conflicted, complicated feelings he had of being thrust into the national spotlight, becoming a symbol of the prejudice and hostility toward Chinese Americans. Yet the narrator remains deeply conflicted. In fact, at times he recounts conversations between the other characters and then pulls back, revealing that it was a fiction of his own creation, or was it? That lingering doubt speaks to the failure of memory, either willingly or deliberately, as well as the position witnesses are also put into wherein they must tell the same story over again with the details correct each time in order to frame a narrative. Thus, even though Davies uses first person here, the narrator is inconsistent, not even very reliable. The reader knows him and yet does not, true to how we describe events and emotions to others only in a limited way.

The fourth story in "The Fortunes" follows John Ling Smith. The point of view is third person limited again and only describes John's emotions and thoughts. True to the story, John is the main character in this story. Even though other characters, such as his wife, Nola, and the prostitute, Pearl, appear, the narrator only gives a fleeting characterization of them. Nola and Pearl appear in the story, but John is not too concerned with them. The focus of the story is squarely on John and his introspection upon the occasion of going to China to adopt a baby girl orphan. The reader gets the sense that the narrator represents John's feelings quite accurately. Unlike in the third part, John's story is straightforward. Even to his wife and other characters he is honest. The reader has no reason to suspect that he, or the narrator, is withholding anything.

Language and Meaning

The author uses language to great effect in "The Fortunes." Each of the characters, and each of the stories contain many complex sentence structures and utilize an advanced vocabulary. One of the recurring language choices is to include Chinese, both Cantonese and Mandarin, in conversations between Chinese American characters. Throughout the course of the novel, the Chinese language gets less and less prominent. In the opening story, Ling struggles to work hard to be fluent in English as well as to lose his distinctive Chinese accent. He wishes to assimilate and be taken seriously as an American, and overcoming the language barrier is part of accomplishing this goal. The second story shows Anna using English with more ease. Her father, though, made sure she learned Chinese and forced her to go to Chinese classes after school. When she goes to China, though, she is less sure of her language skills to speak the mother tongue. In the third segment, the narrator is of a different generation having grown up in America. In his first person narration, he uses English flawlessly and seems somewhat uncomfortable with Chinese language. In fact, it seems as if he has rejected it all together. This thread continues culminates in the fourth story where John, a Chinese American, does not know how to speak or understand Chinese. Yet the other parents on the trip expect him to be able to converse in Chinese. In fact, they are at

times openly jealous of his ability to speak the native language of their adopted Chinese daughters. One example of how this hinders John is during the scene where Napoleon, the guide, realizes something is wrong when the daughter, Mei Mei, is not there on "Gotcha Day!" morning. She whips out her phone and makes several calls. John cannot quite get the tone of what she is saying, but at one point he thinks she is smoothing things over for them. Actually, Napoleon is talking with her boyfriend. Later, at the orphanage, John is frustrated by not being able to understand what is going on. His inability to understand Chinese, and in fact the idea that learning Chinese was optional for him growing up as an American, circles back to Ling, who started in America not knowing any English and being forced to learn it to survive.

Structure

"The Fortunes" is structured in four lengthy short stories. (The following pagination refer specifically to the first hardcover edition of "The Fortunes," published in 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.)

The first story, Part I: Gold - Celestial Railroad, is, at 96 pages, the longest story and approaches novella length, usually around 30,000 to 60,000 words (roughly 65-125 pages). This story is told in straightforward prose divided into twelve different sections. The author might have made this part the longest section because it establishes some of the recurring themes and symbols developed later in the novel. For example, the idea of Chinese daughters led into prostitution, the duality of being the biracial child of an interracial relationship, names, and luck and fortune.

The second story, Part II: Silver - Your Name in Chinese is 72 pages long. The story is divided into titled segments, such as "Fifty Million Frenchman," "Orientally Yours," and "Critical Reception." It is unclear who chose to title these sections, though since the first section, "Riveting," is a capsule synopsis of Anna and her career, the story is meant to be read as a biography. It is revealed in this story that Anna kept a journal of her life.

The third story, Part III: Jade - Tell It Slant is just 25 pages long. The story is presented as a recollection or monologue by the unnamed narrator. The sections are not numbered or identified individually, separated as paragraphs through section breaks. The story the narrator tells in first person jumps around in time, flipping back and forth between the past and present, the events not always told linearly. That the story lacks any distinctive divisions indicates that the narrator is perhaps discussing the events with someone else—indeed, he frequently refers to a "you," e.g. "If you remember the case at all (and maybe it's coming back to you?), if you were watching TV back then, you might recall her, Vincent's mother—Lily—going on Donahue (remember him?), or meeting with Jesse Jackson (remember him?) at one of his presidential campaign rallies" (187). Thus, the narrator's recollections are more stream of conscious and therefore are not meant to be seen as an organized, polished account such as with a lengthy article.

The fourth and final story, Part IV: Pearl - Disorientation is 57 pages long. This section is also not numbered or chunked into distinct passages. The events are told linearly, without hindsight or analysis of the adoption day that a personal recollection might provide. Indeed, the events are not framed with reflection (such as John looking back on the trip to China and evaluating his actions). Instead, the narrator tells John's story with events happening sequentially.

Each of the stories begins with a quote. For example, the second story begins with the quote "'The truth is always exciting. Speak it then. / Life is dull without it.' - Pearl S. Buck." These quotes are used to introduce themes for the stories. Here, in the second section, the quote not only strikes a tone of being open and honest, just as Anna is with the world as a very candid movie star who does not often shy away from attention to her personal life. Furthermore, the quote is from Pearl S. Buck, the famous novelist and author of "The Good Earth," a story about a family in China. The controversial casting of a Caucasian actress for the lead role in the movie adaptation of "The Good Earth" enraged and deeply wounded Anna. Even years later, this casting decision clings to her enduring legacy in cinema and Chinese American history. Last, the quote and its author will be referenced later with the name "Pearl" in John's section, the fourth story.

Quotes

You're a credit to your race, my boy.
-- Crocker (Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad: Section 6: Page 44)

Importance: One of the themes in "The Fortunes" is money and transactions. Ling comes to America because he wanted to be rich. He is obsessed with earning gold. Here, his employer, railroad tycoon Charles Crocker, calls him a credit to his race after Ling demonstrates his strength in front of Crocker's business friend, Stanford, and his foreman, Strobridge. Based on Ling's performance, Crocker hires fifty "Celestials," or Chinese men, to work on his railroad. Ling is initially happy about this, but Little Sister throws the words back at him, asking him, "How do you spend that?" (44). She tells him that she would buy a brothel if she could and says they could do it together if he would earn more than credit. This exchange helps Ling understand that Crocker's words might seem kind, but they are racist and in fact represented an empty promise to him, as if Ling should be grateful. At the same time, it shows that Ling's place, as the Chinese assistant, is to represent all the Chinese workers and the Chinese in general. It seems to Little Sister that he should be compensated for his value beyond an imaginary credit, and she wonders how much the Chinese men Crocker hires would get paid. Through her conversation with Ling, she also reveals that she wants to have a business of her own one day. She mentions Ah Toy, a famous Chinese courtesan whom Ling will meet later in the story.

We're not so different, you and I. Oh, I know about you. Crocker's 'pet'—the one he brags about—the first pet, first among thousands, but still a pet. And he's not bragging about you. He's boasting of himself, his vision.
-- Madame Ah Toy (Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad: Section 8: Page 69)

Importance: Ling gets to visit the famous Chinese courtesan Madame Ah Toy in her brothel. She is famous in America as a satisfying prostitute, and she eventually opens up her own brothel. Crocker is a customer. While Crocker is having sex with one of the Chinese prostitutes, Ling and Madame Ah Toy talk. In this quote, she talks about how Ling is similar to her in some ways. To men like Crocker, she and Ling are objects to own. Crocker boasts of Ling, but he sees him more as his pet than his equal. He wants to be known as a visionary for hiring Chinese laborers. Ling has long suspected that Crocker had a sort of fetish for the Chinese. His home is done up in the chinoiserie style, an imitation of Chinese aesthetics. He hires Ling. He hires thousands of Chinese workers, supposedly due to Ling's influence, and he regularly visits Chinese prostitutes. After these words from Madame Ah Toy, Ling starts to look at the bigger picture and how he fits into Crocker's fantasy as a pet he wants to show off and possess.

Well, if I ain't seen the elephant!
-- Little Sister (Part 1: Gold - Celestial Railroad: Section 12: Page 95)

Importance: One of the phrases that appears constantly throughout the first story in "The Fortunes" is the concept of "seeing the elephant." Ling first hears this when he

was new and working in Ng's laundry. Ng is said to have "seen the elephant," meaning seen everything there was to see in life, since he was once a forty-niner gold rusher. However, over the course of the story, the meaning of this expression changes. It become a euphemism for all kinds of things, everything from a man's penis to having sex with a woman and here, as Little Sister says after seeing Ling again for the first time in a while, to have seen something remarkable. Earlier in the story, seeing the elephant was a kind of quest for Ling as he wanted to take in America and venture out to find gold. Yet the idea and the imagery behind elephants sticks with Ling, and he thinks about this expression frequently, especially in the final pages. Ling seems at peace with the ambiguous meaning behind the expression. There is no clear-cut answer to what the elephant is, and it is an expression utilized by many different people to mean different things.

She never wanted to be just famous," Browning said once. "She wanted to be white. I told her she was going to have to settle for being famous for being Chinese."
-- Ted Browning (Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese: "Siamese": Page 125)

Importance: The director Ted Browning, a lover of Anna's, says this sentiment to the press once. This quote represents the struggle Anna faces with trying not only to be a famous Hollywood actress, but to overcome being seen as just a Chinese actress. Browning, though, knows that she will never play parts for white women. She will have to settle for being Chinese and using that identity to her advantage. Browning is correct. Anna comes to be known as the most famous Chinese actress in Hollywood. At the same time, she is boxed out of roles that should have gone to a Chinese actress. It seems that Anna struggles to find the right balance between the two paths that Browning references here. Going to China is a wakeup call for Anna to see how even though she was a film star, in China many people feel that she took roles that stereotype the Chinese and reflect poorly on China. Anna tries to tell them that these were the only roles available, yet some people still feel betrayed by her choices. It is not enough to be a successful Chinese American actress, the critics think. Anna should have been advocating for better roles for Chinese characters. However, Anna will continually run up against white actors in yellow face taking substantive roles. This cycle of frustration is a dominant struggle in Anna's life and career.

Don't worry," her father had told her when she bade him a tearful goodbye in L.A. "This way you won't have to come to my funeral."
-- Mr. Wong (Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese: "China City": Page 153)

Importance: Anna always had a contentious relationship with her father even back when she was a young girl. Her mother tells her at one point that her father wanted a son and that when Anna was born, he did not come home for days. This sets the tone for their relationship for the rest of their lives. Anna's father is extremely harsh as a disciplinarian, and when Anna skips school to go to the movies he beats her. He is never proud of her success even though Anna tried to please him her whole life. In this quote, Mr. Wong reminds Anna of how she chose to keep starring in a Broadway play rather than come back to L.A. for her mother's funeral. Anna had sent her younger sister and understudy, Mary, to go home for the funeral. Her father never forgives her and

does not understand that it was a career choice for Anna to stay in New York. Plus, she reasons, if both she and Mary went, there would be no one to play the part, and the theater would close. Now, on the trip, Anna is moved when she went to his village and he tries to get her to stay, telling her that this was her home. Eventually, Mr. Wong is forced to return to America. Their relationship remains still stiff, though it seems as if Anna and Mr. Wong understand each other better in later years after Anna traveled across the ocean to see him and her homeland.

That's acting, darling. That's art. It's why what's unbearable in life—loss, heartbreak, despair—is bearable on the screen: because we know the picture will end."
-- Anna (Part 2: Silver - Your Name in Chinese: "The Understudy": Page 170)

Importance: Anna's younger sister, Mary, was the favorite of her father's, but she looked up to Anna and hoped to be an actress, too. She emulated Anna, but whatever roles Mary had were often ones Anna passed over or were too small for Anna. Mary killed herself in 1940. Anna attributes it to her struggles with her career. After Mary's death, Anna thinks back to a conversation she had with Mary once. Mary had wanted to know how she kept her composure if she felt like she had to sneeze or cough or break character and the camera was on. Anna told her she just had to endure and focus on each second until the take was over. Anna answered her with this quote. This quote demonstrates Anna's philosophy on film. Actors play out horrific circumstances, such as loss, broken hearts, agony, depression, etc., The magic of cinematic art is audiences get to watch someone experience these emotions in a story that wraps up neatly with an end time. There is a defined beginning and end to the suffering, Anna believes. Anna is happy to give that gift to viewers who would find watching films cathartic. This quote also touches on a theme in Anna's story, that of there not being a rigid line between Anna's life on screen and her life off screen. At times throughout her trip to see her father, Anna feels uncertain what was part of the documentary and what was part of her life.

What do I remember? What does anyone remember after all this time?
-- Unnamed narrator (Vincent Chin's friend) (Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant: Page 179)

Importance: The third story is told by an unnamed narrator, a Chinese American man who was friends with Vincent Chin, a young Chinese American man who was murdered as a hate crime at his bachelor party in 1982. The narrator chooses not to identify himself, but his account of the murder, of which he was a witness, and the aftermath are written almost as if they are spoken to someone who was not very familiar with the crime. From the narrator's timeline, his narration is situated between 2002 and 2012. In this quote, he repeats the question of what he remembered of the murder. The narrator frequently undercuts his reliability by saying something and then backing off and saying it had never happened. He also wishes to correct people's misconceptions. For example, Vincent Chin became a martyr for Asian Americans who suffered from discrimination. Chin was turned into an all-American hero, but the narrator knows that he was actually not as perfect as he seemed, such as being a frequent customer at the strip club. In this quote, the narrator introduces the theme of memory not being entirely reliable and also references how such a huge case could become forgotten over time.

I'm not a motherfucker.
-- Vincent Chin (Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant: Page 193)

Importance: Vincent Chin got into an altercation with two men, a father and a stepson, who took out their resentment for the Japanese on him. They started the fight, and they called Vincent a "motherfucker." The narrator has since wondered why this word set Vincent off in particular. The narrator thinks it might be because Vincent was adopted, his parents, both Chinese, were unable to have children, and it took ten years until they could successfully adopt Vincent. Vincent was close with his parents, especially his mother, Lily, who was like a second mother to the narrator since his mother died when he was just a child. The narrator thinks the implication behind this insult, someone having sex with his mother, bothered Vincent because he was so dedicated to his mother, an extremely hard worker who adored Vincent. He had been living at home at the time of the murder. Yet it always bothered the narrator that Vincent did not include him in his phrase, that he did not say "We're not." The narrator wonders about why Vincent did not use the plural form, whether Vincent really saw him as a fellow Chinese man or not.

All-American, baby. We're all American here." It felt like something to cover ourselves in, that word, its warm anonymity. And I nodded, sank back on my stool, bought her that drink.
-- Cindy; Narrator (Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant: Page 204)

Importance: The narrator avoids strip clubs throughout his life after the Chin murder. When he does go to one, however, he feels uncomfortable being around the Asian stripper, who dances to songs like "Turning Japanese" and "China Girl." He does not want to talk to her and hopes that he would blend into the background. She introduces herself to him. He asks her if she was Japanese or Chinese, and she tells him "Whatever you want me to be, baby," and asks him if he wanted to guess (204). Her answer is that she was All-American. It bothers him that she is calculating about whether or not to reveal her heritage. Her words reveal that for many men, she could be Chinese or Japanese, whatever their desire, because they could not tell her apart. Thus she would fulfill whatever fantasy they had. It doubly bothers the narrator that he cannot tell if she was Japanese or Chinese himself. This encounter proves that the lingering inherent bias in Chin's murder, that white men could not tell if he was Japanese or not, is still something many Asian American people experience. Cindy's response that she was American and that they all were satisfies the narrator. They are American both, no matter if they are Chinese American or Japanese American. They both have claim to American heritage.

Time up....You should have fucked me....You could have gotten me pregnant, left little orphan for some other American to adopt. Joke!
-- Pearl (Part 4: Pearl - Disorientation: Page 238)

Importance: John Ling Smith is having difficulty sleeping the night before the adoption. He decides to go to the hotel bar, where he sees a young prostitute making calls to try to drum up business. He buys her a drink to try to learn more about her life. The

prostitute, Pearl, fascinates John, though he notes that he thinks she plays up her accent on purpose, as if he would like that or that would be part of his fantasy. Pearl often speaks as if she were using rehearsed lines. Here, though, she makes a joke at his expense. She implies that John came all that way to purchase one of China's unwanted daughters. He could have just got her pregnant, and then she would have a baby that some other rich American would adopt in a vicious cycle of irony. John is stunned by a possibility he did not even consider. Pearl also makes him think about how he has never wanted to sleep with a Chinese woman, that it would just feel wrong to him. John is very concerned with the gender disparity in China and thinks it would lead to something like this, with women having to go into prostitution which would alternately be a lucrative career since they were so outnumbered by men because of the policy. John sees Pearl once more when he and Nola bring their new daughter back to the hotel. Pearl says to take her, the child, home. John decides to name his daughter Pearl.

And this is what she wants, what they both want more than anything, not to choose, after all, but to be chosen. He by her, she by him, both of them by this child. It's part of why he loves Nola, he thinks, because she, a white American, chose hom.
-- John (Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant: Page 259)

Importance: After Mei Mei dies, John and Nola are shown the nursery in the orphanage and asked to choose a baby. The orphanage director has already given them the new baby, but she says that they could pick another one if they did not like her. Nola and John agree to take the new baby. They both say they could not choose. John realizes then that it was being chosen that was so significant a part of love. This baby had found them through luck and fortune, though it was misfortune for Mei Mei, but fate had brought her to them. John knows it would be impossible to adopt every baby, but he settles for this new daughter. Her, at least, they could save. John knows, too, that part of the reason he loves Nola was that she had chosen him, a half Chinese and half American man, while being a white American woman. He secretly feels great that she had picked him. John also recalls the theme of fate and fortune. For John, they have free will here. Even though the new baby was picked as a replacement, it was not only her luck but also their free will choice to take her with them.

I wonder who she'll be," Nola murmurs a little while later.
-- Nola (Part 3: Jade - Tell It Slant: Page 261)

Importance: At the start of his trip to China, John feels restless and has difficulty sleeping. He is worried about starting a new life with Nola, that the baby will change everything for them. They have had a pretty strong marriage and lived childless for years. Their new baby, Pearl, safe with them in the hotel room, John and Nola wonder about what she will be like when she grew up. There seems to be an endless possibility now that Pearl has an opportunity to grow up in America with affluent parents. Nola admits she had always wanted to be rich and famous, like the actress and singer Olivia Newton-John. John confesses he had wanted to be an astronaut. As Nola drifts off to sleep, John wonders at the world they were bringing this child into, how different it would look when she grew up. He hopes that she and her fellow adopted Chinese daughters will become leaders of industries, from railroads to automobiles and the

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Of all the characters in "The Fortunes," Pearl will be given an opportunity others would not have. It will be up to her to forge her path. This is the gift of her good fortune: a chance at a new life.