

## ***NATIVE SPEAKER'S INTERCULTURAL ZIGZAG BETWEEN REMNANTS OF THE PAST AND PROJECTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY***

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*Abstract: Chang-rae Lee's debut novel draws on the ethnic background without the author necessarily turning into a spokesperson for a larger community. Writing empowers him to reconcile past and present, thus forging a more inspiring future, and it also helps him to articulate an unmistakable identity over time. At the core of his writing lies the determination to come to grips with both the mainstream American society and the ethnic background.*

*Native Speaker comes across as a literary work with and about immigrants, unravelling linguistic concerns, bringing to the fore of the narrative those tropes of recycled hopes; it's also a novel about treason performed as one's profession as well as about self-betrayal, about emotional enigmas, language effusions, people with wrap-around cupidity tentacles, a novel of deceptions, of alienation, of failure and redemption as well as of failure and annihilation.*

*We consider that language, as a pivotal pawn of the Americanization process, carries one too many shades of meaning, thus emphasizing Lee's aim of making a statement through his title: Native Speaker.*

*Along the same lines, claiming a place, being in constant pursuit of others' acceptance as someone caught between cultures-neither here nor there-, driven by the urge to become vocal, facing, therefore, strenuous emotional dilemmas time and again, all the aforementioned reasons lead the writer to undoubtedly jump at the opportunity of balancing views and triggering debates through his art.*

*Keywords: ethnicity, Korean American background, zigzagging between cultural challenges, a sense of belonging.*

### *1. Introduction*

Born to Young Yong and Inja (Hong) Lee, Chang-rae Lee immigrated to the United States with his family in 1968. They settled in New York City, where Lee's father started a psychiatric practice. His mother, on the other hand, never became fluent in English and stayed mostly at home raising the family. Lee grew up knowing the professional success of his father's life and the homebound life of his mother's domesticity. The pronounced differences between the two led to Lee's observation of the sophisticated world of metropolitan New York, the inner-city struggles of Korean American neighbourhoods and businesses and the quieter struggles in suburban life. His experiences of these worlds helped shape the inner tensions of his protagonists, whether Asian American or other. Lee's first novel, *Native Speaker*, was published in 1995. (Huang, 2009: 595-6)

To start with, the Latin phrase, 'Respice, adspice, prospice' (*Analyze the past, examine the present, look forward to the future*), seems to be deeply embedded in Chang-rae Lee's narrative fabric. Moreover, Roxanne Swentzell's poem poignantly captures Henry Park's intercultural zigzag between remnants of the past and projections of authenticity: 'I SCULPT/ To reach out to you/ Hoping to go past/ the words and thoughts/ that bind us/ to a shallow world/ Hoping/ to catch a moment/ of direct connection/ between your soul/ and mine/ then for that second/ we will remember/ what is important/ and in remembering/ there is hope.' (Acampora and Cotton, 2007:180)

Language lies at the heart of the struggle for identity in *Native Speaker*. As an identity marker, it is used for prestige, as a weapon or as a shield in an ethnically diverse society. Ultimately, it is his language that marks Henry as a foreigner: although he speaks English quite well, his attentiveness to sounds and careful pronunciation keep him from perfect fluency: 'I thought English would be simply a version of our Korean. [...] Native speakers may not fully know this, but English is a scabrous mouthful. In Korean, there are no separate sounds for L and R, the sound is singular and without a baroque Spanish trill or roll. There is no B and V for us, no P and F. I always thought someone must have invented certain words to torture us.' (Lee, 2013: 249-50)

Identity in *Native Speaker* is conceived both racially and in broader terms. Henry's marriage to Lelia and the birth of their son raise questions of relationships in mixed-race families. In Henry's work as a spy, he is always Asian American, but under that racial umbrella he devises a number of identities, creating and embodying diverse traits under various names, often blurring

boundaries by using his real name but lying about his occupation, or by permeating an invented personality with details from his real life. (Oh, 2007: 211-2)

*2. Henry Park's Attempt at Deciphering His Conundrum-like Existence: Caught between Cultures, Vacillating between Private Life and Work Dilemmas*

On the very first page, Lee reveals Henry as a character seeking but unable to find his authentic voice; Henry wants to be a 'native speaker' of his real self but continually stumbles, as the opening episode regarding the 'list' suggests. The first sentence of the novel states: 'The day my wife left she gave me a list of who I was.' Will the list provide the necessary ingredients of who Henry is? Such an inventory no doubt contains valuable information, yet the reader is denied immediate access to it.

Throughout the novel, we accompany Henry Park, Lee's protagonist, as he engages in a demanding process of self-discovery, fighting his way out from the deepest feelings of anger and despondency to eventually become capable of embracing ideas like 'tolerant acceptance' and even 'self- forgiveness.' With this in mind, we readily agree with Lou Fritas Caton, who maintains that,

*Because the world - unfairly imperfect - allowed his son to die in a foolish schoolyard catastrophe, Henry feels life has little meaning or joy. This bitterness of being unjustly singled out by fate is further compounded both by misrepresentations related to his ethnicity and the duplicity associated with his job. That is, Henry lives an unrecognized, uncertain American life in at least three distinct ways: the world refuses to recognize him, he works as a spy, and he is Asian. Serving as a type of psychological paralysis, such a triple whammy produces in him a sorrowful desire for authenticity and acceptance. (Caton, 2008: 121)*

Caton also touches upon the underlying significance of several instances of postponement in Chang-rae Lee's novel. As the critic claims, 'Lee defers revealing the items on the list for several pages. In fact, before presenting this initial information to the reader, Henry tells us that he threw away the original and only kept photocopies; hence, when the reader eventually *does* hear of the particulars, they come from a copy not an original.' (Caton, 2008: 122)

If we are to mention another keyword in the string of those matching the intricate topic of the novel, this would be *fragmentary*, an idea thoroughly set forth by the same Lou Freitas Caton:

*The note becomes important only for its uncertain, fragmentary, belated, and simulated status rather than for its ability to reveal information. A communiqué that might hold insights into authentic self-discovery turns into reiterated displacements or duplications that are continually postponed until they eventually surface as list of severed, ambiguous fragments.* (Caton, 2008: 123)

Henry is forever uncertain of his place, a perpetual outsider looking at American culture from a distance. And now, a man of two worlds, he is beginning to fear that he has betrayed both and belongs to neither. Chang-rae Lee's first novel *Native Speaker* is a raw and lyrical evocation of the immigrant experience and of the question of identity itself.

Embarking on an unsettling journey towards self-discovery, Henry Park, Chang-rae Lee's choice for the protagonist behind the plot thread in *Native Speaker*, starts reassessing his life in the light of a series of traumas, which end with his wife's, Lelia, estrangement.

Lelia's departure is sealed by a well-structured portrayal of her husband, articulating poignant answers to questions having floated for a long time between two lovers-lately-turned into bitter strangers, nonetheless questions never spoken out loud: 'You are surreptitious/ B+ student of life/ first thing hummer of Wagner and Strauss/ illegal alien/ emotional alien/ genre bug/ Yellow peril: neo-American [...] I found a scrap of paper beneath our bed while I was cleaning. Her signature, again: False speaker of language.' (Lee, 2013: 5-6)

In a similar vein, Mary Jane Hurst (2011: 82) claims the following: "The novel functions as a quest to discover the inner self of Henry Park. The opening sentence, 'The day my wife left she gave me a list of who I was' (1) launches Henry's search for identity. [...] By making copies of his wife's list, Henry reveals facets of his insecurity: his reliance on other people's assessment for identification, his custom of fighting with the subversive strategies of the underdog position, and his need to be ever ready to offer proof of his identity."

Who's Henry Park? In his words, a rather modest spy by the general standards in that he only insinuates himself into people's lives in order to gather as much information as possible in the most inoffensive manner, after all. He isn't politically committed in any way by being a spy. Henry Park pictures himself more like a 'domestic traveller' than anything else. Therefore, working as a spy comes across as less fancy than people usually tend to imagine it.

*We casually spoke of ourselves as business people. Domestic travellers. We went wherever there was a need. The urgency of that need, like much of everything else, was determined by some calculus of*

*power and money. Political force, the fluid motion of capital. Influence on your fellow man. These basics drove our livelihood. In a phrase, we were spies.* (Lee, 2013: 18)

Henry Park is earning a living by generating ‘myriad facts and extrapolations’ about ‘people working against’ the ‘vested interests’ of ‘individuals of resource and connection.’ He is mainly assigned to scrutinize ‘well-to-do immigrants’, people of his ‘own kind.’

‘The most prodigal and mundane of historians,’ as Henry defines himself, a genuine chameleon, he ingratiates himself with everyone who is *available* to be emotionally exploited: ‘We chose instead to deal in people. Each of us engaged our own kind, more or less. Foreign workers, immigrants, first-generationals, neo-Americans. I worked with Koreans, Pete with Japanese. We split up the rest, the Chinese, Laotians, Singaporeans, Filipinos, the whole transplanted Pacific Rim.’ (Lee, 2013: 19)

In his work as a spy, Henry’s chameleon qualities have enabled him to succeed. He relies, both at work and at home, on his ability to say as little as possible. However beneficial they may be at work, Henry’s talents prove detrimental to his private life because they foster deception and misunderstanding among people who expect intimacy and trust.

Instead of being himself, Henry works hard to be what he imagines others want him to be. As Mary Jane Hurst points out, ‘In the early stages of his relationship with Lelia, she is flattered by his desire to please, but later in their marriage she cannot tolerate his inability to share his real self. By the time Lelia leaves her husband, they have gone from discovering and building a community to maintaining and guarding individual isolation, just as they have moved from joyful shared speech to confused and bleak silence.’ (Hurst, 2011: 83)

In a similar vein, we notice that ‘Henry *can* reveal himself under the care of Dr. Luzan, the psychiatrist Henry is investigating in his job as a spy. He is able to move beyond his inhibitions or psychological blocks in this specific situation of doctor/ patient. [...] Under these occupational conditions of *inauthenticity*, then, he is able to achieve the public façade of authenticity. Complicating this situation even more is the fact that Henry seems to be able to talk about his real life only while playing this role of someone else.’ (Caton, 2008: 123)

Henry Park, instructed to cleave to the efficiency of certain behaviour, to display a particular attitude, is, indeed, expected to outperform his colleagues by acting as surreptitiously as possible when entrusted with a mission: “He went on, different again, his voice calmer. ‘Remember how I taught you. Just stay in the background. Be unapparent and flat. Speak enough

so they can hear your voice and come to trust it, but no more, and no one will think twice about who you are. The key is to make them think just once. No more, no less.’ ” (Lee, 2013: 46)

Furthermore, Dennis Hoagland, his ruthless boss, attempts at dissipating Henry Park’s qualms regarding the damage that his spy job eventually causes to the people he deals in. A rather unscrupulous man, Dennis won’t be filled with the tiniest remorse for the suffering inflicted by any of the tasks he pursues.

We also accompany Dennis, who, along the same lines, starts lecturing Henry, his Korean American reluctant spy with a recently failed assignment attached to his portfolio, on life and morality, on how cruel and unfair the world is, how intractable problems can become, underscoring how ‘there’s always a picture too big to see,’ therefore how unnecessary it results to ruminate for an indefinite period of time about the unfathomable reasons lying behind the evil, which lurks everywhere: “He said, ‘Then you know that no matter how smart you are, no one is smart enough to see the whole world. There’s always a picture too big to see. No one is safe, Harry, not in some fucking pleasure boat in the Caribbean, not even in lovely Long Island or Queens. There’s no real evil in the world. It’s just the world. Full of people like us.’ ” (Lee, 2013: 48)

### *3. John Kwang, Seemingly the Epitome of a Korean Immigrant’s Success in America*

Referring to Henry’s ‘primary assignment’, Mary Jane Hurst emphasizes John Kwang’s skills at ‘bringing a new paradigm to city issue’ coupled with his contribution of ‘innovative ideas to other’ matters, features which definitely help Lee’s protagonist understand his new target’s value: ‘Henry’s primary assignment in the novel requires him to gather information about John Kwang, a Korean American city councilman considering a run for mayor of New York. Henry does not know who requests the information or even what information is wanted. His job is to infiltrate the personal and public life of Kwang. Kwang, a handsome man with a traditional Korean wife and two young sons, is a self-made millionaire who is active in his church, in the Korean American community, and in the New York political scene.’ (Hurst, 2011: 85)

Additionally, we see how getting close to John Kwang, the aspiring Korean American mayoral candidate, is not tantamount to what the ethnic spy has already envisioned.

John Kwang’s public persona is surprisingly at odds with the manner in which Henry has been accustomed to think about any possible trajectory of Koreans in America: ‘[...]A

heterogeneous, hybrid and multiplicitous Asian America necessarily includes those who have apparently made it, like, for example, Chang-rae Lee's John Kwang, and those who struggle with traumatic pasts as they continue into the present and are exacerbated by intraracial and interracial differences.' (Adams, 2008: 172) Consequently, when he observes Kwang's taking centre stage, all the ingrained beliefs seemingly turn obsolete: 'Before I knew of him, I had never even conceived of someone like him. A Korean man, of his age, as part of the vernacular. Not just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a larger public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family. (Lee, 2013: 149)

As Bella Adams argues, "for the most part, however, *Native Speaker* is not concerned with this wartime history, but with post-war historical events. At least three contemporary events are represented in the novel: first, the 1992 uprising in Los Angeles; second, the 1993 *Golden Venture* incident in New York when a ship carrying illegal Chinese immigrants ran aground; and, third, 'Giuliani time' " (Adams, 2008: 167)

In dwelling on John Kwang's public figure, Bella Adams poignantly underscores the apparent discrepancies between the mayoral candidate and the professional spy, both American citizens of Korean ancestry: "Not an exploiter, then, like Park and his colleagues, Kwang is champion and friend of the exploited, from unregistered voters to undocumented workers and 'every boat person in between'. Kwang's constituency resembles a multicultural family, and his campaign attempts to diversify Asian American political practices.

Kwang's response to the injustice perpetuated by the white patriarchal political economy is a 'giant money club, our huge *ggeh* for all...with people other than just our own' giving and receiving financial support." (Adams, 2008: 169)

By the same token, the Korean *ggeh* is also taken into consideration by Mary Jane Hurst: 'Huge sums are being donated, mostly in small amounts by vast numbers of legitimate shopkeepers and poorer workers, many of them illegal aliens, in Kwang's district. In turn, Kwang distributes money to those starting their own businesses or those with special needs. The system operates with honourable intent, modelled after the Korean *ggeh*.' (Hurst, 2011: 90)

#### 4. Henry Park's Father, a Beleaguered Professional in Disguise

As we progress with the unravelling of *Native Speaker's* secrets, we are to encounter pages and pages peppered with insights into the culture of Korean immigrants in America.

Sacrificing most of his time and energy on the altar of work and family, Henry's father embodies the stereotypical Korean immigrant in America, whose fierce resolution to steer a path of his own, as successful as possible, has always set an example: 'I thought his life was all about money. He drew much energy and pride from his ability to make it almost at will. He was some kind of human annuity. He had no real cleverness or secrets for good business; he simply refused to fail, leaving absolutely nothing to luck or chance or someone else.' (Lee, 2013: 53)

We are most certain that Chang-rae Lee displays a truly outstanding talent for making words serve his literary purpose. Therefore *Native Speaker* undeniably gives proof of his creative artistry, capturing the existential dilemmas of urban jungle characters and pouring them into a witty, intriguing plot.

Concerned with self-discovery, with assessing and reassessing both his past and present, Henry Park also delves into his Korean immigrant father's background, thoroughly shaped by an entrenched creed, embraced in order to succeed in 'his chosen nation,' America. However, years later, the son challenges to a greater or lesser extent the inscrutability and sacrifices specific to his parents: 'I was to inherit them, the legacy unfurling before me this way: you worked from before sunrise to the dead of night. You were never unkind in your dealings, but then you were not generous. Your family was your life, though you rarely saw them. You kept close handsome sums of cash in small denominations.' (Lee, 2013: 51)

Lying at the core of the novel, ethnicity prompts several points of view on the matter: 'The notion that for many Americans, particularly those committed to revanchism, an American is white or European in origin makes Asian Americans queer in the sense of abnormal. At the same time, however, Lee's novel queers the category of American, most directly via the 'gentlest, queerest voice' of a Scottish American who makes her living out of being an English-language speaker.' (Adams, 2008: 171)

Bearing this in mind, we also take into consideration Mary Jane Hurst's claim that 'In Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, protagonist Henry Park's problems have developed, at least in part, because of stereotypes and prejudices related to his identity as a Korean American man, but his problems are exacerbated by his uncertainty about those stereotypes and about his own personal identity.' (Hurst, 2011: 82)

Evoking his childhood, Park brings forth instances of his parents highlighting the stark contrast between Korean and American cultures in terms of verbalizing one's impressions,



beliefs, and feelings as well as the degree of withdrawal from the community, usually perpetuated within a Korean immigrant family in comparison with the increasingly extrovert, boisterous lifestyle, promoted by American society. Once the discussion regarding Henry Park's childhood is broached, several issues surface, among which the hurdles encountered by Park's immigrant father, as Bella Adams also highlights it: '[...] Park's immigrant father was also confined to the domestic sphere, not so much by choice but by historical conditions within a bipolar racial formation.' (Adams, 2008: 170)

We see how Henry decides to get to grips with residual issues from his earlier years, childhood and adolescence, in pursuit of redefining his identity, which is severely questioned in the wake of Lelia's departure.

*I remember thinking of her, 'What's she afraid of, what could be so bad that we had to be that careful of what people thought of us, as if we ought to mince delicately about in pained feet through our immaculate neighbourhood, we silent partners of the bordering WASPS and Jews, never rubbing them except with a smile [...]' (Lee, 2013: 56)*

Successful only as the owner of a chain of fruit and vegetable outlets, scattered across the town, Henry's Korean immigrant father remains nonetheless a beleaguered professional, toiling 'from before sunrise to the dead of night' without even once complaining that his diplomas, attesting he was trained as an industrial engineer, have not guaranteed him a living in America: "'Shh!' she said, grabbing my wrist. Don't shame him! Your father is very proud. You don't know this, but he graduated from the best college in Korea, the very top, and he doesn't need to talk about selling fruits and vegetables. It's below him. He only does it for you, Byong-ho, he does everything for you. Now go and keep him company.'" (Lee, 2013: 60)

We see that the ethnicity issue also gains prominence throughout the encounter between Lelia's father, a genuine WASP and his Korean immigrant son-in-law; yet, it does not amount to a cultural clash in disguise. On the contrary, when they meet what takes precedence over any potentially arising controversy is the WASP's admittance of Henry's careful education and the fact that 'there's so much that's admirable in the Oriental culture and mind'.

*'Say, Lelia tells me your father is a fine businessman.'*

*'Absolute best,' I said, taking a long sip.*

*'He had to be,' he replied. 'No one was going to help him if he failed. [...] I saw a man who didn't have to make a display of himself. You knew he walked every inch to where he is. He owes no one, and he can't conceive of being owed something.'* (Lee, 2013: 131)

### *5. Language as a Metaphor for Belonging*

It is definitely true that we find irrefutable evidence sustaining Mary Jane Hurst's assertions: *'Native Speaker* is a novel about the use of language in America at the end of the millennium, about the meaning of language, and about the importance of language in reflecting individual and community identity. In its title, *Native Speaker*, and in its content, from opening to closing, the book is about the power of language to shape and reveal the inner self.' (Hurst, 2011: 82)

Not being an English native speaker encodes Henry Park's perpetual status of an alien notwithstanding his fluency in the host culture's language. The metaphor of language as *belonging* presents us with integration subtleties in disguise as the novel abounds in corresponding linguistic comments, more or less blunt.

*I will always make bad errors of speech. I remind myself of my mother and father, fumbling in front of strangers. Lelia says there are certain mental pathways of speaking that can never be unlearned. Sometimes I'll still say riddle for little, or bent for vent, though without any accent and so whoever's present just thinks I've momentarily lost my train of thought.*

*But I always hear myself displacing the two languages, conflating them- maybe conflagrating them- for there's so much rubbing and friction, a fire always threatens to blow up between the tongues. Friction, affliction.* (Lee, 2013: 249-50)

We consider that language as a pivotal pawn of the Americanization process carries one too many shades of meaning, thus emphasizing Lee's aim of making a statement through his title: *Native Speaker*. Unlike Lelia whose first language was English, therefore she is, beyond any suspicion of doubt, entitled to enjoy the native speaker qualifier, Henry Park's English skills have been acquired over years of gruelling efforts to reconcile the embedded linguistic patterns of his mother tongue, Korean, with those of an unbelievably strange language.

Furthermore, one of the ideas we can infer from Chang-rae Lee's gripping novel is that mastering English doesn't necessarily entail a miraculous erasure of all other features, indicative of his ethnicity, meaning of his inability to access the same amount of information as the American mainstream society.

Culturally immersed in the American mainstream society, Henry Park has nonetheless felt singled out by his English performances hardly enough to enable him pass for *a native speaker*. Lelia, for one, an ESL teacher, could not have been fooled by him.

Alongside what we have already pointed out, Korean scholar, HyungjiPark, delves further into the matters concerning the inextricably connected *language* and *assimilation*: “*Native Speaker*: the two words of Chang-rae Lee’s title seem, at first glance, to be self-explanatory. We all know what a ‘native speaker’ is: a fluent speaker of a language, one who has absorbed that speech from birth or early childhood, often from family. The novel offers up a definition, at least, of the antonym: ‘nonnative speakers’ among children are those who entered school ‘speaking a home language other than English’. When Korean American, Henry Park first meets his ‘very white’ and ‘American’ wife-to-be, Lelia Boswell, he confesses that ‘People like me are always thinking about still having an accent.’”

Chang-rae Lee, for being an American writer of Korean ancestry and choosing to draw on ethnicity-related matters in several of his novels as well as on his naturalized status, has been readily labelled as ‘an ethnic writer’, empowered with the authoritative voice of a minority’s spokesperson. Notwithstanding the readers’ and some critics’ assumptions, the writer has always eschewed such responsibility. Along the same lines, literary critic Mary Jane Hurst argues that ‘A reader would be foolish to assume that Chang-rae Lee represents the point of view of all Korean Americans or that Amy Tan has been writing documentaries. Just as John Updike does not represent all white men and Alice Walker does not represent all black women, Tan and Lee should not be seen as spokespersons for Americans of Chinese or Korean ancestry.’ (Hurst, 2011:80)

### *6. Insights into Korean Scholars’ Critical Approach*

Written by an American author of Korean ancestry, *Native Speaker* offers us the chance to get a wider perspective by drawing parallels between American scholars’ point of view and their Korean colleagues’ critical approach. Consequently, we will only gain more insights into the intricacies of Chang-rae Lee’s novel by acknowledging a Korean scholar’s standpoint.

HyungjiPark seems to defend the thesis according to which the trope of the ‘immigrant as spy’ lies at the core of *Native Speaker’s* narrative fabric. In the light of this assumption, the Korean scholar places further emphasis on the fact that ‘Henry Park is the quintessential

immigrant-as-spy of Asian origins, perpetually outside of the loop.’ The most compelling evidence that she envisages the novel from such an angle is encompassed by the following statement: ‘More specifically, espionage as a metaphor for the Asian American experience testifies to the complexities of linguistic proficiency and assimilation staged in this novel.’

Furthermore, in the same vein, HyungjiPark maintains that “*Native Speaker* represents a sophisticated, puzzling, complex portrait of what it is to be Asian American in America today, when a *zeitgeist* tends to bind Americans of Asian origin to that culture of origin in condemnatory ways. *Native Speaker* encodes the problem of ‘Asia’ in the trope of the ‘immigrant as spy’ and renders this on the most personal of levels, on the protagonist’s relationship with his wife, Lelia.”

The ethnically marked experience of immigrants often includes significant humiliation, and public lives in the United States, by definition, require a high degree of exposure.

Moreover, these and other appearances of the doubling theme in the novel involve, directly or indirectly, pragmatic aspects of language just as they all emphasize, directly and indirectly, the role of community in one’s self-identity. Further, ‘the double serves as an offensive as well as defensive tool, for Henry Park and John Kwang employ their capacity for doubleness to exploit other people as well as to protect themselves. In the end, Kwang is exposed by Henry, but Henry is duped by another double, and the unravelling of the affair ends his career in espionage as certainly as it ends Kwang’s political career.’ (Hurst, 2011: 89)

### *7. Conclusion*

A rather challenging novel, *Native Speaker* is peppered with questions, many without eliciting any response, with fascinating insights into human relationships, hence a novel of appearances, of the ethnic perspective on the mainstream American society, of human grandeur and decadence. Moreover, Chang-rae Lee’s *debut novel* comprises extensive reflections on the writer’s ethnic background, hinting at his attempts to come closer to the mainstream American society, without wanting, though, to entirely turn the back on his roots. In fact, we equally consider that negotiating one’s identity through *assimilation demands* most certainly equates with the lack of a powerful sense of belonging.

In a similar vein, we maintain that the novel brings to the fore a thoroughly devised plot, infused with all kinds of conundrums akin to the XX<sup>th</sup> century.

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