

MADAME BUTTERFLY AND MEN OF EMPIRE:
STEREOTYPING AND TRAUMA IN 20TH CENTURY
NOVELS

Sandra Lyne

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ABSTRACT

While most research has rightfully focused on sexism and racism in 'Madame Butterfly' texts (Marchetti 1993; van Rij 2001; Morris 2002; Koshy 2004; Prasso 2005; Park 2010), this thesis argues that stereotypical protagonists and narrative themes from Puccini's fin de siècle opera, *Madama Butterfly*, reappeared after wars in Korea and Vietnam and in the first years of the new millennium as prototypes for two traumatic, sub-textual 'ghosts' suppressed in public discourses: an 'unmanly', psychologically-wounded Western subject-as-perpetrator, and a scarred Asian woman, the civilian victim of Western atomic and incendiary weapons, an almost un-representable figure.

This thesis draws on a variety of fields, including literary trauma theory (Mandel 2006; Weaver 2010; Visser 2011; Balaev 2015), military masculinity studies and social psychology. It examines, in close readings within cultural, historical contexts, the synergies between trauma and moral (*thémis*) conflict represented in a selection of twentieth century 'Madame Butterfly' narratives, primarily by ex-military writers, at three significant moments in history: firstly, 1880-1912; secondly, post-WWII from 1950-1980, including the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam Conflict; and, thirdly, from the 1990s to the early 2000s, the turn of the new millennium. 'Moral conflict' in this thesis refers to Shay's definition of *thémis* as 'just order' or 'what is right' (*Achilles in Vietnam* 5) and to the idea that a disjuncture between *thémis* and experience can cause psychological damage (Shay *Odysseus in America* 33). Examples of novels representing this disjuncture include *Fifth Daughter* by Hal Gurney (1957), Jere Peacock's *Valhalla* (1961), James Webb's *The Emperor's General* (1999), and Anthony Swofford's *Exit A* (2007).

The examination of twentieth-century reconstructions of *Madama Butterfly's* gendered and racist stereotypes in these novels has found evidence supporting Gilman's notion (in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*) that stereotyping reveals much about the fears and anxieties of those producing the stereotypes, that 'pathology' in human cognition stems from 'disorder and loss of control, the giving over of the self to the forces that lie beyond the self' (Gilman 24), to trauma. This thesis examines the notion that Madame Butterfly stereotypes and themes allowed veterans 'to write about the war' for an uncomprehending public, as did Salinger in *Catcher in the Rye*. Along the way, the thesis also attempts to understand why Western men should have maintained such an emotional attachment to a quaint fin de siècle literary figure for an entire century.