

The Language of Depathologized Melancholia in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*

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Abstract

This paper explores the literary implications of the portrayal of Asians in Asian American women's literature. It deals with representations of gender, racial and postcolonial melancholia in Filipina American writer Jessica Hagedorn's 1990 novel *Dogeaters*. It challenges the concept of melancholia as innately pathological that entails an ego-attacking mechanism, which results from permanent illness (Freud, 1917). Employing contemporary literary theories of melancholia, I examine the matrixes of gender, racial and postcolonial identity as everyday instances of productive grief that results from losses eventually integrated as gains in identity. Combining Judith Butler (1994)'s concept of gender melancholia, Anne Cheng's theory of racial melancholia and Paul Gilroy (2004)'s notion of postcolonial melancholia, I show that losses within identity feature as sources of melancholia that eventually become gainful ends in themselves, reframing losses as building blocks for normalized 'character-building' (Freud, 1923). As an experimental, multi-faceted and playful semi-epistolary fiction, *Dogeaters* explores Filipino/a's fascination with American imperialist powers whilst delineating their ongoing fixation with America as the ultimate 'golden' destination. Amidst this contextual background, Hagedorn's text significantly suggests transformative processes of identity within 'subversive acts of betrayal' (Bow, 2001) and political and cultural economy as confrontational sites for the rise of character productivity.

Introduction

This paper deals with representations of gender, racial and postcolonial melancholia in Filipina American writer Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dogeaters* (1990). It questions the idea of melancholia as innately pathological that entails an ego-attacking mechanism due to permanent sickness (Freud 1917). Beginning with critical theories of melancholia, I examine the matrixes of gender, racial and postcolonial identity. I challenge deconstructive melancholia by introducing the idea of productive losses, akin to Melanie Klein's notion of productive suffering (Klein, 1987). In view of Judith Butler's concept of gender melancholia (Butler, 1994), Anne Cheng's theory of racial melancholia (Cheng, 2000) and Paul Gilroy's postcolonial melancholia [Gilroy, 2004], I depart from an emphasis on pathological losses to argue for loss management. By integrating identity gains into melancholic losses, I thus reframe losses as building blocks for normalized 'character-building' (Freud, 1923). As an experimental, multi-faceted and playful semi-epistolary piece of fiction, *Dogeaters* explores Filipino/a's fascination with American imperialist powers whilst delineating their ongoing fixation with America as the ultimate 'golden' destination. Amidst this contextual background, Hagedorn's text significantly suggests transformative processes of identity within 'subversive acts of betrayal' (Bow, 2001) as well as political and cultural economy as confrontational sites for the rise of character productivity.

Crucially, Hagedorn's novel suggests that identity is both non-static and fluid; I argue that identity is in fact portrayed as transformative rather than fixed in its stuck circularity as ego-impooverished. By employing the term 'transformative', I signal the radical yet gradual positive changes in identity that mark the ethical, aesthetic, and socio-psychoanalytical processes entailed in loss management. Subsequently, I contend that social stigma, and its resultant psychological damage, are subverted by treating the everyday condition of losses a

positive contribution to identity and subject formation. I go on to propose that Hagedorn's critically-acclaimed novel that has often been critically read as melancholic writing exhibits Asian identities that are neither pathological nor schizoid compositions, thus foreclosing assumptions of inherently sick and permanently damaged Filipino/a American characters. The pervasive notion of the pathologized identities of Filipino/a colonial wards is attributed to both nostalgia—a desire for object loss—and the continued influence of U.S. colonial power. Even as these conditions are pervasive, I contend that Hagedorn's novel taps into what Eng and Han (2000) call the 'productive gap' along the continuum of mourning and melancholia. In instantiations of miscegenation, celebrityhood and 'broken' families, Hagedorn's novel stresses the Filipino/a's evolving personal and social identity away from definitions of pathological isolation, permanent segregation and perpetual damage.

Narrative structure

Dogeaters (henceforth 'DG') defies ideas of conventionality in its readings and writing, as it comprises a haphazardly experimental and poly-plotted narrative of unlikely protagonists. By featuring mestizo/a Filipino/a subjects—controversial lovers, Hollywood fanatics, prostitute boys, hypersexualized women—during Marcos' political downfall in the seventies, the novel documents the volatility and historicity of Asian American relations before the fourth wave of Filipino immigration into America in which family reunification was the predominant reason for seeking U.S. visas. Even as the title adopts the derogatory term 'Dogeaters' to describe Filipino's barbaric dining on dogs, an act that alienates them from the outset, I argue that Hagedorn dispels the myth of their permanent sickness via cultural acceptance and instilled pride. All but for the protagonist's eventual immigration to U.S. at the very end of the novel, Filipino/a American and white American subjects are seen to inhabit the Philippine archipelago, and in particular its capital of Manila. In as much as Asia's geographical boundaries signify the Gonzagas' 'Genes, Generation and Geospiritual (Be)Longings' (Li, 1998, p. 111), Hagedorn goes on to challenge the reader's expectations of an Asian American novel in terms of plot and character. As a first-generation immigrant to America, Hagedorn locates her text beyond the comforts of U.S. territory to explore the dynamics of racialized subjects using the external lens of America's transnational exportation of its 'white ideal', most notably in the 'Hollywood' product. Moreover, the prevalent diffusion of America's national melancholia or what Anne Anlin Cheng calls 'exclusion yet retention' (2000, p. 11) of its racialized subjects in the 'U.S. colonial ward' (Philippines) sheds light and lends new meanings to the conception of racial melancholia. It also challenges the idea of racially melancholic persons as permanently isolated, and located on the social peripheries of cultural polities. By situating her several marginal subjects as protagonists within her plots and subplots, and interrogating their gender and postcolonial assumptions as raced subjects, Hagedorn shows the transformative opportunities available within their identity. Similarly, the exportation of white American culture complicates and informs the mestizo Filipinas' idea of gender (especially, within conflicting ideals of beauty), simultaneously challenging too the way femininity and race are coterminously intertwined in neocolonial times.

As a female performative artist, writer and playwright from the Philippines, Hagedorn addresses the interplay of gender and racial melancholia in the Filipina American figure. Yet, the author does well to subvert the crippling debilitation that these may cause when writing empowerment into their everyday struggles as sexualized subjects. Manila's consumerist culture speaks of the commoditization of America's Hollywood and concomitant beauty products. Though her sexual attractiveness alludes to her objectification, the Oriental woman's physical beauty also serves as a positive tool of desirability. In this way, physical attractiveness is troped as a positive attribute of femininity rather than gross flagrant

sexuality. Oriental hyperfemininity is embraced and flaunted by the ultra-feminine Pucha Gonzaga who is characterized by her frequent giggles and regular appointments at the beauty parlour 'Jojo's New Yorker'—a name that readily signals American normative standards of beauty. Pucha flaunts her femininity by 'wiggling and strutting all over the place' (DG, p. 6) to gain boys' attention. She also holds the view that 'bathing suits have been created for the purpose of showing off the body' (DG, p. 60) rather than for any practical purpose. Pucha celebrates the female body, even though she panders to the male gaze. Thus, Pucha's attitude signals the sexual prerogative of Asian women even as it serves 'male-agented ends' (Mulvey, 1990, pp. 28-34). In contrast, Trixie Goldman, the American consular's daughter, wears the less feminine apparel of 'jeans and her father's old t-shirts' (DG, p. 236). For this reason, even if somewhat erroneously, Pucha derides Trixie and calls her a lesbian. Pucha's subscription to hyperfemininity sees her flaunting her body as a tool of sexual attraction and desirability—both as a product of what she consumes from American culture and her experimentation with her own Filipina mestiza identity.

Illnesses

There are a number of significant metaphors that speak the language of melancholic losses. Amongst these, the trope of illness serves as a metaphor of melancholia. Illnesses are symptomatic of losses; yet, they are also an opportunity for the productive reassessment of subjectivity. The plethora of illnesses plaguing characters in *Dogeaters* is suggestive not only of the loss of health, but also of losses in identity created by 'sexual naturalization' (Koshy, 1996, p. 315). I have coined the subsequent phrase 'sexual racialization' to signal the way gender and sexuality are inherent components of America's process of racialization. Additionally, the use of this term indicates the way Asian female characters are doubly, if not triply, subordinated by racial segregation as their bodies are marked by the combined factors of gender, sex, and race. The physical illnesses take their toll on the women in *Dogeaters* by afflicting both their corporeal bodies and affective state. With illnesses like Baby's leprosy-like rash (DG, p. 28) and Daisy's chronic drowsiness (DG, p. 158), their physical and mental ailments seem to be without an identifiable cure. With Baby's physician lack of prescription, the paralysis affecting both the individual and community confounds as well as builds society at the same time. However, by sharing in the 'normal' experience of losses, the sufferers of loss crystallize and transform their visceral injuries suffered in and through sexual racialization. Illnesses, thus, thematize the melancholic loss sustained within, and embodied in, the body of the racial other. Yet, opportunities for membership in a community of loss also present the normalizing process of identity flux that subsumes losses as integral to character-strengthening.

Signifying the transference and internalization of loss, pervasive illnesses also typify the melancholic past and presence of physical and psychic wounds sustained in racial stereotyping. Injuries caused by various illnesses plaguing Filipinas are testimony to the anxieties generated by the racially melancholic condition. The injuries instigated by illnesses are symptomatic of the melancholic wounds of the processes of racialization and sexualization. Yet, both the reactionary and revolutionary responses to these injuries signal the communal agency exercised to manage their collective individual losses. Baby's 'melancholy eyes' which are at once 'dark and erotic' (DG, p. 25) are a telling physical symptom of the non-specific topical illness she suffers. Baby's afflicted eyes are indicative, too, of the sadness and grief experienced due to loss of female independence in a patriarchal society. Baby's 'itchy rash develops into hideous, watery blisters and open sores' (DG, p. 28) to a point where it turns into a kind of leprosy that causes her family to isolate her. Baby's topical fungus continues to provide her with grief as her feet become swollen and deformed

which ‘force [her] to spend her time in bed or in a wheelchair’ (DG, p. 28). Baby is also psychically crippled by the anxiety that accompanies her imbricated racial, gender, and sexual melancholic conditions. Because of her illness and her pregnancy, Baby ‘spends her afternoons, lying in bed’ (DG, p. 157) paralyzed and prostrate. Because she is unable to reap the full benefits of her transgressive actions in attempts to escape patriarchy, Baby thus experiences the full effects of her limited agency. She leaves her authoritarian parents to marry a chauvinist husband who consigns her to a role as domestic wife. Yet, although limited in her success of performative agency, Baby’s considerable effort to empower herself amid racial sexualization and sexual racialization is, no less, a progressive step that she takes.

Illnesses are not just restricted to women, as Rio’s grandfather becomes the first white man stricken with *bangungot* which is ‘a nightmare sickness, a delirious fever in which he sweats, sleeps, and screams’ (DG, p. 16). With Whitman’s physical scourge causing him to break out in feverish sweat, Lola Narcissa identifies his illness as ‘*bangungot*’ (DG, p. 14) – labeled as such to refer to the Filipino cultural folklore of sudden death in sleep (Munger & Booton, 1998, p. 677). Read allegorically, the white man is an intrusive and contaminating presence in Asia. Whitman’s physical deterioration speaks of national melancholia in addition to the racial melancholia faced by racialized subjects (Cheng, 2000, pp. 10-13). Notably, Whitman’s ‘mysterious illness’ (DG, p. 16) remains undiagnosed by his white medical doctors in America. Whitman’s name is clearly a pun on the ‘Whit[e] man’ whose colonial interests are reprimanded by his contagion with a tropical illness. Collectively, the images of sickness and confinement display the tropes of melancholic loss and of being ‘stuck’ (Ng, p. 139) in the melancholic retention of physical wounds. Yet, for all these losses and precisely because of these wounds, *Dogeaters* gestures to transformative racial melancholia in the opportunities presented in these moments of crisis. I refer to the communal agency which is channeled in both conscious and unconscious ties with other melancholic ‘ill’ sufferers, both within one’s sex and beyond lines of one’s gender.

To exemplify my point on the expressive communication and intersubjective ties that make possible the act of making losses productive, Daisy Avila suffers from nightmares which are a subconscious reaction to her rebuking the gross exhibition of female sexuality in American-cultured Philippines. Daisy’s retaliation to Oriental hyperfemininity features as a bold act of opposition to patriarchal expectations and ideologies of sexual racialization. Interestingly, Daisy is unable to identify the cause of her melancholic grief that is manifested through her recurrent nightmares. Yet, her loud actions in shunning the paparazzi’s lens readily point to her protest against the sexualization of Filipinas. Daisy’s physical and psychic affliction is accentuated by her not knowing exactly what it is that she has lost. The omniscient narrator declares, Daisy ‘does not know why she mourns’ (DG, p. 155) and ‘cannot pinpoint the source of her mysterious and sudden unhappiness’ (DG, p. 105). Unable to comprehend her melancholia, Daisy finds it impossible to locate the reason why she feels sad. Daisy’s inability to recognize the source of her melancholia signals the psychic internalization and unconscious incorporation of wounds from a combined reality of racialization and sexualization. Descriptions of Daisy ‘like a corpse’ (DG, p. 155) instantiates her feelings of loss—a state in which opportunities for transformation in this moment of crisis is presented via communal agency in intersubjective ties. Daisy’s exchange of letters with her cousin Clarita adds female empathy to a shared sense of racial and gender melancholia. Daisy gains a semblance of empowered liberation in her identification with other Filipinas. Her ties with Clarita inform her of the gendered social conditions in which women transform their identity. Along this line, Daisy’s nightmares may be read as powerful transitions to the psychic management of melancholic loss. Further references to tomb-like spaces are instantiated when Rio’s uncle remarks that his sister’s boarded-up bedroom is ‘like a tomb’ (DG, p. 86). However, rather than subscribing to her brother’s view, Dolores Gonzaga uses

the analogy 'like a womb' (DG, p. 86) to explicate her cocooned condition in her room. This description reinforces the maternal female connection. In this view, the womb functions as an amniotic site for the provision of support, love and sustenance, which underscores the intersubjective support rendered in the restorative project of making loss productive via intergenerational lines.

Language Usage

Moving onto the topic of *Dogeaters*' language use, I wish to highlight the lines of intersubjective communication and its significance for depathologization. Even as scholars have previously analyzed the relationship between language and identity (Ashok, 2009), there is room for a further examination of the Filipino–American 'Creole' language in *Dogeaters*. I argue that these language components contribute positively to identity formation. In this respect, it is useful to adopt the conceptual framework of 'Creole' to read language use in Hagedorn's novel. Edouard Glissant's coinage of 'Creole' [18] is a term used to describe culturally open voices, which symbolically represents the merging and counterpoise of West/Male and East/Female dichotomy that enrich identity in its syncretic production. Britton understands Edouard Glissant's concept of 'Creole' as 'one of the more complex forms of opacity, a language that conceals meaning while loudly proclaiming to reveal its meaning' (Britton, 1999, p. 224). This definition helps us to understand why it is that, although written primarily in English, Hagedorn's novel draws strongly on Filipino slang and dialogue whilst purposefully denying any literal translations. Catered for an American readership, *Dogeaters* enacts 'a strategy of resistance' (ibid.) that counteracts not only cultural, racial and gender oppression of her literary subjects, but also entails 'deliberate obscurity' to preclude white agency from formulating authoritative misconceptions about the raced other. Readers, thus, become cognizant of Hagedorn's showcasing the dialogic openings and interactive meanings America adopts in relation to its Asian geographical and political counterpart, which informs the raced subjectivity.

Furthermore, Hagedorn's simultaneous use of English and Tagalog loanwords to produce Creole language highlights gains in language losses. In other words, even as Creole is 'a response to a constrained and contradictory social situation,' (Britton, 1999, p. 224) wherein raced subjects are readily conceived as pathologically melancholic, I argue that subjective gains are formed within this inclusive yet exclusive form of linguistic communication. Along this line, Asian and American identities are newly framed around an emerging language corpus that not only signifies and typifies melancholia, but also integrates transformative melancholia. In this vision, Creole's opacity does not inhibit its functioning as an expressive tool of communication for developing Asian American subjectivity. As a salient site of resistance, amalgamated language blocs function in identity depathologization for emergent productive melancholia, to transform notions of perpetual sickness, alien otherness and permanent damage of raced, gendered, and postcolonial Asian subjects in white heteronormative discourses.

To illustrate the ambivalent reception to language use in *Dogeaters*, a *New York Times* reviewer claims that 'conveying [Taglish's] nuances to an English-speaking readership is a task Ms. Hagedorn has set herself but one in which she has not quite succeeded' (D'Alpuget, 1990, p. 38). In response to D'Alpuget's remark, which 'assumes that the author is supposed to cater to this particular English-speaking American audience and inadvertently points to the hierarchization of languages that reflects the global division of labor in the political economy of the United States,' critic Gladys Nubla (2004) conversely notes that 'the sprinkling of Tagalog and Spanish words and phrases among the English words in the novel stimulates a dynamic among the various languages quite different from the way Standard English is

deployed in the United States' (p. 200). If Nubla's observation holds true, then the 'rather superficial form of Taglish [that] comprises much more Tagalog than English' that Hagedorn employs in *Dogeaters* not only reflects the author's own perception of Manila during Martial Law (1972-1986) against which the novel is set, but so too evokes the intricate marginalization of sexualized and racialized identities belonging to her female, transgendered, and impoverished male characters. In other words, Hagedorn's use of Taglish that acts along a linguistic 'Creole' vector, insofar as this 'pidgin talk' is a nativized form of language combining Spanish, Tagalog, and English, is a response to the linguistic, racial and sexual hierarchy created and maintained by the West/Male. Yet, it is also a simultaneous critique of the Western world's imposition of peripheral marginality (read 'un-normal') to Eastern as well as Eastern-derived bodies. Hagedorn's novel features not just the working-class and male sex industry workers, but also the daughters, wives and sisters of powerful male politicians. These seemingly pathologized figures are pushed to the social peripheries in *Dogeaters*. However, in placing special focus on such characters, which Anglophone American readers would regard as atypical protagonists, Hagedorn's multiple plots purposely revolve around non-conservative, non-conformist and powerfully transgressive marginal figures as she pushes back the boundaries of that constituting normalcy. Controversially placing sexually objectified, feminized, Eastern figures on center-stage, Hagedorn teases out the racialized Filipino/a identity via unconventional ways, in the use of Taglish in her predominantly English novel. In so doing, the author presents Filipino/a and Filipino/a diasporic identity—in relation to white American identity—as not simply a product of binarism, but rather as an uneasy disruption to traditional benchmarks of raced/white identity, crucially opening up third spaces (Soja, 1996) in habitations 'apart from both [Eastern Philippines' and Western America's] national abstractions' (Nubla, 2004, p. 201). Hence, Hagedorn depicts wider cultural sensibilities and broader relational sensitivities in narrating Filipino/a's physical realities via a creole language that feeds, and is fed by, their mestizo/a identities.

Linguistic Borrowings

Tagalog used in *Dogeaters* appear in strategic sprinklings, and co-exists alongside Hagedorn's predominant use of the English language. Taglish exemplifies both class and ideological boundaries between its users, as well as signaling the flux in diachronic structures within the hierarchies of socio-linguistics, of which the Gonzagas are not exempted. Cousins Rio and Pucha Gonzaga belong to the upper middle class society with their Spanish American privilege of lineage. Their penchant for Hollywood becomes evident in their frequenting Avenue Theatre where 'Foremost! First Run! English Movies Only!' are screened, such as Pucha's all-time favourite *All That Heaven Allows* featuring Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson and Gloria Talbott 'in Cinemascope and Technicolor' (DG, p. 3). Rio's grandfather gives added testimony to the social borders and boundaries implicit to language and culture, as he dismisses the Philippine's popular radio serial *Love Letters* as attracting 'the bakya crowd' (DG, p. 11)—a people possessing lower-class sensibilities. '[R]efus[ing] to listen to Tagalog songs, or go to Tagalog movies' (DG, p. 12), the Gonzagas distinguish themselves from the 'lower common denominators' (DG, p. 11) that encompass Joey Sands, a mestizo (of black, Filipino and American origins) who is openly homosexual and readily ventures into the porn and sex industry. Yet, in spite of their declared antipathy for Tagalog, Gonzaga's speech is no less littered with the language that they have grown up with in Manila. And so, ironically, Pucha Gonzaga's speech in English is perforated with loan words in Tagalog. Pucha's disgusted reaction to Rio Gonzaga's fascination for black-haired Gloria Talbott further instantiates the power differentials at work alongside the lower prestige her family seemingly attaches to Tagalog. Pucha dismissively exclaims, 'AY! *Puwede ba*, you have weird taste!

She's really *cara de achay*, if you ask me.' Hagedorn's void of Tagalog-to-English translation also denies transparent meanings to a Western Anglophone readership not well-versed in Tagalog. Yet, the text's obscurity is resolved by the contextual inferences in and beyond these utterances that demonstrate class differences via culturally opposed images at play. Together with her dislike for non blond-haired Gloria, Pucha's insult of Lorenza, Rio's chaperone or *yaya*, is revealed when Rio the narrator describes the way Pucha exhibits class consciousness when she 'purses her lips to emphasize her distaste, comparing the starlet [Gloria Talbott] to an ugly servant without, as usual, giving a thought to [*yaya*] Lorenza's presence' (DG, p. 4). Hence, racial and class ideals become intimately intertwined with language choices, wherein colonial impressions and inclinations of Americanist neo-colonial culture in postcolonial Philippines are deeply incorporated into the social fabric.

Additionally, critic Gladys Nubla writes, '[t]he consumption-oriented economy of Manila operates on a particular kind of moral and social hierarchy that excludes certain kind of individuals, like Joey and Rio from becoming producers in the market, to the extent that they must leave the Philippines if they want to be able to produce, to break out of the cycle' (2004, p. 207). If Nubla is right to claim that social exclusionary practices and non-heteronormative ideologies become push factors, then Lorenza's case is no differently read as social marginalization within a servant-master as well as raced-white dialectic where hierarchical divisions promote derision and alienation. Nubla's statement suggests that an escape route to America presents a solution for identity crises, and a resolution towards social acceptance and participation that does little to attenuate the prevalence of losses once moved to America. Whilst Rio negotiates the spaces of her counter-cultural (transnational) world and eventually leaves Philippines for America (to join her immigrant mother), Joey continues making his livelihood in Philippines—simultaneously trapped and liberated by the social systems that define his subjectivity. Yet, for all their distinct life trajectories, marginal subjects internalize their racial, sexual and gender melancholia that are integral to their identity. Contrary to claims that this internalization pathologizes their identities, Hagedorn's novel exhibits that gains are produced in subjectivity amidst losses. For instance, Joey's acceptance of the inextricable vagaries of his life is exemplified by the cessation of his ideals of America as the desired destination. Instead of resigning to a view of his 'broken or tainted' self, he traverses an upward spiral journey in life, thus forging ahead the process of making losses productive. Formative small steps are, thus, taken to normalize losses and attain gains in subjectivity. Hence, Hagedorn's marginalized characters, although clearly lying on society's peripheries, become the central and 'normal' figures within her rewritten narrative of loss, which employs the subjective use of Taglish language. In this way, Hagedorn's novel simultaneously stresses the ethical import of transformative melancholia as her characters empower themselves within losses by fluidly traversing (the real and imaginary) waters between Philippines and America.

Conclusion

To conclude, just as Joey's "third" sexuality is 'loaded with the promise of resistance' (Nubla, 2004 p. 207), melancholic illnesses and nightmares serve as integral mechanisms for transformative 'plus' processes within physical and psychic losses. Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* traces the opportunities for re-thinking losses as productive gains in subjectivity, which emerge from melancholia's 'productive gap' (Eng & Han, 2000) positioned at the interstices of race, gender, and a postcolonial Creole language. Fully acknowledging past, present and future subject formation within productive melancholia—a new concept insofar as Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' hitherto dominates literary criticism, Hagedorn's writing enacts melancholia's depathologization in her creative re-writing of the trope of illnesses. Instead of

emphasizing losses as all-negative, Hagedorn re-casts melancholic losses as a communal experience present in a wide spectrum of characters, whose intersubjective interactions positively inform subjectivity formation. Along this line, I argue that transformative gains are simultaneously achieved in Hagedorn's remapping of Creole as a language removed from low prestige, and encapsulating the coterminous livelihoods and everyday life of Filipino and Filipina American characters. Even as the historicity of past generations and language blocs prevail, Hagedorn's marginalized protagonists emerge as normalized subjects with pride instilled in their language choices despite increased ambivalence to losses. Consequently, the language of depathologized racial, gender, and postcolonial melancholia manifests itself in dialogic 'Taglish', and in other literary metaphors of losses that construct identities by converting melancholic losses into subjective gains. Hagedorn writes a vernacularly charged text that challenges early synchronic ideas of pathological melancholia, as losses are seen to contribute to 'character-building' (Freud 1923). Hagedorn's female subjects and sexually deviant characters instantiate melancholia reframed as collectively shared, rather than an individual's ego-depletion, thereby challenging the injurious permanence of pathology. With melancholia conceived as non-pathological losses, *Dog eaters* is understood as a text that depathologizes Asian American losses by functioning as 'literature of resistance,' to borrow Barbara Harlow's term (1987). In this subversive strand, transformative identity—defined as subjectivity undergoing normalization processes for constructing the positive self—arises against a specific transhistorical, socio-racial and transcultural background to trace a new politics of psychic depathologization excited by Hagedorn's recovery of productive identities.

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