Ways of Knowing Small Places: Intersections of American Literature and Ethnography since the 1960s

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Acknowledgements

How far back do research projects go? Who gave us reading suggestions, made incisive comments, sent books? Which seminars, which teachers made reading meaningful? Whose ideas plowed the deepest furrows in our minds, channeling other thoughts? Who set the terms of the debates we entered? Whose handwriting is that on the margins?

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maker – served as a reference point for my thinking about the intersections of literature and ethnography.

Between the lines of this book lie formative experiences that I continued mulling over in my mind as I wrote: discussions that took place at UCLA in the mid-1990s in the seminars of King-Kok Cheung, Jinqi Ling, Valerie Smith, Eric Sundquist, and Richard Yarborough. Nothing in my education has ever matched the thrill of studying history with Henry Yu. Outside of class, my research interests and commitments took shape in conversations with Jim Lee, Lois Leveen, Beth Wightman, Emily Magruder, Tammy Ho, Darlene Rodrigues, Connie Razza, Collette Brown, Mary Pat Brady, and many others.

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Introduction

> Back in the mid-1960s I decided to follow my BA in literature with a PhD in anthropology. In my first graduate class a classmate asked our famous teacher, a woman who had done ground breaking work in African ethnography, what she saw as the difference between an ethnography and a novel. The teacher answered brusquely, with impatience and disdain: 'If you don't know that, you don't belong here.' My classmate dropped out after the first quarter, became a leader in the anti-war movement, and co-founded the women's liberation movement on the West Coast. The teacher retired. I have gone on to spend more than thirty years pondering the differences between the ethnography and the novel.
>
> Janet Tallman, "The Ethnographic Novel," p. 10

This study analyzes a series of responses to crises in ethnographic and literary representation that began roughly in the 1960s. Ethnography and literature inhabit a continuum but, as a rule, neither likes to be mistaken for the other. At the far ends of the continuum, there are staunch purists who draw sharp boundaries around their own practices. One group of purists set up its camp at the end of the nineteenth century, when anthropology became an academic discipline and its practitioners[1] defined themselves in contrast to "amateurs": travel-writers, missionaries, and regionalist writers. The pure literature camp dates back to the 1930s and 1940s, when New Critics began to insist on literature's uniqueness, distinctiveness, and oppositionality to other cultural discourses.[2] Playing in the muddy

[1] Franz Boas, one of the founding fathers of American anthropology, warned his students and colleagues about the dangers of collapsing lay and professional ethnography: "The greater the public interest in a science and the less technical knowledge it appears to require, the greater is the danger that meetings may assume the characteristics of popular lectures. Anthropology is one of the sciences in which this danger is ever imminent, in which for this reason, great care must be taken to protect the purely scientific interest" (Boas qtd. in Stocking, *The Ethnographer's Magic* 8). As my epigraph from Janet Tallman's "The Ethnographic Novel" suggests, in the 1960s the gulf between legitimate academic discourse and fiction was still felt to be very wide. Maintaining the distinction is in the interest of university-based anthropologists to this day.

[2] Though it was the formalists who first insisted on keeping literature pure, more recently some minority writers have followed suit. They occasionally invoke the "pure literature" ethos in self-

middle ground between the two camps are those who encroach on each other's territory, either because they refuse to see the difference, or because they object to the way that difference is constructed. They are the subjects of this book: writers who have used literary discourse as a way to expose the fictions of social science; undisciplined anthropologists who have provisionally abandoned the conventions of objective reporting for the more subjective genres of autobiography or fiction; as well as members of minority groups traditionally objectified by ethnography, who have usurped the power of representation to produce counter-discourses.

A central assumption of this study is that literature can be read as a mode of critical theory and that, for historical reasons, recent American literature by and about racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and other minorities constitutes an intervention into contemporary debates on epistemology. I see this body of literature as grounded in "subjugated knowledges" (as defined by Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway), which emerged in relation to dominant ethnographic discourses. Susceptible to cooptation and never "innocent," these "subjugated knowledges" deserve to be critically examined, contextualized, and sometimes problematized. Anthropologist Henrietta Moore recently observed that although poststructuralists pay lip service to the importance of local knowledges, they do not accord those knowledges the status of theory. Locally produced knowledges are often viewed as "closed systems … incapable of self-reflection," to be interpreted through critical theory (2–6). I see a similar dynamic in literary studies, where local texts, for instance by and about Caribbeans or Pacific Islanders, are framed with theories that are no less locally produced, in such places as Paris or New York. Such framing, however useful, forecloses some of the potential meanings of texts that, when read carefully, yield their own theoretical insights.[3]

Why the 1960s?

This account starts in the 1960s because of the decade's watershed status. With decolonization gaining momentum abroad and the Civil Rights movement at

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defense, feeling constrained as much by those who hold them accountable for representing their minorities, as by those who appreciate them more for the authenticity and ethnographic accuracy of their work than for its artistry. Among the authors who have attempted to shake off the burden of ethnic representation are Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Li-young Lee, and David Wong Louie (see interviews in Cheung, *Words Matter*). When, in 1998, Lois-Ann Yamanaka's Association for Asian American Studies prize for literature was revoked due to protests that Yamanaka consistently vilified Filipinos in her writing, 82 Asian American writers wrote letters in her defense, insisting that fiction writers, unlike social scientists, have poetic license and are answerable to no one for their racial and ethnic representations (see Huang 321). Conversely, Frank Chin attempted to discredit Maxine Hong Kingston by accusing her of writing "pop cultural anthropology" (Kim 198).

[3] This is a lesson I learned in King-Kok Cheung's literature seminars at UCLA. My reading experience has since reinforced this conviction. Also Rocío Davis argues that using minority literature as mere illustration for Euro-American theories can be seen as a form of colonization (5).

home, the question of who had the right to represent whom (in politics, science, the arts, and literature) became a highly charged one. The Vietnam War, various strands of feminism, as well as the succession of homophile, gay, lesbian, and queer movements cross-fertilized each other and politicized unprecedented numbers of people. When the 1965 Immigration Act replaced legislation privileging European immigration, large numbers of immigrants from Third World countries began to enter the United States. The ensuing demographic changes strengthened minority groups' resolve to challenge the white hegemony. Assimilation to the white middle-class norm came to be seen by many as gratuitous self-effacement; ethnic difference could be claimed as a badge of distinction, even though the racial hierarchy remained largely intact.

Until the late nineteenth century, writing about people of color was the preserve of white travel writers, regionalists,[4] and, since then, anthropologists or sociologists. Few Americans of color had access to the social sciences and any literature they wrote was subject to market pressures. In the 1960s, however, non-traditional students – people of color and women – began entering universities in large numbers. The first ethnic studies programs were instituted at San Francisco State University in 1968, and at UC Berkeley and UCLA in 1969, in the wake of mass student strikes; other campuses followed. Whether they did graduate research in the social sciences or studied literature and creative writing, the former objects of ethnography began to develop new discursive and formal ways of intervening in, distorting, and playing with the tradition of ethnographic representation. These ranged from auto-ethnography (representing oneself and one's own group) to counter- and mock-ethnography (turning the tables on the dominant group and submitting it to ethnographic scrutiny), as well as anti-ethnography (refusing to play the ethnographic game at all). Women's and minority literatures grew strong; "representative" texts were reluctantly added to college reading lists as a result of periodic canon wars.

In the words of historian James Clifford, the realization that anthropology is "enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities" and "no longer speaks with automatic authority" brought on a disciplinary *crise de conscience* (Clifford and Marcus 9).[5] Symptomatically of these developments, in 1986 anthro-

[4] Literary regionalism, also disparagingly called "local color," anticipated contemporary minority literatures and created an audience receptive to cultural difference. From Harriet Beecher Stowe's stories of the 1830s, through Sarah Orne Jewett's "sketches," to the work of Willa Cather of the 1910s, regionalism looked away from American mainstream culture towards the rural, the quaint, and the exotic. Generally written for and by the white middle-class (though it also created a space for minority writers like Charles Chesnutt and Sui Sin Far), regionalism represented white as well as ethnic enclaves, often in the sentimental mode. Groundbreaking work on regionalism has been done by Judith Fetterly, Marjorie Pryse, and Richard Brodhead.

[5] For geopolitical reasons the development of ethnography in Poland has followed an entirely different trajectory. Since Poland did not directly participate in the colonial race, and was itself under foreign rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Polish anthropologists did not share in the postcolonial *crise de conscience*. Bronisław Malinowski, who traveled with a German passport, is a

pologist Michael J. Fischer surveyed the existing body of ethnic American fiction in a bulging 40-page essay, and concluded that, in a sense, his discipline had been upstaged. He was not the first anthropologist to take literature by people of color seriously: ethnic American literature courses had been taught at the Chicago School of Sociology[6] long before they became a staple at English departments (Capetti 31). But while the Chicago ethnographers read ethnic fiction as primary material for investigation, Fischer combed it for methodological and formal insights:

> Just as the travel account and the ethnography served as forms for explorations of the 'primitive' world … and the realist novel served as a form for explorations of bourgeois manners and the self in early industrial society, so ethnic autobiography and autobiographical fiction can perhaps serve as key forms for explorations of pluralist, post-industrial, late twentieth-century society. (195)

Certainly, anthropology departments did not shut down overnight at this announcement; nor did most practitioners of the discipline come to believe that the methods and procedures elaborated for the study of cultures had become obsolete. Yet Fischer's assessment did signal the growing awareness among American anthropologists that the tools of their trade were inadequate for dealing with cultures and peoples that had long ago become detached from places and that refused to keep still for observation.

The very titles of well-known post-1960 publications in anthropology and sociology – *Reinventing Anthropology*; *The Death of White Sociology*; *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*; *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*; *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*; *Women Writing Culture* – show how the disciplines repeatedly attempted to shed their old skins and adjust to new sociopolitical contexts. Some scholars retrenched and sought ever more rigorous scientific standards; others tentatively took up unconventional tools and genres, including autobiography and ethnographic fiction, as modes of self-reflection and reevaluation of their discipline. Autobiography and fiction were

notable exception; it was that very passport that got him stranded in the Western Pacific during World War I, a predicament that allowed him to develop the method of long-term participant observation. Few Poles had a chance to do fieldwork abroad before World War II, while after 1945, the communist authorities restricted foreign travel and steered ethnography towards the study of Polish folk culture. Only in the last twenty years has the discipline experienced a revitalization accompanied by an outpouring of critical/theoretical writing. For comparative views on the development of ethnography in Poland and abroad see Marcin Brocki et al., (eds.), *Kultura profesjonalna etnologów w Polsce* (2006), and Han F. Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Roldán, *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology* (1995).

[6] Carla Capetti writes: "At a time when literature courses in English departments ended with the seventeenth century and American literature, African American literature, ethnic literature, although they were read, were not considered worthy of critical attention, Chicago sociologists acted to constitute, preserve, and promote them." The knowledge produced by the sociologists is highly problematic, having been generated "for the purpose of social control," but the legitimation of minority writers by the Chicago sociologists need to be acknowledged (31).

a means to continue cross-cultural investigation on new terms, without the authority that comes with doing science. Many shifted their interest to communities within the U.S., such as primarily white rural and mining towns, food cooperatives, New-Age health centers, or urban ghettoes.[7] As cultural anthropology lost its foothold in the Third World and fewer graduate students could look forward to doing their apprenticeship abroad, enrolments fell.[8] At least some of those who might have gone on to become social scientists dropped out and studied English or creative writing. This was the case of Paule Marshall and Russell Leong, discussed in Chapter 1 of this study. Hundreds of others took heart from the literary successes of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Marmon Silko and attempted to write for a living.

Meanwhile, the humanities and social sciences absorbed the critical theories of Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, as well as those of feminist philosophers who challenged the dominant epistemological assumptions, including Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, and Donna Haraway. Literary critic Ryszard Nycz views the ensuing decades as a period marked, on the one hand, by the process of aestheticization of the cultural reality and the tendency to read culture as text, and, on the other, by the " 'reculturation' (contextualization) of literature which thus becomes once again one of the discursive practices of the cultural reality" ("Wprowadzenie" 31, my translation).

Reflecting in 1986 on these historical and theoretical developments, Clifford reached for powerful geographical metaphors: "A conceptual shift, 'tectonic' in its implications, has taken place. We ground things, now, on a moving earth. There is no longer any place of overview (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedean point from which to represent the world. Mountains are in constant motion. So are islands: for one cannot occupy, unambiguously, a bounded cultural world from which to journey out and analyze other cultures" (Clifford and Marcus 22).

On a "moving earth," places, mobility, and displacement have become key metaphors in literature and critical theory. Iain Chambers's *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1994), Caren Kaplan's *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (1996), and James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) are just a few of the many books to theorize places and movement in recent years. Historian Henry Yu relates movement to knowledge. To his cross-country commutes between familiar and unfamiliar places Yu attributes some of the insights in his study *Thinking Orientals* (2001), a book on the migrations and mutations of ideas associated with the Chicago School of Sociology:

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[7] See contributions to *Anthropologists at Home in North America* (1981) edited by Donald A. Messerschmidt.

[8] See for example Keesing and Keesing's *New Perspectives in Cultural Anthropology* (1971) and Messerschmidt's "Introduction" to *Anthropologists at Home* (1981).

> Through those long hours on America's roads, I realized that coming to know something is often a physical as well as an intellectual movement, that coming to knowledge is not something that occurs only in a study room or a research lab somewhere in a university; sometimes it is an act strewn across a landscape of ignorance. It is a leaving of some familiar place in order to trace a series of journeys into the unknown. The physical location of the unknown, a sense that it is elsewhere, is an aspect of the mystery of knowledge that is often forgotten when we have overcome our ignorance. We come to feel more at home with something, we are comfortable in knowing more about it, we no longer fear to tread its unknown streets. The excitement of being lost, of being confused, or even afraid, is replaced. Knowing is a secure place to be. (v)

Anthropologist Keith Basso, in turn, explains how places can be used to organize a body of knowledge. While doing conventional fieldwork in Cibeque, Basso was asked by an Apache chairman to make maps with Apache place names, both to "find out something about how we know our country" and to help the tribe preserve its local knowledge (xv). In the subsequent months he worked with storytellers who helped fill his map with countless meaningful landmarks, each serving as a prompt for a story seen as vital for the tribe's survival and spiritual well-being. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (1996) is a study based on this experience. In western culture, too, islands and other landmarks have long been used for organizing knowledge[9] and in the past decade, there has been an outpouring of island research across the disciplines; "islandness" is now a popular critical term. An interdisciplinary electronic *Island Studies Journal* has been coming out since 2006.

Why small places?

The phrase "small places" in the title of this study comes from Jamaica Kincaid's essay *A Small Place.* It is the smallness of her native Antigua, she argues, that makes it vulnerable to neocolonization; deceived by its smallness, outsiders assume it is easy to grasp; they see its culture as quaint and primitive. Insiders, in turn, are relatively isolated and lack a broader frame of reference – a scale on which they might measure their successes and failures. For Kincaid the small place is a trap to run from. By contrast, in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* "small places" (132) have a magnetic appeal. Another author discussed in this study, O.A. Bushnell, only came to appreciate the smallness of his island upon returning from the mainland: "Once back in Hawai'i, I felt established again. My feet were on the ground. My roots all became very important. There is something different about being in Hawai'i. It's small enough so you can see how people are affected by the land and can affect it" (qtd. in Gima n.p.). It is in relation to the big place – the

[9] For discussions of islands in Western culture see John R. Gillis's magisterial *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (2004); Greg Denning's *Islands and Beaches* (1980); Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith's edited volume *Islands in History and Representation* (2003); and Diana Loxley's *Problematic Shores: Literature of Islands* (1990).

continental United States – that the smallness of islands discussed in this study becomes meaningful. Size here serves as a metaphor for the twin asymmetries of access to political and cultural representation.

Significantly for this project, islands have been key sites for the development of Western academic methods and procedures for the systematic study of non-western peoples. Professional anthropologists in the early twentieth century traveled out to islands which they understood as equivalents of biologists' laboratories – perfect preserves of the "primitive," offering the greatest possible contrast for the "modern." In effect, non-Western cultures came to be perceived as confined to small places, unchanging, and immobile.[10] Until the atrocities of World War II provided evidence to the contrary, ethnography supported the evolutionary paradigm in which culture was unitary and Western peoples stood at the apex. For instance, in order to better understand the problems of American adolescents, Margaret Mead did not go "to Germany or to Russia, but to Samoa, a South Sea island about thirteen degrees from the Equator" because, as she explained,

> we do not choose a simple peasant community in Europe or an isolated, group of mountain whites in the American South, for these people's ways of life, though simple, belong essentially to the historical tradition to which the complex parts of European or American civilisation belong. Instead, we choose primitive groups who have had thousands of years of historical development along completely different lines from our own, whose language does not possess our Indo-European categories, whose religious ideas are of a different nature, whose social organisation is not only simpler but very different from our own. From these contrasts, which are vivid enough to startle, and enlighten those accustomed to our own way of life and simple enough to be grasped quickly, it is possible to learn many things about the effect of a civilisation upon the individuals within it. (Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa 5*)

For decades, Pacific, Caribbean, and other islands were the preferred sites of ethnographic research, though fieldwork was also done in Africa, Central and South America, Australia, as well as Alaska. But the island study remained paradigmatic, and scholars continued to seek small, culturally homogenous communities that had had as few contacts as possible with Western culture. Pacific islanders, Caribbeans, and others were in no position to reciprocate. As Sandra Harding points out, in the nineteenth-century "the chances were low that aborigines would arrive in Paris, London, and Berlin to study and report back to their own cultures the bizarre beliefs and behaviors that constituted the 'tribal life' of European

[10] In "Putting Hierarchy in its Place" (1988), Arjun Appadurai problematized the fact that for traditional ethnography "natives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow *incarcerated*, or confined, in those places" while anthropologists think of themselves as mobile and unattached to any particular place (37). James Clifford's 1997 study *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* elaborated on this problem, trying to imagine an ethnographic practice that disrupts the old paradigm". James Buzard, in turn, pointed out in his 2003 essay "On Auto-Ethnographic Authority" that "native" or auto-ethnographers tend to unwittingly perpetuate the image of their ethnic groups as confined to small places in order to build up their own authority to represent those groups.

anthropologists" (155). Colonial migrations of white people to the Third World precipitated reverse migrations of Third World peoples to the metropolis in the twentieth century. Over time, the migrants and their descendants have attempted to alter the asymmetries in access to textual representation, political power, and economic resources.

Although the island setting helped to limit the scope of this study, the category of "small places" could well be extended to urban ghettoes, reservations, and other enclaves whose inhabitants were/are subject to the ethnographic gaze. The idea of "small places" in this study also covers two literary representations of non-traditional minority communities that did not choose to be "islanders," yet found themselves outside the pale: a nineteenth-century "leper colony" and a present-day queer enclave. Since disease and non-normative sexuality have an isolating effect and serve the dominant majority as a pretext for investigation or surveillance, the analysis brings out some telling parallels between such enclaves and island communities.

Fictional narratives set on faraway islands are especially prone to being read ethnographically. Whether depicted as utopia, South Sea paradise, desert island, or relic of the stone age, home to devious sirens, noble savages, cannibals, or lusty maidens, the island is the locus of essential difference, sedimented with layers of western cultural associations. Separate and clearly bounded, it once seemed to be all of one thing, graspable, legible, stable, and unchanging. Anthropologists turned small Pacific islands into laboratories or time machines where one could come face to face with the prehistory of "western civilization." To treat islands as pristine, insulated laboratories, ethnographers had to ignore the often complex history of intercultural contacts before their arrival, as well as their own contaminating presence in the field. Their mission was to "salvage" for safekeeping in Western archives written records of cultures supposedly doomed to extinction – cultures valuable and interesting precisely because they would soon become extinct or contaminated through contact with modernity.

Writing from or about small places for publication in the big place induces authors to take into account reader interests and expectations that may be very different from those of people in the small, geographically remote places like Antigua, Cuba, Molokai, or Taiwan, all of which are discussed in this study. In recent decades, the mainstream American interest in such places has been molded by multiculturalism. As I argue in Chapter 4, multiculturalism (as an educational policy and a signal to all Americans that they should expose themselves to "ethnic" difference) encourages readers to sample literature about small places much as they sample kimchi, baked yams, or bakhlava. One literary voice usually stands for one minority on the school or college reading list, just as in traditional anthropology one monograph per island or tribe sufficed. As a rule, experimental and non-narrative writers are not seen as "representative," hence the preference of fiction over poetry. (This is a bias my study reproduces due to its ethnographic framework.)

Other small places discussed here – Manhattan island, a sand bar off the New Jersey coast, and an imaginary Gullah island – lie much closer to the American mainland both geographically and culturally. White, Black, Asian, and racially mixed – the "natives" of these islands function simultaneously as mainstream America's cultural others and, in some cases, as quintessential Americans, the bearers of values abandoned on the mainland. In three instances, I extend the concept of "small places" to relatively isolated mainland communities. Edith Turner's story about the Alaskan Inupiaq tribe is set on a promontory jutting out into the ocean – a location more remote than many an island. Rhoda Halperin's story collection *The Teacup Ministry* is mostly about a New Jersey island, but several thematically related stories are set in a relatively insular working-class neighborhood of Cincinnati. Finally, in Chapter 6, I reach for the novel which inspired this project: Karen Tei Yamashita's *Brazil-Maru*, based on fieldwork the author conducted in a Japanese immigrant commune in the Brazilian jungle. The cultural isolation of this commune, imposed as much from within as from without, fascinated Yamashita forty years ago and inspired a novel that is perfect material for analysis in a study of the intersection of literature and ethnography.

Admittedly, much canonical American literature can also be said to be about "small places." Places of ethnographic interest need not necessarily be geographical islands inhabited by people of color. Other differences may also have an exotic appeal. For instance, Edith Wharton turned New York's upper class into an object of ethnography, encouraged by Henry James to "do New York" (James qtd. in Bentley 2), that is, to investigate the customs and manners of the tribe she knew best.[11] But when the subject, object, and intended audience of ethnography are all white and (upper) middle class, the asymmetry of power is erased. Had Wharton's "natives" found her representations wanting, they could have published their own competing fictions. In fact, many such fictions were already in circulation at the time. Similarly, Sherwood Anderson's or Don DeLillo's narratives of small places appeared in the literary marketplace alongside hundreds of competing representations of white middle America. So many variants of Winesburg, Ohio and The-College-on-the-Hill exist in print that to treat these representations as a source of ethnographic knowledge about Euro-Americans seems absurd. Yet fictions by Americans of color who were among the first of their minorities to achieve recog-

[11] Martha Banta first pointed out the ethnographic aspect of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* in the early 1990s in her introduction to a reprint of the novel. In *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton* (1995) Nancy Bentley produced a detailed analysis of Wharton's work as a mode of ethnography of New York's leisure class. As Bentley explains: "In my study, understanding fiction ... means understanding what it is to *do* fiction, what kind of social and aesthetic office it performs. To analyze fiction as a practice, as a way of mastering manners on the page, I explore convergences between novels and ethnographic texts and their collaboration in helping to produce our modern discourse of culture. In turn, the collaboration opens up for us new historical and critical perspectives on the particular mastery of manners that is fiction writing" (2–3, emphasis in the original).

nition – Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, N. Scott Momaday, Maxine Hong Kingston, or Rodolfo Anaya – did bear the burden of ethnographic representation. They were appreciated primarily (though not solely) because they transported readers to places they avoided in real life and rarely saw mentioned in print: the ghetto, the reservation, Chinatown, the all-black town, or the barrio. Over the years, these and other authors of color put countless texts into circulation; through exposure to different techniques of representation readers increasingly began to pay attention to point of view, voice, narrative technique, use of irony, parody, and other formal strategies. However, that which literary critic King-Kok Cheung calls a "strong 'ethnic' quotient" (*Words Matter* 19), remains a magnet for mainstream American readers. Small places, as defined in this study, are always read as "particular" and cannot aspire to "universality" in a way that Winesburg, Ohio or The-College-on-the-Hill can.[12] As Chapters 4 and 6 of this study suggest, the asymmetry between small places and big places in terms of political as well as literary representation persists.

Why intersections of literature and ethnography?

As I demonstrate in the readings that follow, ethnography (whether in the form of travel narrative, fiction, or monograph) is an intertext of many American fictions. Thus, one reason for building an awareness of the goals, methods, and key concerns of ethnography is that when studying literary texts we can then trace certain persistent themes, discursive tensions, and formal innovations that would otherwise go unnoticed. Another reason for drawing on the work of historians and critics of ethnography is that they have theorized "ways of knowing" more systematically than have literary theorists, due to the epistemological crisis in the social sciences. If, as I am trying to suggest, literary representations of racial/cultural difference are often read ethnographically, then the insights developed within the social sciences might be helpful for problematizing minority literatures' relation to knowledge.

Several Polish literature scholars – most notably Michał Paweł Markowski, Ryszard Nycz, Andrzej Mencwel, Anna Łebkowska, and Anna Burzyńska – have, in recent years, explored the intersection of literary studies and anthropology, inspired (or provoked) by such postmodern theorists as Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu, Richard Rorty, and Jacques Derrida, the reader-response theorists Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser, the Birmingham School, as well as feminist theories. The "cultural theory of literature" proposed by Nycz, as well as his valorization of "transdisciplinarity," give me license to think about the problems that emerge when literature acts like ethnography, or is mistaken for ethnography, or

[12] David Palumbo-Liu has discussed this problem at length in "Universalism and Minority Culture" (1995).

when ethnography acts like literature. But, due to the virtual absence of the problem of racial representation in Polish scholarship, and the search for theories that might revitalize the study of *mainstream* Polish literature, these approaches have limited relevance for this study.[13] To my best knowledge, the only Polish Americanist to have explored the intersection of literature and ethnography is Agata Preiss-Smith.[14]

A brief overview of the two types of writing (and ways of knowing) should make apparent the points at which they intersect and diverge. An ethnography is generally understood to be an academic text based on a "research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture" in order to make his or her "personal and theoretical reflections available to professionals and other readerships" (Marcus and Fischer 17–18). A physical distance and knowledge gap between the objects and readers of ethnography is a precondition for its existence. The ethnographer acts as a go-between, with privileged access to places few of his or her readers are likely to ever visit. Bronisław Malinowski is credited with having established fieldwork through "participant observation" in a faraway place as a rite of passage for anthropologists when he returned from Melanesia to the London School of Economics after World War I. In the introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski defined the face-to-face encounter with the other, and the attempt to "grasp" the other's culture, as a moral imperative for the serious scholar: "The Ethnographer has in the field … the duty before him of drawing up all the rules and regularities of tribal life; all that is permanent and fixed; of giving an anatomy of their culture, of depicting the constitution of their society" (Malinowski, *Argonauts* 11). "Grasping" the exotic culture and "getting the news out" (Graham Watson qtd. in Wolf, *Thrice-Told Tale* 1) became the secular mission of British and American ethnographers who hoped such knowledge would open the Western self to the enriching influence of other cultures and provide reference points for rethinking Western culture. What ethnography might do *to* or *for* the people it investigated was of marginal concern. Even when the motive was "salvaging" premodern cultures from the steam-roller of modernity, ethnographers imagined Western audiences as the beneficiaries – not the indigenous peoples. As late as 1966, Horentse Powdermaker asserted: "The anthropologist is not primarily interested in helping his

[13] In the volume of essays edited by Markowski and Nycz (2006), there is only one essay on ethnicity – an overview of American and British studies on race and ethnicity by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec. The handful of Polish studies mentioned in this essay (on representations of Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians in Polish literature) suggests that explorations of the territory of cross-racial/cross-ethnic representation in Poland have only just begun. See: Mencwel, *Wyobraźnia antropologiczna: Próby i studia* (2006); Markowski and Nycz, *Kulturowa teoria literatury: Główne pojęcia i problemy* (2006); essays by Łebkowska, Markowski, and Nycz in *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2007); and Benedyktowicz, *Portrety "obcego": Od stereotypu do symbolu* (2000).

[14] See Agata Preiss-Smith, "The Ethnography of Writing: American Anthropologists and the Scandal of Bronislaw Malinowski's Diary" (2007).

informants, although he may do so inadvertently. His motivation is to secure data" (296).

This way of imagining the relation between the subjects and objects of ethnography collapsed when the newly decolonized peoples on the one hand, and feminists and Americans of color on the other, refused to play their appointed roles.[15] "How removed my fieldwork was from the fieldwork out of which modern anthropology was born," wrote the Cuban-Jewish American Ruth Behar, "the sort of fieldwork where one retired to the most distant village one could find, or stranded oneself on an island and took the heroic role of ethnographer, towering over all the outsiders and elites out of a sense of higher calling" (*Vulnerable Observer* 243). Likewise, Pnina Motzafi-Haller, an Israeli of Mizrahi origins trained in the U.S., found herself looking for ways to avoid "essentializing my people" (215). "One's positioning within marginalized communities," she discovered, "shapes not only one's research interests and the epistemologies one chooses in developing such research; it also sensitizes one in conscious and/or unconscious ways to look at practices of exclusion and perhaps to write in ways that do not accept the status quo" (216). In the post Civil Rights era, the ethics of "grasping" cultures became suspect, as did the goal of hoarding cultural knowledge in Western academia – a practice that disregarded the welfare of those under investigation, even as their existence on the margins of global capitalism became increasingly precarious.

Traditionally, ethnographies were organized according to research topics or problems. In the nineteenth century, the research topics were systematized in the form of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*,[16] and periodically revised in response to current theoretical debates. Ethnographers were trained to look for cultural patterns and ignore singular events. "To pause for a moment before a quaint and singular fact; to be amused at it, and see its outward strangeness; to look at it

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[15] In his critical history of the Chicago School of Sociology's research on Asian Americans, Henry Yu demonstrates that in the first half of the twentieth century the non-white ethnographers and their informants did play their appointed roles (93–150). Anthropology students like Paul Siu, Rose Hum Lee, and Frank Miyamoto are among a host of minority researchers trained in the first half of the twentieth century, who duly studied their own immigrant communities. If they experienced the discomfort voiced by subsequent generations of scholars like Motzafi Haller and Behar, they did not feel entitled to voice it. The Japanese internees studied by Miyamoto (also an internee) during World War II were certainly in no position to object to the way Ruth Benedict used their statements to define Japanese culture as antithetical to American culture in every detail. See Geertz (*Works and Lives* 102–128) for a fascinating analysis of Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*.

[16] The first edition of *Notes and Queries* was prepared by British anthropologists in 1874, to be used by non-professionals, including travelers, missionaries, or colonial administrators, for collecting ethnographic data. *Notes and Queries* consisted of a long list of questions grouped under such topics as "Physical Characteristics" and "Language." The last (sixth) edition came out in 1951. Malinowski used *Notes and Queries* for his Melanesian fieldwork, as did Edith Turner (whose story is discussed in Chapter 2). For a discussion of various editions of *Notes and Queries*, see Dan Rose (209–210).

as a curio and collect it into the museum of one's memory or into one's store of anecdotes," wrote Malinowski, "this attitude of mind has always been foreign and repugnant to me" (*Argonauts* 517). Expected to "reduce the puzzlement" (Geertz qtd. in Wolf, *Thrice-Told Tale* 128) by discovering cultural patterns, the ethnographer could not afford to be distracted by the singular.

As ethnographic description focused on typical behavior rather than on what the researcher saw someone doing on a particular occasion, the "ethnographic present" was most commonly used. As Malinowski put it bluntly: "we are not interested in what A or B may feel *qua* individuals, in the accidental course of their own personal experiences – we are only interested in what they feel and think *qua* members of a given community" (*Argonauts* 23). Even if one's professed goal was to report home "how the natives think," textual authority and closure were achieved by demonstrating that one understands the "natives" better than they understand themselves. Reflecting with wonderment on the structural-functionalist training she received decades earlier, Edith Turner wrote: "An apparently coherent picture [of a culture could] be obtained, based on many experiences, numerical surveys, and reported events. We could break down the material into the Environment, Subsistence, Social Structure, Kinship Rules, Economic Exchange, Religious Change, Conflict and Maladjustment" ("Experience" 30). As these categories suggest, the body of the ethnographic text was expository but lacked temporal ordering. If the ethnographers felt compelled to write about their arrival in the field and how they came to know the local people, this information was confined to the introduction, postscript, or footnotes.

Since the 1980s, American ethnographers have concertedly labored to reinvent their discipline using insights from critical theory, cultural studies, ethnic studies, feminist theory, and queer theory. The enormous theoretical and methodological changes are evident when we survey the standard American and British cultural anthropology/ethnography textbooks published around 1960 and after.[17] But, though ethnography's axioms (including the irrelevance of singularity) have been modified, the discipline still seeks cultural patterns in everyday social interactions.[18] Its main objective is, after all, "to reduce the puzzlement" and to discover "the informal logic of actual life" (Geertz qtd. in Wolf, *Thrice-Told Tale* 128).

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[17] See for example Felix M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: The Science of Custom* (1958), Roger M. Keesing and Felix M. Keesing, *New Perspectives in Anthropology* (1971); Richley H. Crapo, *Cultural Anthropology: Understanding Ourselves and Others* (1990); Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (1999); and David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography* (1998). Writing in 1958, Keesing presented anthropology as a "science" and focused largely on Third-World cultures; by 1990, the idea of anthropology as a science had lost ground; true to its subtitle *Understanding Ourselves and Others*, Crapo's textbook provides numerous examples from Western culture to offset those from non-Western cultures. It foregrounds cultural adaptation and change, unlike earlier textbooks which favored premodern cultures.

[18] "Pattern" is a key word for anthropologists. For instance, Ruth Benedict's best-known works are titled *Patterns of Culture* and *Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Cul-*

Like ethnography, literature can be understood as a mode of encountering otherness, whether the other is conceived as an unfamiliar culture, something closer to home but beyond the horizon of our intellectual or aesthetic experience, or an aspect of the self as yet unexplored. Where writers and readers draw the line between the familiar and unfamiliar depends as much on their cultural background, class, gender, race, and age as on their individual exposure to literature. For instance, Derek Attridge invokes Derrida and Levinas to talk about literature's capacity to "free up" "the settled patterns of my mental world, the norms of my idioculture" so that "the truly other finds a welcome." For Attridge, repeated exposure to the other through literature has the potential to alter subjectivity, until "the self can be said to be a 'creation of the other'" (24).

While self-consciously avant-garde literature is by definition about pushing both writer and reader beyond the safety of the known, popular fiction, too, can serve as a space of encounters with the other, as the following reminiscence by anthropologist Margery Wolf suggests:

> When I was a girl growing up in a working-class family … I was particularly interested in novels about women. I read to find out about a life that I saw from a distance but to which I had no access. I knew the stories were often 'phony,' but I didn't care. I wanted to know how women in cities boarded streetcars, bought food, chose friends, what they talked about, and so on. And I wanted to know from someone who was there, had experienced it … I hungered for the details [such novels] provided me on a life that seemed exotic and exciting. In time, though, I gave up novels – there was no longer enough new information to make up for the boring stories. (*A Thrice-Told Tale* 58–59)

Thus Wolf, a budding anthropologist, lost interest in the adult heroines of popular romances when she learned as much as she needed to perform the role of a city woman and the heroines' otherness paled. The bulk of American literature is written in recognizable (often formulaic) genres. Although each of these genres in its own way mediates the encounter with the other, it nonetheless makes some form of encounter possible for some readers.

Exploring the distinction between academic and literary ways of knowing, Attridge draws on Levinas, who faulted educational methods grounded in Western philosophy for being "dedicated to the mastery of otherness, leaving no room for surprise; whereas for [Levinas], true philosophical understanding, and true teaching and learning can be achieved only in being surprised by the other" (Attridge 84). For Charles Bernstein, another close reader of Levinas, poetry is the ideal way of knowing, for it has an infinite capacity for surprise:

> no single sentiment but clashes of sentience: the magnificent cacophony of different bodies making different sounds, as different as the hum of Hester Street from the gush of Grand Coulee, the buss of Central Park on August afternoons from the shrieks of oil-coated birds in Prince William Sound. (1)

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ture. Chapter 1 of Margery Wolf's *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* is titled "The Past and the Pattern."

Bernstein believes that literature in general and poetry in particular leaves room for dissent (both formal and ideological), and for the multiplicity and indeterminacy of meaning. It works against "the male version of the universal voice of rationality trying to control, as if by ventriloquism, female bodies" (5). Poetry speaks in many voices, and, at its best, "include[s] multiple conflicting perspectives and types of language and styles" (Bernstein 2). All the texts discussed in this study belong to the category of fiction rather than poetry, yet they, too, construct and mediate difference by means of figurative language and multiple narrative perspectives.

Like ethnography, fiction written at the interstices of cultures often engages in the production and interpretation of difference. Building on Benedict Anderson's theory of the novel's key role in the construction of national identities, Jonathan Culler draws attention to the "radically different ways in which readers of the novel may be both outsiders and insiders. In colonies or former colonies in particular, readers' ideas of national identity may arise from a vision from outside, when they see how they are placed on the map" (38). It is in the form of the novel and the possibilities it creates for (dis)identification, rather than in its representative function, that Culler sees the novel's potency:

> What is distinctive about the novel, about its formal adumbration of the space of a community, is its open invitation to readers of different conditions to become insiders, even while the novel raises as a possibility the distinction between insider and outsider, friend and foe, that becomes the basis of political developments. (38)

While ethnographers, to be treated seriously, must demonstrate full control of their field material by eradicating any loose ends and unresolved dilemmas, fiction writers habitually leave readers puzzled or unsettled. To write well means to occasionally relinquish control, abandon familiar language patterns, and avoid resolutions. Literature, particularly poetry, is averse to closure: "anything [is] better than the well-wrought epiphany of predictable measure – for at least the cracks and flaws and awkwardnesses show signs of life" (Bernstein 2). The novel, the play, and the poem encourage the mingling of many voices. As Mikhail Bakhtin observed, even an ideologically committed novel is dialogic and therefore polyvocal.

Paradoxically, however, in the words of Elisabeth Frost, "the importation of ethnography into the novel has *impeded* experimentation." The stress on the representational function of literature has deterred some authors from pursuing their formal interests, while keeping those who did pursue them out of the multiethnic canon. Such was the case, Frost points out, of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, author of *Dictee* (1982), a multigeneric, multilingual, polyvocal book assembled out of the shards of many cultures. Because Cha failed to "assert an 'authentic' representative Korean American self, she was not embraced by the early critics."[19] It is only

[19] I thank Elisabeth Frost for this insightful comment.

in the last decade that she and other "unrepresentative" minority writers have received the critical attention they deserve.

Ethnography describes typical behavior and "common denominator people" (Van Maanen 49); by contrast, literature thrives on the singular, the eccentric, and the strange – that which cannot easily be explained away or reduced to a familiar pattern. Literature is generally more interested in what "A or B may feel *qua* individuals" (Malinowski, *Argonauts* 23) than in what they are culturally conditioned to feel; in fact, the novel only becomes interested in A and B when they pull slightly away from their cultures. Since the novel form is associated with the rise of capitalist ideology and the concomitant emergence of individualism, it tends to focus on singular characters, often in the process of identity formation, even when readers are expected to recognize some of the characters as types (like Hemingway's Robert Cohn, the alienated New York Jew). Fiction may have its equivalent of *Notes and Queries* in the form of implicit themes, but it is usually plot-driven and organized around developing characters. When fiction writers use the present tense, they usually do so to create a sense of immediacy, not to suspend characters in an ahistorical "ethnographic present."

I am not as optimistic as Attridge and Bernstein about literature's unique capacity to represent the other without ventriloquizing, or to free us from old patterns of thought and form. Literature that mediates between cultures is subject to particular pressures and misreadings. The pressures, as Vietnamese immigrant writer Le Ly Hayslip explains, come from having to reconcile "what people [in the U.S.] want, need to know, and what people should know about us. We offer something that they would not understand even though they may have lived [in Vietnam] as servicemen, journalists, politicians, and scientists" (Ho 109). In some circumstances formal experimentation backfires (for instance in the work of Jamaica Kincaid discussed in Chapter 5).

Conversely, James Clifford's readings of Michel Leiris, Marcel Griaule, Marjorie Shostak in *Predicament of Culture* suggest that ethnography too has its cracks and flaws that harbor life, and that formal innovation is possible within the limitations of an academic genre. Because ethnographers and fiction writers have often defined themselves in opposition to each other, it is easy to forget the traffic and cross-fertilization that has gone on between them. As I attempt to demonstrate in Chapter 2, anthropologists have been avid readers of fiction, particularly when working in the field, where books often replaced family and friends. Anthropologists have also written literature, whether to popularize their findings, or to release pent up memories of fieldwork that once had no place in formal ethnographies, or simply because they enjoyed creative writing. Conversely, creative writers are exposed to ethnography in a variety of popular forms, such as geography textbooks, ethnographic films, magazines, and travel guides. In Chapter 1, I discuss the special case of two fiction writers who studied social science but abandoned it for literature and fictionalized the practice of ethnography as a way of distancing themselves from it.

The traditional model of ethnography which relied on the existence of a knowledge gap and the technique of familiarizing the unfamiliar is not inevitable: now that many ethnographers do research "at home" (in places that are relatively well-known to their readers), the goal of their work is usually to make the familiar seem strange (and thus not inevitable, open to change). Early ethnic American literature, too, relied on the existence of a knowledge gap: it purported to represent to the "mainstream" the experience of "minority" groups.[20] Today, much of the "mainstream" is non-white. "Minority" communities themselves (which fifty years ago may have lacked both the resources to buy books and literacy skills) now constitute an important readership for ethnic fiction.[21] Defamiliarizing the familiar, representing minority groups to themselves, and mapping out their relationships to other groups are now parallel concerns.

Ostensibly, ethnography and literature relate very differently to the problem of knowledge. The former makes serious knowledge claims and must amass, sort, and interpret data to support them; aiming for objectivity, it must also constantly question its own underlying assumptions. By contrast, literature makes no claims to objectivity (though it cares profoundly about knowledge) and is therefore free to use any means to keep the reader engrossed in its fictions; singularity, partiality, and subjectivity are the measures of its strength – not weakness.

The texts analyzed in this project mostly fall into the category of fiction, though some double up as auto-ethnography or enter into a dialogue with ethnography. In *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (1997), anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay proposes a broad definition of auto-ethnography that covers three overlapping genres: "native anthropology," in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; "ethnic autobiography," personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and "autobiographical ethnography," in which anthropologists interject personal experiences into ethnographic writing (2). A similarly inclusive meaning of auto-ethnography emerges from the work of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, who have been promoting self-reflexive writings by social scientists since the 1990s. For the purposes of this project, it was necessary to distinguish self-reflexive fiction by ethnographers from fiction by minority writers who engage the legacy of ethnography from the "object" position, either by assuming the right to represent themselves and their communities, or by returning

[20] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong has problematized this mainstream use of minority fiction in the essay "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiographical Controversy." While Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is certainly no straightforward Chinatown tour, earlier writers, including Lin Yutang, Pardee Lowe, and Jade Snow Wong, felt compelled by the fact that they were writing for an almost all-white audience to act as guides to their own ethnic enclaves.

[21] See essays by Bebe Moore Campbell, Malaika Adero, and William W. Cook, in *Defining Ourselves: Black Writers in the 90s* edited by Elizabeth Nunez and Brenda M. Greene.

the ethnographic gaze, or else by deconstructing/displacing ethnographic ways of knowing. My provisional categories are:

– ethnographic fiction (autobiographical fiction by ethnographers);

– minority fiction featuring anthropologists, conceived as a critique of ethnography;

– auto-ethnography (minority writings that to some extent fulfill mainstream readers' demand for authentic cultural representations);

– counter-ethnography (minority fiction that objectifies mainstream Americans);

– mock-ethnography (parodic imitation of ethnography);

– anti-ethnography (writings that propose alternatives to ethnographic ways of knowing).

Some of the texts discussed in this study overlap several categories and no work can be reduced to an exemplar of a category. Most have, in fact, been the subject of literary analysis from a variety of angles unrelated to ethnography.

What ways of knowing?

"Ways of knowing," as I use the term here, are a matter of positioning, not of essential difference. As John Berger demonstrated, what we know – like what we see – is always culturally mediated. Positioning needs to be understood as shifting and contextual, though it is usually linked to the way human bodies are interpreted through such cultural categories as race, gender, age, (dis)ability, or sexuality. The 1987 book by Mary Field Belenky et al., titled *Women's Ways of Knowing* argued that American women, regardless of race and class, relate to knowledge and to themselves as knowers differently than men do (albeit for historical reasons). Poststructuralist feminists have problematized this claim while retaining an interest in exploring "subjugated" ways of knowing – those underrepresented in mainstream literature, the arts, and academia. Feminist critics of science, most prominently Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway, have been seeking a compromise between, on the one hand, the poststructuralist argument that objectivity is a false ideal because all knowledge claims are radically contingent and, on the other, the profound conviction that some knowledges are better (less oppressive, more beneficial to marginalized communities, women, the natural environment, etc.) than others. In her 1991 study of the possibilities for instituting a feminist epistemology Harding asked:

> Who can be subjects, agents of socially legitimate knowledge? (Only men in the dominant races and classes?) What kinds of tests must beliefs pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge? (Only tests against the dominant group's experiences and observations?) … What kinds of things can be known? Can 'historical truths,' socially situated truths, count as knowledge? Should all such situated knowledges count as equally plausible and valid? What is the nature of objectivity? Does it require 'point-of-viewlessness'? … Can there be 'disinterested knowl-

> edge' in a society that is deeply stratified by gender, race, and class? (*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* 109–110)

It only became possible to ask such epistemological questions recently, when the dominant paradigm of positivist science was challenged by Thomas Kuhn in 1962; when in the 1970s and '80s Michel Foucault reinterpreted the mechanisms of power upholding emblematic Western institutions and enlightened beliefs; when a critical mass of women and people of color assumed positions of authority. Such questions precipitated the conceptual shift which, in Clifford's words, left social scientists no elevated vantage point "from which to represent the world" (Clifford and Marcus 22).

Reading Foucault's 1976 lectures on the circulation of power and knowledge, we can reconstruct a compelling story – a seismographic record of events Clifford would later describe as earth-shaking (Clifford and Marcus). The power of Western institutions, Foucault argued, such as hospitals and prisons, but also academic disciplines, comes from "the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control. All this means that power, when it is exercised through these subtle mechanisms, cannot but evolve, organize, and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs" (*Power/Knowledge* 102). But the hierarchical order of power associated with science is no longer secure, wrote Foucault, for "there is something to which we are witness, and which we might describe as an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*" (81, emphasis in the original). Present all along, both inside and outside the knowledge-generating institutions, these upstart knowledges had been systematically disqualified as "inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" (82). Now they are increasingly gaining attention. Some are "erudite knowledges" buried "within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory, which criticism has been able to reveal"; others are "naïve" knowledges, those of the psychiatric patient, prison inmate – and, I would add, of ethnography's "native informant." Not only are these knowledges particular, local, and differentiated, but they constitute a cacophony of voices "incapable of unanimity" (82). This, however, makes them all the more vital for, unlike the orderly and well-integrated legitimate discourses, the upstart knowledges (elsewhere called "anti-sciences") preserve "the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge" (83). Antagonism and conflict (as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe would later affirm) are catalysts of change, to be heeded not smoothed over. The problem with insurrections, Foucault cautioned in the final part of this story, is that they are all too easily defused. No sooner are these subjugated knowledges "disinterred," "brought to light … accredited and put into circulation" than they "run the risk of recodification, re-colonisation" by being integrated into the legitimate knowledges (86).

Foucault's story about the attrition of legitimate and subjugated knowledges resonated with the concerns of feminist poststructuralists who met at conferences, read, and commented on each other's work. Among them were philosophers Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler, as well as anthropologists Dorinne Kondo and Lila Abu-Lughod.[22] "We don't want a theory of innocent powers to represent the world, where language and bodies fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis," wrote Haraway in "Situated Knowledges" in 1988 (579). Refining Foucault's propositions, she insisted that "subjugation is no grounds for an ontology"; there is no unmediated vision from subjugated standpoints, any more than there is from other standpoints (586). Knowers must neither be essentialized nor romanticized, for "the positions of the subjugated are not exempt from critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation … The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions" (584). Yet, that is precisely why, according to Haraway, they should be valorized. Knowing their own knowledges to be marginal, the subjugated are less likely to succumb to the illusion of objectivity or universality (584). Haraway's own prose straddles philosophy and literature as it conjures up ever new metaphors to break old habits of thought. She also invokes literature as a metaphor for ways of knowing: Native American Coyote tales, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and, finally, Katie King's theory of the way "poems" are generated at the intersection of art, business, and technology.

Many other American academics have sought in the poem, the play, the short story, or the memoir a release from the posture of scientific detachment and objectivity without giving up the pursuit of knowledge. While in the past such breaches of discipline had to be covert (so anthropologists often published literature under pen names),[23] today they count as innovative scholarship. Writing anthropology, Kondo combines the theoretical essay, autobiographical narrative, interview, and play; Margery Wolf, Edith Turner, and Rhoda Halperin, the anthropologists discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, turned their fieldwork experience into short stories. Thus, to use Foucault's vocabulary, we have witnessed a surge of upstart "erudite knowledges" grounded in the authors' experience deployed as a critique of functionalist and systematizing theory.

Literature rarely makes overt knowledge claims, yet its social and educational function indicates that some readers and educators do see it as mode of knowledge production. Modern nations, as Benedict Anderson has observed, rely heavily on novels for socializing citizens and building a sense of community.

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[22] A record of these and many other thinkers' intellectual exchange can be traced through direct and oblique references to each other in their writing, including footnotes acknowledging debts of gratitude. See for example Haraway (596).

[23] The literary pursuits of anthropologists are discussed by John Van Maanen, *Tales from the Field*; Richard Handler, *Critics against Culture: Anthropological Observers of Mass Society* (96–122); and Barbara Tedlock, "Works and Wives: On the Sexual Division of Textual Labor."

Taught in schools, national literatures are treated as a supplement to history. Taught as part of the American multicultural curriculum, ethnic literatures are an element of civic education. It thus seems that what Harding calls "historical truths" or "socially situated truths" do count as a form of knowledge when they appear in the form of literature. The texts I discuss in Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6 certainly enter into a dialogue with more legitimate knowledges, and question the ways in which knowledge about non-mainstream groups is produced.

One of the ways writers of both literature and ethnography acquire knowledge is through dialogue (or gossip) with others. But the dialogic origins of knowledge are erased in conventional ethnographic texts, while fiction thrives on dialogue. "Participant observation," the mainstay of ethnography, must be supplemented with gossip – casual conversations with informants about their own private lives and the lives of other members of their small community. One cannot compile kinship charts, reconstruct a community's moral norms, or understand its spirituality without asking personal questions that, under other circumstances, would be considered indiscreet. To highlight this oddity, critic Marianna Torgovnick quotes a memorable passage from Malinowski's introduction to *The Sexual Life of Savages*, in which he urges the reader to walk with him into a Melanesian village:

> We shall follow several [of the villagers] in their love affairs, and in their marriage arrangements; we shall have to pry into their domestic scandals, and to take an indiscreet interest in their intimate life. For all of them were, during a long period, under ethnographic observation, and I obtained much of my material through their confidences, and especially from their mutual scandal-mongering. (Malinowski qtd. in Torgovnick 3)

Interestingly, this passage suggests that prying and gossiping in the name of science is not only acceptable but that this is what the scientist (and, by extension, the reader) *has* to do. As the originator of the participant observation method and one of the first anthropologists to spend enough time in the field to comfortably gossip with the "natives" in their own language, Malinowski must have written this self-reflexive passage out of a need to naturalize his method of securing data. If his successors ever felt a similar discomfort, they could simply ignore it, for by their time the method was well-established in the discipline.

Theorist and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha plainly states her objections to ethnographic ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge about non-Western peoples when she defines them as academically sanctioned gossip. From a postcolonial perspective, she argues, ethnography is not just gossip with the "natives": it is a conversation among Western academics about people who are conveniently absent and thus unable to talk back. Questioning the assumptions behind passages like Malinowski's above, Trinh points out that:

> a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them' is a conversation in which 'them' is silenced. 'Them' always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subject of discussion, 'them' is only admitted among 'us,' the discussing subjects,

> when accompanied or introduced by an 'us,' member, hence the dependency of them and its need to acquire good manners for the membership standing … Anthropology is finally better defined as 'gossip' (we love to speak together about others) than as a 'conversation' (we discuss a question) a definition that goes back to Aristotle. (*Woman* 67–68)

Ethnographic texts usually erase the specifics of data collecting (except in introductions like Malinowski's quoted above) and move directly to exposition and theory. To learn more about the role of gossip in ethnographic research, we may turn to fieldwork manuals or, better still, to autobiography and fiction by ethnographers. I shall look at selected examples of ethnographic fiction to see how various authors represent the daily practice of gossip as data gathering, and how representation of the practice and product of gossiping changes when the ethnographic subjects are not illiterate members of an isolated Third-World community but English-speaking people who may eventually read what the ethnographer writes.

Although Trinh's dismissal of ethnography as gossip is reductive (it was, of course, intended as a provocation), I do find her trope useful because it draws attention to the relation between subjects, objects, and readers: who is addressing whom and in whose absence/presence. Reading texts for the "gossip" factor helps to problematize the faith in creative writing as an alternative to "realist" ethnography – a way to avoid objectifying, exoticizing, romanticizing, and otherwise exploiting the other. As I argue in Chapter 2, letting "the subaltern speak," to use Gayatri Spivak's term, by making ethnographic texts dialogic or polyvocal, or otherwise undermining one's own ethnographic authority, does not necessarily eradicate the asymmetry between observers and observed in terms of control of representation.

* * *

Chapter 1 analyzes one Asian American and two African American narratives that feature anthropologists and carry out a critique of ethnography. Paule Marshall's narrator observes white American anthropologists at work in the Caribbean and exposes their neocolonial entanglements. Although their applied research project fails to bring any relief to the community in question, Marshall suggests that "native" researchers (and outsiders willing to make a long-term commitment) have a chance of doing valid and useful research. By contrast, Gloria Naylor dismisses the "native" anthropologist in her introductory chapter and proceeds to give voice to others, whose ways of knowing are antithetical to his. Russell Leong, in turn, constructs his story as a play in which three characters of color – an anthropologist and two informants – vie for symbolic and discursive power during an ethnographic interview. In the course of the interview, the difference initially constructed by the anthropologist collapses, and the informants cut the interview short because they know themselves to be far more complex than his theoretical model allows.

While these three texts lay out some of the problems associated with ethnographic research from the perspective of ethnography's "objects," the writers discussed in Chapter 2 confront these very problems as the "subjects" of ethnography. Anthropologists Margery Wolf, Edith Turner, and Rhoda Halperin are among many white women who turned to autobiographical fiction at various points in their careers, presumably because it helped to mediate the discomfort of being professional observers and not being able to write about the visceral experience of fieldwork in their monographs. Fiction allowed them to reflect on and objectify themselves along with their informants, as well as to suspend the authority that comes with doing social science. Paradoxically, though, the stories function as proof of having "been there" and thus are a form of self-authorization. Also the fact that all three writers eventually inserted their stories into academic essays and published them with academic presses suggests that their experiments with storytelling were quickly absorbed into the discipline.

Chapter 3 takes a queer look at a Hawaiian island through the eyes of a white male islander, O.A. Bushnell. His novel *Molokai* displaces the legacy of exoticist Pacific island ethnography by reconstructing a year in the life of a nineteenth-century leper colony. Three characters – one white and two Hawaiian – narrate the events of that year. Rather than fetishize the precontact past, the novel attempts to make sense of physical and cultural contamination, and to show how a group of more or less able-bodied exiles cobbles together a culture of care from imported scraps of other cultures. Writing on the eve of three emancipatory movements (Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and the gay and lesbian movement) Bushnell imagined non-essential racial and sexual identities, and provided ample material for disability studies to explore.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 were conceived as a unit on the paradoxes of American multiculturalism and the way writers of color negotiate the fact that their work is assumed to represent an ethnic group. The introductory chapter examines the context for the rise of a vibrant sector of multicultural literature: fiction by women from Caribbean and Pacific islands. It considers how books are packaged to meet reader expectations, and shows similarities in the way they are perceived by market readers, educators, and academics. Four works written by the Antiguan Jamaica Kincaid over the course of two decades are examined in Chapter 5 to show that market forces and reader expectations may drive authors to invent ever new literary personas, narrative strategies, and ways of knowing. For instance, Kincaid started out by performing the role of exotic other, but went on to explore the possibilities of mock-ethnography, writing about white tourists and entrepreneurs in the Caribbean and the local elite that caters to them; she then produced a fictional counter-ethnography of white middle-class Americans from a Black domestic's perspective. The novels by Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Achy Obejas, and Karen Tei Yamashita analyzed in Chapter 6 thematize insular communities and the politics of the gaze but show these communities as complex, hybrid products of colonialism,

global migrations (Japanese in Hawai'i and Brazil, Spanish Jews in Cuba), and traveling ideologies (Judaism, Protestantism, Rousseau's idealism, communism).

Other combinations of the same texts could be as productive. For instance, we might compare the narrative structures of Bushnell's *Molokai* and Yamashita's *Brazil-Maru*, explore the compulsion to retell history shared by Marshall, Obejas, Yamashita, and Kincaid, or ask about the relative explanatory power of history and ethnography. Yamanaka's auto-ethnographic writing in *Heads by Harry* could be contrasted with Kincaid's in *Annie John* to bring out the nuances of this subgenre. Another alternative pairing would be Turner and Obejas who, despite their different background and training, struggle to understand cultural difference aware that one can only read others through personal, visceral experience, and that the effort yields little more than approximations of knowledge.

Chapter 1

Fiction as critique of ethnography: Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, and Russell Leong

> What did the Hawaiians see in the first encounters with Europeans? We are accustomed to reading Pacific literature or viewing films and television romances that give us views of approaching islands, that is, the view from a ship's deck. But what of the view from the shore?
>
> Stephen Sumida, *And the View from the Shore*, p. 11

> [I]t is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work.
>
> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 82

Anthropology as "the study of man" (though really of small "exotic" communities) gained respectability in the West at a time of increased migrations of peoples and intercultural contacts towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, with decolonization abroad, the passage of the 1965 immigration act in the U.S., and the gradual desegregation of racial communities, these migrations and contacts intensified. Cultural interpreters were needed more than ever. By this time, most of the world's local communities or small places had long ceased being "islands unto themselves," with distinctive, bounded cultures. Meanwhile, cultural anthropology had not adjusted to dealing with small places as part of the global economic and political system.

Without the protective umbrella of colonial institutions, ethnographers could no longer expect the "natives" to docilely and unquestioningly submit to "participant observation." Reflecting on their own precarious and ethically ambiguous position, many ethnographers began to question their discipline's basic assumptions. In his introduction to the 1969 collection of essays *Reinventing Anthropology* (a critical intervention into American anthropology's methodologies, episte-

mological assumptions, and choice of subject matter), Dell Hymes provocatively asked: "If anthropology did not exist, would it have to be invented?" (3). After all, "most of the world has done without something called anthropology" (5). Hymes then went on to argue that American anthropology had become anachronistic, for the conditions that enabled its emergence as a study of exotic peoples no longer existed. Third-World peoples were increasingly beginning to resist ethnographic inquiry which brought them no measurable benefits (5), being primarily geared to the needs and interests of the Euro-American academia. Given the fact that most non-western cultures had been thrust into modernity by colonialism, anthropology's evolutionist preoccupation with the unadulterated "primitive" was self-interested if not outright pernicious (30–31). After carrying out a sustained critique of Boasian anthropology, Hymes closed by restating the warning that the world could manage just fine without anthropological ways of knowing. If the discipline wanted to survive, it would have to make itself relevant and accountable to the communities it studied (55). Similar views were articulated throughout the 1970s by those who called for a politically engaged anthropology.[24]

One of anthropology's major problems, according to Hymes, was disciplinary. By specializing in "customs and manners," it had left the broader political and economic context out of its purview.[25] Anthropologists studying small places were thus ill-equipped to report on the pressures of the global on the local. Hymes observed that anthropologists were simply being upstaged "in the field": "The American quietly interviewing and observing in a foreign community is likely to be a sociologist, a political scientist, a social psychologist, or even an economist" (4). While "the American" envisioned by Hymes was not explicitly gendered or raced, in the late 1960s he would have still most likely been white and male.[26]

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[24] Likewise in sociology the political upheavals of the 1960s brought a wave of revisionary writing, collected by Joyce Ladner in the ominously titled book *The Death of White Sociology* (1972), which included essays by such respected scholars (black and white) as E. Franklin Frazier, Robert Staples, Robert Blauner and David Wellman, and Kenneth B. Clark. These progressive sociologists considered issues as wide-ranging as the socialization of black sociologists, the white cultural norms underlying minority studies, American racial minorities as constituted by internal colonialism, and the racist bias of white researchers.

[25] Also in *Reinventing Anthropology* Mina Davis Caulfield voiced her frustration with disciplinary constraints. But although she problematized ethnography's entanglement with imperialism, she felt obliged to renounce any pretensions to interdisciplinarity in the confusing statement: "What I am suggesting for my profession, then, is not that we should turn sociologist, historian, or economist and deal with the phenomena of imperialism in terms of another discipline, but rather that we should become truly ourselves and try to understand imperialism in its cultural aspects" (209).

[26] Only one of the contributors to *Reinventing Anthropology* (William S. Willis, Jr.) was nonwhite. Students of color had generally been confined to research in their own communities and discouraged from aspiring to careers in the social sciences. Such was the case of the African American Zora Neale Hurston; the Chinese American Rose Hum Lee did receive a doctoral degree from the University of Chicago and even became a department chair, yet spent most of her career studying the Chinese minority in the U.S. (Yu 125–133).

Writing as a social scientist, Hymes understandably did not include a novelist in his expanded category of professionals authorized to represent mainstream America's cultural others, yet by this time literature *had* begun to usurp for itself the right of representation. Not only were people of color finally entering the social sciences and thus taking racial/ethnic representation in their own hands; they were also graduating from English and creative writing programs. Unlike anthropology, ethnic fiction was unhampered by disciplinary constraints, and thus constituted an appealing alternative to "the study of man." Moreover, ethnic fiction was able to reach a broad readership, for neither the writer nor the reader needed specialized training.[27] More importantly, the ethnic writer was not relegated to representing an ethnic community as a bounded and homogenous entity (standard practice in ethnography), but could highlight the interracial and interethnic relations shaping that community. Finally, literature presented itself as a vehicle for thinking critically about cultural anthropology as a way of knowing.

This chapter examines three works by Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, and Russell Leong that feature ethnographers as characters, problematize ethnographic constructions of difference, and propose alternative ways of knowing. Valorizing literature over ethnography is not the goal of this analysis: each mode of representation addresses a different set of interests and formal expectations, and each has its uses in American society. What the analysis highlights are points where there has been a productive friction between the established or hegemonic discourse of ethnography and an emergent one – that of ethnic literature. By examining these points of friction from a historical and cultural studies perspective, we can see that literature did not merely reflect the changes that occurred in ethnography over the past four decades; by mounting a critique of ethnographic ways of knowing, ethnic literature both anticipated and helped to precipitate such changes.

Each of the authors discussed below adopts a different position in relation to ethnography, from a conditional acceptance to outright denial of its capacity to understand cultural difference – that which distinguishes others and that which is inherent in the observing self. Having studied social science before turning to literature, Marshall and Leong attempt to show that disciplined ways of knowing ultimately serve the interests of the discipline, not those of the objects of ethnography. One of the most significant shifts of perspective all three authors attempt to effect concerns the formulation of the research problem.

[27] Cathy Davidson, writing about the beginnings of the novel in North America, proposed that the novel had a democratizing power, particularly in terms of gender and class, for it required neither writers nor readers to have an elite education. In the case of the early American novel, the power to represent and interpret social phenomena was wrested by "average Americans" (i.e. white, middle-class men and women) from the better-educated and institutionally empowered clergymen (55–79). Parallels can be drawn between this process and the development of the ethnic American novel, which empowered writers of color to represent their own communities.

While in the social sciences it is traditionally the non-normative (premodern, Third-World, sexually deviant, poor) culture/community that constitutes the research problem, whether as something to be preserved from extinction (Hopi traditions) or one to be eradicated ("the culture of poverty"), the ethnic fiction discussed here locates the problem outside the community in question.[28] Marshall identifies the problem in the tribal culture of multinational corporations. Such businesses, with roots firmly planted in the colonial era, sponsor ethnographic research and development schemes in much the same style as once they bore "the white man's burden." Also Leong turns his critical eye on a specific institution, American academia, to show how disciplinary affiliation leads the ethnographer to construct otherness where there is none, and to deny the other in the self. For Naylor, the culprit seems to be not a specific institution but the spirit of scientific rationalism.

Marshall wrote *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, between 1963 and 1969,[29] at the height of decolonization, when Hymes and others felt compelled to "reinvent anthropology." Omniscient narration in this realistic novel reflects the dire need to claim full narrative control and wrest from social science the authority to represent small places. Marshall constructed her three white ethnographers (two professional and one lay) as well-meaning if fallible individuals, but showed them to be hopelessly mired in institutional structures that protect Western interests while claiming to foster economic development in the Caribbean. What they come to understand is that the problem lies not in the culture of the destitute islanders but in the colonial and neocolonial relations which produced it. Sent to find ways of changing the islanders' lifeways, the ethnographers learn that they should really be changing the economic and political environment, which is beyond their

[28] Historian Henry Yu in *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (2001) reconstructs in meticulous detail the way anthropologists at the Chicago School of Sociology formulated "the Oriental problem" in the U.S., which generated research topics for several decades. Among the "deviant" communities the white anthropologists and their "ethnic" doctoral students studied were Chinese and Japanese enclaves on the West coast and in Hawaii, as well as communities of Chinese laundrymen in Chicago. "The Oriental problem" was a field of research parallel to the better known "Negro problem."

[29] On the last page of *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, Marshall gives the dates "1961–1969" which presumably denote the period spent on research and writing. In a *MELUS* interview with Joyce Pettis, she described the process in the following words: "I'm still recovering from that work. As I said, I knew that it was going to take me a very long time to do research for that novel; it was very extensive. I had to do all the research on Cuffee Ned and the uprising, the whole manufacture of sugar from the time it comes up in the fields until the time it's taken to the mill; to go Sunday mornings to the slaughtering of the pigs and be there and observe every little detail. It was a long haul of a research project for that novel, long and intense. I had a terrible time for a number of years trying actually to make the transition from research to fiction, just to put aside all those facts that I had accumulated and move into writing the novel. My sense of what I wanted to do, of course, was to have a kind of vehicle that looked at the relationship of the West to the rest of us" (Pettis 123).

control. Perhaps to alleviate the sense of failure in what is a belated positivist novel, one of the departing anthropologists expresses the hope that he can train "native ethnographers" to do ethnography in their own communities in order to solve local problems.

Naylor, in turn, published *Mama Day* during the heyday of cultural nationalism in 1988. In the novel's opening, the anonymous narrator using the communal "we" alludes to a trained "native ethnographer" who returned home to do research, but she immediately dismisses him as a dismal failure. Rejecting omniscience, Naylor shares out ethnographic authority between the anonymous narrator and two lay seekers of cultural knowledge – a black engineer from New York and a black woman raised on the island but temporarily estranged from it. To complicate conventional notions of knowledge, Naylor represents the isolated (pre)modern American culture with African roots through magical realist techniques.

Finally, Leong in his story "Eclipse," published in 2000, allows two "native informants" to turn the tables on the "native ethnographer" (all three are "ethnic" Americans). Once the "natives" assert their agency and start questioning the scholar, the boundary between the ethnographic subject and object collapses. Leong strikes hard at the foundations of cultural anthropology, suggesting that it manufactures cultural difference where there is none, to feed its own voracious appetite. The story's setting is postmodern: the island of Manhattan. The form is dialogic: a mini-play or skit in two acts. Identity – racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual – is shown to be situational and constituted through performance: danced on table tops, recited in poetic language, written in fountain-pen script, and spat out in street slang. Like Marshall and Naylor, Leong asserts that mainstream America's others know who they are without the aid of anthropology.

The analysis below is an attempt to link the formal choices made by the three authors with their ideological positions and their understanding of literary representation. Marshall seems to have been aware of the conventionality and inadequacy of the positivist novel form but embraced it for strategic reasons: it empowered her as a social critic and enabled her to reach a broad American readership. Also, as the Caribbean writer and critic Edward Brathwaite observed, *The Chosen Place* was unprecedented as a monumental attempt to represent the Caribbean holistically (227). It thus carried a heavy burden of representation. For Naylor and Leong, who wrote several decades later, reaching the white middle-class audience was not a primary concern since by then a large ethnic readership had constituted itself in the U.S. What Naylor and Leong wrote did not carry as heavy a burden of representation as did Marshall's novel, for by then there were many recognized African American and Asian American writers to share the burden. In effect, they were in a position to satirize the ethnic seeker of ethnographic knowledge and demystify the Enlightenment category of knowledge itself.

Anthropology meets history in the Black Atlantic

> With what in fact were these buried, subjugated knowledges really concerned? They were concerned with a historical knowledge of struggles … the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge.
>
> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 83

The Chosen Place was written back-to-back with Thomas Pynchon's *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, as well as John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and *Lost in the Funhouse*, yet it embraced wholesale the realistic conventions of authorial omniscience, plot and character construction, narrative coherence and conventional ending. Like many ethnic writers, Marshall wrote realistic fiction out of an urgent need to represent the postcolonial predicament of the Caribbean to a broad English-speaking audience; meanwhile, Pynchon and Barth experimented with metafiction out of a concern about literature's (and history's) unacknowledged fictionality. Given that our access to the external reality and to our own experience is always already mediated by language, the novel cannot take itself too seriously, some postmodernists concluded, for it can only rewrite or deconstruct the overwritten and overplotted world outside the text (Bradbury 201). Yet not all human experiences had been overwritten to the same extent. Some had not been told at all. In response to the postmodern assault on literature's capacity to represent anything but itself, feminist and minority critics pointed out that such claims served to preserve the hegemony of the white cultural elite: many postmodern authors were based at American universities and addressed not universals but themes considered important in their own social milieux.[30] At the very moment when people of color and women claimed the power of literary self-representation, postmodern theorists (many of whom were novelists) denied validity to minority representations. From Marshall's politically engaged perspective, to have dwelt on fiction's limited capacity to signify, or to have relished the pastiche, or valorized surface over depth would not have made much sense. Building psychological and historical depth was the logical way to counteract stereotypical representations of black communities. While Marshall did not believe in an essential originary Africanness, she knew that racial origins mattered in the sense that both in the Caribbean and in the U.S. they had historically determined one's position as master or slave, mistress or mammie, speaking subject or silent object. She did take the novel form seriously, just as she took history seriously – history that had gone unrecorded. Her

[30] See Frances E. Mascia-Lees et al., "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective," and Faye V. Harrison, "Writing against the Grain: Cultural Politics of Difference in the Work of Alice Walker."

counterpart in *The Chosen Place*, Merle Kinbona, is a black Caribbean woman who cannot stop talking about the past. On first meeting this compulsive talker, the anthropologist Saul Amron likens her to Coleridge's ancient mariner: "she might have been condemned to tell the tale … might have been a witness to, victim of, some unspeakably inhuman act and been condemned to wander the world telling every stranger she met about it" (89).

It is not that Marshall failed to recognize the mediated nature of what counts as historical fact. Rather than take a real Caribbean island as her subject, she invented one that roughly resembled Barbados in terms of history and topography. Unlike Pynchon, Barth, or DeLillo, who playfully deflated public legend, Marshall used the novel form to circulate new legends. Since she dealt with material hitherto unrepresented in the United States, she could not afford to parody the vehicle of representation that had only just become accessible to people of color. Nonetheless, she did plant in *The Chosen Place* an image – a vehicle – that can be read in retrospect as a postmodernist trope of her novel. The novel's climax is an extended account of a carnival parade whose centerpiece is a shabby float representing Pyre Hill with a burning white house on the summit. On and around this float the Bournehills community (which is the object of an ethnographic investigation) enacts the story of its own enslavement, a nineteenth-century slave revolt and the killing of the plantation owner, followed by a long siege and capture of the rebels by British soldiers. Not only does the community reenact the story over and over again as the parade makes its way through the island's capital; it has been bringing the same float to town every year for as long as anyone can remember, despite the strict carnival rule that the themes and costumes change annually. "Are they playing the same damn masque again this year?" asks one spectator. "Why they won't change? The vagabonds! They ought to be banned from town," says another (280). But the peasant farmers of Bournehills will not play cowboys, Indians, homecoming queens, or soldiers in full battle gear like other islanders. In fact, they will not play at all. Out of an infinite choice of carnival themes they have ritualized one that is vital to their psychological and cultural survival. Marshall deliberately dwelt on the artificiality of the float and the staginess of the performance, but she insisted on "the damn masque's" power to command the undivided attention of all spectators, even those who scoff at it. With a vital story to convey to her home readership, she chose the float of realism as the most likely to command attention.

History, as understood by the fictional people of Bournehills, is firmly linked to place (hence the compulsion to lug Pyre Hill to town on a float each year). Historical accuracy matters immensely to some of the men, who are shown debating historical details late into the night. Pre-literate communities, Marshall suggests, are neither timeless nor history-less. In a very different context, discussing his work of recording Apache oral history, anthropologist Keith Basso spoke of "placemaking [which] involves multiple acts of remembering and imagining which inform each other in complex ways" (5):

> The place-maker's main objective is to speak the past into being, to summon it with words and give it dramatic form, to *produce* experience by forging ancestral worlds in which others can participate and lose themselves … the place-maker often speaks as a witness on the scene, describing ancestral events 'as they are occurring' and creating in the process a vivid sense that what happened long ago – right here, on this very spot – could be happening *now*. (32, emphasis in the original)

In constructing the carnival scene, Marshall had her characters reenact key moments in their group's history as a way of asserting their communal bonds as well as challenging the erasure of the colonial past from official discourse.

The central role of history in the novel distinguishes it most clearly from positivist ethnographies, which usually adopt a synchronic framework. In their influential study *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: The Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (1986), anthropologists George Marcus and Michael Fischer join with Johannes Fabian in questioning the ethnographic convention of presenting non-western communities synchronously, as "timeless," fixed, and unaware of their own history (78, 95). The customary use in cultural descriptions of what Johannes Fabian has called the "ethnographic present," reinforces the impression that the "natives" have been doing what they do since time immemorial. Marshall's ironic title, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, invokes the language of the Bible and that of ethnography, both of which are undermined in the body of the text. Apparently abandoned by God, Bournehills, has been "chosen" as an object of benevolence by an American corporation for PR purposes. The "timeless people" of Bournehills resist liberal notions of progress, but they are passionate about Caribbean history, which other islanders are apt to forget.

With the exception of the Bournehills peasants, the Bourne Islanders have adjusted to the global economy and accepted the fact that the Caribbean is a backwater attractive mostly to western tourists, hotel chain operators, and tax evaders. This modern population is embarrassed by the peasants who live in hovels on the barren, hilly Atlantic edge of the island and grow cane as their ancestors did in colonial times. The government has defined Bournehills as a problem and, from time to time, has exposed it to ineffectual development schemes (56). The backwardness of Bournehills is also the problem that the anthropologists must solve on behalf of the corporate-funded Center for Social Research in Philadelphia, whose trustees have a long-standing interest in the Caribbean as their family fortunes were made in the Atlantic trade. It takes Marshall almost 500 pages to demonstrate that Bournehills is in trouble but it is not the problem.

To redefine the problem, Marshall makes forays back in time and provides a sweeping panorama of contemporary economic relations in the Atlantic rim. The fact that literature allowed her to do this may have been one of the reasons she embraced it at the expense of social science, which she began to study in college.[31]

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[31] Marshall herself does not make this connection. She traces her literary awakening to the period when, as a student of social work at Hunter College, she was forced by an illness to spend time in a sanatorium and a friend encouraged her to write. She does, however, admit to taking

It was not until the 1980s that anthropologists began to officially discuss their discipline's limitations when faced with the large-scale political and economic processes that impinged on the lives of the small places they studied. Marcus and Fischer, who wrote *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* between 1982 and 1986, admitted that such processes "exceeded anthropology's grasp" (91). Convinced that a more "holistic" approach was necessary, they looked to literature for models of representation:

> How to present rich views of the meaning systems of a delimited set of subjects and also to represent the broader system of political economy that links them to other subjects, who are also richly portrayed in their own world, is an experimental ideal for ethnographic theory and writing. While there are texts of complexity in fiction (e.g. Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*), we know of none yet in the literature of ethnography. (91)

The Chosen Place may not meet the rigorous Geertzian standards of "thick description," but it does fulfill Marcus and Fischer's requirement that ethnographies reflect a multi-locale strategy: "Rather than being situated in one, or perhaps two communities for the entire period [of fieldwork], the fieldworker must be mobile, covering a network of sites that encompasses a process which is in fact the object of study" (94). Realistic fiction allowed Marshall to do just that: sketch a network of sites in England, Africa, and the U.S. that contribute to the making of Caribbean culture understood as a function of the material conditions in which people live. While traditional ethnographies focused only on "primitive" communities, Marshall was able to show how the Caribbean rural poor relate to the towns people and the elites. (In this fictional case study, many of the rich and the poor are, in fact, blood relatives, being either acknowledged or unacknowledged descendants of the same promiscuous planter.) Finally, in constructing her American anthropologists as racially-marked characters with family histories, Marshall was able to speculate about the various motives that bring First-World scholars to the Third World.

In her groundbreaking essay "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up" (1969) Laura Nader asked, "what if, in reinventing anthropology, anthropologists were to study the colonizers rather than the colonized, the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty?" And "how has it come to be … that anthropologists are more interested in why peasants don't change than why the auto industry doesn't innovate, or why the Pentagon or universities cannot be more organizationally creative?" (289). "Studying down" is, of course, technically easier, for tribal villages are more accessible to researchers than corporate headquarters. And in "studying down" anthropologists keep the balance of power in their own favor. Nader encouraged her readers to design research projects that, instead of

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Thomas Mann's *The Buddenbrooks* as the model for *Brown Girl Brownstones*, for it offered her "the sense of a large canvas that would take a family and trace its experience over a long period of time through a couple of generations" (Pettis 120).

fetishizing exotic peoples, might expose the tribal cultures of western public and private institutions, thus helping citizens and consumers to use them more effectively. If anthropology is to produce useful knowledge, she insisted, it cannot treat communities like the Crow or Cheyenne as if they were "islands unrelated to the wider society" (291). For Nader, understanding complex social phenomena required studying "up, down, or sideways" (292).

Marshall suggested as much in her 1968 novel. Her Bourne Island may be an imaginary place, but it is firmly planted within a web of power relations that extends east, south, and west across the Atlantic, and back in time to the eighteenth century. Together with the white anthropologists, we learn that the Bournehills peasants grow cane because their ancestors were taught this skill as slaves, and they still occupy the same social position in neocolonial times. They live on a diet of rice and salt cod not because it is their food of choice but because salt cod is what Philadelphia merchants happened to buy cheaply in Newfoundland and sell at a profit to Caribbean planters.

> The widow Susan Harbin had launched the family's modest wealth by her small-scale speculation in the West Indies trade, which in those days consisted in taking a few shares in a number of sloops making the twice-yearly run between Philadelphia, the West Coast of Africa, and then back across the Atlantic to the islands. In a stained, faded ledger still to be seen in a glass display case at the Historical Society, the widow had kept careful account in a neat, furbelowed hand of the amounts of flour and salted cod, cornmeal and candles that went out on the sloops, the number of slaves taken on in Guinea and then just how much her portion of that cargo, both human and otherwise, had brought in crude sugar and molasses in the islands. (37–38)

In a heated debate between the American ethnographers and Lyle Hutson, a black lawyer and politician, readers get to see a small place caught up in a transnational circuit. With no resources or capital of its own, Bourne Island courts hoteliers and other entrepreneurs, luring them with tax-free periods, or building industrial parks at its own expense to rent for nominal sums. There are, consequently, no taxes to redistribute to communities like Bournehills (206–207). Many parts of the novel function as an ethnographic description of the black and mixed-race elite lifestyles supported by foreign bribes. As presented in the novel, the two main social strata on the island are the modern-day equivalents of the planters and slaves, the gulf between them as wide as ever.

But perhaps the most interesting case of "studying up" in the novel is its account of tribal relations within a fictional American institution named Unicor. Built on the wealth generated by the trade in "homey products" like fish, candles, and lumber, Unicor has expanded into other areas: "huge sugar refineries, a soft drink popular all over the world, mammoth flour and paper mills, as well as major interests in other, more impressive industries: iron, oil, the large-scale manufacture of munitions, uranium mining, banking" until it grew into a "giant complex, like some elaborate rail or root system, endlessly crisscrossing the world, binding it up" (37). The Center for Applied Research, which finances the Bourne Island re-

search project, is an offshoot of Unicor. Through Harriet Shippen, a member of the Philadelphia clan that owns Unicor, and wife of anthropologist Saul Amron, we get a glimpse of how decisions are made within the corporate structure.[32]

Women of this clan have no official power. At best, they can serve as volunteer fundraisers like Harriet or as sponsors – "monied matrons" in "flower-laden spring hats" (20). Harriet suffers from a recurrent fear of being useless and weak. But behind the scenes the matrons do "wield some small power" (39), so that Harriet is able to further the career of her first husband, a nuclear scientist, and then secure a major ethnographic research project for her second husband. When the Bournehills project threatens to draw all of Saul's energy away from Harriet, she promptly has Saul recalled to Philadelphia and the project suspended. All this is accomplished through the Uncle Chessie, "a member of the both [the Philadelphia Research Institute] board of directors and Unicor's as well as the head of a well-known Philadelphia law firm" (38). Unicor may have a board of directors and pay lip-service to transparency, but its decision making process is highly informal.

"Studying up" – a daring undertaking for anthropologists even today – is, of course, no novelty for novelists. While the anthropologist can be sued should confidential information about a corporation be made public, the novelist is free to spin her fictions about Unicor risk-free. What is novel in *The Chosen Place* is the bold, penetrating gaze turned on institutions that are distinctly neocolonial in character, and on their emissaries, including the three Americans who come to study Bournehills: Saul Amron "one of the pioneers in the field of applied research," Allen Fuso, who specializes in quantitative research, and Harriet Amron who, like many ethnographers' wives, does amateur research by spending time with the village women and children. She is portrayed as a modern-day *exploratrice sociale* who makes an informal career out of investigating "how the other half lives."[33] From the moment the Americans arrive, they are constantly the object of someone's gaze, a theme that cuts through the novel. Saul responds to the gaze by taking stock of his conscience:

> under cover of the darkness he felt them assessing him: his outer self first – his large, somewhat soft white body that had never known any real physical labor, the eyes that had gone

[32] The imperative of "studying up" voiced by Laura Nader around the time *The Chosen Place* was published would be reemphasized five years later as vital to black sociology. In "The Case of the Racist Researcher," Richard F. America looked at institutional racism endemic to various research centers, particularly those with corporate sponsorship like the Stanford Research Institute.

[33] The term *exploratrice sociale* comes from the work of Mary Louise Pratt, who used it with reference to the "specifically exploratory activity identified with urban middle-class women in the early nineteenth century. The political work of social reformers and charity workers included the practice of visiting prisons, orphanages, hospitals, convents, factories, slums, poorhouses, and other sites of social management and control" (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* 244). Before coming to the Caribbean, Harriet played this role by doing volunteer work with children in the Philadelphia slums, and she continues her social exploration on Bourne Island where she peeps into people's houses and comments on the lack of hygiene and proper nutrition.

> dumb after his first wife's death, the coarse hair that had begun to recede at the temples. They saw even farther, he sensed; their gaze discovering the badly flawed man within, and all the things about him which he would gladly have kept hidden: his deep abiding dissatisfaction with himself, for one, his capacity for failing those closest to him, his arrogance born of that defensive superiority which had been his heritage as a Jew, his selfishness… (137)

Harriet, too, repeatedly muses on the peasants' gaze "which plumbed deep" (137). Even the curious children who come to visit her "scarcely seemed children … Something unnervingly old and knowing lay within their dark gaze and was suggested by the quality of their stillness" (168).

In addition to the "natives" who insist on returning the ethnographers' gaze, the omniscient narrator also plays this power game, exposing far more of the ethnographers' intimate lives than of the Bournehills peasants' (Bronisław Malinowski and Margaret Mead favored the reverse proportions). For instance, we learn a good deal about the sexual lives of Saul and Harriet, including their preferred positions during intercourse. We are also made privy to the anguish experienced by Allen, a closeted gay man who has fallen in love with a Bournehills youth named Vere. On carnival night, the narrator coolly observes Allen who is forced to go on a heterosexual double date and then to watch Vere making love to a woman. By contrast, the narrator affords the locals more privacy. The one exception is the central character Merle Kinbona, who serves as a self-appointed "cultural broker" and "prime informant"[34] to the American anthropologists. Merle's frank confession to Saul about her seduction by a wealthy English lesbian becomes a prelude to their affair, and contributes to her construction as a complex character. Interestingly, Marshall resorts to the cultural nationalist dogma that homosexuality is a Western import. Merle's long affair with the Englishwoman is evacuated of emotional content and presented as a form of neocolonial domination.

The plot of *The Chosen Place* revolves around the question: Who has the knowledge and the authority to represent this particular small place? Ultimately the Bournehills folk (whom Gayatri Spivak would call subalterns) cannot speak – at least not distinctly enough to be taken seriously by the government on the other side of the island. Most of the time, they are stunned into silence by the inhumanly hard work of growing and cutting cane. The black sugar mill worker Ferguson is unable to utter a word of protest to the Englishman who represents the absentee English sugar-mill proprietor, as if paralyzed by some vague memory of plantation etiquette invoked by the Englishman's white suit, cane, and sun helmet. Resilient and resistant, the Bournehills folk seem unable to move forward, beyond rehearsing the narrative of the failed slave revolt. Emblematic of the subalterns is Merle's stern old housekeeper Carrington, whom Marshall casts as a mute earth-

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[34] The terms "cultural broker" and "prime informant" are commonly used with reference to local assistants who are familiar with the ethnographer's language and culture, and can therefore mediate in their contacts with the community that is the object of research. See Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (36).

mother figure. Towards the end of the novel, we see the old woman dozing, "her chin fallen onto the great breasts that had been used, it seemed, to suckle the world" (403). In constructing the Bournehills peasants as subjects in need of representation, Marshall resembles the African American anthropologist and fiction writer Zora Neale Hurston, who conducted fieldwork in Haiti and Jamaica in the 1930s. Both authors' ethnographic authority is predicated on the existence of subalterns.[35]

If the subalterns cannot speak, supposedly Merle, who talks incessantly, might function as their spokesperson. She seems well-positioned for this role, being a racial and cultural hybrid who shuttles unselfconsciously between rich and poor, whites and blacks, high English culture and folk culture. Merle knows the island as an insider: we get to see it from her perspective in Chapter 1, before the Americans land in Chapter 2. The fact that she studied history in England and acquired an outsider's perspective enhances her authority. She intuitively understands what the anthropologists will want to know, and what they need to be told even if they do not ask. Yet Merle, who knows all there is to know about the island, seems incapacitated for effective representation by personal and communal trauma. She is prone to depressions at moments of crisis, and her principal mode of communication is the rant – associational, unsystematic, and too emotional to be effective.

Harriet, the anthropologist's wife, fails in her attempts to fathom Bournehills because she cannot suspend her system of values and sense of cultural superiority. She limits herself to typing up Saul's notes and representing the island in letters to Uncle Chessie of Unicor, which are a record of her colossal misunderstandings. In the end, she is eliminated from the novel (punished for her obtuseness?) by means of a convenient suicide.

Marshall grants the cultural anthropologist Saul Amron the ethnographic authority that Merle and Harriet lack. He and Allen Fuso come equipped with research techniques that enable them to systematize what they learn through participant observation and conversations with Merle. Allen, who has written a dissertation on "The Quantitative Approaches to the Analysis of Social Anthropology," complements the work of the cultural anthropologist Saul Amron. Marshall may not have had a great regard for statistical surveys, for she underscored their sterility by making Allen an unfulfilled, lonely homosexual (a strategy that prompted charges of homophobia).[36] By contrast, she made Saul a potent and charismatic

[35] As Ifeoma C.K. Nwankwo observes, "for Hurston, the folk possess religious and folkloric truth, whereas the middle and upper classes possess intellectual, historical, and political truth. Although her valuation of both truths is evident in her works, her separation of them into class-based spheres proves troubling. Even though her approach does not always constitute an explicit denigration of the masses, it is an implicit class-based bifurcation that relegates the masses to the margins of national politics even as it purports to elevate them" (71).

[36] The theme of homosexuality is pervasive in Marshall's *The Chosen Place* (87–88, 91–92, 301–312, 327–335, 377–378). Associated with the West, corruption, and the capitalist consumption

figure, and presented his love affair with Merle as a natural extension of his drive to get as close as possible to the ethnographic objects. By 1960s academic standards, Saul is more than progressive: after writing a "much praised straight anthropological study" on the "Quechua-speaking Indians of Peru," he demonstrated the spirit of self-reflexivity by publishing "a moving personal account" of his two years of fieldwork, and went on to become "one of the early pioneers in the field of applied research" (40–41). But perhaps more important than the two anthropologists' professional credentials are their ethnic credentials which Marshall explores in detail. Unlike Harriet, they are not-quite-white: Allen has "strong Mediterranean coloring" being of working-class Italian and Irish extraction; Saul is not only Jewish but also the son of a Sephardic woman who traces her roots to Spain under the inquisition. His "nigger hair" and "nose, rising like the curved blade of the scimitar" are external signs of an internalized experience of oppression, which, Marshall's narrator suggests, predisposes him to the work of representing Third-World peoples.[37] Both Saul and Allen strongly identify with the Bournehills cane farmers, who sense this and open up to them. But, although Saul ends up protesting on behalf of the cane farmers and organizing them into a cooperative when the sugar mill shuts down, his ability to assist and represent the islanders turns out to be wholly dependent on the Center for Applied Social Research in Philadelphia. When the project is suspended, Saul is forced to leave with a sense that he has betrayed the hopes invested in him by his ethnographic subjects.

Before flying home, Saul shares with Merle his hope of starting a program in the U.S. "to recruit and train young social scientists from overseas … to work in their own countries … that's the best way: to have people from the country itself carry out their own development programs whenever possible. Outsiders just complicate the picture" (467). Since neither Merle nor the narrator question the wisdom of this scheme, it would appear that Marshall saw this as the ideal combination of Third-World and First-World, insider and outsider/academic knowledge.[38]

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of human bodies, it seems to function as the ultimate sign of difference in a novel that tends to foreground the common humanity of all the characters, whether black or white, rich or poor. For interpretations of this theme see: Timothy S. Chin, "'Bullers' and 'Battymen': Contesting Homophobia in Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature" (1997) and Eugenia DeLamotte, *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom: The Fiction of Paule Marshall* (67–68).

[37] Marshall undeniably romanticized Saul as a Jew, equipping him with certain essential character traits that readers today may find stereotypical. In the novel she implied that, in order to understand the predicament of Third-World peoples, the ethnographer must have a communal and/or personal experience of suffering. She also made this point explicitly in the interview with Joyce Pettis: "Yes, well I felt that if I used a Jew who had developed because of his own history and the history of his people, who knew about suffering (and I'm talking about the historical suffering of Jews) it would permit him then to be able to enter in" (126).

[38] The fictional Saul Amron's words were echoed in a 1973 by two real-life ethnographers, Robert Blauner and David Wellman, in *The Death of White Sociology* edited by Joyce Ladner. After reporting on a failed project to study a Black community in California's Bay Area, the two white

But one could also argue that it is the novel's omniscient narrator who emerges as the ultimate authority on Bourne Island. This narrator has the power to tell all, past and present, to balance and distance herself from all factors that might bias her perception, to enter all the characters' minds and penetrate their motivations, to simultaneously view the island from Merle's frog's eye view and observe its green silhouette from the approaching plane together with Saul, Harriet, and Allen. For ethnic literature to usurp the right of representation is a powerful claim. Reviewing Marshall's novel in 1970, the poet and critic Edward Brathwaite recognized this impulse:

> West Indian novelists have so far, on the whole, attempted to see their society neither in the larger context of Third World underdevelopment, nor, with the exception of Vic Reid, in relation to communal history … The question, however, remains as to whether the West Indies, or anywhere else for that matter, can be fully and properly seen unless within a wider framework of external impingements or internal change. The contemporary West Indies, after all, are not simply excolonial territories; they are underdeveloped islands moving into the orbit of North American cultural and material imperialism, retaining stubborn vestiges of their Eurocolonial past (mainly among the elite), and active memories of Africa and slavery (mainly among the folk) … Had Paule Marshall been a West Indian, she probably would not have written this book. Had she not been an Afro-American of West Indian parentage, she possibly could not have written it either; for in it we find a West Indies facing the metropolitan West on the one hand, and clinging to a memorial past on the other. Within this matrix, she formulates her enquiry into identity and change. (225–226)

In a sense, Brathwaite, like Saul, suggests that the person best suited to understanding and representing a small place like Barbados is one who originated from there but has acquired a better vantage point abroad, for instance at an American university. The African American novelist Gloria Naylor would dismiss this notion as incongruous in her 1988 novel *Mama Day*.

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sociologists concluded: "A final question is the role of the white social scientist today in the field of race relations research. Many of our day to day problems derived from the fact that two white sociologists initiated a research project that included a study of Black people … Thus even a project which focused on racism … reflected in its structure and function the prevailing patterns of racial domination … There are certain aspects of racial phenomena that are particularly difficult – if not impossible – for a member of the oppressing group to grasp empirically and formulate conceptually … Today the best contribution that white scholars can make towards this end is not firsthand research but the facilitation of such studies by people of color. We must open up the graduate schools in every discipline to black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and other minority people, particularly those with strong ties and loyalties to their ethnic communities" (238–239).

A tale of two islands in three voices

> ...what I would call a popular knowledge (le savoir de gens) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge [but] on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity...
>
> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 82

Like Marshall, Naylor invented a fictional island instead of appropriating one of the existing Gullah islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, which were originally settled by runaway slaves. Since *Mama Day* has already been explored from a variety of angles, this analysis will focus on Naylor's humorous critique of ethnography and her nuanced exploration of other ways of knowing cultural difference, including their limitations.[39] The role assigned to the ethnographer in *Mama Day* is minor in comparison with *The Chosen Place*, yet his strategic presence in the opening chapter indicates that structurally his presence is indispensable. A native of the all-black community of Willow Springs, who spent several years on the mainland studying anthropology, he is nameless, introduced only as "Reema's boy." From the perspective of the narrator who speaks as a representative islander, Reema's boy has failed the task of telling the small place: "there weren't nothing to do but take pity on him as he rattled on about 'ethnography,' 'unique speech patterns,' 'cultural preservation,' and whatever else he seemed to be getting so much pleasure out of while talking into his little grey machine" (7). The academic jargon and the asymmetry that marks his interactions with other islanders create an unbridgeable distance. His blackness notwithstanding, the language of his account confirms his allegiance to a professional corporation. Anthropologists Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar identify this corporation with "dominant anthropologies," which

> draw disciplinary genealogies and boundaries as they reproduce themselves not only discursively, but also through maintaining control over the authorization of those who can know. There is a multiplicity of academic and institutional practices (e.g. training, research, writing, publishing, hiring and so forth) that constitute obvious mechanisms of foreclosure of the conditions of reproduction and consolidation of the 'dominant anthropologies' establishment.

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[39] For a sample of interpretations of *Mama Day* see essays by Cheryl A. Wall, Susan Meisenhelder, and Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon. Robin Blyn offers an interesting reading of the way *Mama Day* converses with anthropology on the issue of relativism. More specifically, she invokes the work of James Clifford, showing the contradiction inherent in his desire to show ethnography's affinity with fiction, while simultaneously defending it from charges of relativism. By contrast, as Blyn demonstrates, Gloria Naylor in *Mama Day* successfully relativises fictional and factual accounts of African American history. Blyn also makes useful observations about the implied crossover audience of *Mama Day.*

> Indeed, these anthropologies are constituted by the changing and always disputable order of the anthropologically thinkable, sayable and doable, configuring thus not only their horizon of intelligibility but also their possible transformations. (103)

Alternatives to "dominant anthropologies" do exist, Restrepo and Escobar argue, but "subaltern" or "other anthropologies" require more than just the influx of people of color into American academia. "Reema's boy" assumes the authority of one "who can know" when he disregards potential local definitions of "18 & 23," a historically-rooted key phrase in the Willow Springs dialect, and invents his own fanciful interpretation instead. The narrator rightly recognizes this (ostensibly minor) misrepresentation as symptomatic of ethnography's lack of respect for local ways of knowing.

While Marshall signaled the hope that native ethnographers might reform the discipline, Naylor constructed her native ethnographer as a comic figure, the son of an "addle-brained" mother, who has fallen into the hands of "people who run the type of schools that could turn our children into raving lunatics" (8).[40] Returning to the island, equipped with social science theory overlaid with the slogans of Black Power, Reema's boy reinvents Willow Springs as a primitive place whose inhabitants don't know the origins of their own traditions. "Not that he called it being dumb, mind you," the narrator explains; he "called it 'asserting our cultural identity,' 'inverting hostile social and political parameters.' Cause, see, being we was brought here as slaves, we had no choice but to look at everything upside down. And then being that we was isolated off here on this island, everybody else in the country went on learning good English and calling things what they really was – while we kept on calling things ass-backwards. And he thought that was just so wonderful and marvelous, etcetera, etcetera" (8).

Reema's boy does everything by the book, down to sending several copies of his published ethnography to his folks in Willow Springs. One of the big debates in anthropology since the 1980s concerned the ethics of excluding the ethnographic subjects as potential readers and commentators. The most extensive study of this problem, aptly titled *When They Read What We Write: The Politics of Ethnography* (edited by Caroline B. Brettell) came out in 1996.[41] The debate registered in the

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[40] Naylor's dismissal of the "native ethnographer" as an ideal knower coincides with similar opinions voiced within contemporary anthropology. For instance, Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar align themselves with Eyal Ben-Ari in arguing that by inviting Third World people (including Americans of color) to study and join the discussions of academic anthropology, the discipline has expanded its dominance throughout the globe without really transforming itself (109).

[41] Among the many cases discussed by Brettel of "natives" reading – and resenting – what ethnographers have written about them are *Small Town in Mass Society* by Joseph Bensman and *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community* by Paul Wrobel. The controversy surrounding the latter might be particularly interesting for Polish readers. Wrobel's work would not have become controversial had it not been for the press which distorted some of Wrobel's findings, evoking defensive reactions from Polish-Americans across the country. Like the natives of Willow Springs, who mistrusted Reema's boy, some of the Poles who wrote letters to the editor of

study was prompted by a series of bitter conflicts that broke out between ethnographers and their subjects over what the latter perceived as misrepresentation. Various groups protested the fact that ethnographers had not felt the need for informants to verify or even respond to the drafts of ethnographies before publication. In *Mama Day,* the published ethnography causes no bitterness, only a casual dismissal of a text that is not only unreliable but also completely irrelevant to the islanders.

Having dismissed "Reema's boy," the narrator takes on the role of native informant and puts the reader in the ethnographer's position in the hope that s/he will succeed where "Reema's boy" failed. It is all a matter of listening well, the narrator insists: "If the boy wanted to know what 18 & 23 meant, why didn't he just ask?" (8) "But on second thought, someone who didn't know how to ask wouldn't know how to listen. And he coulda listened to them the way y o u been listening to us right now … Uh, huh, *listen*. Really *listen* this time: the only voice is *your* own" (10, emphasis mine). What sounds like a conventional storyteller's device, the call to "listen," turns out to be quite a challenge because the story meanders according to a logic of its own. It also swamps readers with information they initially have no way of categorizing or memorizing:

> Naw, he didn't really want to know what 18 & 23 meant, or he woulda asked. He woulda asked right off where Miss Abigail Day was staying, so we coulda sent him down the main road to that little yellow house where she used to live. And she woulda given him a tall glass of ice water or some cinnamon tea as he heard about Peace dying young, then Hope, then Peace again. But there was the child of Grace, the grandchild, a girl who went mainside, like him, and did real well. Was living outside of Charleston now with her husband and two boys. So she visits more often than she did when she was up in New York. And she probably woulda pulled out that old photo album, so he coulda seen some photos of her grandchild Cocoa, and then Cocoa's mama Grace. And Miss Abigail flips right through to the beautiful one of Grace resting in her satin-lined coffin. And she walks him back out front and points him across the road to a silver trailer where her sister Miranda lives… (9)

What readers are exposed to here is something akin to the fieldwork experience, as the informants follow their own narrative logic that cannot be subordinated to researcher's/reader's questions. We will never be told explicitly what "18 & 23" means, but if we read the novel attentively, we will find the phrase to have several identifiable meanings dependent on the context. The phrase accumulates meaning as it relates the present to a formative moment in the community's past. The disorientation that Naylor's readers feel when confronted with an unfamiliar narrative logic resembles that described by the ethnographer Renato Rosaldo in

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the paper "suggested that Wrobel's parents had wasted their money in sending their son to college; that no good anthropologist would confine a study to such a small group … Many Poles wrote that they were 'Polish and proud of it,' and one irate reader, who acknowledged being 'extensively involved in Polish affairs,' commented that 'constructive criticism is always welcome and beneficial but a study with some unprobable [*sic*] results, doubtful research methods, and suspicion of bias can only mislead the readers and perform unnecessary harm to the parties involved'" (Brettel 19).

his 1980 study of Ilongot headhunters in the Philippines. Armed with structuralist questions grouped around topics like kinship and feuding patterns, Rosaldo was unprepared for the experience of Ilongot men reciting endless lists of place names.

> Perhaps the most tedious stories were about the flight from the Japanese troops in 1945. While people were moved to tears as they recited place name after place name – every rock, hill, and stream where they ate, rested, or slept – my usual response was to continue transcribing in uncomprehending boredom. (Rosaldo qtd. in Marcus and Fischer 99)

Only after hearing out his informants and musing over their narratives did Rosaldo come to understand that the men were reconstructing mental maps which were fundamental to the Ilongot sense of space and, even more importantly, history, a discovery that undermined the anthropological perception of indigenous peoples as timeless. Naylor's readers also have to suppress the desire to make sense of the information flow and trust the narrator/native informant to know best what is worth telling.

After the introductory chapter, the narrative authority is split between three narrators, all of them unreliable, hampered by the limitations of their positioning. The omniscient voice speaks in a local vernacular and could well be an ancestral presence. Present tense dominates in this account but this is clearly not the "ethnographic present": the narrator uses it to deal with the particular rather than the general, to achieve the effect of immediacy rather than to construct a timeless people. Naylor's omniscient narrator can be in all places at all times, look over all the characters' shoulders and into their minds, and access historical knowledge unavailable to the present-day residents of Willow Springs. But being a local, with no exposure to life off the island, s/he has evident blind spots. For instance, s/he only knows the traditional meaning of "field work" and thus berates "Reema's boy" for claiming to have done "extensive field work [when he] ain't never picked a boll of cotton or head of lettuce in his life" (7). The narrator is most interested in one family, the Days, and more specifically, the three remaining family members: Mama Day (a midwife and healer), her sister Abigail, and Abigail's granddaughter Cocoa. The two other narrative voices are those of Cocoa and her husband George, an African American from New York. Over the course of the novel, the reader learns that the two have been separated by George's death. Cocoa is apparently speaking from her husband's graveside, while George tells his side of the story from another world. Although their voices alternate, they do not seem to hear one another. Neither are they attuned to the voices of Mama Day and Abigail, from whom they might have learned a good deal.

The novel's central characters spend a long time trying to understand their cultural others. One of the novel's underlying assumptions is that ethnography is an everyday practice and a survival strategy for Americans; academic ethnography is simply one variant (and not necessarily the most efficient one). Another important assumption is that all knowledge is partial: Naylor avoids the idealizing Black

people as knowers. For instance, Cocoa, who has left Willow Springs for a career in New York, develops an amusing ethnographic taxonomy of her own as she tries to make sense of her new urban environment. As George points out to Cocoa, she constantly assesses and categorizes New Yorkers as types of food:

> that's what you've been saying all evening: fudge sticks, kumquats, bagels, zucchinis. You just called Herman Badillo a taco. Number one, it's ignorant because tacos aren't from Puerto Rico, and number two, your litany has turned the people in this city into material for garbage disposal. I wonder why you do that. (62)

Unmasked, Cocoa tries to explain her habit as a country girl's way of dealing with the overwhelming flux of urban life: "I was scared when I came to this city. Really scared. There were more people living on my one block than on the whole island where I grew up … A whole kaleidoscope of people – nothing's just black and white here like in Willow Springs. Nothing stays put" (63). George's cure for Cocoa's habit is to take her on systematic weekly walking tours around New York neighborhoods other than the "tourist ghetto" she has lived in for seven years as an office assistant. His way of making sense of the urban "kaleidoscope" is to divide it up into small places and deal with them one at a time.

> My city was a network of small towns, some even smaller than here in Willow Springs. It could be an apartment building, a handful of blocks, a single square mile hidden off with its own language, newspapers, and magazines – its own laws and codes of behavior, and sometimes even its own judge and juries. (61)

Although with George as a guide Cocoa revises her opinion about New Yorkers, it is unclear what the weekly tours actually teach her, for they are limited to the observation of street life and tasting local foods. The fact that George explains to her the difference between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans does not necessarily mean that she stops type-casting people. Neither she nor George seek a greater intimacy with the people they observe.

Later in the novel, George continues his ethnographic explorations when Cocoa takes him home with her to Willow Springs. He is the character readers unfamiliar with African American culture can identify with most readily. Raised by white educators in a shelter for boys and trained as an engineer, George has been thoroughly disciplined and taught that "only the present has potential." Unlike Cocoa, he has no past, no sense of heritage, and no patience with the supernatural, signs of which he encounters everywhere in Willow Springs. Empiricism is important to him. Yet he is at first very successful in his amateur ethnography, easily establishing rapport, and drawing the locals out to tell him about their lives. When, after his first morning walk, he reports to Cocoa what he has learned, she recalls thinking:

> It was amazing how much you had managed to find out about people I thought I had known all my life. But then I had never spent any time among the men in the barbershop. It was a place to be passed if I was going to the general store or on my way to having my own hair done.

> Any news about their lives came to me second-hand, filtered through their daughters or wives, sometimes bits and pieces from Grandma and Mama Day. (190)

By showing that men's and women's worlds do not fully overlap, Naylor introduces gender as an important category in ethnography. Cocoa is a cultural insider, on intimate terms with women of all ages, while George has privileged access to traditionally male spaces, such as the barbershop, the poker game held in the woods by Doctor Buzzard, and the bridge-repair crew. At times, George's outsider status is an advantage rather than a handicap. Being local, Cocoa takes the African survivals[42] in Willow Springs culture for granted, never delving beneath the surface or asking questions about supernatural events, even about the spells that eventually disfigure her body. It takes someone like George to defamiliarize the magic by his very ignorance of it. Towards the end of the narrative, George is subjected to a draconian test that requires him to suspend reason and take on faith the powers that be. Although he resists and dies in the process, the very fact that he is speaking to us from beyond the grave means that he has had to accept the supernatural. Unlike the reprobate Harriet Amron in Marshall's *The Chosen Place*, who commits suicide to escape a cultural difference she can neither understand nor control, George dies heroic-comically fighting against phenomena he does not understand, and gets to tell the tale from an afterlife.

Mama Day, a classic wise woman figure, is the novel's most versatile (though not ideal) knower. She functions equally well in the modern-day world of television, telephone bills, and developers, and in "the other place," an estate inhabited by ancestral spirits, where she finds the power to bring down lightning bolts on her enemies. When it comes to ethnographic knowledge, she develops unconventional methods. For instance, when Cocoa first leaves Willow Springs for New York, Mama Day

> started watching the Phil Donahue show religiously … It gave her an idea of the kind of people Cocoa was living around since she'd moved north … this show gave the audience a chance to speak, and what they had to say was always of more interest to her than the people on the stage … sometimes she'll keep the volume turned off for the entire hour, knowing well that what's being said by the audience don't matter a whit to how it's being said. Laughter before or after a mouth opens to speak, the number of times a throat swallows, the curve of the lip, the thrust of the neck, the slump of the shoulders. And always, always the eyes. She can pick out which ladies in the audience have secretly given up their babies for adoption, which fathers have daughters making pornographic movies, exactly which homes been shattered by Vietnam. (38)

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[42] African survivals are the subject of Melville Herskovits's 1941 revisionary study *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Trained in both history and anthropology, Herskovits exposed the widespread racist myth that the descendants of African slaves had no culture (other than dance and music), and were thus doomed to imitating Western culture. Arguing against the assumption that African Americans had contributed nothing to world history, Herskovits attempted to show not only the richness of African American culture but also the many African cultural elements that had been absorbed into mainstream American culture.

Although this account of Mama Day's "research" is comic, and her knowledge of the northerners must be superficial, it suffices for her purposes. At the end of the novel, Mama Day, despite her age, does "go out into the field" when she accompanies Cocoa on a trip to New York. The narrator alternately mocks her and pays tribute to her youthful capacity for learning about people. From this ethnographic expedition she returns to Willow Springs with shopping bags full of trophies (kitschy gifts for friends at home). But she learns more about New York's diversity than Cocoa ever did, for she talks with everyone she meets, from a coffee shop owner to the director of Carnegie Hall, collecting family recipes and information about elite entertainment. If Mama Day makes no ethnographic discoveries of great profundity, her interaction with others as equals allows her to move gracefully among them in the spirit of multiculturalism.

In many ways the cultural differences in the Willow Springs community itself are starker than those between Willow Springs and "mainside" communities. Some islanders cultivate esoteric knowledge for healing and matchmaking, others to make money or wreak vengeance on those they misrecognize as enemies. Some are good housekeepers, others have lost the art of growing food and cooking nutritious meals. An industrious market-gardener, a man who runs a liquor still, and a kept man go dancing together "mainside." Older people celebrate "Candle Walk," the biggest feast of the year, in the old style, walking with their candles and distributing home-made gifts, while younger people do the rounds in pick-up trucks, use flashlights, and buy their gifts in stores. The novel explores cultural syncretism and asks the reader/listener/amateur ethnographer to do the same.

What Willow Springs does not have is the faintest hint of non-normative sexuality. Like Prospero's isle in *The Tempest* – the principal intertext for *Mama Day* – Willow Springs is the site of strictly heterosexual desire. Queerness has been displaced to another island, Manhattan, where it functions as the ultimate sign of difference. It is only on that wild, postmodern isle that a country girl (Cocoa's friend Selma) can fall prey to a "Park Avenue neurosurgeon" who proposes to her but reveals that he is about to undergo a sex change. The condition is that the country girl changes her sex from female to male "because he'd never dream of sleeping with another man" (17). In *Mama Day*, transsexuality is constructed as perverse and ominous – the stuff of cautionary tales that circulate among young black women who come to Manhattan to work and marry Prince Charming. By contrast, in Russell Leong's "Eclipse" queerness is identified as a subculture, and Manhattan's East Village as the site of anthropological research.

Anthropology eclipsed

> The marvelous, maddening mix that is the Big Apple is home to the largest gay community in America and probably the most diverse in the world. Whatever your taste – from wildly conventional to boringly outrageous – this city of 7.3 million has something (or someone) for you … Try the West Village, home to a mix of older clones, black and hispanic dudes, and friendly lesbians. In the East Village, youngsters are pierced, bleached, and grunged within an inch of their lives …
> In short, for our tribe there's no just place like New York, New York.
>
> David Appell (ed.), *Access: Gay USA*, pp. 229–230

Russell Leong's story "Eclipse" was written long after the postcolonial and postmodern theorists began to raise questions about modes of representation, objectivity, accountability, relativism and ethnocentrism, and most anthropological research was repatriated to North America. Previously, American anthropologists had mainly done their fieldwork abroad, while the U.S. was the province of sociologists. No longer comfortable in the Third World, many American anthropologists turned to studying white enclaves, often using tools and theoretical categories developed through contact with small tribal communities. Based on a study carried out in the early 1970s, James Spradley and Brenda Mann co-authored *The Cocktail Waitress: Woman's Work in a Man's World*, a well-received book about the tribal culture of an American campus bar. In 1979, the Polish-American Paul Wrobel published the controversial ethnography *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*. Rhoda Halperin researched her home community on an island off the New England coast (see Chapter 2). Besides studying immigrant communities – a tradition established by the Chicago School – anthropologists turned to sexual minorities. A slew of well-received ethnographies of non-normative sexuality, often involving people of color, appeared after 2000, including Matti Bunzl's *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*, Martin F. Manalansan's *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, and Megan J. Sinnott's *Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand*. Leong's story "Eclipse" takes a close look at one such (fictional) research project.

What Leong problematizes in the story is not the idea of studying non-normative sexualities as such. As the editor of *Amerasia Journal*, he has brought out numerous articles as well as a special issue on sexuality. He has edited *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, an interdisciplinary volume of essays published by Routledge in 1996. Exploring the politics and poetics of sexuality is also the impulse behind several stories collected in Leong's *Phoe-*

nix Eyes (2000), of which "Eclipse" is one. For Leong, the problem lies in the reasons why people explore others' sexuality and the methods they use.

The political consciousness underlying "Eclipse" was forged while Leong was studying at San Francisco State University, in the same intellectual climate that inspired social scientists to contribute to Dell Hymes's *Reinventing Anthropology* and Joyce Ladner's *The Death of White Sociology*. Symptomatic of this consciousness is Leong's decision to make a break with social science after he received his B.A. in 1972, in order to do film studies UCLA. It was at San Francisco State that the first African American Studies program was established in 1968, after a wave of student protests led by the sociologist Nathan Hare. The UCLA Asian American Studies Center – Leong's workplace of many years – was established in 1969, also through faculty, student, and community advocacy. The protesters in both San Francisco and Los Angeles rejected social science conceived as a corporation of academics committed to an abstract ideal of "expanding the body of knowledge" while advancing their own careers. Instead, they envisioned a discipline that responds to the needs of marginalized communities and works towards social justice. Today, UCLA graduate students in sociology and anthropology continue to do community-oriented research under the aegis of the Asian American Studies Department.[43]

The fact that in the 1990s the problem of social scientists exploiting minority subjects in the name of knowledge was still acute is reflected in Leong's satirical story "Eclipse." Focused on the relationship between an anthropologist and his native informants in the field, the story "records" two conversations that reveal the power dynamics of the ethnographic interview (a typical tool for eliciting life-stories that are then used by anthropologists to create general theories of cultural difference). Leong experimented with the burlesque, structuring the story as a theatrical skit and having his characters use a wide range of registers, from the high academic to the vulgar. The setting is a fashionable fusion café in East Village, Manhattan. The dramatis personae are:

> LETA HUNTER … a transgendered pre-op Afro-Asian American, mid-twenties. Olive-skinned, with expressive eyes and hands. A dancer's body.
>
> DANTE WOO … a muscular Chinese male, shaved head, with a combination of rough good looks and street smarts. Artist/occasional hustler.
>
> PROFESSOR RICHARD "DICK" KUSAI … a New York University professor of anthropology, Japanese American. Closeted, in his mid-forties. Is doing a study on sexual

[43] "Since its founding in 1969, the Center has established partnerships, collaborations, and exchanges with hundreds of public and private institutions across the nation and around the world, and has played a critical role in developing Southern California's infrastructure of social service agencies, civil rights organizations, museums, historical societies, media and cultural groups, and business associations that serve and represent the Asian American and Pacific Islander population." The following disciplines are represented by faculty of the AAS Department and Center: creative writing, cultural studies, economics, education, film, geography, history, infomration studies, literary studies, public health, theater, urban anthropology, urban planning. Source: Asian American Studies Center home page.

> self-representation among Asian Americans, a comparison between straight, gay, and transgendered individuals. 'Kusai' means 'stinky' in Japanese – a pun. (101)

This is the only story in the volume structured as a play, a formal strategy that helps to highlight the theme of ethnographic research. To undermine narrative/ethnographic authority in *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor orchestrated three voices, none of them reliable. Leong does away with the narrator altogether. As Professor Kusai builds up his academic authority line by line, Dante and Leta take it apart for they see through his act. Also, depending on how we, in our minds, direct the "play" (that is, how we imagine the performance of certain lines), we may chose to either see Dante and Leta's act as sincere or as invented for the benefit of the anthropologist. In addition, the dramatic form brings out the theme of social roles – professor, artist, picture-framer, hooker – that are dealt out arbitrarily rather than based on merit or "natural" inclination. Similarly, gender and sexual roles are shown as studied, performed, and contextual. Dante and Leta act out their specific understanding of masculinity and femininity. They also step out of their assigned roles and attempt to interview Professor Kusai.

In the first of two scenes, Professor Kusai makes contact with Dante Woo and arranges to interview him the following day for a fee of $50. Dante offers to bring a friend, Leta Hunter, who, he claims, is a perfect respondent for the study. In the second scene, Professor Kusai attempts to elicit information from Dante and Leta by using standard questions designed for his study of gender identity and sexuality. Dante and Leta refuse to confine themselves to the terms used by Professor Kusai, which flatten their lived experience. They also have trouble conforming to the interview regime which requires that they answer questions and ask none in return. Frustrated, they attempt to perform their sense of identity by dancing and reciting poetry on the café tabletops. When Professor Kusai tries to reimpose his sense of order on the interview, Dante and Leta accuse him of hypocrisy and self-interest, smash his tape recorder, and storm out of the café without claiming their $50 each, payable upon signing a release form.

Dante and Leta's behavior might seem unwarranted to those who assume that scientists have not just the right but the obligation to study whatever interests them and contributes the universal store of human knowledge. This assumption changes when we take into account that social scientists have now been researching American urban ghettoes for over a century. Some ghetto communities, such as the Pruitt-Igoe projects in St. Louis, Missouri, have been studied by generations of academics with no palpable improvement in the quality of life for the communities involved.[44] Commenting on this phenomenon in 1973, anthropologists Robert Blauner and David Wellman admit that

[44] Sociologist David A. Schulz often returns in his study *Coming up Black* to a middle-aged black man named Andrew Buchanan who has collaborated with many ethnographers, keeps some of their publications on his shelf, and is well versed in social theory.

> many of us know ghetto residents who have said, partly boasting and partly complaining, that they have put a dozen people through graduate school, so studied have some Black communities been … There may be less unhappiness at being used in this way by a budding scholar from one's own ethnic group – but this doesn't change the essentially exploitative character of the relationship … Thus there is a growing hostility to universities in many Black ghettos. (316–317)

Blauner and Wellman were among those radical scholars who, taking their cue from the Civil Rights movement, attempted to wed ethnography to social change and bridge the gap between the subjects and objects of academic research. In *The Death of White Sociology*, they told the story of their less-than-successful project involving such innovations as black community members trained as interviewers, funding to reimburse interviewees for their time, and the slow dismantling of the academic hierarchy, where hitherto white men always had the privileged status of experts. "Eclipse" is in many ways a literary exemplum of the problems Blauner and Wellman came up against and self-consciously reflected upon, though it goes further in its critique of social science. It also calls into question such categories as race, gender and sexuality, proposing instead a notion of identity akin to Judith Butler's "performativity." While Blauner and Wellman are committed to social science and hope to develop a functional, socially useful model of ethnographic research, Leong seems pessimistic about institutionalized power/knowledge.

"Consider the norm of the in-depth interview," write Blauner and Wellman. "The respondent is expected to spill his guts about various aspects of his personal life and his social or political beliefs; the interviewer is supposed to be a neutral recorder, revealing nothing about his own life, feelings, or opinions that might 'bias' the data" (315–316). Professor Kusai's interview is certainly designed to elicit intimate details of his respondents' sex life; they comply up to a point, but when they see how demeaning the role of "native informant" is, they quit: "We're telling this priest here a whole lot for fifty bucks. Even if he is so sincere and searching for enlightenment. Shit, even those Times Square booths don't give that much detail, honey" (110).

Professor Kusai has no sense of being an exploiter. "I do have good intentions," he says defensively. "My study, if published in a reputable refereed journal, will help gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals. Like yourselves" (111). Yet Blauner and Wellman exposed the exploitative nature of such work decades before: "In social research, subjects give up some time, some energy, and some trust, but in the typical case get almost nothing in return. As social scientists we get grants which pay our salaries; the research thesis legitimates our professional status, then publications advance us in income and rank, further widening the material gap between the subjects and ourselves" (316). Dante and Leta intuitively know, as working-class people sensitive to asymmetries of power, that research may help academics to get ahead but it will not help them or their parents "quit their fuckin' shit-pay jobs" (111).

Dante and Leta indicate more than once that ethnographic interest is mutual: "Besides having good taste in men, and a job at NYU, what are you here for?" asks Dante (103). "Why are you interested in the subject, Professor? I'm just as curious as you are," asks Leta. The Professor evades the question by saying, "You're the subject, Leta. And Dante. I am just the transmitter. I listen. I record. I interpret." Undeterred, Leta keeps up her questioning: "Are you gay, Professor?" forcing him to admit, "That's not relevant, but let's just say for the sake of our little discussion, that I'm open. I'm exploring bisexuality. It's part of my work" (106). The professor invests so much energy in maintaining the strict division of roles because the logic of his project rests on it. His expert status depends on the existence of subjects who know neither what they are nor how to help themselves. Only by presenting himself as straight (and therefore presumably unbiased) can the Professor construct a non-normative category that needs to be investigated. Here, the text shows how social science manufactures difference where there is none.

Dick Kusai's subjects know exactly who they are and insist on the right to define themselves. "I am Leta. She is me. My dick – bad word choice – is not the dividing line between male and female" (107). "We are boy-toy and spore-whore. Or, call us Kwan-Yin and Rahu Woo. We know our names. We are a team. We are talent" (110). Not only does social science fail to understand what sexuality means to them; it cannot even claim to be more enlightened and thus more tolerant of difference than those who are its subjects. Leta's black aunt, who raised the biracial and transsexual child, is open-minded though uneducated. "God has his reasons for mixing and meddling," she tells Leta (195). Non-judgmental, she helps Leta dress up in drag for the prom, saying: "Man or woman. Either or neither. That's God's will. Who am I to disagree" (106).

Ethnographers amass data from participant observation or interviews in order to make generalizations about certain categories of people or types of behavior. As Blauner and Wellman regretfully point out, "the individual subject's unique outlook and specific responses are lost in the aggregate of data which are subjected to standardized statistical summaries, ideal type classifications, or some other operation" (315). Although Professor Kusai claims to treat each informant "as an individual with a unique voice" (104), his standardized questions belie this, as does the scope of his project: "a four city study … I'm interviewing people in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York" (110). In response to one blunt question, Leta cautions him, "You can't generalize, Professor, though I know NYU is a good school" (105). What she and Dante proceed to tell him about themselves and their relationship is certainly non-generalizable. This confuses Professor Kusai, who begs, "Can you be more prosaic? A little less poetic? More specific" (108).

At this point Dante and Leta counter science with poetry and dance. The stage directions read:

> DANTE strips off his T-shirt to reveal a solid physique. They begin chanting; DANTE taps his foot on the table … LETA bends her arms in a slow, sinuous movement; in contrast, DANTE

> continues tapping the table and slowly running his hands over his throat, chest, and stomach. The two, trancelike, begin to recite, in alternating lines. (109)

Their performance of the Thai sun god Rahu and the Chinese goddess Kwan-yin plays on the imagery of light and darkness, the moon eclipsing the sun. On a physical level, Professor Kusai responds by sweating with excitement, but as an anthropologists he is at a loss for how to write up what he has seen and heard. Further questions elicit more metaphors, leaving him more confused than ever. Rather than adjust the framework of his study to account for more complex material, Professor Kusai lashes out at his informants:

> The academic world is really a terrain of ideas. Not a metropole of desire and desperation. It's hardly the street. Now, I've spent a good two hours with you. Most of my informant interviews are an hour and a half – at most. I have been very patient with you two. Trying to translate your – lingo … (111)

In this moment of weakness, Professor Kusai maps out the actual relationship between the subjects and objects of social science: his element is the rarefied air of academia, theirs – the vulgar world of city streets. His time is precious, theirs – cheap. His sexuality is (properly) concealed, theirs – deviant and thus in need of attention. They cannot possibly have anything to teach "Dick Kusai, anthropology, NYU" (the phrase he uses when introducing himself to strangers).

In terms of tone, aesthetics, and ideological assumptions, Leong's text can be usefully compared with Trinh T. Minh-ha's essay on anthropology, "The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as Scientific Conversation of Man with Man" included in *Woman, Native, Other* (1989).[45] Though one a short story and the other a rather unruly academic essay, Leong and Trinh use the same strategy (combining satire and poetry) to counter the authority of science. Trinh constructs a Great Master, who is a composite of Bronisław Malinowski, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Marcel Griaule,[46] and inserts him into a pantomime in which he talks shop with other white male anthropologists over the heads or behind the backs of "the Yellow, the Black, or the Red" (*Woman, Native, Other* 57). In some passages, the Master's other is a woman. The figures in the pantomime are sharply polarized by race and/or gender for the sake of clarity.

Where Leong has Dante and Leta speak in metaphors about the elusive sphere of their sexuality, Trinh takes the risk of shifting from (legitimate) theoretical writing to (illegitimate) poetic prose and riddles uttered by a prophetic voice:

> He belongs to that fraction of humanity which for centuries has made other fractions the objects of contempt and exploitation, then, when it saw the handwriting on the wall, set about to give them back their humanity. In view of such eternal recuperation, she can no longer align

[45] One of the most influential figures in postcolonial and women's studies, Trinh T. Minh-ha was trained in music and film. She is Associate Professor of Cinema at San Francisco University, filmmaker, and author of *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) and *When the Moon Waxes Red* (1992).

[46] The composite identity of the Great Master is easily reconstructed from the footnotes documenting the lines he speaks.

> any trace on the page without at the same time recognizing the trace of his traces. Drifting from one (shore) to another, she therefore steps into his universe, wavering between the will to release and the desire to hold back. Sometimes she takes pleasure in wearing shoes three times bigger than her feet and coats so large as to turn herself into a mere hanger. (48)

The dance of pronouns – *he* standing for academic authority, *she* for a rebel otherness about to usurp the power to categorize and define – introduces a passage about the anxiety of wresting the right to know and to represent from the hegemonic intellectual elite:

> We set out here, she and I, to undo an *anonymous*, all-male, and predominantly white collective entity named *he*, and we wish to freeze him once in a while in his hegemonic variants. Knowledge requires a certain dialectic of information and control, and I think in may help to reverse our roles once in a while, more for the emergence of a certain awareness than for the gratification of aping. (49, emphasis in the original)

Searching for a language that would free her of ethnographic ways of knowing, Trinh resorts to poetry but recognizes the impossibility of speaking from a position outside discourse (avoiding "the traces of his traces"). She also splices the written text with a photographic essay: portraits of African and Asian women and children, interiors of clay huts, and eerie snapshots of the head, belly, and leg of a donkey's carcass. While in traditional ethnographic photography the camera had to see without being seen, Trinh's camera is evidently in full view of the subjects: they look directly at the lens. Taken together, the visual and textual fragments are deliberately anti-ethnographic.

Similarly to Trinh, Leong and Naylor (and, to some extent, also Marshall) assume that ethnography can no longer present itself as a privileged way of knowing: it exists next to other, competing ways of knowing. Evidently, the ethnographers in these narratives are given a hard time. If they are not outright ignored (*Mama Day*), their research protocol gets disrupted by informants who ask rude questions ("Eclipse") or who stare at them, making them squirm (*The Chosen Place*). At best, they are mocked and parodied (*Woman, Native, Other*), and get their tape recorders smashed ("Eclipse"); at worst, they get killed off by unfeeling authors (*The Chosen Place*). Fiction as a critique of ethnography is hardly a level playing field. Whether the critique is harsh or playful, such fiction is intended to empower those who have traditionally been the objects of ethnography by stripping anthropologists of automatic authority in the ethnographic encounter. However, what this fiction does not do is naively promise that knowledge produced by cultural insiders will be any more reliable than that produced by outsiders. Occasionally, cultural outsiders do see more (George in *Mama Day*, Saul in *The Chosen Place*). Finally, insider status in itself is shown to be no guarantee of qualitatively different studies or less exploitative relations between the subjects and objects of research (*Mama Day* and "Eclipse"). What ultimately matters is the degree to which ethnographers – whatever their racial and cultural background – conform to practices and conventions that originated in colonial times and are out of place in contemporary world.

Chapter 2

Fieldwork in (un)common places: Fiction by anthropologists Margery Wolf, Edith Turner, and Rhoda Halperin

> In terms of its own metaphors, the scientific position of speech is that of an observer fixed on the edge of a space, looking in and/or down upon what is other. Subjective experience, on the other hand, is spoken from a moving position already within or down in the middle of things, looking and being looked at, talking and being talked at. To convert fieldwork, via field notes, into formal ethnography requires a tremendously difficult shift from the latter discursive position (face to face with the other) to the former.
>
> Mary Louise Pratt, *Fieldwork in Common Places*, p. 32

Anthropologists read literature. When stranded in the field, some have treated fiction as an antidote to the alien cultures they were immersed in, a prophylactic against "going native," or as a home away from home. Bronisław Malinowski's voracious reading on the Melanesian island of Mailu would fall under all three categories; his diary records hours – sometimes stretching into days – spent guiltily consuming Conrad, Dumas, Kipling, Rider Haggard, or Thackeray (*A Diary*). On another Melanesian island, Lesu, Malinowski's Jewish American student Hortense Powdermaker found she "could escape from the endless details of life in Lesu into the multiplicity of details in another culture" by immersing herself in *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Jean Christophe*, *The Red and the Black*, *Ulysses*, and *The Tale of Genji* (100). When writing up their field notes, some anthropologists used literature as a source of data, or of epigraphs that refract the key themes. Rhoda Halperin combed Faulkner for cultural detail while conducting a study of a white working-class community, and quoted Steinbeck in her monograph on working-class whites in Cincinnati. Edith Turner quoted Blake and D.H. Lawrence.

Anthropologists have also written in a variety of literary genres. Ethnographic fiction has roots in the nineteenth century.[47] Adolf Bandelier, who studied the Pueblo culture in New Mexico, attempted to breathe life into the ancient remains by writing a historical novel, *The Delight Makers* (1890). Zora Neale Hurston turned her Florida fieldwork into the novel *Mules and Men* (1935). Yet the fieldwork autobiography is perhaps the most distinctive and enduring contemporary genre, best represented by Laura Bohannan's *Return to Laughter* (1954), a fictionalized account of her Nigerian fieldwork; Hortense Powdermaker's *Stranger and Friend: The Way of the Anthropologist* (1966), recounting a life in anthropology; and Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993), the story of a Jewish-Cubana's fieldwork in Mexico. New Age anthropologists Carlos Castaneda and Florinda Donner wrote "anthropologically inspired fiction" about the process of initiation into Indian cultures.[48]

While until the 1960s or 1970s anthropologists tended to compartmentalize their analytical/theoretical and literary writing, today they are more likely to write in "blurred genres," even though more traditional anthropology departments may not consider autobiography and fiction scholarly enough. Margery Wolf, Edith Turner, and Rhoda Halperin, whose work is analyzed below, combine fiction with critical commentary and ethnographic theory. Sociologist Carolyn Ellis developed a hybrid genre: a novel/textbook titled: *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about*

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[47] One could, of course, seek the roots of ethnographic literature in English in much earlier epochs, for instance in the curious case of George Psalmanazar, a man of French-German descent who, at the turn of the seventeenth century, passed for a native of Formosa (present-day Taiwan), inventing not only an elaborate autobiography for himself but also a complete ethnography of Formosa, a rudimentary language system, and an alphabet. His "An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa" was well received in England, where he briefly became a celebrity. Even after his "forgery" was disclosed around 1708, he continued to write for a living, "subject to pressures and demands of printers and the need to generate income through the sale of his manuscripts and by literary hackwork" (Stewart 49). Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* can be read as another early forerunner.

[48] Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan series and Florinda Donner's *Shabono*, once controversial, are now anecdote material in anthropological circles. Castaneda's writings based on interviews with Don Juan, a Yaqui Indian shaman, (submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation in anthropology at UCLA) are discussed both as a hoax and as a powerfully written novel with superb narrative drive. Critics have traced the source of Donner's *Shabono* to the 1965 book *Yanoáma* transcribed by Ettore Biocca, published in English as *Yanoáma: The Story of Helena Valero, a Girl Kidnapped by Amazonian Indians*. According to Corey Donovan, Donner "uses many identifiable scenes, events and dialogue from the book, but greatly simplifies them, making her account more readable and novel like, with clearer dramatic arcs and plenty of foreshadowing (a device one would expect to be quite limited in a strictly factual description of daily life)" (n.p.). In "Fieldwork in Common Places" Mary Louise Pratt examines Donner's novel with interest, dismissing the voices of anthropologists who decry Donner's inauthenticity.

Autoethnography (2004).[49] Some ethnographic encounters have mutated into drama: Bruce T. Grindal's *The Redneck Girl* performed at Washington State University was collaboratively produced by an anthropologist and a dramatist/stage director.[50]

Historians of anthropology and ethnographers themselves write eloquently about ethnographic literature, whether to promote this mode of expression, explore its potential for the discipline, or reassert the superiority of academic forms of writing. Since the 1980s, those influenced by postmodern theory, particularly James Clifford, George Marcus, and Michael Fischer, Clifford Geertz, and John Van Maanen, have entertained high hopes for nontraditional genres as a way to stave off the problems besetting anthropology – particularly charges that anthropologists pass off conjecture as objective knowledge and usurp the authority to speak for non-Western peoples. As Clifford Geertz diagnosed the predicament, "what once seemed only technically difficult, getting 'their' lives into 'our' works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate" (*Works and Lives* 130). Ethnographers would have to drop "the pretense of looking at the world directly, as through a one-way screen, seeing others as they really are when only god is looking" (141). The self-reflexivity of autobiography and the dialogic nature of fiction, the postmodernists hoped, would break down the barrier between the observer and the observed, and allow writers to represent the dynamic process of fieldwork itself, rather than just the results in a calcified academic format. Using a psychoanalytic trope, Edward Bruner argued for the need to reintegrate the split selves of the anthropologist: the "ethnographic self" and the "personal self" – something that could be achieved by allowing the personal to seep into the scholarly (Benson 1–26). In the edited volume *Anthropology and Literature* (1993), Bruner and Paul Benson showcased the ways in which anthropology had been energized by autobiography, fiction, drama, and poetry.[51]

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[49] In *The Ethnographic I*, Carolyn Ellis constructed herself and her students as fictional characters and told the story of a seminar on autoethnography, an interdisciplinary field she is pioneering at the University of South Florida. Each of the ten chapters is a dramatic rendition of a particular class (with occasional episodes in a corridor, restroom, or Ellis's home), followed by reading lists, suggested writing assignments, and guidelines for writing autoethnographically. A collaborative effort, the novel was first read by the participating students, and revised on the basis of their feedback.

[50] The story of this collaboration, narrated by Bruce T. Grindal and William H. Shephard in "The Redneck Girl: From Experience to Performance," is one of numerous projects born in the 1980s and 1990s out of an urgent need felt by anthropologists to rethink their writing practice, question the "scientific" pretensions of their discipline, and avoid objectifying their subjects. Grindal first wrote a story based on a long conversation with a working-class woman on a Greyhound bus. He and Shephard then turned it into a play, which was further altered by the cast rehearsing it. Whether this particular project – two white male professors bonding and ventriloquizing their fantasies through the figure of a working-class woman – constitutes a radical departure from ethnographic representation is debatable, but the formal experimentation deserves recognition.

[51] A similar enthusiasm for "the experimental turn" was expressed by George Marcus and Michael Fischer in the "Preface" to *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*: "'What is happening' seems to us to be a pregnant moment in which every individual project of ethnographic research and writing is potentially an experiment. Collectively these are in the process of reconstructing

Yet, there have been skeptics of – as well as conscientious objectors to – the literary, dialogic, and "self-reflexive turn" in ethnography. Paul Rabinow, in the influential 1986 collection *Writing Culture* edited by Clifford and Marcus, argued that "dialogic texts can be as staged and controlled as experiential texts. The mode offers no guarantees" (246). A number of feminist anthropologists, in turn, refused to be seduced by what they saw as a fad endorsed by narcissistic men entrenched in the academic power structure, who would rather theorize and write autobiography than study people in dire need of representation. Feeling they had a responsibility to other women, who had been marginalized as both subjects and objects of anthropology, Frances Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, Colleen Ballerino Cohen, and Margery Wolf reasserted their commitment to realist ethnographic representation. Defending ethnographic realism, Wolf wryly cautioned enthusiasts of the new: "Surely this kind of known authoritative voice is safer than the artifice of the fictionizer, who has no obligations beyond making the text plausible, interesting, and faithful to whatever aesthetic integrity is peculiar to the period's genre?" *(Thrice-Told Tale* 131). In a similar vein, Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen argued: "the postmodern focus on style and form, regardless of its sophistication, directs our attention away from the fact that ethnography is more than 'writing it up' " (245). And yet, for better or worse, the appeal of nontraditional genres proved so strong that other feminists (including Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon in the U.S., and Deborah Reed-Danahay, Judith Okely, and Helen Callaway in the U.K.) waved aside their colleagues' warnings.

The stir that ethnographic autobiography and fiction provoked was limited to ethnography departments.[52] Literary critics took little interest in the new "blurred genres," perhaps because with the rise of ethnic minority literatures (discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6) they already had their hands full. The stress on minority self-representation must have made ethnographic fiction seem of marginal significance. Published by academic presses, often squeezed in among traditional essays in edited volumes, such fiction has had very limited distribution. It is likely that due to the proliferation of ethnic minority literatures and tensions over racial representation, some anthropologists have chosen not to write autobiographically at all.

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the edifices of anthropological theory from the bottom up, by exploring new ways to fulfill the promises on which modern anthropology was founded; to offer worthwhile and interesting critiques of our own society; to enlighten us about other human possibilities, engendering an awareness that we are merely one pattern among many; to make accessible the normally unexamined assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter the members of other cultures" (ix).

[52] The response to autobiographical writings by ethnographers has not been entirely positive. Accusations of "navel-gazing" are common. James Buzard's essay "On Auto-Ethnographic Authority" (2003) is a recent attempt to problematize the genre. Although I find the tone Buzard adopts with reference to minority and women authors patronizing, I find myself agreeing with some of his comments about the self-absorption apparent for instance in Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer* or Carolyn Ellis's *The Ethnographic I*.

Minority scholars like Ruth Behar, Pnina Motzafi-Haller, or Kirin Narayan are notable exceptions.[53]

Some anthropologists see in literature a tentative solution to the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological problems that have plagued their discipline since the 1960s. Several initiators of the experimental "self-reflexive turn" in anthropology – including Clifford Geertz and James Clifford – took courses in literature departments at a time when postmodern literary studies developed (or adapted) sophisticated theories of subjectivity and "the other." Self-reflexiveness gained importance as American ethnographers lost their footing in the Third World and began doing fieldwork at home; it was then that many turned to "blurred genres" as a way of mediating the discomfort of objectifying groups they identified with. As Mary Louis Pratt suggests, personal narrative "mediates [the] contradiction between that engagement called for in fieldwork and the self-effacement called for in formal ethnographic description, or at least mitigates some of its anguish, by inserting into the ethnographic text the authority of the personal experience out of which the ethnography is made" ("Fieldwork" 33).

Anthropologists' excursions into the field of literature are usually driven by such questions as: does revealing the subjectivity and constructedness of the ethnographic account lead to a more truthful representation of the other? Where is the line between legitimate self-exposure and self-indulgence (contemptuously referred to as "navel-gazing"[54])? Can ethnographers continue to split their "personal self" from their "ethnographic self," particularly now, when so many are engaged in studies of their own communities? Do literary modes of expression allow for a decentering of ethnographic authority and an empowerment of the other? Does experimenting with intertextuality, dialogue, and reflexivity really demystify the anthropologist's authority to represent the other, or does it "make the new ethnographies more obscure and thus difficult for anyone but highly trained specialists to dispute?" (Mascia-Lees 227). Do the advocates of textual

[53] Ruth Behar, Pnina Motzafi-Haller, and Kirin Narayan all explore the paradoxes of studying Third-World peoples when one's own roots are in the Third World. Behar, a Cuban-American, has managed to carve out an academic career for herself by writing autobiographically, starting with *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993) based on her fieldwork in Mexico. She followed this with a book of essays, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (1996), a reflection on the trials and tribulations that made her the scholar she is. Motzafi-Haller writes movingly about the way her Mizrahi roots and dark skin have complicated her early years in Israel, her fieldwork in South Africa, and her career in the U.S. The "Participant Observation" in Narayan's story takes place in the heart of American academia, where an Indian anthropologist closely examines the customs of her professional tribe. Meanwhile, she exchanges letters with a white anthropologist doing fieldwork in India, and pines for the familiar sights, smells, and sounds of home.

[54] Dismissive comments about self-reflexive writing as mere "navel-gazing" are mentioned by several contributors to the volume *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Esthetics*, edited by Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis.

experimentation really want to redress the imbalance of power between the observer and the observed (and global power inequalities), or do they embrace experimentation as a way of maintaining hegemony in the discipline?

While these questions have sparked many scholarly debates, they are of limited use in a literary study. A few of the questions will reappear below as persistent themes of contemporary ethnographic literature. But for this inquiry to be productive it needs to begin with a different set of concerns: what can we learn by thinking about ethnographic and literary ways of knowing the other as similar yet different? What does literature allow ethnographers to do that traditional "realist" ethnographies do not? When they adapt literature to their own needs, interests, and sensibilities, how do they transform it? Under what circumstances do scholars trained to view human behavior in terms of cultural patterns turn to fiction, which thrives on the singular and the atypical? How does ethnography, whose goal is to prove hypotheses and achieve closure, translate into fiction, with its aesthetics of fragmentariness, open-endedness, and ambiguity? What can we learn about the nature of ethnographic research from literary narratives that we cannot learn from academic texts?

To explore these issues, I turn to the short fiction of three seasoned anthropologists: Margery Wolf's "The Hot Spell" (1960/1992), Edith Turner's "When Jimmie Nashnik Was Lost in the Tundra" (1993), and Rhoda Halperin's story collection *The Teacup Ministry and Other Stories* (2001). The texts are linked by a series of thematic concerns and by their focus on small non-urban communities, which they share with classic ethnographies. Wolf's story reconstructs several days of fieldwork in Taiwan in the 1960s. Turner writes about working with the Alaskan Inupiaq tribe in 1988. Most of Halperin's stories, in turn, take place in the 1990s on an island off the coast of New Jersey, where her family owned a summer home since the 1950s.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's provocative critique of ethnography as gossip (discussed in the Introduction) serves as a theoretical tool here, for the dialogic form of the short story brings out the key role of gossip in ethnographic research. By making gossip audible and choosing a genre accessible to non-academic audiences, the three writers of ethnographic fiction deflate some of the pretension of their practice as a science. They also provisionally ward off the problem of producing hermetic academic discourse to be shared among academics alone (which Trinh describes as "a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them'… in which 'them' is silenced" [67]). At the same time, most of the objections to gossip raised by Trinh remain valid.

According to John Van Maanen's typology of non-traditional ethnographies, Halperin's stories are closer to the traditional "realist tales," while Wolf's and Turner's lean towards the "confessional" and "impressionist tales." Some scholars – most notably Carolyn Ellis (24–52) and Deborah Reed-Danahay (1–9) – would classify the texts by Wolf, Turner, and Halperin as autoethnography, an accepted though still "experimental" mode of doing qualitative research in the social sci-

ences. Alternative terms for this kind of writing are: personal ethnography, reflexive ethnography, or narrative ethnography. I shall refer to the three texts discussed in this chapter as ethnographic fiction and reserve the term autoethnography for fiction by ethnic minority writers responding to the predicament of being the objects of the ethnographic gaze (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The writers are all white women and their professional lives overlap: Turner and Wolf began doing fieldwork at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s; Halperin in the 1970s. Turner and Wolf recently retired; Halperin continued to teach until her death in 2009. All three started out in a period when anthropology's domain was the Third World. Wolf did her apprenticeship in Taiwan, Turner in Zambia, and Halperin in the Caribbean and Mexico. Subsequently, Halperin and Turner shifted their interest from communities of color to white communities, as did many of their colleagues; Wolf, however, specialized in Chinese culture and remains one of the foremost authorities on the subject.

Wolf's and Turner's first-person narratives convey the visceral experience of the woman ethnographer far from home trying to make sense of a culture very different from her own. Halperin, by contrast, writing about her Jewish American family, as well as her white working-class neighbors and friends, uses omniscient narration and inserts herself into the frame as one of the characters (changing her name and profession). The fact that all three women wrote short stories may have been motivated by lack of time, by the fact that writing fiction was not their day job, or, possibly, by their interest in the dynamic between many individuals within communities rather than in the development of one or two protagonists (to which the novel form is better suited).

The rationale for choosing stories by women is that experimental texts by women ethnographers far outnumber those by men. Helen Callaway notes that "ethnographic autobiography is written almost exclusively by American women" (37). Her assessment is confirmed by Barbara Tedlock, whose survey of non-traditional writings by anthropologists reveals that "until recently it has been mainly women who have published experiential fieldwork materials. Where husband and wife worked in the same region, it was usually the woman who adopted the narrative mode and the man the expository one" (Tedlock 267). Two of the three anthropologists discussed below, Wolf and Turner, began experimenting with fiction as anthropologists' wives – not, I would argue, because as women they had access to "women's ways of knowing,"[55] but because their marginal position in the academy made them less receptive to the idea that a textual model adapted from the natural sciences is suited to their subjective ways of knowing small places.

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[55] I am referring here to *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (1986) by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicar Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarkle, a groundbreaking project conceived by a group of Second Wave feminists. While it has been justly criticized alongside the work of Carol Gilligan as marred by essentialism, it inspired more methodologically and theoretically refined studies.

An ethnographic tale of mystery and suspense

> I took my notebook out of my pocket and was about to begin to write. But suddenly I said to myself, 'How can you take notes in the midst of human sorrow? Have you no feelings for the mourners?' I had a quick vision of a stranger with a notebook walking into the living room of my Baltimore home at the time of death. The notebook went back into the pocket. But I continued, 'Are you not an anthropologist? This may be the only mortuary rite you will witness. Think of what you will miss, if you do not record it. A knowledge of these rites is absolutely essential.' The notebook came out of my pocket.
>
> Hortense Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, p. 84

Written in 1960 in Taiwan, where Margery Wolf[56] and her husband Arthur Wolf had been doing fieldwork for about a year, "The Hot Spell" remained unpublished until 1992. Wolf explains that the intended audience for this story was "the general public" (119), but she either could not find a publisher or deliberately withheld it. The fact that Wolf was an apprentice at the time, with no scholarly publications to her name, may have kept the ambitious young scholar from the temptation of seeing her story in print. Most anthropologists prefer to establish a reputation in the discipline before publishing non-academic material. It was not until Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, George Marcus, and Michael J. Fischer began to engage in a postmodern critique of ethnography in the 1980s that Wolf pulled the story out of a drawer. It became part of *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility*, a book-length feminist polemic with the postmodern "self-reflexive turn" in anthropology. In their edited volume *Writing Culture* Clifford and Marcus had expressly stated that they had found no feminist ethnography worthy of inclusion because this group of scholars tended to focus on "setting the record straight" and eschewed formal experimentation (Clifford and Marcus 20–21). By making public her ethnographic fiction from the early 1960s Wolf intended to demonstrate that self-reflexiveness and formal experimentation were

[56] Margery Wolf retired from the University of Iowa Department of Anthropology in 2002. She did extensive ethnographic research with her husband Arthur Wolf in Taiwan around 1960, and spent a year in China in 1980–1981 studying the contemporary situation of women. As an anthropology student, she took at least one course in creative writing at Santa Rosa Junior College (Wolf, "Discussant's Comments" 78). Wolf is an accomplished stylist, both in her fiction an in her academic prose, a fact commented on by a *Population and Development Review* quoted on the cover of *Revolution Postponed*: "The author's highly personal and caustic writing style adds light and sparkle to an otherwise gloomy subject." She is the author of *The House of Lim: A Study of a Chinese Farm Family* (1968), *Women in Chinese Society* (1975), *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (1985), and *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility* (1992).

nothing new to feminists, and that the value of such experimentation for anthropology was, in fact, negligible. To prove her point, in addition to the story Wolf included in *A Thrice-Told Tale* 22 pages of fieldnotes and a 24-page scholarly article covering the same topic and period.

Interestingly, Wolf did not acknowledge that the hybrid form of *A Thrice-Told Tale* was borrowed from yet another enthusiast of postmodern literary experimentation, John Van Maanen. In *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (1988), Van Maanen lined up his own "Primary texts" – a "realist" ethnographic account, a "confessional" first-person narrative, and an "impressionist" short story – so as to demonstrate the advantages of fiction over the traditional mode of writing. Wolf reversed the order: she opened with the "impressionist" short story and ended with a traditional article. The latter, she argued, did justice to the complexity of the events and took responsibility for interpreting them – a responsibility postmodernist anthropologists (who favor open-ended polyvocal accounts) transfer to inadequately informed readers. In an attempt to control the meaning of her book, Wolf framed each of the three "primary" texts with an introduction and commentary. "I am, I fear, too irretrievably attached to Enlightenment projects to rid myself of the conviction that there is something emancipatory in knowledge," she wryly concluded (123).[57] However, as the discussion below should demonstrate, there are meanings that Wolf's discursive frame did not manage to foreclose.

The plot of "The Hot Spell" – an ethnographic mystery story – is straightforward. During a heat-wave in a small Taiwanese village called Peihotien, the narrator, whom the Taiwanese call "Wu Ma-chi" (apparently a Chinese phonetic rendition of Margery Wolf's name) finds herself temporarily alone when her husband, an anthropologist, leaves for the capital in search of land ownership records. Over the course of several days, the narrator witnesses a series of disturbing events: a young married woman named Mrs. Tan apparently becomes insane and draws large crowds by making a spectacle of herself; she speaks in a masculine voice, prophesies, and threatens neighbors who have wronged her family. Meanwhile, the narrator conducts an investigation to determine the cause of Mrs. Tan's behavior. Three explanations circulate among the villagers: Mrs. Tan may be insane, possessed by an unknown god who wants to use her as his medium, or possessed by an evil spirit. By means of skilful interrogation techniques, the narrator finds out a great deal about Taiwanese spirituality and power relations in the village, but

[57] With characteristic wit and pragmatism, Wolf farther argues "there are far, far fewer postmodernists with their high tolerance for ambiguity, tedium, contradiction, and ambivalence than there are readers who simply want to find out what the Wiliwili do about adultery. Some Wiliwili may not know, having never encountered such a situation, but when faced by a questioning anthropologist, they will provide a full and complete if nonsensical answer … some … will insist such a thing never happens in Wiliwililand. But many will both know something about adultery and be willing to tell what they know. Is it not the responsibility of the ethnographer to sort out these voices, saving the nonsense answer for an essay on field methods, the never-happens answer for a chapter on attitudes to foreigners, and interweaving the partial truths of the others into as complete a story as possible?" (*Thrice-Told Tale* 122).

she does not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, even though her neighbors eventually settle for insanity as the cause of Mrs. Tan's trances. A U.S. armed forces news bulletin forms the story's coda: it reports that a flash flood has swept away the village and an American woman is among the missing.

Most of the story's action (with the exception of the fatal flood) is thoroughly documented in the fieldnotes and recounted at the beginning of the academic article. Fiction allowed Wolf to render the Taiwanese field assistant's speech in idiomatic American English. We are not told whether Wu-Chieh spoke Pidgin English or a Chinese dialect when communicating with her employers. Had Wolf used Pidgin for her speech, Wu-Chieh would have sounded less intelligent than she actually was and the story would have been barely readable, for the dialogues form the dramatic backbone of the story. Wolf also heightened the oppressive atmosphere of the events by changing the season to the height of summer, when typhoons bring the only respite from the heat and are eagerly awaited.

There are many reasons why Wolf may have chosen to write up this material in the story format, saving other fieldnotes for her monograph *The House of Lim: A Study of a Chinese Family* (1968). The singularity of the crisis around Mrs. Tan, coupled with the difficulty of pinning down its meaning, meant that it had no place in an ethnographic account organized around typical culturally-regulated behavior. The dramatic events must have made a strong impression on the young feminist scholar: a woman little older than herself, a village non-entity, barely visible to the more established residents, came close to being treated with awe and reverence as a medium for a god. Such drama clearly deserved to be recorded – if only for friends and family at home – in a less abstract form than the expository essay that transforms village gossip into knowledge. By choosing the dialogic short story genre, Wolf was able to put the gossip back into the context of the questions that elicited it.

If Mrs. Tan's rise to local fame and fall from grace constitutes one dramatic trajectory, the other is the narrator's rite of passage as an anthropologist. From interviewing mothers on toilet training and observing children at play the narrator graduates to analyzing hard-core cultural difference. In a scholarly monograph there would be no room for this other story – no opportunity to show how the narrator methodically collected and cross-checked data, made and revised hypotheses, and arrived, literally and figuratively, at a dead end. Wolf (whose flair for irony and figurative language is evident even in her conventional academic writing, such as the 1985 book *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*) must have seen the literary potential not just of spirit possession as a subject but of her own position as an anthropologist confronting the supernatural equipped with an empiricist toolbox. "A very inappropriate shiver went up my spine," the narrator confesses on realizing that even her trusty Taiwanese research assistant is willing to see Mrs. Tan as a spirit medium, "and I was overwhelmed with a feeling of being very, very far from home – a feeling that had come less and less frequently in recent months" (29).

Wolf constructs her narrator as a committed, non-mercenary, self-motivated social scientist with "much curiosity about the world around her" – a stance that she shares with her field assistant Wu-Chieh. This curiosity has driven her across the Pacific to Taiwan, where she willingly suffers the discomforts of village life, the ostensible loss of status (her landlady handles her as roughly as she would a daughter-in-law), the oppressive heat, and the pungent smells. Wresting knowledge from the villagers is hard work; even the meek Mrs. Tan, when she falls into a trance, ridicules her: "Where's the foreign female big nose? Does she believe in me? … Wu Ma-chi, why do you ask so many questions? Come to me and I will give you all the answers" (37). Worse still, her field assistant constantly withholds precious information and, instead of doing research, slips away to look after Mrs. Tan's children. Irritated, the narrator thinks: "I was not a colonial officer who expected her to be at work ten hours a day, and I hated it when she cast me in this role" (27).[58]

Yet the disempowerment of the narrator seems exaggerated. If we read the text closely, we find that the bossy landlady, in fact, shops, cooks, and serves the anthropologists, freeing them to do intellectual work. Similarly, the haughty field assistant is dependent on the wages they pay her; trying to reconcile her loyalties split between the employers and the people in the village, she has learned to avoid "job-endangering confrontations." Though the Americans' research grants may be meager, they are connected with the centers of power: in an off-hand manner the narrator mentions that she and her husband have at their disposal police files on every village resident. After Mrs. Tan's first public trance, the narrator reaches directly for the Tans' police records. She gets her news from U.S. military broadcasts (clearly, American troops are nearby). Meanwhile, her husband is in Taipei examining Japanese colonial land records. Japan had given up all territorial claims to Taiwan just eight years before the events of the story, in 1953. Presumably most of the villagers still had vivid memories of life under colonial rule, and lived in an authoritarian state which kept detailed records on its citizens. Based on this information, we may begin to suspect that the villagers' reluctance to provide "data" may have something to do with the fear of surveillance, and that it is the villagers, not the American anthropologists, who are disempowered.

Even the lowliest graduate students doing ethnography in the Third World had powerful Western institutions behind them, a fact many did not acknowledge until

[58] Commenting on "The Hot Spell" in 1992, Wolf insisted that there was no power differential in her relations with the Taiwanese in 1960, and referred to her husband and herself as "a penniless graduate student and his wife" (57). Apparently, even after 30 years she remained oblivious to the privilege an American passport and a graduate education conferred on her and her husband. Writing about illiterate informants also involved a privilege Wolf deliberately ignored. As anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup cogently argues: "at the autobiographical level, ethnographers and informants are equal; but at the level of anthropological discourse their relationship is hierarchical. It is our choice to encompass their stories in a narrative of a very different order. We select the quotations and edit the statements" (122).

the 1960s. Nor did they acknowledge that they sometimes subjected their informants to questions they would never have considered asking people at home. Malinowski and Powdermaker saw themselves as innocuous and non-invasive observers of "primitive" life, but when describing the process of collecting data, they used violent metaphors. Introducing *Argonauts*, Malinowski wrote: "the ethnographer has not only to spread his nets in the right place, and wait for what will fall into them. He must be an active huntsman, and drive his quarry into them and follow it to its most inaccessible lairs" (8). As late as 1966, Powdermaker used similar language: "To 'crack' a strange culture, never taking anything for granted, to ferret out relationships between customs, to dig out the system of kinship from many genealogies, to understand the social structure, to learn a language which had never been recorded" is the anthropologist's mission (95–96). Likewise, Wolf's narrator assumes that it is both her right and duty to know what motivates Mrs. Tan's behavior and what it means within Taiwanese culture. Some of the dialogues between the narrator and her field assistant Wu Chieh, which take up a large proportion of the story, sound eerily like police interrogations. Wu Chieh tries to give away as little as she can, for Mrs. Tan is a friend; her employer has to intelligently "drive her quarry" into her "net," as in the following fragment of a 6-page-long dialogue, where she is trying to sound out village opinion on Mrs. Tan:

> "Do most people think that is why she jumped in the paddy?"
>
> Wu Chieh looked stricken. One of her rules is that she cannot out and out lie when asked a direct question about something she doesn't want to discuss with the foreign anthropologists. 'Yes' was clearly not the answer; 'no' would require going even further; and by saying what 'most people' thought about one intimate fact in the unfolding drama, she had lost the option of saying she didn't know what people thought. I felt mean but the story had now become considerably more interesting than the game of extracting it.
>
> "Well?"
>
> "Some do, some don't."
>
> "Do you want to tell me about those who don't?"
>
> "There really isn't anything to tell. Some people just don't think she's crazy."
>
> "Come on, Wu Chieh, what *do* they think?"
>
> "It's hard to explain."
>
> "Try."
>
> "Well, they think a god is calling her."
>
> "Calling her for what? Do you mean a god wants her to kill herself?"
>
> "No. Why do you always think that? She wasn't trying to commit suicide that day. The god was calling her and she just got confused..."
>
> "Well, I am confused too. Why is a god calling Mrs. Tan?"
>
> "Nobody knows that. They just choose some people."
>
> "Choose them for what?"
>
> "To speak for them… You know, to be their *tang-ki.*" (29)

The narrator's persistence and her inventive tactics for "cracking" the strange culture are a testimony to her ethnographic authority.[59] Living in a house that is centrally located in the village, she knows intimately the sights and sounds associated with various times of day and picks out every irregularity. Equipped with a notebook, she attends the gatherings in the Tan compound, observing every move of the people present. When a woman whispers an "exciting piece of gossip" the narrator writes: "From my position against the wall, I could watch this piece of information literally spread through the crowd" (33). Gossip is precious data. The narrator pursues it single-mindedly, undeterred by villagers who tell her to "lay off" (43) when asked for the latest gossip on Mrs. Tan. It is because fiction since Hemingway has relied so heavily on dialogue that Wolf, in constructing the anthropologist's dialogues with her Chinese informants, showed us the centrality of gossip to fieldwork.

If a present-day reader can caricature the woman anthropologist the way she has been purposely caricatured here, it is only because Wolf used fiction in 1960 to distance herself somewhat from the role anthropology required her to play. Though evidently proud of her ability to play that role, Wolf seems not to have been fully converted to the discipline. Consequently, she revealed the incongruities involved in "cracking" a strange culture that the older Wolf, author of the 1990 article "The Woman Who Did Not Become a Shaman," is no longer willing to see. For the older Wolf, the story was inferior to article because it lacked explanatory power. She thus withheld it until she was able to contextualize Mrs. Tan's case by invoking anthropological research on shamanism in Taiwan, and to read her behavior through the feminist psychoanalytic theories of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gillgan. From a literary studies perspective, however, the story's power lies in the fact that it amasses almost as much information on Mrs. Tan as does the article, yet it privileges neither the socio-cultural nor the supernatural explanation and ends in an aporia. However we choose to read the violent ending, in which the lone fieldworker is swept away by the typhoon together with the village she had been studying, it is certainly an ending that allowed the author to achieve narrative closure without forcing an interpretation on the events. It also let the Taiwanese have the last word: according to the Armed Forces News Bulletin, "survivors claim that a local god called down the flood as a punishment for nonbelievers" (49). If this theory does not seem plausible to the readers of *A Thrice-Told Tale*, we have to remember that neither does the 1980s feminist psychoanalysis Wolf deployed in the article. (In fact, Wolf herself admitted in a footnote added in 1992 that reading behavior shaped by Taiwanese culture through Western psychoanalysis may have been

[59] Wolf's chapter titled "Doing Research in China" in *Revolution Postponed* is all about outsmarting the Chinese bureaucrats and appointed "handlers" who usher the Wolfs from city to city and from one collective farm to another. Written with humor and verve, the chapter builds up the impression that the ethnographer has to be a tough, smart, and indefatigable sleuth.

misguided [114].) Evidently, some ways of knowing small places date more quickly than others.

Interestingly, after writing an entire book on the pitfalls of literary experimentation, Wolf continued to explore its potential. In 2003, one of her graduate students reported that "she is currently working on a fictional ethnography or an ethnographic fiction – she says she still hasn't fully resolved the tension between the two, and she is not sure it can be or needs to be" (Olson 61). The University of Iowa graduate students who contributed to *Who's Afraid of Margery Wolf: Tributes and Perspectives on Anthropology, Feminism and Writing Ethnography* (2003) attest to the fact that as a teacher she encouraged them to explore non-traditional forms of expression. Her standard warning was, however, "Don't turn to fiction until you've finished your dissertation" (Comito 66).

A tale of redemption

> Nothing seems more fictitious to me now than the classic monograph in which a human group is drawn and quartered along the traditional categories of social, economic, religious, and other so-called organization and everything holds together.
>
> Jean-Paul Dumont qtd. in Callaway, p. 39

The setting of Edith Turner's[60] "When Jimmie Nashnik Was Lost in the Tundra" is as exotic as that of Wolf's "The Hot Spell," and the weather is as extreme (an arctic winter). Another similarity is that Turner's story also documents a one-time event – a community crisis. The story covers three days of fieldwork in Point Hope, Northern Alaska, a village on a gravel spit jutting out into the sea, where

[60] Edith Turner currently teaches at the University of Virginia, where in 1980 she received her M.A. degree in anthropology, followed by an honorary doctorate from the College of Wooster, Ohio, in 2000. Through the fieldwork she conducted in Zambia (1950–1954), Northern Alaska (1987–1988), and, more recently, in the Republic of Ireland, she explored the sacred sphere of ritual, healing, shamanism, rites of passage, and festivals. On the University of Virginia website, she defines herself in the following words: "I am an anthropologist engaged in the study of ritual, religion and consciousness. I have been researching the field of symbol and ritual for 58 years, formerly in collaboration with Victor Turner. My theoretical interests have developed from Turner's 'anthropology of experience,' a field that has been spreading in anthropology to narratology, humanistic anthropology, and the anthropology of consciousness." She is the author of *The Spirit and the Drum* (1987), *The Hands Feel It: Healing and Spirit Presence Among a Northern Alaskan People* (1996), *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing* (1992), *Among the Healers: Stories of Spiritual and Ritual Healing around the World* (2005), and *Heart of Lightness: The Life of an Anthropologist. Autobiography* (2006). She shared the fieldwork that served as the basis for Victor Turner's influential work, *The Drums of Affliction* (1968), and she co-wrote with Victor Turner *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (1978) (Turner, Home Page n.p.).

about 600 Inupiaq Eskimos were living in 1988. When a young man fails to return from a hunt, the village consolidates to bring him back: the men repeatedly go out to search for him; the women, including the narrator, stay home and pray. The narrator becomes fully engaged in the circuit of practical, emotional, and spiritual support and, together with her informants, experiences the joy of Jimmie Nashnik's return. We learn from the story that at the time the tribe used modern technology, including snowmobiles, binoculars, CB radio, and television, but continued the tradition of subsistence fishing and hunting. Tribe members spoke English as well as Inupiaq, which Turner was studying for better access to precontact beliefs and practices incorporated into the fundamentalist Christianity embraced by most members of the Inupiaq tribe (34).

While Margery Wolf wrote "The Hot Spell" with an American audience in mind and did not consider the possibility of her Taiwanese subjects ever reading her words, Edith Turner's Inupiaq subjects were neither foreign nor illiterate. As fellow Americans under no obligation to submit to participant observation, they made it clear when she arrived that they had read what anthropologists had previously written about them:

> The people of Point Hope did not much like anthropologists, some of whom had incompletely interpreted their culture; in fact in a neighboring township the Eskimo authorities refused all but their own appointed researchers because they had experienced certain vicious slurs from unauthorized writers in the past. Moreover, my interest in precontact customs aroused the ready factionalism of the village … (34)

Aware that she was in Point Hope on sufferance, she responded by "smiling a lot, and trying to behave with courtesy" (34). But the awareness that her informants were very likely to read what she wrote produced more than the endearing smile; it profoundly affected her choice of what to represent and how to represent it. If her predecessors had "incompletely interpreted" the culture, how was she to render it in all its complexity? How was she to write something relevant to the people she studied, not just an analysis to tickle the interest of the academic readership? That Turner pondered these questions is apparent from the article which frames the story, in which she formulates her goals and research methods:

> Anthropology can be looked at as a kind of getting down and behind people, learning as many details about their lives, about their intentions, their techniques and ways, and at the same time gradually demonstrating that you do know and understand those ways; and then reflecting them back to the people, as innocently as possible, like the moon reflecting the sun, nonjudgmentally. (28)[61]

Ethnography was invented to describe how "they" differ from "us." In many cases, when "they" had their culture reflected back to them in the crooked mirror

[61] In imagining the anthropologist as "getting down and behind people" Turner uses a similar spatial metaphor to that used by Mary Louise Pratt in "Fieldwork in Common Places" (see epigraph: "down in the middle of things, looking and being looked at, speaking an being spoken at").

of ethnography, they found the information either distorted or patently obvious and therefore irrelevant. As long as anthropologists worked with illiterate subjects, the problem lay dormant; it erupted when literate communities in the West were targeted for participant observation. Introducing the ominously titled volume of essays *When They Read What We Write: The Politics of Ethnography* (1996), Caroline B. Brettell tells of the indignant protests caused by anthropologists' betrayal of confidence, insensitivity, unwarranted generalizations, and mercenary motives, which followed the publication of numerous ethnographies (1–24). Turner therefore set herself the difficult goal of addressing a crossover audience. Her short story, embedded in an essay titled "Experience and Poetics in Anthropological Writing," tries to simultaneously model a way of knowing and writing about small places for the benefit of her scholarly readers, to render the Eskimos with dignity as protagonists of a serious drama, and to show both readerships how an ethnographer's self is affected and changed by the work she does among others.

Unrepresentable within the conventions of traditional ethnography, the singular dramatic event witnessed by Turner brought out facets of the Inupiaq spirituality that did not appear in everyday interactions and therefore deserved representation. Also unrepresentable and unthinkable within the framework of traditional ethnography was Turner's emotional involvement, which would have undermined her authority to describe the Inupiaq. The short story form solved both problems. On the issue of personal involvement Wolf and Turner represent opposite camps in ethnography. For Wolf, objectivity remains a value in itself, no matter how difficult it is to attain. Maintaining a distance from her ethnographic subjects is no less important for the narrator in "The Hot Spell" than it was for Wolf when she did ethnographic research for *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*.[62] By contrast, Turner claims that emotional involvement is fundamental to understanding the other, not because through empathy one gains mystic access to the other's thoughts and feelings but because one is able to use one's own emotions to interpret what is happening to the other.[63] The singular event of the story is a religious one. What tides the

[62] Like Sandra Harding and other many contemporary feminist academics, Wolf believed women had to use their hard-won academic authority and knowledge to "set the record straight," make sure women are no longer underrepresented as objects of research, and that the epistemology of patriarchal institutions is challenged. Harding claimed in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives* (1991): "Using women's lives as grounds to criticize the dominant knowledge claims, which have been based primarily in the lives of men in the dominant races, classes, and cultures, can decrease the partialities and distortions in the picture of nature and social life provided by the natural and social sciences" (121). Based on the "standpoint theory" developed by Patricia Hill Collins, Harding formulated the ideal of "strong objectivity" to be achieved by allowing marginalized perspectives to act as corrective lenses for the "weak objectivity" of traditional natural and social science.

[63] A way of knowing the other by reflecting on one's own experience is also the subject of anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod's article "A Tale of Two Pregnancies." The author studied Egyptian women, particularly their views on infertility, pregnancy, and childbirth, before she herself underwent infertility treatment and became pregnant; she observes that her understanding of many of her conversations with the Egyptian women changed after these experiences.

Inupiaq over the crisis and makes a collective epiphany possible is religious faith. Turner claims the authority to interpret the event because she felt it rather than mastered it intellectually. The story contains a diary entry in which Turner described her spiritual condition while in Alaska:

> I was right in the midst of the religious events myself, my makeup in the process of being modified back to the Protestantism of my childhood, gladly falling into step with local ways, moving, as it were, into the traffic flow, up the ramp of Eskimo life to reach its own speed. (43)

Turner's approach, which would have been outlawed as "going native"[64] several decades earlier, is gradually gaining acceptance in American anthropology, as evidenced by the enthusiastic response to her story by Edward M. Bruner. Also Clifford Geertz praises it for the "true sense of 'being there' that preserves the drama of the lived event and conveys a striking impression of the integrity and the honesty of the ethnographer" (Geertz qtd. in Bruner 10).

In Kirsten Hastrup's view, which is close to Turner's, "only by admitting that the anthropologist was part of the plot can we maintain our authority" (126). This is because "subjects don't speak the truth: they speak in response to questions and situations, aware of who they are talking to" (117). Turner is clearly working on the same assumption. Although she chooses fiction over ethnography, she does not give up ethnographic authority altogether. Instead, she redefines its grounds. By describing the part she played in the plot – praying with Jimmie Nashnik's distraught family, keeping people company as they waited, or lending her binoculars to the rescue team – Turner builds her authority as a "witness." As she explains in the "Commentary," "The prime product of the experience [is] not a text but witness – a word related to 'witting,' knowing – and the acceptance of subjectivity" (45).

Turner introduces herself as a sixty-seven-year-old mother and grandmother (34), someone the residents of Point Hope are at ease with because she takes the trouble to fit in as a neighbor, a friend, and a regular churchgoer. Aware that generosity is "the prime Eskimo virtue" (35), she emulates it by giving and accepting gifts of food. A number of scenes in the story show her performing acts of reciprocity, empathy, and courtesy, from exchanging glances and nods to acknowledging shared thoughts: " 'Job. It was the trial of Job,' said Annie. I nodded. I had been thinking the same myself " (40). "The implied storyline" of the confessional tale, Van Maanen remarks, "is that of a fieldworker and a culture finding each other and, despite some initial spats and misunderstandings, in the end making a match" (79). This is precisely the impression we are left with at the end of Turner's story.

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[64] "Going native" ruined Frank Hamilton Cushing's chances for an academic career, though he did several years of pioneering fieldwork in Zuni Pueblo (1879–1884), because the academics felt he had come to identify too closely with the goals and beliefs of his informants (see Curtis Hinsley, "Zunis and Brahmins: Cultural Ambivalence in the Gilded Age"). Subsequent generations of ethnographers were taught to beware of "going native."

All the dialogues are constructed as ordinary, brief exchanges; there is no equivalent in this story of the interrogations in "The Hot Spell." The narrator implies that whatever ethnographic knowledge she has was proffered spontaneously during day-to-day interactions, lessons with "Irene, my language instructor," and "discussions" with "the healer." If some people found her questions impertinent, she does not report it. Paradoxically, her account sounds convincing because she does not take herself too seriously. She also keeps track of the source of each piece of "data": Annie, Steve Lisbourne, the postmaster, Pikuq, or Samuel's son Gordon. Even when we are meant to understand that an action or statement is significant as part of a larger cultural pattern, Turner never says "the Inupiaq do X or Y."

Gossip does play a role in the story: when the news about Jimmie being lost breaks, the narrator already knows from Annie about certain "horrors in [Jimmie's] family history": rape, murder, and divorce. Later, the gossip is revisited because Annie reads Jimmie's misadventure as "fate's revenge on the Nashniks." But unlike Wolf, Turner recognizes gossip for what it is and uses it sparingly. In the only abstract passage of the story, she explains: "many stories pop up from the past as a reflexive reaction in this kind of drama, their importance heightened now, their old meanings clearer … A religious bent … triggers gossip, which constitutes criticism by means of a comparison of the actual situation with a continually presented ideal" (42). The fact that this odd theoretical aside appears in connection with gossip might be attributed to Turner's discomfort with reporting it.

Knowledge in the story is something intuited and gained through performance; Turner has no trouble admitting that she does not understand what people mean. For instance, Annie tells her about the way the wives of whaling captains assist their husbands without physically leaving home: "The whaling captain's wife raises an empty pot to heaven, to bring the whale. What comes into it? It is a 'ping,' a drop from above, a golden 'ping.' It is the whale saying, 'I am coming to you.' What did these utterances mean?" (37). By telling the story, the narrator tries to understand what she experienced when she prayed with other women for Jimmie's return:

> we were an interlacing body of women yet not touching, a counterweight system, just as the whaler's wife assists when her husband is out there after a whale – she is quiet and slow in the house to quiet and slow down the whale. In the old days many of these women would have been shamans and would have been able to quiet and clear the weather also; maybe they could do it still. (37)

Together with the villagers, the narrator follows a double strategy to help bring Jimmie home: keeping track of weather reports and sharing her compass on the practical level and acting as a "counterweight" on the spiritual level. The readers have to take her word for it when she says: "I knew we were in a sacred moment" (37).

At the climactic point of Jimmie Nashnik's return, the narrator presents herself as one of a crowd of eager spectators ("we"), standing at a respectful distance

inside the Nashniks' house. Viewed from afar, the son's reunion with his mother is aestheticized – reduced to a cluster of colored blobs:

> A young man appeared in a white hunting parka carrying something and surrounded by a little crowd.
> Dora Rushed out in her thin emerald blouse. The watchers hushed. Two were hugging, the green and the slight form in white. A hug. (41)

The story ends in a crescendo of feelings experienced communally. First, we are shown the joyful bustle in the Nashniks' house. Later, the narrator spends the evening alone listening to the CB radio. Various people come on to give thanks for Jimmie's return, including Dora, Jimmie's mother, who recites Psalm 130: "Put of the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord" (44). A prayer for forgiveness and redemption from iniquities, the psalm allows Dora to place the horrors of her family's history within a religious framework and hope for grace. The narrator's last words address Dora directly: "We know the source of those tears, Dora, the deepest fountains from which they rose – supposedly rare in our day, but never rare; we too are bathed in them as in every age" (44). Turner thus consciously inscribes her story in the sentimental tradition that includes *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, universalizing Dora's experience. The "we" of the final sentence is an ambiguous pronoun. Throughout the story Turner used "we" whenever she was involved in communal activities. Here, however, depending on how effective the story has been, the "we" might encompass both the people listening to the CB radio and the readers.

Rather than scoff at Turner's sentimentalism and her decision to universalize Dora's experience, we may appreciate the rhetorical move of drawing readers out of their comfortable position of armchair anthropologists and into the position of the mother who almost lost her son. This is no naïve gesture. As Clifford Geertz observed in 1988, the year Turner worked in Point Hope, "one of the major assumptions upon which anthropological writing rested until only yesterday, that its subjects and its audience were not only separable but morally disconnected, that the first were to be described but not addressed, the second informed but not implicated, has fairly dissolved" (*Works and Lives* 132). The breaking down of the distinction between self and other that takes place on the level of the ethnographic encounter in Turner's story resonates with what Derek Attridge believes should ideally happen when we are challenged by literature: the "simple opposition of inside and outside" should break down, together with the "sense of integrated and active subjectivity."

> Furthermore, if the settled patterns of my mental world, the norms of my idioculture, have been so freed up that the truly other finds a welcome, my subjectivity will have been altered in some degree, and thus – especially if the cumulative effect of such events is taken into account – the self too can be said to be a 'creation of the other.' In fact, when I encounter alterity, I encounter not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer the other. (Attridge 24)

It would be difficult to find a more appropriate interpretation of what Turner attempts to model for us in the story: not an ethnographic encounter with the authen-

tic other but a reflection on the self responding to that encounter. Although an essay frames the story, Turner does not use it to tell us how to interpret Annie's or Dora's words. Studded with quotes and parenthetical references, it visually resembles an essay but it, too, subverts academic conventions. Absorbing the overflow of material from the story, the essay wavers between scholarly and figurative language, and treats the home-grown theorist Ernie of Point Hope on par with Clifford Geertz and Stephen Tyler.

An allegory of two warring tribes

> All the characters in this book, except myself, are fictitious in the fullest meaning of that word … I am an anthropologist. The tribe I have described here does exist. This book is the story of the way I did field work among them…
>
> Laura Bohannan, *Return to Laughter* (Author's Note)

Rhoda Halperin's[65] fiction can be read as an attempt to put into practice the ideas of postmodern critics of positivist ethnography, who saw hope for the discipline in the "experimental turn." If ethnography renounced some of the undeserved authority it had acquired as a "science," the postmodernists hoped; if anthropologists were encouraged to reflect on their daily practice; if the language of ethnography did not have to pretend to be transparent; if it incorporated indigenous voices on par with academic voices, the discipline would once again be able to lift its head in the postcolonial world.

In Halperin's case, the initial impulse to cross the line between ethnography and fiction seems related to the decision to write about her home culture (more specifically, about white Americans on the New Jersey coast). While Margery Wolf and Edith Turner followed the ethnographic tradition of going abroad or studying across race, Rhoda Halperin intruded on territory traditionally covered

[65] Rhoda Halperin (1946–2009), specialized in the economy of culture. She received her Ph.D. from Brandeis in 1975 and worked at the University of Cincinnati from 1977 to 2004, where she served as chair and helped revitalize the department. She spent the last 5 years of her career as chair of anthropology at Montclair State University. In the 1970s, she conducted fieldwork in the Caribbean and Mexico, and wrote *Peasant Livelihood: Studies in Economic Anthropology and Cultural Ecology* (1977). Her interests then shifted to white working-class communities in Kentucky and Ohio. Out of these studies came her philosophy of long-term commitment to specific communities and the need to combine fieldwork with advocacy in order to help the communities to achieve their own goals. In addition to ethnographies *The Livelihood of Kin: Making Ends Meet the Kentucky Way* (1990) and *Practicing Community: Class, Culture, and Power in an Urban Neighborhood* (1998), she also wrote two theoretical works: *Economies Across Cultures: Towards a Comparative Science of the Economy* (1988) and *Cultural Economics Past and Present* (1994), expanding on the economic theories of Marx, Polanyi, and Pearson.

by sociology. As anthropologist Donald A. Messerschmidt points out in *Anthropologists at Home in North America* (1981), studying people "in one's own back yard" with whom the ethnographer shares a language and who are therefore more likely than foreign informants to read the written product of fieldwork, means new challenges and new opportunities. Standard approaches developed for the study of peasant societies have to be revised and there is a greater emphasis on applied research that might be useful to the communities in question (3–14).

Raised in Philadelphia and on an island off the New Jersey coast, by Jewish American parents who were the first generation in the family to achieve middle-class status, Halperin had strong emotional ties to the island on which her family owned a summer home since the 1950s, and to the white working-class people who had been her neighbors and friends. After duly serving her apprenticeship in anthropology in the Caribbean and Mexico, she spent the rest of her life applying the knowledge of peasant cultures to the study of poor whites in the U.S. Unlike the sociologists of her generation, she did not see her role as diagnosing social "problems" or "pathologies." Throughout her career, she attributed un(der)employment, poverty, single-parent households, teen delinquency and psychological disorders to the forces of late capitalism, which pushed working-class people out of the workforce and restricted access to better education. Individual creativity and communal ways of coping with the precariousness of life on the fringes of capitalist society were her focus. Her training in cultural economics had taught her to appreciate cultural adaptations to specific socio-economic environments.

Not all the subjects of Halperin's scholarship and fiction are white. Occasionally, after reading a page or two about a person introduced only by name, we learn, for instance, that "she worked for white people," which suggests that she herself is non-white. Clearly, race as a category is irrelevant to Halperin's interpretation of identity. Similarly, other categories of difference, including gender and sexuality, lack explanatory power for Halperin. Her dismissal of difference other than class aligns her with whiteness studies scholar and anthropologist John Hartigan, Jr. In *Odd Tribes: Towards a Cultural Analysis of White People* (2005), Hartigan argued that white group identities in the U.S. form, first and foremost, through a recognition of cultural sameness and not in opposition to racial others. Invoking Martin Sokefield, Hartigan suggested that the "immensely influential model of otherness … brackets off attention to the social processes that are encompassed by cultural analysis: the working of sorting out matters of belonging through the recognition of replication of sameness and similarities" (12). Halperin's and Hartigan's anthropological view of group identity formation stands in sharp contrast to what David Roediger, George Lipsitz, Toni Morrison, Cheryl I. Harris, and many others have been saying for decades: that the meaning of American whiteness can only be understood in relation to the racial categories it excludes. Hoping to undermine this "influential model of otherness," Halperin and Hartigan studied

sameness and the cultural bonds that develop within working-class communities which Hartigan refers to as "the odd tribes." Yet the basic rationale for writing ethnography has been to describe cultural difference abroad in relation to an assumed cultural sameness at home so as "to reduce the puzzlement" (Geertz qtd. in Wolf, *A Thrice Told Tale* 128). The question then arises: Is it possible to write ethnographically about any group without invoking, or implying, the presence of its cultural other? By reading Halperin's *The Teacup Ministry*, I shall attempt to show that because ethnography by definition focuses on discrete small places, such as islands, villages, or urban neighborhoods, it always posits an outside (other). In her fiction, Halperin attempted to break down the outside/inside observer/observed dichotomy by submitting her own island, herself and her family to the ethnographic gaze. Yet, because her project was ethnographic, it had to construct the antithesis of the distinctive white culture it showcased. The other it constructed – both as an object of inquiry and as an implied readership – was the white middle class. I propose to read *The Teacup Ministry* as an allegory of two warring white "tribes" that need the narrator as a go-between in order to understand each other.

One of these "tribes," long known in the U.S. as "poor white trash," [66] began to draw the attention of middle-class Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century. Eugenicist researchers like Elizabeth Kite, conducted family studies that sought the roots of poverty and criminality in heredity. Of the poor whites or "pineys" of New Jersey, Kite wrote: "the real piney has no inclination to labor, submitting to every privation in order to avoid it. Lazy, lustful, and cunning, he is a degenerate creature who has learned to provide for himself the bare necessities of life without entering into life's struggle." Kite attributed the fact that pineys lived in unsanitary conditions to their hereditary "lack of intelligence, absence of ambition, dearth of ideals of any sort" (Kite qtd. in Wray 80–81).

Those who study or teach American literature are familiar with the "odd tribe" of pineys through William Carlos Williams's 1923 poem "To Elsie,"[67] though the speaker's voice in this poem is one of concern rather than contempt:

> The pure products of America
> Go crazy –
> mountain folk from Kentucky

[66] See Matt Wray's *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* for a succinct interdisciplinary discussion of the rise of distinctions within the larger category of white Americans, from "lubbers" and "crackers" in colonial America to the more contemporary "poor white trash" and "pineys," followed by an overview of eugenicist research and policies. Assuming that segments of the white race were declining physically, intellectually, and morally, eugenicists sought genetic explanations for the pockets of poverty, disease, illiteracy, and criminality among the predominantly middle-class whites in America. Wray's study suggests that New Jersey was one of the centers of eugenicist research (70, 79–81). Shades of whiteness are also the subject of John Hartigan's *Odd Tribes: Towards a Cultural Analysis of White People.*

[67] For a striking interpretation of Williams's "To Elsie" within the context of modernist ethnography see James Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 1–7.

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes and thieves
old names
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure

and young slatterns, bathed
in filth
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
character

The cause of the speaker's concern is the mass of uprooted poor whites from the New Jersey woods and Appalachian hills drifting into the Atlantic coast cities. Once in the cities, the speaker laments, they shed the "peasant traditions" that gave them (their tribal) "character." Dedicated to Williams's domestic servant Elsie, the poem draws her and other impure "products of America" into the Modernist aesthetic. Significantly, though, Elsie is not the poem's implied reader. In fact, this woman with "broken/brain" and "great/ungainly hips and flopping breasts" is the last person the speaker imagines reading his impassioned diagnosis of national dissolution. Although the speaker senses that Elsie's grotesque figure somehow reflects "the truth about us," she is not one of "us." Neither are the "deaf-mutes," "thieves," and "slatterns" of New Jersey.

Sixty years later, when anthropologist Rhoda Halperin turned to the study of poor whites, she found herself writing against these entrenched class stereotypes. The "peasant traditions" were alive and well, she reported in 1990 in *The Livelihood of Kin: Making Ends Meet the Kentucky Way*. Extended family networks and weekly market circuits linked farming folk with urban dwellers, Halperin discovered, and created a continuity with the past. In *Practicing Community: Class Culture and Power in an Urban Neighborhood* (1998) Halperin wrote about having to counter "bad numbers" (negative statistics that feed stereotypes of poor whites in Cincinnati) with "good numbers" (those that show their resilience, resourcefulness, attachment to place and to family) (104). Rather than shiftless, drifting, "impure products of America," she found pure Americans, rooted in their "peasant traditions," which they relied on to build a mutual insurance system in an unstable

economy. As the six-year-long study in Cincinnati's East End unfolded, Halperin committed herself to advocacy on behalf of the East Enders in protracted conflicts with bureaucrats in the City Hall and with developers intent on acquiring valuable riverfront lots in the East End.

Her short story collection *The Teacup Ministry* (2001) is not a departure from but a logical extension of Halperin's research interests and formal experiments. Over the course of her career, she had increasingly been using evocative descriptive language in academic writing, and including long fragments of interviews, which made her work more polyvocal than traditional ethnography. The study *Practicing Community* is best described as a collage in which conventional cultural description, methodology, case studies, and kinship charts are combined with working-class Cincinnatians' poems and pronouncements on local politics, as well as Halperin's own poetic prose evoking the atmosphere of the run-down neighborhood. Critical theory is relegated to the final chapter and used to confirm research findings rather than dictate the project's main concerns.

Stories in *The Teacup Ministry* are grouped thematically and each section has its own critical introduction that highlights the key themes. As Halperin explains in the "Afterword," the stories are autobiographical in the sense that they contain "the things I learned in the course of my work and my life as an anthropologist – the things that seemed to stick in my mind, but that never made it out of my field notes into print" (131). Only in the introductions and one or two stories ("Beach Badges" and "City Lines") does the narrator's voice seem to be Halperin's own; elsewhere, she uses omniscient narration, reducing her presence to that of a minor character, the pediatrician Lauren.[68] The decision to appear in the text as Lauren may reflect the desire to align herself with the observed, as did her forerunner Zora Neale Hurston upon returning to her home town in Florida as a fieldworker equipped with "the spy-glass of Anthropology" (*Mules and Men* 1). Hurston, too, found it difficult to objectify her "own people" in the conventional ethnographic format, so she fictionalized herself along with them.[69]

Generically, most of the stories are modified ethnographic "case studies." For instance, the story "Rehab" features the family of James and Megan Strong, subjects of a case study reported in *Practicing Community.* In turning interview-based

[68] Lauren is a pediatrician in name only. She is never shown working. There are tell-tale references in the stories that would suggest she shares Halperin's profession: she has worked in the Third World and engaged in "community work" in the U.S. (41). She never misses an opportunity to study class culture as a participant observer, or to politely enquire why people do what they do, as in "The Teacup Ministry," where she finds out that Lynn and her husband have a Christian "ministry" that involves assisting anyone in the neighborhood who has experienced job loss or a personal tragedy (41–43).

[69] Later, when shooting ethnographic films on occult practices in the South, Hurston also insisted on participating in the filmed events. See Fatimah Tobing Rony's discussion of Hurston's ethnographic films in *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (203–211).

case studies into fiction Halperin has a formidable forerunner in Gertrude Stein, who developed the profiles of the protagonists of her book *Three Lives* out of medical case histories.[70] To readers of traditional short stories, Halperin's fictionalized ethnographic case studies may initially seem flawed. First, we encounter in them a multiplicity of characters connected through kinship, friendship, employment, and other ties. Some make brief appearances never to return; others become the protagonists of their own stories. Second, the omniscient narrator often provides elaborate genealogies that may seem redundant: "Just after Solomon died … [his] children received a phone call from the adult child of Frances, Solomon and Martin's half-brother, son of their father Henry, from his first marriage. It seems that Henry's first wife had died giving birth to Frances, who was then adopted by his mother's sister and her husband in California" (xvii). Third, few of the stories have an identifiable crisis or epiphany. They unfold slowly, through flashbacks and digressions, rather than build up to a climax. Like ethnographic case studies transcribed from interviews, the stories paint portraits instead of following plots. Consequently, readers have to learn to identify the focal points of the stories – ironic juxtapositions, minor frictions along class lines, incidents that may involve little more than an angry glance. These "flaws" in narrative structure follow from the author's interest in communities rather than individuals, in the ways extended families make a living and create mutual insurance networks. Halperin's genealogies – a staple of "kinship studies" – displace the die-hard eugenicist genealogies, show patterns of dependence and responsibility, and reveal class mobility across generations.

The development in Halperin's writings from straight ethnography and theory of cultural economics to a fusion of ethnography and fiction may be attributed to many factors, some shared with other white ethnographers who switched from fieldwork abroad to "home work" in the U.S., others highly personal. Among *The Teacup Ministry*'s protagonists is Halperin's alter ego Lauren, her mother, father, son, and several distant relatives. By submitting her own family to the ethnographic gaze, Halperin made a radical move: anthropologists had traditionally found their subjects far from home, among illiterate, pre-modern peoples. Using fictional techniques meant she could avoid reducing people she knew as complex individuals to the role of exemplars of a class culture. (It also allowed her to protect their identities.) Already in the 1998 East End study, Halperin had attempted to break the conventions of academic writing because it required her to turn friends into "informants" and "subjects." Edith Turner (discussed above) faced a similar problem, as did the anthropologist Kirin Narayan. In a short story titled "Partici-

[70] According to Daylanne K. English, Stein began working on this project, originally titled *Three Histories*, in 1903, soon after she gave up studying medicine. The stories of Anna, Lena, and Melanctha, "might well function as medical histories" (99). William Carlos Williams, who was a physician as well as a poet, also recognized the medical origin of *Three Lives*, for he called Melanctha "a thrilling clinical record" (Williams qtd. in English 99).

pant Observation," Narayan's narrator reflects on a South Asian woman she became close friends with during a field trip: "How could Padma, with her quick mind and vigorous opinions, ever be stuffed into the word 'informant'?" (41). In view of the problem posed by ethnographic representation, Halperin might have chosen fiction because it enabled her to write about cultural patterns, yet still portray friends and relatives as complex "round" characters.

Most of the stories in *The Teacup Ministry* are set on an island six miles off the New Jersey coast. Several Philadelphia and Cincinnati stories are so inconspicuously interspersed in the volume that on the reverse of the title page the University of Texas Press listed the catalogue categories for the book as "Working class – New Jersey – Case studies." The island has a heterogeneous population of old timers who live there the year round, new "summer people," and those who commute there from coastal towns to clean houses and work in service jobs. Some of the latter are islanders displaced by rising real estate prices. *The Teacup Ministry*'s dominant themes – class boundaries and friction, maintaining community, resistance to gentrification, multiple livelihood strategies, working-class creativity and vulnerability – echo the themes of Halperin's ethnographies. One story (probably based on her own family history) serves as an introduction, another as the "Epilogue." The eleven remaining stories are arranged in three thematic sections, each with its own theoretical "Prologue." The "Afterword" recapitulates the main concepts and themes. Several stories describe events that have special anthropological interest. "Sudden Death" explores the mourning rituals after the death of an elderly middle-class Jewish man. Marriage and gift-giving are the subjects of "A Bridal Shower." Meetings of a city council and its advisory group are described in "City Lines." In each case the focus is on a ritualized event that reveals how class boundaries are maintained and, occasionally, transgressed.

Halperin's imagined audience, in addition to middle-class teachers and students of anthropology, includes the "ethnographic subjects." To fellow anthropologists, Halperin demonstrates fiction's potential as an alternative way of knowing both self and other. To students of ethnography, she offers an original textbook of case studies for practicing their analytical skills before going out to do their own fieldwork. Since Halperin combined research with activism and insisted on long-term engagement, she knew many of her informants well and assumed they would read whatever she wrote, for it could have a direct impact on their lives. Like the testimony she gave in court and expert opinions she prepared for the Cincinnati City Hall, *The Teacup Ministry* served as an affidavit written on behalf of working-class people and addressed to yet another set of readers: middle-class city officials. Should the latter read *The Teacup Ministry*, they would find there unflattering reflections of themselves and the institutions they run.

In the history of anthropology, islands have played a key role; their cultures, threatened by modernity, were imagined as vanishing and thus in need of salvage (Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory" 112–113). The island in Halperin's topog-

raphy is emblematic of "a certain separateness" (6) and of cultural values that are losing ground to consumer capitalism. In the story "Beach Badges," the island is the locus of nostalgia, all the more understandable when we realize that Halperin defines herself as a "third-generation intellectual descendant" of Karl Polanyi, whose studies in the archaeology of economic systems build on Karl Marx's work (Halperin, *Economies Across Cultures* vii–viii).

> The island itself is a big sandbar, eighteen miles long and, at its widest, only a few blocks. Sparse vegetation – low cedars and bayberry bushes cluster now on the few empty lots. They used to grow in profusion but gradually have been replaced by manicured flower gardens. In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, the island belonged to the fishermen who cast their nets out into the ocean or took their boats out to sea. It was a precarious life, but one in which the local community, for most of the year, was left alone to claim the island. The island is still a beautiful place, but it is being taken over by 'summer people' from the cities. Oceanfront homes, most used only on summer weekends, sell for millions of dollars, and in some areas threatening signs with warnings like 'No beach access, owners and guests only' forbid outsiders to trespass. Some of these 'homes' look like hotels, they are so big and ornate, with turrets, marble floors, and swimming pools. Modest, humble dwellings are called 'tear-downs,' meaning that the person who buys the property should tear down the original old house and build a large new one. (7)

Gone are the Norwegian fishermen of the narrator's childhood. Gone are the "pineys" she describes as "unusual folk living in the dense mainland pine forests" who "were supposed to be scary for their disorganized lives and their potential violence" but whom she knew as decent, hard-working people (7–8). Gone is the rickety bridge that was almost level with the sound. Now the island is firmly linked to the coastal economy by an intimidating "gigantic span of concrete and metal high enough to let the tallest mast to pass under with ease" (6). The change registered in the landscape, and the cultural adaptations to that change, are the focus of the whole book. In the Cincinnati stories, the landscape shifts from seafront to riverfront but the problems are essentially the same for old-timers unable or unwilling to participate fully in the American economy (89–98).

Throughout the volume, Halperin seems to be saying: to those who obstinately cling to their "tear-downs" and their communal values "attention must be paid" (to borrow the words of Arthur Miller's Linda in *Death of a Salesman*). In story after story, Halperin counters the stereotypes of "pineys" (6) and "rednecks" (95) by depicting people who cherish a class culture that is the antithesis of the Kite's eugenicist description. In one story we meet Gina and her crew who clean the "summer people's" houses, managing as many as thirteen 'changeovers' on Saturdays between 11:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. Everyone on the crew has other jobs: driving, selling real estate, stocking supermarket shelves, or doing office work (12–14). Creative rather than cunning, Halperin's characters recycle old things, build their own houses (9, 30), decorate them (66–67, 70–77), and make meaningful personalized gifts (59–64). Instead of promiscuity, we get stories about long-term commitment, with or without marriage, and of people, young and old, who

put the welfare of family members above personal ambition. Paula looks after Buck who has multiple sclerosis; "she reschedules her work around his needs by restricting herself to low-paying part-time and flexible jobs" (19); a college student takes a long time to graduate because she wants to be "near Dad" who is in a wheelchair (128). The quick wit, intelligence, and tact of working-class people are foregrounded in almost all the stories. They are the true bearers of such all-American values as resourcefulness, hard work, self-reliance, spirituality, creativity, as well as devotion to family and community.

Because the information Halperin provides on the working-class characters is overwhelmingly positive, the epistemological problem of "gossip," which I pointed out in the work of Wolf and Turner, ostensibly seems not to apply to *The Teacup Ministry*. Thus, as readers we do not immediately ask ourselves how the narrator came to know what she knows. This, however, is not the case with the stories about the middle class, which are rife with gossip. Admittedly, most fiction writers do not hesitate to "gossip" about human vices and family secrets; in fact, fiction is often valued for engaging with vices and secrets. What is different about "gossip" in Halperin's fiction is that in order for her ethnographic allegory to work she can only attribute "pathology" to one of the tribes.

In "The Bridal Shower" we encounter a classic "tangle of pathology," as dense as that diagnosed by Daniel P. Moynihan among poor urban Blacks in the 1960s.[71] We find ourselves reading about secrets revealed by Sophia, "a close friend of the family" that is the subject of the story. The "gossip" includes: a loveless marriage between a "bright young physician" and a social climber who "schemed" to "catch" him; interfering in-laws; chains of divorces; naughty children locked in basements and threatened with being strapped to chairs, who later attempt suicide or become chain smokers; children with attention deficit disorder who cannot seem to please their parents – the litany goes on. At one point the narrator makes us privy to information we simply should not have access to: "Once, in a confidential conversation with his sister-in-law several year before the divorce, Robert lamented Judy's dependency on her parents" (104). That the "pathology" is not restricted to the one extended family gathered at a particular bridal shower becomes apparent when we encounter other middle-class characters in other stories. For instance, in "The City House" Lauren describes the neighbors she grew up among in suburban Philadelphia. She points out the house of Penelope and Herbert, whose dog "always seemed to receive more attention than the children," and whose daughter "at the age of forty-five is morbidly obese and jobless" (50). In the now vacant house across the street lived

[71] In *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), Daniel P. Moynihan held up poor urban Black families to the white middle-class norm and found them severely wanting. Focusing on female-headed households, absent fathers, and illegitimacy rates, he defined the Black community as "a tangle of pathology." Halperin, in turn, pathologizes the white middle-class.

Lauren's best friend Darcy, whose mother bleached her hair (a sign of phoniness?) and whose brother "could never succeed at school" but "drove a Corvette" (51).

The "pathology" Halperin discloses in middle-class homes is not accidental or genetic: apparently it is a pattern produced by middle-class culture which emphasizes individualism and upward mobility. The "Epilogue: Shoobies Go Home" drives this point home with a vengeance. This first-person narrative opens with a poem apparently written by a young working-class woman about the "day trippers" (called "shoobies" on the island). By stepping aside and allowing an "indigenous" woman to provide the conclusion to her volume of stories, Halperin seems to fulfill the ideal of postmodern ethnography. When considered as analogous to William Carlos Williams's "To Elsie," this poem acquires a new dimension:

> I hate their noise and bratty children.
> Let them scream like gibbons in the zoo.
> They think they own my space, my ocean, my bay, my island that
> I've loved from childhood.
> Their cars pierce the silence of my peace
> My dog barks when they tease her
> She understands
> They play intensely – tennis racquets, jet skis that sound like
> Mosquitoes buzzing in your ear at night, sail boats –
> But ignorantly.
> Slam! goes the boat's bow… (124–125)

Two features firmly link this poem with Williams's "To Elsie": the form of the long, breathless rant and the theme of being beleaguered or displaced by a hostile element (though in this case it is the "piney" who is being displaced by the rootless middle-class "shoobies"). But whereas Williams's ranting intellectual recognizes that "they" reveal a vital truth about "us" – perhaps "they" even really are "us" – the young woman's poem, and *The Teacup Ministry* as a whole, insists on the allegory of two agonistic classes or "tribes." I would, therefore, suggest that Halperin engages in a form of ventriloquism: the "indigenous" voice authenticates and validates her allegory. Within this allegory there are no villains, for the acquisitive and individualistic "shoobies" are portrayed as victims of their middle-class cultural training. There are, however, heroes, like James Strong, the 78-year-old community leader who gazes despondently at his shrinking neighborhood like the aged Indian chiefs photographed by ethnographers in the age of westward expansion.

Halperin's allegory requires a mediator, someone who knows the customs of both "tribes" and can help James Strong protect the neighborhood "he worked to preserve and revitalize for most of his adult life" (94). As a fiction writer, Halperin may have erased the ethnographer from *The Teacup Ministry* and stepped into the modest role of Lauren (daughter, mother, pediatrician), yet by creating an allegory in which "outsiders … don't know the perils experienced daily by the com-

munity people" and do not "understand the river or the community the way residents do" (92) she has made herself indispensable.

Halperin did work indefatigably on behalf of the East Enders for many years, and promoted the idea of long-term research projects combining ethnography with advocacy. She died on April 9, 2009, a day after delivering a lecture on "Long-Term Field Work as Memoir" in Calgary ("Rhoda Halperin 1946–2009"). My reading of *The Teacup Ministry* as an allegory is not intended to depreciate the value of her life's work but to problematize the assumption that ethnographic fiction allows the anthropologist to transcend the limitations of traditional ethnography, which keeps self and other in separate boxes. The message underlying Halperin's ethnographic fiction is the same message that generations of ethnographers writing about small faraway places have tried to convey to readers back home: here is a culture that deserves respect and protection. Also like her forerunners, Halperin implies that the values and lifeways of the people she studied could be used to critique mainstream American culture – a culture that breeds social climbers, conspicuous consumers, adults incapable of parenting, neighbors incapable of empathy, and city officials blinded by class stereotypes.

Contemporary literary critics and theorists of anthropology set high hopes on literature as a site where the self may encounter the other and thus be transformed. According to Clifford Geertz, the conscious use of literary language can revitalize ethnography provided that writers do not start using "verbal seduction" to "move intellectual goods in a competitive market" and audiences do not end up believing that ethnography is simply "a good read" (*Works and Lives* 142). Though these are very real risks, Geertz believes they are "worth running because running them leads to a thoroughgoing revision of what it is *to open (a bit) to the consciousness of a group of people to (something of) the life-form of another, and in that way to (something of) their own*" (143, emphasis mine). Derek Attridge, in turn, argues that literature can have a similar effect: by exposing writers as well as readers to the other (understood as that which is singular, surprising, irreducible to a single meaning), literature can potentially unsettle habitual patterns of thinking and lead to the "*remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer the other*" (24, emphasis mine).

As the three literary examples discussed in this chapter suggest, writing literature does release anthropologists from the objectivity requirement and allow them to explore such issues as their subjects' and their own spirituality, as well as their own positioning in relation to their subjects and readers. Since anthropologists can no longer assume the legitimacy of their specialized ways of knowing, and since they increasingly work among people who are likely to read what they write, fiction has become an important site for self-reflection. Fiction makes room for recollections of singular events that elude clear-cut explanations, and for representing complex characters who do not simply act out cultural patterns. Wolf's "The Hot Spell" and Turner's "When Jimmie Nashnik Was Lost in the Tundra"

exemplify the contemporary literary aesthetics of fragmentariness, open-endedness, and ambiguity. The narrators formulate hypotheses about the events they witness, and struggle to confirm them, but use self-irony to gently satirize their own efforts. The stories give us insights into the banal aspects of ethnographic research such as "gossiping" with informants and "getting down and behind people, learning as many details about their lives, about their intentions, their techniques and ways" (Turner 28). Such glimpses of "participant observation" raise new questions about the epistemology of traditional or "realist" ethnographies. Perhaps most importantly, in autobiographical fiction the anthropologist meets herself as other, as a character on a page whose words and acts become defamiliarized along with those of her ethnographic subjects.

But literature by anthropologists is not inevitably characterized by singularity and openness to the surprising other that Attridge values; neither are all anthropologists ready to relinquish control. "Dialogic and constructivist paradigms tend to disperse or share out ethnographic authority," James Clifford warned in *Predicament of Culture*, "while narratives of initiation confirm the researcher's special competence" (133). Wolf's story about her own initiation into professional ethnography, though self-reflexive, works hard to demonstrate her ability to overcome the initial bafflement and "read" Taiwanese culture, the ending notwithstanding. Halperin's stories, dialogic as they appear, only include characters and events that support the author's theories about working- and middle-class American cultures. The resulting allegory is further reinforced by the theoretical prologues and afterword, through which Halperin reasserts the interpretive authority she provisionally renounces in the stories. Of the three authors, only Turner earnestly attempts to abandon academic authority, as much in the story as in the essay that frames it. Instead of reenacting the old allegory of the anthropologist as a mediator between two "tribes," this story collapses the distinctions between the modern and the pre-modern, the spiritual and the pragmatic; neither the Western self nor the Eskimo other are immutable, culturally discrete subjects. Whether the anthropologist renounces or reasserts her ethnographic authority, opens up to the singular and unpredictable or continues to focus on cultural patterns, makes her prose dialogic or uses ventriloquism is an authorial decision, not an inevitable consequence of choosing fiction.

Chapter 3

Queer ways of knowing islands: O.A. Bushnell

> There can be no recognition of my life being like another's life except through the specific social norms that allow certain populations to emerge as living beings and others to be considered as non-living, or as only partially living, or as threats to the living. We cannot be dependent on already existing and established norms of recognition if we are to try and expand our understanding not only of who deserves to live, whose lives are worth protecting, but more fundamentally, whose lives count as lives, and whose lives are finally grievable.
>
> Judith Butler, "Frames of War"

After his 1866 visit to Hawai'i, Mark Twain conceived an idea for a novel. According to literary critic Stephen Sumida, rather than a rollicking satire, it was to be a work of historical fiction contrasting an idyllic view of the islands with "the unvarnished truth" (Twain qtd. in Sumida, "Reevaluating" 589). The protagonist was to have been based on the biracial Hawaiian lawyer William Ragsdale, who had greatly impressed Twain in Honolulu. The fact that several years later, at the peak of his career, Ragsdale contracted leprosy and was exiled to a "leper colony" on the island of Molokai made him particularly interesting to Twain; the idea of a gifted man's "suffering and presumably death by a loathsome disease in a supposed paradise" had even greater literary potential (Sumida, "Reevaluating" 596). Analyzing Twain's references to this novel made over the course of some twenty years, Sumida suggests several reasons why the project never materialized. The four months Twain spent in Hawai'i may have left him insecure about his ability to render the context without resorting to clichés. The prospect that readers would find the subject of leprosy repellent may have induced him to suppress it. Twain may also have felt daunted by Hawaiian racial politics which were quite distinct from those of the American South (597–599). Finally, work on the novel may have been impeded by Twain's ambivalent attitude towards both Hawaiian religious practices and the imposition

of Christianity (601–602). Fred W. Lorch and others have suggested that the unwritten novel may have mutated into *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, with Arthurian knights supplanting Hawaiian warriors. If so, then Ragsdale, leprosy, and race dropped out of the picture.

The time when race and leprosy could be inserted back into the picture did not come until almost a century later. Only then was O.A. Bushnell[72] able to imagine an American audience receptive to – and possibly even grieving for – someone like Ragsdale and other "unfit" characters on an island falling off the edge of the horizon. Twain may have had trouble producing a satisfactory extended narrative about Hawai'i because he continued to valorize the romantic notion of an "uncontaminated" Hawaiian culture over the "contaminated" one he had actually observed. Bushnell reversed these values in his 1963 novel *Molokai.* Setting the action in the years 1884–1885, he envisioned a world of collapsing oppositions – modern vs. primitive, Christian vs. pagan, white vs. brown bodies, healthy vs. diseased bodies, normative vs. queer sexuality – a world which Twain had actually witnessed but for which he had clearly been unable to find an appropriate literary form.

For a piece of middlebrow rather than high modernist fiction, *Molokai* has a very unusual structure[73]: the story of about six months in the life of a community of exiles diagnosed with leprosy is told three times over, by three narrators who arrive on the island of Molokai on the same boat. All three narratives are retrospective internal monologues. Although they do not fully overlap, they cover most incidents from at least two perspectives. The first lens is that of Doctor Newman,[74] a European bacteriologist, who intends to find out how leprosy is transmitted. The two other lenses belong to newly-diagnosed patients: Malie, a young native Hawaiian noblewoman, and Caleb,[75] a native Hawaiian lawyer whose green

[72] O.A. (Ozzie) Bushnell (1913–2002) was a third-generation Hawaiian of Portuguese and Norwegian descent. He attended the University of Hawai'i, and, after serving in the military during WWII, he went on to do graduate work in microbiology at the University of Wisconsin. On returning to Hawai'i, he was hired by the Territorial Board of Health and later taught at the University of Hawai'i. As a writer, Bushnell alternated between historical fiction and epidemiological history of Hawai'i.

[73] According to Sumida, Bushnell claimed never to have read Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* or *Light in August* but "such a technique [multiple narrators, limited point o view] comes naturally to a writer raised in a society characterized by the coexistence of different cultures and points of view, where, too, one is aware (as Twain and Faulkner knew), that what the outside world thinks of this locale is at odds with what the local people know" (*And the View from the Shore* 192).

[74] Based on John Tayman's reconstruction of the history of the Molokai "colony," I assume that Doctor Newman is a composite character based on several historical figures: Nathaniel Bright Emerson (118), Arthur Albert Mouritz (129), and Eduard Arning (133–135, 145–147).

[75] Caleb Forrest appears to be a composite based on several historical figures, including William Ragsdale and Ambrose Hutchinson, two of the better-educated residents of the Molokai settlement who left copious records. According to Tayman, "Ragsdale offered different versions of this story over the years" to writers and journalists (344); these archival materials and the records kept by another potential prototype for Caleb, Ambrose Bierce, would have been available to Bushnell.

eyes are the legacy of a white ancestor. Much of the time, the three lenses focus on the Hawaiian farmer Keanu,[76] who has chosen to be the subject of Newman's leprosy experiment rather than be hanged for having committed a crime of passion. The three internal monologues can be read as a record of participant observation in a community whose daily practices have evolved out of reusable scraps of various cultures to accommodate progressive disability and death. By gradually moving the reader from the position of the recalcitrant outsider (Newman) to the position of outsider/insider in the process of acculturation (Malie, Caleb), Bushnell attempted to change his reader's perception of cultural contamination, physical monstrosity, disability, and sexual difference.

Relatively unknown on the mainland, *Molokai* is recognized as a classic text in Hawai'i. Though Sumida only provides a synopsis of *Molokai* in his study *And the View from the Shore* and does not analyze it, he pronounces it to be "the kind of serious, complex, and mature literature of Hawai'i that Twain evidently tried to pioneer a century earlier" ("Reevaluating" 609). Significantly, unlike the "native ethnographer" in Naylor's *Mama Day*, whose writing was rejected by the "home folks," Bushnell, though white and trained on the mainland, is a much appreciated "native son," whose fiction still plays a modest cultural role in Hawai'i.

Molokai was originally brought out by The World Publishing Company (once North America's largest Bible publisher), and reprinted twice by the University of Hawai'i Press (in 1975 and 1998). That a Bible publisher initially took an interest in the novel can be explained by the fact that one of the characters is the historical Father Damien/Joseph De Veuster,[77] a Catholic missionary who worked and died of leprosy on Molokai. Several religious systems collide in the text and ethical dilemmas account for much of the tension. Both Malie and Caleb are drawn to

[76] From Tayman's research it is clear that Keanu was a historical figure (133–134, 153–154). However, the real Keanu was almost thirty years older than his fictional counterpart when he was sentenced to death, and Dr. Eduard Arning experimented on him in a Honolulu leprosarium, not on Molokai.

[77] The Belgian priest Father Damien/Joseph De Veuster (1840–1889) was a member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1995, he was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009. Although he spent only eight years on Molokai, as Penny Moblo points out, his figure dominates most accounts of the "leper colony's" 100-year history. In a meticulously researched article, Moblo argues that Father Damien has been the subject of concerted mythmaking, as much by the Catholic church as by lay Europeans and Americans fascinated by his figure. In order to create a heroic, superhuman, saintly figure, generations of authors reduced the native Hawaiians to the role of lethargic children in need of a father, or victims of neglect in need of saving. "The Damien myth allows a telling of history that, by depoliticizing the loss of native autonomy and economic control, renders it palatable. One heroic death establishes white charity as a 'fact,' distorting a past that involved depriving the Hawaiian of self-rule and property" (Moblo 717). Bushnell constructs Father Damien as an ambiguous character, whom the three narrators variously view as a non-entity, a fraud, or an inspiring role model.

Father Damien, though Caleb only embraces Father Damien's humanistic ethic without committing himself to Catholicism. Appropriately for a novel about human abjection and suffering, *Molokai* closes on Easter Sunday in Father Damien's church. However, the story's climax actually takes place a little earlier, on Good Friday, and involves a white man's conversion from repressive – "civilized" – sexual norms to a traditional Hawaiian understanding of sexuality. If the novel is interested in effecting a conversion in the reader, it is not to Christianity but to a non-normative understanding of sexuality. It thus inscribes itself in a tradition of Western ethnographic writings about the Pacific that propose alternatives to Western social norms.

Underlying *Molokai* is the old liberal idea that discrimination is a matter of ignorance and that it takes place on a person-to-person level; it can therefore be eradicated by helping people to recognize their prejudices. There is no room for considerations of systemic/institutional inequality or collective action; the very policy of exiling people diagnosed with leprosy is never explicitly questioned (though as a microbiologist Bushnell must have recognized it as pointless). Yet, as this chapter should demonstrate, *Molokai* is more than a bizarre, campy, middlebrow historical novel. It is worth reading because it intelligently engages a wide range of problems central to contemporary critical race, disability, and queer studies. I address these problems below in terms of three "encounters."

The myth of the "first encounter," extensively discussed by contemporary historians of anthropology, is grounded in a modern exoticist fascination with discovering ever new societies that have had no previous contacts with Western culture. By studying pre-contact "primitive" societies, early anthropologists hoped to reconstruct the roots of their own "civilization." Travel to remote tropical islands thus functioned as vicarious time travel. Arriving where no white person had presumably set foot before, anthropologists understood their mission as one of "salvage." Although their very presence compromised the assumed pristine purity of the "primitive" culture, that presence was justified by the mission to produce a textual/material/photographic/phonographic record of the culture before it "vanished" through the inevitable contact with modernity. The "first encounter" between white westerners and Hawaiians occurred in the eighteenth century, and was followed by countless belated "first encounters," which dramatically transformed life in the archipelago. By the time Bushnell wrote *Molokai*, Hawai'i had become a palimpsest of encounters motivated by exploration, trade, fishing, commercial crop production, colonization, missionary work, and tourism. I use the trope of "encounters" as a way of drawing attention to three inextricably entwined kinds of difference with which Bushnell confronts the mainland (or mainstream) American reader. (That monolithic mainland reader is, of course, as far-fetched as the myth of the "first encounter.")

First encounter: racial and cultural difference

While *Molokai* is patterned on conventional realistic fiction, with elements of naturalism and romantic melodrama, it enters into a dialogue with ethnography if only because it is set in Polynesia, a region that was heavily textualized by amateur ethnographers since the eighteenth century. "From the time that Captain Cook returned from Tahiti," anthropologist George W. Stocking explains, "the focal ganglion of European primitivistic longing was the islands of the 'South Seas,' where handsome brown-skinned natives led untroubled lives, finding sustenance in the fruit of palm trees under which they made free and easy love" (Stocking, *Ethnographer's Magic* 307). Academic ethnographers took little interest in Hawai'i because, as a stopping point on many trade routes and a magnet for missionaries and sugar cane planters, the islands had become racially and culturally "contaminated." More isolated archipelagoes, where intercultural contacts had not been as intense, passed for primitive island Edens much longer than Hawai'i: Bronisław Malinowski made his name in Papua New Guinea in the 1910s; Margaret Mead chose American Samoa for her fieldwork in the 1920s. The one Hawaiian theme that continued to attract academics until the 1990s was the well-documented moment of "first encounter" between white explorers and "natives." Interpretations of Captain Cook's 1778 landing on the island of Maui – his initial adulation and subsequent dismemberment by the alleged cannibals – still have scholars up in arms today, as they attempt to understand "how natives think."[78] But while professional anthropologists sought their "vanishing primitive" in a bygone era, writers of popular ethnography continued to find it in Hawai'i well into the twentieth century. A critical survey of travel narratives and tourist guidebooks from the first half of the twentieth century yields a reservoir of images of the islands as "safely exotic" that could be absorbed by American culture emerging from the Victorian era. "As Americans embraced more sensuous and sexual forms, the producers of popular culture looked out to 'exotic' and 'primitive' cultures … The hula, from the 1910s to the 1930s on the mainland, stood for exotic sexuality; Hawai'i itself

[78] *How Natives Think* was the title of Lucien Lévy Bruhl's once influential – now infamous – anthropological study emphasizing radical cultural difference. Its English translation was published in 1925. Half a century later, reading between the lines of half a dozen accounts by Cook and his contemporaries, Marshall Sahlins attempted to reconstruct "how natives think," while his adversary, Gananah Obeyesekere, followed suit with a study of Cook's frail mental state on his last voyage, and accused Sahlins of giving academic legitimation to a Western myth of Cook's apotheosis by the natives. According to Obeyesekere, such an understanding of Cook's death is only possible because Sahlins believes Hawaiians to be wholly determined in their thoughts and actions by a single set of mythical beliefs and practices. To counter this view, Obeyesekere extracted evidence from the same historical records to show that Hawaiians held many beliefs about the nature of deity that cannot be reduced to a single rigid mythical system, and that they were fully capable of reasoning and improvising in the face of unprecedented events. More recently, Victor Li published an extensive critique of Sahlins's vision of cultures as coherent and internally undifferentiated structures.

came increasingly to stand for romance" (Bailey and Farber 643). A typical brochure from the 1930s advertised Hawai'i as the place "where centuries ago the pagan made 'care' and 'must' taboo" (643).[79]

Bushnell, too, had been attracted to the drama of the "first encounter" and in 1956 had proposed his own fictional reconstruction of the events in *The Return of Lono*, narrated by a young English seaman from Captain Cook's ill-fated flagship *Resolution*.[80] Upon the "first encounter," Hawai'i is an appropriately idyllic setting for the young seaman's love affair with a native princess. Though clouds eventually gather and the affair is cut short, the first encounter with innocence and savagery leaves a lasting impression. In writing this novel Bushnell followed the traditional anthropological interpretation of Cook's death (his Cook, a sophisticated and heroic explorer, is deified by savages, who turn against him when they see his human frailty). Yet, the young narrator exposes a series of abuses perpetrated by the English that led up to the murder of Cook. As a white Hawaiian sensitive to cultural difference and the recent colonial past, Bushnell used the romantic young sailor's perspective to highlight the misinterpretations and imperialist assumptions that led Cook's crew to appropriate the local population's food supply and drain the village well to stock the ship, and finally to desecrate a shrine. As a bacteriologist, Bushnell additionally highlighted the spread of venereal diseases by the sailors.

Long after the Pacific had been mapped and colonized, Westerners continued to seek the thrill of the first encounter with innocence and savagery.[81] In his second novel, *Molokai*, Bushnell rendered the disappointment of some of those belated encounters. The German-trained Doctor Newman,[82] who has volunteered for a job in Hawai'i under the impression that he would be living in a primitive

[79] For further reading on ethnographic representations of the Pacific, see Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawai'i*; Jane C. Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World*, Jane C. Desmond, "Picturing Hawai'i: The 'Ideal' Native and the Origins of Tourism, 1880–1915" and Jeffrey Geiger, *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the U.S. Imperial Imagination*.

[80] For a detailed discussion of Bushnell's *Lono*, see Sumida, *And a View from the Shore* (164–225).

[81] Contemporary popular novels, such as Kathleen Ann Goonan's science fiction *The Bones of Time*, whose central drama takes place in Hawai'i in 2034, resuscitate the trope of the "first encounter" and the romantic myth of the "noble savage." Though Goonan equips her "noble savages" with extraordinary mathematical skills and cutting-edge technology that makes time travel possible, she implies that those skills are somehow innate, as is the Hawaiians' intuitive capacity for navigation by the stars. Instead of being decimated and marginalized, her native Hawaiians, strong in their indigenous community, break through time/space barriers to navigate the metauniverse. I thank Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska for drawing my attention to this novel.

[82] A comparison between Newman's narrative and Bronisław Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* yields eerie parallels, though Bushnell could not have read the *Diary*, published four years after *Molokai*. Perhaps disenchantment, irritation with the "natives," hypochondria, boredom, and the desire to escape the present by devouring Western literature were shared by many white men in the tropics during the colonial era. Bushnell, who published the biography of Dr. Eduard

Eden, is repelled by the country's hybrid culture marked by a century of international commerce and foreign settlement. In a letter home, he dismisses Honolulu as "a village so new that it has no history [and] sprawls like a pimpled adolescent beside the dirty pond its people call a harbor." He scoffs at its western-style buildings as inauthentic (as if elsewhere architecture were not imitation with a difference). "Palaces of princes spring from coral reefs, where the stinking seaweed has not yet had time to dry; and between them clapboard cottages and grog shops and churches – so many churches! – are rising to milch the commoners" (12). An episode of sharing a house with a man he views as a "savage" leaves him bored and frustrated. *Molokai*, however, unlike *The Return of Lono*, goes beyond the theme of white men's encounters with the "other," to imagine what it may have felt like to *be* "other," living in a bastard culture, and bearing the consequences of colonialism.

Malie, whose narrative follows Newman's, speaks as a native informant and often uses the plural pronoun "we," as in the scene of the departure for Molokai: "In sorrow we touched for the last time our loved ones, received for the last time their kisses, bent our heads for their blessings, placed upon us with their *leis*" (190). Much of the time she is absorbed by communal events such as porch-sitting, visiting, teaching school, and singing. By contrast, the third narrator, Caleb, speaks as a westernized Hawaiian, whose ironic distancing from the community suggests there can be no homogenous "Hawaiian perspective." Each of the three narrators has privileged access to some spaces and is excluded from others. It is through Malie's eyes that readers see the celebration of the King's birthday, an event that brings the residents of the colony out for a parade, a feast, and fireworks. Newman, in his self-imposed isolation, misses the event entirely. Caleb attends but leaves early, unable to pay homage to the State which has cast him out.

Malie's and Caleb's narratives also include encounters with the supernatural. Caleb has an unnerving face-off with the ghosts of his ancestors, which he cannot explain away using the language of rationality. Both Malie and Caleb recall their respective visits to the forest witch or *kahuna* to seek advice, but whereas Malie is deeply moved and acts on the advice she receives, Caleb is put off by the *kahuna*'s artificial manner, crooked wig, and money bowl. The ontological status of the supernatural events remains uncertain, yet Bushnell signals that Malie and Caleb share a cultural memory that is unavailable to Newman.

In its treatment of race and culture as fluid and contextual *Molokai* was ahead of its time, for the postcolonial debate about the racial and cultural difference was just beginning. Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Brazil-Maru* (see Chapter 6), which resembles *Molokai* thematically and structurally, was not published till the 1990s. No less importantly, *Molokai* affirms racial hybridity and cultural syncretism – concepts closely related to contamination.

Arning in 1967, must have read his journal and other archival materials related to his leprosy research in Hawai'i and used them several years earlier to construct the figure of Doctor Newman.

Second encounter: disease and disability

Molokai also affirms illness, and accords it the central role it has played in Hawaiian history. Leprosy (also known as Hansen's disease) was one of many diseases that Hawaiians contracted in encounters with foreigners. Although it affected fewer people than other imported diseases, such as syphilis and tuberculosis, in the 1860s it came to be perceived as a threat to the healthy body of the newly united Hawaiian nation, and, in the 1890s, with the annexation of the islands by the U.S., as a threat to the American nation (Moran 47–73; Moblo 697). Consequently, for over 100 years, from 1865 to 1969, Hawaiians diagnosed with leprosy were exiled by law to the state-operated "leper colony" of Kalaupapa on the island of Molokai. By all accounts, the Molokai colony was *not* designed as panopticon for the observation and disciplining of non-normative bodies. The state picked the island for its relative isolation, which made it useful for the removal and containment of what it did not wish to see. For decades, leprosy patients wrote letters protesting not against excessive surveillance but the near-absence of medical care and food supplies. Abandoned on a barren rock, they were expected to fend for themselves. By the late nineteenth century, due to negative publicity, Hawai'i came to be associated by most Americans with the dreaded disease – so much so that entrepreneurs who wanted to develop tourism in the islands and to tighten economic ties with the U.S. had to mount expensive PR campaigns (Tayman 216–219). A cure for leprosy was developed by the mid-1940s, but a handful of leprosy patients were still living in the Molokai settlement when Bushnell began his research for *Molokai*.

Bushnell was not the first to write fiction about leprosy in Hawai'i. Since its early days, the Molokai settlement had been haunted by literary celebrities and journalists in search of what disability studies scholar Rosemarie Thompson would call "extraordinary bodies." "There was clearly a market for writing about braving the hazards of the leper colony," writes historian Rod Edmond. "Like most modern travel writing, such work offered a frisson of apprehension and risk from the safety of the armchair" (Edmond 221). The San Francisco writer Charles Warren Stoddard stopped for several days at the Molokai settlement on his South Pacific travels. The experience provided material for the short story "Joe of Lahaina" published in the volume *South Sea Idyls* in 1873, and inspired a book-length biography of Father Damien. Robert Louis Stevenson, who visited Molokai in 1889, wrote a fanciful tale about leprosy titled "The Bottle Imp." His young wife Fanny Stevenson also published a "leper colony" story titled "The Half-White" based on the life of the same William Ragsdale, who would become the prototype for Bushnell's Caleb. Also Jack London found ample literary material in Molokai, as did the travel writer Paul Theroux. As Edmond points out, in the eyes of all these writers the Molokai settlement served as a figure of the culturally and racially contaminated Hawai'i, its innocence and primitive glory swept away by modernity

and imported disease. Stevenson turned the settlement into "a synecdoche … for the dying cultures of the Pacific" (230). For London, "Molokai became the burial ground for the Hawaiians" (233). Stoddard encapsulated Molokai in an apocalyptic vision in "Joe of Lahaina":

> I seemed to be looking into a fiery furnace wherein walked the living bodies of those whom Death had already set upon … Have you ever had such an experience? Then go in the midst of a community of lepers; have ever before your eyes their Gorgon-like faces; see the horrors hardly to be recognized as human, that grope about you; listen in vain for the voices that have been hushed forever by decay. (107–108)

Stoddard's *South Sea Idyls* is a series of lyrical farewells to the innocent and primitive Polynesia, a world he sees as irretrievably lost. "I shall never see little Joe again, with his pitiful face, growing gradually as dreadful as a cobra's, and almost as fascinating in its hideousness," says Stoddard's narrator (114). Like this narrator, the real-life celebrity visitors to Molokai came, saw, and sailed away, one after another, with a shudder of relief.

Unlike his predecessors, Bushnell did not reduce the "leper colony" to a trope for the vanishing primitive. Neither did he construct the disabled body as the ultimate, monstrous "other" from which one must inevitably turn or sail away. Although Doctor Newman does act out the Stoddardian script, he first experiences the fragility of his own body and complete dependence on others. The two other narrators do initially see Molokai as a macabre place and their exile there as a premature burial, but they come to accept living with disability as an ordinary state, one that does not preclude work, self-fulfillment, love, hate, murder, sex, having children, growing trees from orange pips, making coffins, and making music. Caleb struggles against his own sense of abjection by saying:

> The things which broke Hawaiians down were diseases of the flesh, not of their unconquered spirit. Look at them, even here, in this open tomb: living and laughing and loving, as they always do, and caring not a grain of sand about the fate of their souls. The thought of them made me proud to be one of them: they are mine, I said, lifting my head high. (510)

All exiles arriving on the island enter into new relations; forced to share the limited housing, they attempt to build surrogate families. Over time, they are altered by mutual dependency and by the precariousness of life on Molokai. Thus, Bushnell's 1960s revision of "leper colony" literature affirms the life of the disabled rather than mourning the end of a noble, primitive race.[83]

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[83] More recent literary tributes to the exiles of Molokai are Lois-Ann Yamanaka's novel *Blu's Hanging* (1998) and Alan Brennert's *Moloka'i* (2003). While Yamanaka explores the enduring sense of stigmatization experienced by former leprosy patients and their children, Brennert recycles the dramatic contrasts that so appealed to nineteenth-century writers. In a cover blurb, reviewer Robert Morgan ecstatically praises *Moloka'i* as "a haunting story of tragedy in a Pacific paradise. The book opens a window on a world of dazzling beauty, and ugly disease and fear, and the courage of a young woman in the Hawai'i of a hundred years ago. It is a story of romance and humanity, and struggle

By depicting Hawaiians as physically contaminated, Bushnell both tempted and taunted his readers with the spectacle of "extraordinary bodies." Analyzing the cultural function of circus side shows in the U.S., Thomson concluded that people of color, giants, midgets, Siamese twins and other human side-show exhibits, in addition to providing entertainment, served as reference points which enabled white mainstream Americans to construct normative identities. Assuming that Bushnell wrote for a mainland as well as a Hawaiian audience (he had already published *The Return of Lono* with Little, Brown & Co.), there was a danger that his representations of indigenous Hawaiians disfigured by leprosy might be viewed as side-show curiosities. To counteract readers' desire to read racial difference and leprosy as radically other, Bushnell developed several effective strategies. First and foremost, two of his three narrators are non-white and have been diagnosed with leprosy. As one of the narrators observes on entering the settlement, "My body was as a pebble upon the shore of Kalawao, compared with the number of bodies gathered there upon the plain. I was but one among many, and in the instant of seeing the many, I was made one with them" (200). It is through the narrators' eyes and from within their bodies that readers see both able-bodied and disabled people. Since virtually everyone in the segregated island community is also ill, physical deformity becomes normative and usually passes without comment. By contrast, the white doctor's healthy body appears abnormal: "Thin, fair, stoop-shouldered as a palm tree curved by the sea wind, he looked to us like the small baby shrimp, white and weak" (187). Given the length of the novel (539 pages), readers also have time to get accustomed to being in the constant presence of disability.

From a present-day disability studies perspective, the novel may be seen as problematic because it does, to some extent, use illness as "a test of moral character" – a literary strategy Susan Sontag critiqued in *Illness as Metaphor.* Even though diseases like tuberculosis or leprosy may no longer be viewed as a divine punishment for one's sins, she argued, they are still thought to "provide a redemptive death for the fallen … or a sacrificial death for the victim" (Sontag 41). Some of Bushnell's characters do want to see illness as meaningful; others insist on its contingency. As a microbiologist, Bushnell was far from understanding leprosy as a punishment, yet like Novalis and Nietzsche, whom Sontag upbraids (31), he evidently found illness far more interesting than perfect health. He also used health crises fairly predictably, as climactic moments when learning takes place. What can be seen as redeeming about Bushnell's treatment of illness is that instead of individualizing the sufferer, a problem discussed at length by Sontag, illness serves as the glue of community. Parts of *Molokai* can therefore be read as a fictional ethnography of a community organized around disability and death.

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with the pain of isolation, in a place faraway in time, yet very close in intimacy and vividness, exact detail, giving us a sense of community and true kinship across time. It is a story of a victor."

Third encounter: non-normative sexuality

Bushnell's decision to explore non-normative sexuality in a South Pacific setting, like his engagement with leprosy, meant he had to stake out a position in relation to existing literature on the subject. In Hawai'i, the discourses of leprosy and non-normative sexuality have historically been intertwined because the rapid spread of the disease was attributed to Hawaiians' licentiousness.[84] For a long time leprosy was considered to be an advanced stage of syphilis. Although this medical theory was eventually discredited, the association of all sexual practices other than heterosexual marital relations with illness/pathology persisted and was reified when Western medicine and psychology made a systematic study of sexuality towards the end of the nineteenth century.[85] Eugenics policies adopted by some American states in the 1920s required the segregation and, in some cases, sterilization of the "unfit" – a capacious category that included the "deformed," "mentally deficient," "syphilitics," and "lepers," as well as "sexual deviants" like promiscuous women and homosexuals.

Because the Western discourse of non-normative sexuality was limited to "two forms – pornography or studies of psychological or social pathology," writes literary critic David Bergman, "authors had to move outside Euro-American culture, where they could write about homosexual relations as 'primitive' rather than as 'pathological.'" Many found academic and popular ethnography "a particularly attractive form of writing" since it tended to valorize sexual difference (Bergman n.p.). There was, in fact, a venerable western tradition of writing about hetero- as well as homoerotic encounters between Europeans and Pacific islanders: from eighteenth-century English sailors' accounts, through the fiction of Herman Melville and Pierre Loti, to the stories of Charles Warren Stoddard.

Pre-modern Hawai'i was particularly interesting for anthropologists because, according to Marshal Sahlins, sexual relations undergirded all Hawaiian economic and political relations, as well as being the key mode of mortals' commerce with the gods. Cook's men mesmerized European readers with tales of young Hawaiian women who were "exceedingly beautiful [and] used all their arts to entice our people into their Houses, and finding [the sailors] were not to be allured by their blandishments, they endeavoured to force them & were so importunate they would absolutely take no denial" (Samwell qtd. in Sahlins, *Islands* 2). Alongside exuberant heterosexual sex, western visitors to Hawai'i recorded numerous other cul-

[84] For a fascinating analysis of the intersection of the discourses of sexuality and leprosy, see Gregory Tomso's article "The Queer History of Leprosy and Same Sex Love." Tomso argues that Stoddard's appropriation of leprosy as an intellectual and aesthetic metaphor both constrained and enabled him to articulate sexual "desires that he otherwise might have concealed of disavowed" (748). In his search for a legitimate language of desire, Stoddard stretched "to the limits a long-standing Catholic tradition of seeing the mark of divine beauty in leprosy's disfigurement of the body" (747).

[85] See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

tural practices: "wife-capture as well as husband-capture, hypergamy as well as hypogamy, homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. Famous ruling chiefs were bisexual, but the preoccupation with sex was expressed as much in the virginity enjoined on certain young persons as the liberties granted to others" (Sahlins, *Islands* 10).

In the ethnographic imagination, Pacific islands became the places for studying "primitive" sexuality. Though missionaries had been persistent in imposing Western moral norms on indigenous peoples, even in the twentieth century the Pacific offered Westerners glimpses of sexual cultures sufficiently different from their own to warrant ethnographic research. Looking for solutions to what she perceived as a crisis in American girls' adolescence, Margaret Mead went to Samoa to study the socialization of girls into a "primitive" sexual culture. In the introduction to *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) she wrote:

> We [anthropologists] choose groups who have had tens of thousands of years of historical development along completely different lines from our own … From these contrasts, which are vivid enough to startle and enlighten those accustomed to our own way of life and simple enough to be grasped quickly, it is possible to learn many things about the effect of a civilization upon the individuals within it. (8)

Similarly, Bronisław Malinowski in *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929) represented the Trobrianders' practices as the exuberant antithesis of Judeo-Christian sexual norms. Both authors wrote extensively on child sexuality, extramarital sex, and same-sex relations.

The community Bushnell imagined in *Molokai* is exemplary of this Western fantasy in terms of the variety of non-normative desires allowed expression (though some of the practices are systematically concealed from the community's more pious Christians). Few people in the settlement are too young or too old to be sexual. Young adolescents are erotically initiated and make overtures to adults. An older woman named Tutu, whom some dismiss as a doddering grandmother, talks unashamedly about her own and other people's sexuality, and eventually remarries. A woman named Emma is mentioned several times as a "wife to many," who comforts lonely men without expecting payment, unlike the colony's regular prostitutes. Conversely, there are two stories of polygamy in which men competing for the same woman end up living amicably in threesomes (at least for a time). One of the more intriguing secondary characters is an uninfected man named Momona, who came to the island to take care of his exiled male lover Peter Kaeo[86] and remained there after the lover's death. At the end of the novel, the narrator Caleb becomes the caregiver of the adolescent boy Eleu, whom he has come to love, and whom leprosy has left blind. Even Father Damien's caressing touch

[86] Peter Kaeo was a historical figure, one of the few Hawaiian aristocrats to submit to exile in the early years of the Molokai colony as a way of setting a good example. He maintained a lively correspondence with Queen Emma, through which he attempted to publicize the inhuman treatment of patients in the colony – a situation the government attempted to cover up.

when he changes the dressings on his patients' wounds is more than the efficient touch of a nurse: the Christian love it is meant to convey is subtly eroticized. To use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terms, a large number of the relations represented in *Molokai* are homosocial if not overtly homoerotic, even if such relations remain unconsummated.[87] Although the only act of lovemaking explicitly described in the text is a heterosexual one (between young adults who eventually marry), for a novel edited by the largest Bible publisher in the U.S., *Molokai* contains a great deal of erotically-charged material.

Yet it is not the occasional peeks at a fictional sexual culture that make *Molokai* interesting as a queer text. Its novelty lies in the narrative structure, which allows Bushnell to align the reader's gaze with the gaze of each of his first-person narrators in turn. In Books I and III we are exposed to male gazes that might be interpreted as queer. Both belong to highly individualistic and self-reflexive men who declare romantic interest in women but are far more emotionally involved with each other and with other men. Wedged between these two narratives is Book II narrated by a heterosexual woman who expresses a strong communal identity.[88] In typographic terms, the woman's narrative keeps the men's narratives apart. In terms of the romantic plotting, Malie marries Keanu, Doctor Newman's object of desire, and makes herself unavailable to Caleb, who has been courting her half-heartedly, leaving him free to pursue other interests. Among them are the stimulating conversations with Momona, a musician, artist, and one-time male lover of Prince Kaeo. Towards the end of the novel, Newman and Caleb do have intense physical contact, as patient and nurse, a relation whose eroticism they both deny. The gendering of the novel's three-part structure might be usefully interpreted as a pre-identitarian early 1960s variant of Kosofsky Sedgwick's "erotic triangle" laid out in *Between Men*. A psychoanalytic exploration of *Molokai* is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

Bushnell's decision to use internal monologue seems significant: readers tend to identify more readily with narrator-protagonists than with the protagonists of third-person narratives. *Molokai*'s readers find themselves gazing at human bodies – brown and white, male and female – through the eyes of three characters whose sexuality is neither made explicit nor overtly thematized. The exercise of alternately identifying with and distancing oneself from the desires of all three narra-

[87] The terms "homosocial" and "homoerotic" derive from social science, but they were redefined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Her goal is "to draw the homosocial back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic [and] to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1–2).

[88] From a feminist perspective, Malie is an interesting and complex character, yet Bushnell's insistent association of this Hawaiian woman with folk culture, the earth, and pregnancy limit her agency in the novel. Feminist and queer studies critics would also be disappointed to find that while affirming male-male desire, Bushnell completely omitted lesbian sexuality and made Malie overtly homophobic, in contrast to Caleb, who instinctively likes the queer character Momona and helps the uncloseted Newman to overcome his self-loathing.

tors (constrained as they are by racism, sexism, and internalized homophobia), has the potential of unsettling readers' self-positioning in relation to the heterosexual norm. Arguably, *Molokai* raises some of the same questions Diana Fuss would ask in her 1991 introduction to *Inside/Out*:

> Questions of epistemology ('how do we know?') enjoy a privileged status in theorizations of gay and lesbian identity. How does one know when one is on the inside and when one is not? How does one know when and if one is out of the closet? How indeed does one know when one is gay? The very insistence of the epistemological frame of reference in theories of homosexuality may suggest that we *cannot* know – surely or definitively. Sexual identity may be less a function of knowledge than performance. (Fuss 6, emphasis in the original)

As readers of *Molokai*, we are exposed to queer ways of knowing[89] through characters who do not necessarily recognize them as such – which is precisely why, as critics, we may want to take an interest in the literature of past epochs. Although the title of this chapter suggests that "queer ways of knowing" is an identifiable category (presumably different from "straight" or "normative" or "dominant" ways of knowing), *Molokai* itself seems not to know what it knows and does not expect a recognition of its own queerness from us. For the moment we "recognize" Doctor Newman as a "closeted gay male" who initially denies and then acknowledges his desires (which we "disidentify" from or "identify" with) we step out of the novel's epistemological frame of reference and into an essentialist one developed by medical discourse, or an identitarian one shaped by decades of American political activism. What the novel apparently wants is to absorb readers, regardless of their sex and sexuality, into an imaginary way of knowing and experiencing human relations.

For instance, both Newman and Malie describe in minute detail their response to seeing the convicted murderer Keanu descending from a carriage just before sailing for Molokai. Newman initially sees him as noble savage, "a god among men":

> Proud and disdainful of us, he flaunted his health and his virility. In the haughty lift of his head, in the magnificence of his shoulders, taut against his prison shirt, in the flat hardness of his belly and the brazen bulge of his manhood, where the dungaree trousers divided to show the columns of his legs … naked as if he never knew the touch of clothes, the triumphant, unregenerate male. (47)

Quickly, however, Newman readjusts his response, reducing Keanu to human size or, more precisely to the status of "a superlatively handsome animal – exactly the animal I needed" (49). In the course of the 189 pages of his narrative, Newman repeatedly gazes at Keanu in this ambivalent way, performing the role of a scientist entitled to closely examine a "savage." Trained to see people of color as less than human and himself as an enlightened modern man, he does not acknowledge the eroticism of his own gaze (a "mis-recognition" the reader may share). Only in

[89] I would like to thank Tomasz Sikora for encouraging me to rethink queer ways of knowing in this chapter by asking such questions as: Do we really want (or should we expect) the reader to arrive at a "recognition" of Newman's queerness? Is that what the book "wants"? Would such "recognition" still be queer or would it rather be associated with the ideology of identity and coming-out?

Book II, when Malie describes her first glimpse of Keanu descending from the carriage, do we recognize that she shares with Newman an object of desire:

> We opened a way for him to pass among us to the waiting ship … I saw him the first time close to me the strong curve of his mouth, the arch of his nose, the fullness of his brow. At the open neck of the prison shirt I saw the smooth skin of his chest, where it met the column of his neck. I, who in my life had been given no chance at love, I felt the sudden stir in my blood as my eyes sought other evidences of his splendor and his manliness. (190)

Malie, too, immediately attempts to quell her desire by reminding herself that she is looking at a murderer. But observing Keanu furtively on the island on many occasions, she eventually gives full reign to her feelings and seeks him out. The "naturalness" of their mutual desire is underscored by the fact that their lovemaking always occurs in the bosom of nature – for instance, inside a volcanic crater. Interestingly, the novel does not at any point "denaturalize" Doctor Newman's desire for Keanu; it is his appropriation of the object of his desire – as an experimental "animal" – that is made to appear monstrous.

The queerness of Caleb's gaze also absorbs readers imperceptibly. He insists that he is familiar with the Honolulu brothels and becomes briefly infatuated with Malie, yet his strongest bonds of love and hate are with men. At the climactic point, when his narrative reaches fever pitch in a dream vision, readers find themselves awkwardly positioned on the ground, looking, through Caleb's eyes, up between the legs of a Hawaiian warrior-god:

> Ghosts, Night Marchers, Gods: they did not exist according to my belief. But now I myself had seen them. I had been close enough to one of them to see the dust upon his feet, the texture of the hair upon his legs. Peering from between his legs I had seen manifestations of that other world which once I denied. From his loins, it seems, I was born again into another world, a world unsubstantial and uncertain, as shifting as shadows yet full of awful might. Never would I forget the magnificence of those warriors … those flaming incorporeal Gods, and the majesty of their violence. (424)

What we as readers see from this peculiar position depends entirely on our willingness to perform the imaginative act with Caleb, who moves from naturalistic description in the first part of the passage to the figurative language that is "unsubstantial and uncertain, as shifting as shadows," leaving space for (but not forcing) an erotic fantasy.

Newman's narrative ends before Newman admits to himself or to anyone else that turning Keanu into an "experimental animal" and infecting him with a fatal disease had been an act of racial violence and, possibly, of displaced sexual violence.[90] It is only at the end of Caleb's Book III that Newman confesses, as best

[90] The graphic description of the procedure during which Doctor Newman infects Keanu with leprosy reads like a metaphor for sexual penetration: "On its first stroke the sharp blade cut open the satin skin. On the second it sliced the corium below. After the moment of affront, the small vessel poured their crimson protest into the neat and narrow wound. On the third stroke the knife opened the deep fascia holding the layers of the skin to the flesh below. There, in the space revealed, lay the folds and curves of the interwoven muscles I sought … There, on the exposed belly of the *musculus supinator radii longus*,

he can, in a language Caleb refuses to endorse: "I have sinned – and I am damned!" (512). At this point Caleb proceeds to give Newman absolution in the language of comparative ethnography:

> My people are more sensible: before the missionaries came, we did not have a word for sin. Did you know this? Right and wrong they recognized, and the different degrees of theft. These covered the same infringements as do all of the Christians' deadly sin, and almost none of the venial. And theft is so much more manageable a word than is sin. Sin has such a sinister sound. No one ever died of a 'sense of theft' among my native people … There are many ways of showing love. The love of a man for a woman is one, the love of them both for the child of their flesh is another. The friendship of a man for his comrade: is it not a great thing in your country, as it is in mine? The love of a man for another man: is this so much different? If this should happen, should love be changed from a virtue to a vice? … What is there to be afraid of in love? What are you Christians so afraid of, in this thing called love? (513–514)

Mouthing these clichés about Hawaiian culture to comfort the distraught Doctor Newman, Caleb feels like a fraud, "stretching a thought here, dropping a fact there, speaking with the persuasive tones of one who knows all the answers to all the world's mysteries" (513–514). Privately, Caleb is unable to embrace the view of Hawai'i as an erotic Eden free of the serpent and the avenging God. Recalling the warriors and priests of pre-contact Hawai'i he thinks: "I could ignore their violence for the sake of my rhetoric, in my role as physician to a physician … the black power of the *kahuna anaana*, the witch priest, who could terrorize a man to death. But I did it all for my patient's sake" (514). One could argue, then, that Bushnell deliberately undercuts the validity of "insider" cultural knowledge, showing such knowledge to be selective and contextual: produced for the benefit of a particular audience at a particular moment. In another context, and for a different purpose, Caleb might tell a story about a sexually repressive – rather than a liberated – Hawai'i. Like his understanding of Hawaiian sexual culture, Caleb's sense of his own sexuality remains "unsubstantial and uncertain, as shifting as shadows" (424), not because he *will* not "come out" but because he *cannot* know how he will respond to Malie, Newman, or a warrior-god until the moment arises.

Grievable lives

Scholars do not, as a rule, "undertake historical research in the absence of a set of animating concerns in the present," Ruth Frankenberg remarks in *Displacing White-*

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in the fossa lying between it and the *musculus flexor carpi radialis*, I carefully laid the leproma taken from Akala's cheek. It was larger than I wanted it to be: it was about the size of a pigeon's egg: but Keanu's big arm would encompass it … Closing the incision was an anticlimax …" (*Molokai* 117–118). Though Newman presents Keanu as a consenting participant in the act, the procedure must be interpreted as a form of rape. Newman legitimates the violation of Keanu's body by describing it in medical terms and insisting that there is no harm in sacrificing one life for the sake of many.

ness (3). We may therefore want to ask: what motivated the epidemiologist Bushnell in the early 1960s to embark on a project requiring arduous archival research on the century-old practice of excluding people with leprosy and the counterpractices developed by the excluded to survive on a barren island? Since the Molokai settlement was almost deserted by 1960 and leprosy practically eliminated on U.S. territory, Bushnell could not have in any way hoped to ameliorate the situation of people with leprosy by taking up their cause. Neither was he among the journalists and fiction writers for whom the leprosarium at Molokai was merely a side-show attraction of monstrously disfigured human bodies. What, then, were Bushnell's "animating concerns"? Critics have asked similar questions of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* – an anti-slavery novel published long after slavery was abolished. One compelling theory is that *Huckleberry Finn* was Twain's commentary on the failure of the Reconstruction to substantially change the social position of African Americans in the South. By analogy, *Molokai* can be read as voice of dissent from the oppressive normalcy of the 1950s (at the end of which Hawai'i became the 50th state). As a microbiologist, Bushnell must have been acutely aware of the fact that while leprosy had been eradicated locally, popular attitudes towards the "unfit" had hardly changed: fear and loathing might erupt again (as, indeed, they did during the AIDS epidemic).

The partly historical and partly imaginary Molokai allowed Bushnell to explore what might happen if the disabled and people of color became the majority, while the able-bodied whites – the anomalous minority. In a 1999 overview of the history of disability studies, Leonard J. Davis noted that "the use of the word *normal* in reference to physical bodies appears in English merely 150 years ago, coinciding with the birth of statistics and eugenics." Until then, the concept of "ideal" bodies was in use and "all bodies were less than ideal" (504). The expansion of the Molokai "leper colony" coincided with the rise of statistics and state policies to separate the "fit" from the "unfit" – eugenicist policies which would eventually culminate in the Holocaust. It would appear, then, that Bushnell embraced the island as a trope of the isolation of the abject, and a place where the virtual absence of the "normal" or, to use Garland Thomson's term, "normate" bodies displaces the norm.

Introducing the *MELUS Special Issue: Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature* in 2006, editors Jennifer C. James and Cynthia Wu pointed out that although there is ample scholarship on the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, immigrant and colonial subject status, "there is very little work that addresses the ways categories of race/ethnicity and disability are used to constitute one another or the way those social, political, and cultural practices have kept seemingly different groups of people in strikingly similar marginalized positions." Both people of color and the disabled were treated as "evolutionary laggards" and "targeted for experimentation and isolation" (4). Given the thematic focus of the *MELUS* issue, it is understandable that queer people are not mentioned, though they, too, have been confined to small spaces – more often closets than camps –

and experimented upon. While the theoretical tools for analyzing the intersections of various marginalized identities are only just being developed, I believe we need to acknowledge earlier attempts to theorize these intersections in non-academic genres like fiction. *Molokai*, which anticipates disability and queer studies, can be read as such an attempt.

What makes *Molokai* historically significant is that, like Irving Goffman's landmark sociological study *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity* published in the same year, it attempts to draw analogies between various types of pathologized or stigmatized identities and to question the norms in relation to which they are defined. Both works were written just before the eruption of three major emancipatory movements: Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and the gay and lesbian movement. In the late 1950s, non-essential identities were already thinkable,[91] while the emerging political movements had not yet begun to mobilize the stigmatized around the idea of stable, essential identities. Goffman distinguished three types of stigma constructed in relation to a "phantasmatic" norm: "abominations of the body – the various physical deformities," "blemishes of individual character" (including imprisonment, homosexuality, illegitimacy, and prostitution), and "tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion" (Goffman 4). Concluding his study of the way people experience and deal with stigmatization Goffman wrote:

> stigma involves not so much a set of concrete individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatized and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connection and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives. (138)

Although Bushnell cannot have been aware of Goffman's work, his writing is undergirded by similar ideas. He found the expansive form of the novel ideally suited to conveying the idea of difference as contingent and contextual. His protagonists define others – and find themselves defined – through a range of more or less visible stigmas, including various shades of brown skin, physical deformities and handicaps, ex-convict status, illegitimacy, homosexuality, prostitution, and old age. Confined to the island of Molokai, they begin to rethink who they are in relation to others on whom they depend and who depend on them. This seems to be the kind of work Judith Butler is asking us to do in the epigraph: "to try and expand our understanding not only of who deserves to live, whose lives are worth protecting, but more fundamentally, whose lives count as lives, and whose lives are finally grievable" (n.p.). Of course, there is a fundamental difference between griev-

[91] The American school of anthropology started by Franz Boas at the beginning of the twentieth century had pioneered the idea that race is neither an essence nor a useful predictor of human character traits or capacities. Awareness of the Holocaust further discredited scientific racism. Sexuality, too, could be interpreted as much more fluid after Alfred C. Kinsey published his two path-breaking studies of human sexuality: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).

ing for innocuous fictional others and for real-world others whom Butler actually had in mind – those we fear or feel threatened by, those we watch without flinching as they die in television newsreels. Yet grieving for fictional characters should not be lightly dismissed as sentimental, for literature is a site where "established norms of recognition" (Butler) are continually being reworked.

Chapter 4

Islands of multiculturalism

> The back of Jamaican Barbie's box tells us …'How you do (hello) from the land of Jamaica, a tropical paradise known for its exotic fruit, sugar cane, breathtaking beaches, and reggae beat.' The box goes on to explain that most Jamaicans have ancestors from Africa. Therefore, 'even though our official language is English, we speak patois, a kind of Jamaica Talk, filled with English and African words.' The lesson ends with a brief glossary (eight words) and a few more examples of this 'Jamaica Talk,' complete with translations: "A hope you wi com-a Jamaica! (I hope you will come to Jamaica!) and 'Tek care a yusself, mi fren'! (Take care of yourself, my friend!)."
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> Ann duCille, "Dyes and Dolls," p. 556

> The fantasy of multiculturalism's practitioners depends on [the] parallel movement of more equitable representation and resources: to win ears and minds in the space of our imagined communities, to gain the bread and the land for those living in the landscapes of our real neighborhoods … those who have written literature in its era have noticed an altogether different movement, one in which the work of representing race differently, the work of crossing lines, has not resulted in the work of redistributing resources. In many ways, it has not helped to break down walls, but has instead helped to build them higher.
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> James Kyung-Jin Lee, *Urban Triage*: *Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*, p. xiv

This chapter examines the context for the rise, since the 1970s, of a vibrant sector of multicultural literature: fiction by women who immigrated to the United States from Caribbean and Pacific islands. For reasons that are explained below, much of this fiction is "loosely autobiographical,"[92] constructed around an individual's

[92] Julia Alvarez used the term "loosely autobiographical" with reference to her own prose in "A Note on the Loosely Autobiographical." For a discussion of the autobiographical element in

and/or a family's life on a tropical island, in some cases followed by emigration and settlement in the U.S. The "loosely autobiographical" category includes the work of Julia Alvarez, Cecilia Manguerra Brainard, Christina García, Jamaica Kincaid, Achy Obejas, and Esmeralda Santiago. Jessica Hagedorn's decidedly non-autobiographical *Dream Jungle* is also briefly mentioned here because, in addition to engaging the problem of ethnography, it includes the first-person narrative of an adolescent girl, her passage into adulthood, and immigration to the U.S. – common motifs in (ex)islander fiction.

While the analysis here focuses solely on the external factors that shape the production of literature marked as "ethnic," Chapters 5 and 6, explore the literary strategies several (ex)islanders have used to deal with the ethnographic expectations of editors and readers. The context for examining this literature is the overlap between ethnography and multiculturalism (a broad range of formal U.S. policies implemented by such institutions as schools and colleges for the purpose of fostering an awareness of different cultures and promoting positive relations between people of various ethnic backgrounds). My contention is that multiculturalism, in treating literature as a vehicle for representing the cultural distinctiveness of minority communities, relies on minority literature's affinity with (auto)ethnography.

This is an affinity most minority writers are anxious to deny or at least downplay, for it draws attention away from their work's formal sophistication and makes historical or cultural accuracy the measure of its value. Minority writers also shirk the association with ethnography because they are reluctant to play the role of cultural go-betweens and indefatigably explain their communities' differences to a majority which imagines its own culture as transparent and normal.[93] Yet the majority does imagine them as go-betweens. Until the 1970s, the public interested in communities of color was a fraction of what it is today. Interest in racial and cultural difference increased because the Civil Rights movement made people of

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immigrant fiction, see Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's "Immigrant Autobiography: Some Questions of Definition and Approach" and Jan Walsh Hokeson's "Intercultural Autobiography." Also Jerzy Durczak analyzes the specificity of immigrant autobiography in *Selves Between Cultures: Contemporary American Bicultural Autobiography.*

[93] Rejecting the role of the "ethnic" go-between, David Wong Louie universalizes his fiction: "I'm not even talking to a human being. I feel as if my ambition is to speak to God, to find a human utterance that makes sense to my God" (Hirose 279). Likewise, poet Li-Young Lee insists he has no specific audience in mind when writing: "I've always stupidly thought that I was just writing poems, saying the things that were closest to my heart, cocking my ear to hear what it was that I needed to say" (Lee, "Interview" 278). Increasingly, minority writers manage to sidestep ethnographic expectations and break into a sector of the book market where they are neither evaluated on the "authenticity" of their ethnic subjects nor required to stick to "their own" group defined in essentialist (racial and ethnic) terms. For instance, Chang-rae Lee's *Aloft* (2004), about a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood on Long Island appeared to glowing reviews. Yet this novel has been largely ignored by literature and Asian American studies scholars, unlike the decidedly more "ethnic" *Native Speaker* (1995).

color more visible in the U.S. Literature became one source of information about the causes of unrest. While forty years ago "the public may have been reading [ethnographies like] Carol Stack's *All Our Kin* and Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner* to learn about U.S. communities of color, today they are more likely to be reading Tony Morrison or Amy Tan" (Ebron and Tsing 392).

But if multiculturalist educational policies had not created a demand for the voices of non-traditional (non-white-male-American-born) writers, few immigrants would have attempted to write fiction. Cecilia Manguerra Brainard's career is a case in point. Brainard came to the U.S. from the Philippines in 1969 to study film at UCLA, and went on to write documentary screenplays for several years before turning to autobiography in 1981. By this time, high-schools and universities were already beginning to make room on their syllabi for Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. That Brainard took on the role of the representative Filipina is suggested by the title of her collected autobiographical essays, *Philippine Woman in America* (1991), which brings to mind such titles as Sui Sin Far's "The Chinese Woman in America" (1897), Sonya Michel and Paula Hymans's *The Jewish Woman in America* (1976), or Mary Paik Lee's *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (1990). Today, Brainard is an established author who teaches creative writing, having shed the association with ethnography. However, as this chapter attempts to show, as long as readers continue to bring ethnographic expectations to minority texts, defying the problem of ethnography is somewhat like defying gravity.

The problems discussed here are neither specific to the late-twentieth century nor limited to (ex)islanders: they affect all minority writers. Yet, because (ex)islanders usually come from smaller and less established minority communities than African Americans or Native Americans, they can ill-afford to write for those communities alone. In some cases, the fact that they write in English creates a barrier. Even when translated into Spanish, the work of Achy Obejas and Christina García cannot be officially circulated in communist Cuba, while low literacy levels in the Caribbean mean that writers like Jamaica Kincaid and Esmeralda Santiago are more likely to address the interests of American readers than people "back home." In effect, in order to publish in the U.S., (ex)islanders have to imagine a broad multiracial American reading public.

The theoretical insights behind this analysis come from postcolonial, African American, and Asian American studies. James Kyung-Jin Lee's examination of 1980s literary multiculturalism in *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism* (2004) serves as a point of departure. Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) and Chris Bongie in "Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature" (2003) provide models for exploring the material conditions in which postcolonial discourses are produced and consumed, circulated and contained. John K. Young and Richard

Yarborough[94] engage in similar explorations of African American literature; by referring to their work, I hope to draw attention to a knot of issues around the production and reception of American literature by (ex)islanders. The chapter begins with a reassessment of multiculturalism. It then turns to such paratextual elements as cover art and blurbs, biographical notes, glossaries, and study group questions (now routinely appended to "ethnic" novels), to reconstruct reader/publisher expectations, and to show how novels by (ex)islanders are positioned in the book marketplace and in the broader culture. Since the desire to read ethnographically is not restricted to popular audiences, the second part of the chapter closely examines a 2006 study by the postmodernist critic David Cowart, *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* to demonstrate the troubling ways in which works like Kincaid's *Lucy* and García's *Dreaming in Cuban* are "mainstreamed" and co-opted to support conservative agendas precisely because of the ethnographic function they perform for the white liberal reader.

Islands of multiculturalism in "a sea of urban woe"

Literature by (ex)islanders needs to be examined within the context of multiculturalism in addition to (not instead of) being read as art. Multiculturalism, rooted in the nineteenth century[95] but given an impetus by the Civil Rights movement, decolonization, second-wave feminism, and the lesbian and gay movement, was a project conceived as a way to balance the unequal forces of cultural representation in the U.S. Various civil rights reforms, and the 1965 immigration bill contributed to the growth, empowerment, and increased literacy of communities of color. While in the first half of the twentieth century, writers of color were obliged to address an overwhelmingly white readership,[96] they could now write expressly for

[94] See John K. Young, *Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature*; Richard Yarborough, keynote lecture "Ideology and Rhetoric: Constructing America"; and Ewa Łuczak, "Of the Use and Abuse of Difference: Some Thoughts on Teaching African American Literature in Poland."

[95] Late nineteenth-century writers like Charles Chesnutt or Edith Eaton/Sui Sin Far took the need for literary representation no less seriously than do contemporary authors of color. Sui Sin Far, for instance, made it her life's mission to write fiction about sensitive, romantic, honorable, and self-sacrificing Chinese in North America at a time when they were commonly perceived as insensitive, mercenary, and incapable of higher feelings, particularly love. She clearly assumed that Americans found it easy to dehumanize and discriminate against Chinese immigrants because they did not imagine them as subjects of romantic fiction.

[96] This was the predicament of James Weldon Johnson, the Harlem Renaissance writers, as well as Richard Wright and James Baldwin. But the issue of audience is not as clear-cut as it might appear. In the 1930s and 1940s, the formally accomplished and politically astute Japanese American writers Toshio Mori and Hisaye Yamamoto, on being rejected by mainstream publishers, continued to publish in Japanese American papers and magazines. Their work was not reprinted or given due critical attention until the 1990s.

the minorities that the various emancipatory movements constituted as subjects. Small presses and bookstores were established to promote minority publications. The nationwide movements involving people of color sparked off an "ethnic revival" that changed the compulsion to assimilate into what Matthew Frye Jacobson calls a desire for "hyphenation." Embraced by "white ethnics" as much as by people of color, the ethnic revival "relocated … normative whiteness from what might be called Plymouth Rock whiteness to Ellis Island whiteness" (7). Ethnicity, once associated with the working class, was embraced by the better-educated and more prosperous classes (Halter 10).[97] The 1972 National Ethnic Heritage Studies Program (an expanded version of the 1965 Act) allocated approximately 2 million dollars per year to promoting multiculturalism "in recognition of … the fact that in a multiethnic society a greater understanding of the contributions of one's own heritage and those of one's fellow citizens can contribute to a more harmonious, patriotic, and committed populace" (Jacobson 54). Thus (insular) ethnic identities became a collective (national) project.

Several decades before, Benedict Anderson so persuasively theorized the centrality of the print media – particularly the novel – to the construction of imagined communities, people of color and women in the U.S. pushed for the establishment of ethnic studies programs at universities and the reconstruction of the literary canon. The ensuing changes – often taken for granted today – came slowly, under pressure from groups convinced that the androcentric Anglo-Saxon canon no longer provided the cultural "glue" capable of holding together what was becoming an increasingly stratified and culturally diverse society. Because the pre-1960s invisibility of ethnic minorities on campuses and in curricula was recognized as political, achieving greater visibility and empowerment also required political engagement, a fact that irks many commentators.

Multiculturalism encourages the construction and celebration of ethnic identities, increasing the demand for narratives that, on the one hand, do the imaginative work of community building, and, on the other, function as ethnographies. This narrative work is performed by novels, autobiographies, travel writings, and cookbooks, all of which function as ethnic commodities, just like dashiki wraps, dim-sum, dream-catchers, and dreidels.[98] Americans continue to use such narratives to

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[97] In *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Etnicity*, Marilyn Halter provides a useful overview of ethnicity since the 1960s from the point of view of a historian of economic culture. She shows how sociopolitical change inspired the deployment of ethnicity by manufacturers and advertisers who learned to target specific consumer groups at a moment when parity in the production of consumer goods forced them to abandon mass marketing (Halter 5). While Halter does not discuss literature, it is subject to some of the same market mechanisms as other consumer goods. What her study fails to take into account is that ethnic products, even if targeted at specific groups, are consumed across racial and ethnic divisions.

[98] Multiculturalism's reliance on commodities as the cultural "glue" has been addressed by cultural critics, including fiction writers. For instance, the fetishization of ethnic commodities is one of the main themes of Gish Jen's novel *Mona in the Promised Land.* Discussing this satirical novel,

construct their own ethnicity, both in relation to the group they recognize as their own and in opposition to other ethnic groups. Publishers are increasingly trying to reach this fragmented readership. In a country that in 2000 had a population of approximately 300 million – including 35 million Latinos, 34 million African Americans, 10 million Asian Americans, 2.5 million native Americans and Alaskans, 400 thousand Pacific Islanders, and over 15 million Americans who checked the category "other" – minorities constitute a readership worth competing for ("Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin 2000").[99]

The increased visibility of people of color in the literary marketplace and in the national canon is taken by some as evidence of the successful eradication of racial inequalities – a view that is clearly misguided. Cultural representation does not necessarily translate into political representation or an improved quality of life for minorities. Neither are more radical kinds of difference representable and consumable. Consequently, multiculturalism has come under fire from within and without. Asian Americanist James Kyung-Jin Lee has argued that, starting in the 1980s, the official policy of "recognizing and nurturing a racial renaissance in the realm of cultural production" has been replacing policies aimed at eradicating poverty in racialized urban communities. Instead of social justice and political representation, people of color have been given literary representation and multicultural curricula. In striking island/sea imagery Lee describes 1980s ethnic fiction as "writh[ing] on the uncomfortable island of multicultural 'victory' in a sea of urban woe and loss" (*Urban Triage* xxviii). Likewise, postcolonial critic Graham Huggan has argued that multiculturalism's "aestheticizing exoticist discourse … inadvertently serves to disguise persistent racial tensions within the nation … [and] deflects attention away from social issues" (Huggan 126). Reader-response theorist Stanley Fish, in turn, has criticized multiculturalism's logical fallacies. His provocative theories, which reduced all shades of multiculturalism to a self-serving fascination with superficial difference, sparked off a lively academic debate that pushed multiculturalists to reconsider some of their key assumptions.[100]

Chih-Ming Wang draws on Anthony Giddens to argue that "in a multicultural society, one's self-identity is always already mediated by his or her ethnicity, congealed in various commodities. In other words, the operational logic of multiculturalism is to subsume the individual imagination of ethnicity in the form of commodity, which in return becomes a means of ethnic identification … The discourse of multiculturalism provides the individual with an identity wardrobe in which ethnic identities are deessentialized as exchangeable labels that are favored or disfavored in accordance with his or her need in the social context" (142–143).

[99] More recent statistics show that the population of non-European Americans is growing fast. For instance, in 2006, there were over 44 million Latinos living in the U.S.

[100] Some aspects of multiculturalism also irk second-wave feminist critics like Susan Gubar, who see the critique of feminism by women of color as a destructive and fragmenting force. See: Susan Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" The multicultural canon continues to be the subject of impassioned debates. See for example: Michael Hames-García, "Which America Is Ours?: Martí's 'Truth' And The Foundations Of 'American Literature' "; Margaret Bedrosian, "Teaching Multi-Eth-

Yet, for all its flaws and superficial fascinations, multiculturalism has no ready substitute. Fish ultimately accepts it as a "demographic fact" that makes "saying yes or no to multiculturalism seem to make about as much sense as saying yes or no to history" (Fish 385). Huggan, too, is willing to tolerate multiculturalism's "conceptual limitations" in the absence of a satisfactory alternative, for "it may yet serve as a workable model for civic tolerance" (126). In an era of multiculturalism, many Americans of color are no longer eager to follow the path marked out by Werner Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* and to downplay the ties of descent that bind them to their ancestral communities in favor of ties of consent that lie at the foundation of the American Creed. Since there is nothing consensual about race, and racial segregation has been the experience of many Americans, it is likely that ethnic literatures will continue to be an important means of individual and group self-definition. Asian Americanist Sauling Cynthia Wong argues that no post-ethnicity is possible until each group has had the chance to define itself (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 169). Until such a time, there will be a need for some form of multiculturalism in the United States. And until such a time, those who teach American literature at home and abroad will have to do so taking into account the contradictions of multiculturalism, including its entanglement with ethnography.

Islands as capital

The (ex)islanders discussed here may or may not speak English with an accent; some are white; others are disadvantaged by race as well as gender; several (including Kincaid and Santiago) started out without any educational or financial capital. But as writers, they all have one type of valuable cultural capital: exotic island origin. Alvarez, Hagedorn, Kincaid, and Santiago possess a store of memories of their islands of origin; García, who arrived in the U.S. at the age of two, has had to make do with Cuban descent, supplemented with family stories, visits "home," and research. Yet, though they spent most of their lives in the U.S., all these writers have made islands central to their work.

A niche has long existed in the United States for individual members of minority groups to serve as "native ethnographers" to the society at large. The Dominican Alvarez, for instance, after producing two successful autobiographical novels, began to function as an expert on Latino culture. She has since written children's books based on Latin American history and legends, and was pressured by her publisher to write a book about the Latino tradition of *quinceañeras* or girls' fifteenth birthday celebrations. On her homepage, Alvarez explains her involvement in the project in the following words: "At first, I sent regrets, but he was

nic Literature: Some Psychological Considerations," and Phillipa Kafka, "Another round of Canon Fire: Feminist and Multi-Ethnic Theory in the American Literature Survey."

persistent! He asked me to think about it. I decided to attend a few of these celebrations and I got hooked on the subject." In 2007, Viking brought out her work of non-fiction, *Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the U.S.A.*, which gives outsiders a glimpse into the Latino community and adolescent Latinas a frame of reference for their own identity formation.

Alvarez is not alone in capitalizing on her island origin. Hagedorn, imaginatively dodges the role of "native ethnographer," yet she is quite frank about her own reliance on islands as literary material:

> I've lived in the U.S. for over 30 years. Why do I keep writing stories that are largely set in the Philippines? C'mon! The culture is just so rich and has so much happening in it. To me it's a treasure trove. Lush, stark, abundant, untainted, polluted … The supernatural, the superreal, and the surreal. It's about grim reality, too … You almost don't have to make anything up. (Aguilar-San Juan 6)

It takes living in the U.S., which – Hagedorn implies – is anything but lush, stark, abundant, or surreal, to recognize a "treasure trove" for what it is. Her "superreal" Philippines are all the more interesting to readers convinced their own culture is bland and nondescript, like Wonder Bread, Heinz salad cream, and Kleenex.[101] But Hagedorn's books also appeal to second- and third-generation Filipinos, and to the larger group of Asian Americans who appreciate Hagedorn's evocative portrayals of Filipino culture, with its sediments of Spanish, American, and Japanese imperialisms, Hollywood film culture, and global sex tourism.

Cover girls

It is difficult to map Alvarez's, García's, or Kincaid's islands precisely onto the sea of American literary production: their fiction appeals to market readers as well as to academics. It engages in formal experimentation while rehearsing themes and concerns introduced by pioneer immigrant, racial minority, and feminist writers. For instance, Alvarez's tale of immigration *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* employs a dizzying array of narrative viewpoints and unfolds backwards, its protagonists growing younger with each chapter. But while it lends itself to formal analysis (as demonstrated by David Cowart's study discussed below), it is also popular among high-school students.[102] García's *Dreaming in Cuban* has popular

[101] These metaphors for white mainstream culture were used by white American women in interviews conducted by Ruth Frankenberg for her study *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*.

[102] Alvarez characteristically balances between the highbrow and middlebrow. One of the reasons for the cross-generational appeal is that she has written fiction for children. As these children reach adolescence, they continue reaching for their favorite authors. See Betty Carter, "Adult Books for Young Adults." Readers exposed to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* or *China Men* in high school or college will find generic

appeal even as it shifts back and forth between third- and first-person narration, Cuba and New York, those who stayed behind and those who left, the real and the surreal. Books like Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy*, which are taught as "highbrow" fiction at universities, simultaneously function as "middlebrow" women's fiction and are packaged to appeal to this group.[103]

Literature by (ex)islanders is a product that has to be marketed to specific audiences, hence the same edition of a novel may have more than one cover, and subsequent editions are almost always repackaged. The selection in Fig. 1 only includes images that fall into the "cover girl" category. Some of these novels have alternate covers that replace the images of adolescent girls with more imaginative graphics. "College editions" – an important market segment – sometimes feature archival photographs to suggest serious historical content.[104]

The cover designs shown in Fig. 1 below reveal a distinctive convention of using photographs or paintings of girls in coy poses as a central element. Although a variety of artwork is used for books by (ex)islanders, designers repeatedly resort to the "cover girl" convention, characterized by seductive images of bare-shouldered young women casting sidelong glances at the potential buyer. Although the extent of bodily exposure varies, from just the eyes and hair on the cover of García's *Dreaming in Cuban* to bare breasts on two different covers of Kincaid's *Lucy*, the intent is clearly the same. The "bedroom eyes" on the cover of *Dreaming in Cuban* are all the more expressive because the face is half-concealed. Alvarez's *Salome* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Santiago's *When I Was Puerto-Rican* and *The Turkish Lover*, as well as Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* have been similarly packaged.

A metonymic effect may be at work here, with the "naturally" seductive yet innocent cover girl standing in for the island nation. Cover girls grace even those novels in which the stories of adolescent girls constitute a minor part of the plot (García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle*). The alluring cover performs a double role. By taking possession of the cover girl's story, open-minded mainstream readers come to possess the story of yet another immigrant group. Meanwhile, young American women of Cuban, Dominican, Filipino, or Puerto Rican descent can presumably identify with the cover girls and recognize themselves as target readers. To both groups of readers, these semi-autobiographical narratives hold out a promise of a vicarious journey to an exotic tropical isle.

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and thematic continuity when reading Brainard's *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept* and García's *Monkey Hunting*.

[103] Chris Bongie discusses the arbitrary categorization of Jamaica Kincaid's and Maryse Condé's fiction within postcolonial studies, a supposedly emancipatory field, whose practitioners nevertheless embrace modernist criteria for evaluating fiction. See Bongie, "Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature."

[104] An example is the formal family portrait on the cover of Brainard's *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept*, a historical novel very loosely based on the author's family story.

The covers of two editions of Kincaid's *Lucy* incongruously exoticize the central character, a nineteen-year-old *au-pair* who lives in the U.S., having deliberately cut herself off from her island origins. Her rare reminiscences of Antigua suggest she was raised as a prim middle-class British colonial subject, not a sarong-clad "native." The book designer's portrayal of Lucy as a figure from one of Paul Gauguin's Polynesian paintings is ironic – not so much because of the geographical slip but because we learn from the novel that Lucy encounters Gauguin's art in a museum and identifies not with the brown women in his paintings but with Gauguin himself, an exile and observer in a strange land. Lucy is a modern, sexually and intellectually liberated woman, who takes an ethnographic interest in "middle America" and distances herself from it by photographing people and interiors. By contrast, the cover art thrusts Lucy out of the powerful desiring position of the observer and turns her into an object of the desiring gaze.

Significantly, seductive femininity is not always superimposed on immigrant women's narratives by designers or marketing experts. Now and then, writers themselves participate in designing the wrapping. Asked about the cover of *Dream Jungle*, Jessica Hagedorn replied:

> I found the image that was finally used in a book edited by Jonathan Best … a collection of photographs taken during the early days of the American colonization of the Philippines. The one we chose is called 'Anonymous Visayan Beauty,' a sepia portrait taken in 1904 by an American photographer … I thought the young girl in the picture was so haunting and beautiful and could be Rizalina, but also not. She could also be the Philippines. She is this beautiful, waiting, fierce presence … when you think of a dream jungle, I think seduction and danger have to be part of its allure. Now, what seduction means to you, there's the interesting challenge for an artist, right? (Hagedorn qtd. in Aguilar-San Juan 6)

A seasoned postcolonial writer, Hagedorn is aware of her work as a product. The covers of most of her books feature striking collages or movie stills deployed for a humorous effect, as in *Charlie Chan is Dead* (1993). In designing the cover of *Dream Jungle*, however, Hagedorn knowingly tapped into the "cover girl" convention: she used an ethnographic photograph from the colonial period as a lure, to draw the unsuspecting reader into a text that hints at ethnic authenticity only to expose it as a hoax. The novel's numerous narrators tell intertwined stories about the Philippines not as an island paradise but as a site of political and economic struggle, intrigue, exploitation, and mythmaking.

Why, we might ask, is there such a proliferation of "cover girls" and where are the "boys"? While in the first half of the twentieth century men of color (including (ex)islanders like Carlos Bulosan and Claude McKay) had been the most visible ethnic authors, today both the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands are mostly represented by women authors. Publishers and writers themselves have observed that readership in the United States is split along gender lines. Women readers account for a larger share of the fiction market. White women have formidable purchasing power as a group – a fact publishers have readily responded to since the

1950s.[105] It is this readership (called disparagingly a "sugar sisterhood" by Sauling Cynthia Wong) that partially accounts for the success of many feminist writers of color in the age of multiculturalism. Wong attributes Amy Tan's unprecedented commercial success to white women who "have cultural propensities" (that is: who read ethnographically) and thus appreciate Tan's "acts of cultural interpreting and cultural empathy that appear to possess the authority of authenticity but are often products of the American-born writer's own heavily mediated understanding of things Chinese" ("Sugar Sisterhood" 181).[106] Alternately, we could say that Amy Tan, Terry MacMillan, or Julia Alvarez are popular with white women because feminist concerns cut across racial lines.

In recent decades, publishers have also found that black women account for a large segment of their sales of minority fiction. Several black editors and writers who attended the 1999 conference "Defining Ourselves: Black Writers in the 90s" commented on the fact that far more black women than men read fiction. In fact, writer Brent Staples stressed the dire need for black writers to consciously address black *men*, who read little on average, presumably because they do not find their experiences represented in fiction (193–196). There are "proportionately more women writing books, and more books which appeal to the female reader" (176). One result of this is that major publishers now often approach small publishing houses seeking to reprint books by and for women of color. What these publishers are responding to is a growing demand for books "related to self-help and personal inspiration, male/female relationships (particularly those from the female perspective), personal success stories (particularly those whose protagonists rise above or are swallowed by a life of crime and drugs), stories which espouse middle-class values, and autobiographies and biographies of successful Black people" (206). These general trends may have a good deal to do with the boom in autobiographical fiction by immigrant women and the dearth of such fiction by men.[107]

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[105] As Janice Radway explains in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, until the 1950s publishers failed to recognize the size of this readership; in effect, the mass production of romantic paperback fiction for women by such publishers as Mills and Boon or Harlequin began just half a century ago.

[106] Wong has a strongly critical view of the motivations of white women who read Amy Tan's work ethnographically. In her words, they responded to *The Joy Luck Club* enthusiastically because it afforded the opportunity to exercise a "pleasurable mix of respect and voyeurism, admiration and condescension, humility and self-congratulation" (185). See Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon." Wong also explored the problem of ethnic literature being read by white Americans as popular ethnography in an earlier essay: "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiographical controversy."

[107] One reason for Black male writers being left out of the boom is suggested by Brent Staples: "When you write a book about your family, as I did in *Parallel Time*, you hear a lot of things from television producers and movie producers about what you write. And if you're a Black male they will tell you: You're not writing if you don't have some jail experience. If you haven't really done some crimes, you are not enunciating the true black experience" (195). William W. Cook and Brent Staples

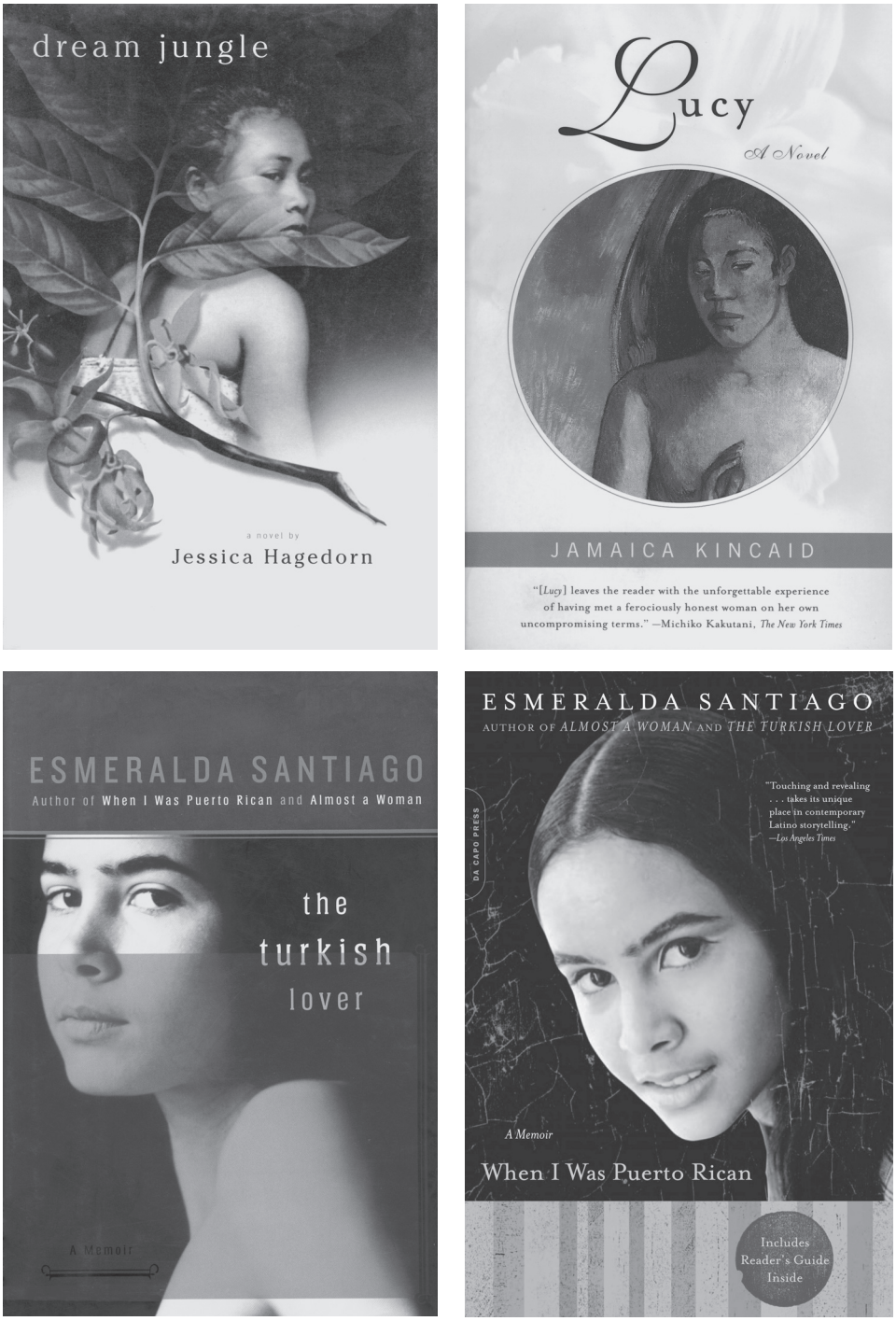

Fig. 1. Covers of the novels by Jessica Hagedorn (*Dream Jungle*, Penguin 2004), Jamaica Kincaid (*Lucy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2002), and Esmeralda Santiago (*The Turkish Lover*, Da Capo Press 2005; *When I was Puerto Rican*, Da Capo Press 2006)

Edible islands

If readers were to choose books judging solely by the cover images and blurbs, they would have trouble telling Alvarez, Brainard, García, Hagedorn, Kincaid, and Santiago apart because their island novels are framed in almost identical language. Whether ravaged by the English plantation system (Kincaid's Antigua), or terrorized by dictators (García's Cuba, Hagedorn's Philippines, and Alvarez's Dominican Republic), or plagued by poverty (Santiago's Puerto Rico), the islands metamorphose into exotic Edens, mysterious, mystical, or magical places. The cover blurbs also project an exotic or primitive quality onto (ex)islanders' literary style, which is always fresh, naïve, unaffected, sensuous, and lush like tropical vegetation. Another persistent pattern involves troping the novel (and, by extension, the island) as an edible commodity – a choice morsel. These qualities attributed to island novels have little to do with actual styles or contents; they seem to be projections of reviewers' desires, or else appeals to the refined taste of prospective readers.

References to Eden advertize both Kincaid's Antigua and Hagedorn's Mindanao. "The island of Antigua is a magical place: growing up there should be a sojourn in paradise for young Annie John. But, as in the basket of green figs carried on her mother's head, there is a snake hidden somewhere within" (cover blurb). Similarly, *Dream Jungle* is as lush as a tropical ecosystem, teeming with strange, beautiful, evolved forms of life. Hagedorn conjures up a postcolonial Philippines "at once innocent and corrupt, gorgeous and rotten" (cover blurb). Similarly exoticist is the imagery associated with Alvarez's Dominican Republic: the island is "magical" (*Kirkus Review*) and the novel offers readers "a remarkable climb up the family tree" (*Baltimore City Paper*).

References to food abound on the covers. Garcia's novel evokes the "sustaining aromas of vanilla and almond" (*Time*); Alvarez's is "a spicy, zestful novel of distinctly Spanish flavor" (*Richmond Times-Despatch*) that puts "new spice in the melting pot" (*Ashville Citizen-Times*); the blurb of Santiago's novel, set partially in a Puerto Rican slum, also foregrounds food: "As she grew up, Esmeralda discovered the proper way to eat a guava, listened to the sound of tree frogs in the mango groves at night, savored the taste of the delectable sausage called *morcilla*, and learned the formula for ushering a dead baby's soul to heaven" (cover blurb). Even seasoned critics like Susan Sontag occasionally slip into this exoticizing discourse: in a review quoted on the cover of *At the Bottom of the River* Sontag extols Kincaid as an "unaffectedly sumptuous, irresistible writer," the words "sumptuous" and "irresistible" evoking a table laden with exotic food. As Bourdieu

agree that the dominant perception of black men as a violent underclass eliminates Black male authors from the "mainstream" literary marketplace as "inauthentic" if they want to tell other kinds of stories. Because this chapter focuses on popular fiction written for a dual readership, it replicates the exclusion of male authors of island origin, whose books have simply not come to my attention (Nunez and Greene).

explains, "one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless 'culture,' in the restricted normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into 'culture' in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavors of food" (*Distinction* 1). In the case of fiction by (ex)islanders, the standard practice of speaking about quality products as if they were gourmet dishes is reinforced by the reviewers' associations of tropical islands with an abundance of food.

A related fantasy projected onto images of islands is a musical soundtrack. For instance, a *Time* reviewer finds García's prose as "rhythmic as the music of Benny Moré" while Kincaid's "Antigua pulsates with the exotic rhythms of the islands," though no music is mentioned in *Annie John*. Island novels are almost invariably "written in a language that is by turns languid and sensual" (Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, cover blurb). In short, advertisers and reviewers take liberties with all our senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell – to render the enchanting experience of reading island novels.

Although the text between the covers is often serious and challenging rather than entertaining, the language on the package bears an uncanny resemblance to the ethnographic blurb on the box of Jamaican Barbie quoted in the epigraph. Ostensibly written to help children build a positive image of their racial others, the text on the box sells an exoticized product by evoking the stereotype of islands as miniature Edens peopled with friendly, scantily-clad natives who welcome tourists/readers with open arms while dancing to the reggae beat.

Ethnographic expectations

Addressing the needs of high-school teachers, academic instructors, and book club members, editors increasingly provide study aids, either at the back of the book or on the web. Many (ex)islander novels have an appendix and related educational websites. Sometimes authors themselves encourage ethnographic readings. For instance Santiago writes: "When I began writing this book, I had no idea it would result in a dialogue about cultural identity" (277). She sees her role as that of a cultural go-between, "no longer Puerto Rican" because on the island she is perceived as "contaminated with Americanism," but not quite American because on the continent "my darkness, my accented speech, my frequent lapses into the confused silence between English and Spanish" stand out (278). The novel is explicitly framed as an autoethnography: in addition to a "Note from the Author" it offers exposition in the form of a "Glossary" and a "Reader's Guide." All but one of the thirteen questions in the "Reader's Guide" encourage cross-cultural comparisons, treating the novel as ethnographic material. Readers are asked to define the differences between rural Puerto Rico and Brooklyn, compare various notions of "romantic love," define the meaning of *dignidad*, which the author leaves un-

translated, and think about the syncretism in Puerto Rican religious culture. Only the thirteenth question signals the fact that, while the book is autobiographical, the author uses many fictional techniques, including a child's point of view. The question "How might you compare the Latino experience of assimilation with those of, for example, Chinese, Jewish, or Haitian immigrants?" assumes that the readers either are of minority origin themselves or are familiar with other stories of immigration and assimilation (276–277).

Similarly, in an interview at the back of *Dreaming in Cuban*, García explains that the impulse to write came from revisiting Cuba and briefly working as a journalist in Miami, which has a large Cuban population. "It wasn't until I began writing that my private Cuban self merged with my public self. Now I feel that I live more on the hyphen than on either side of it" (251). Positioning herself as a middle(wo)man like Santiago, García complains that the discourse on Cuba is "black and white, very polarized, unintegrated," and in need of a writer like herself who is "interested in the gap and shades of grey between the two extremes" (250). The interviewer Scott Shibuya mostly steers García towards problems of form and character construction, but he does encourage her to talk about the religious practice of Santería, perhaps the most exotic element of the novel. The "Questions and Topics for Discussion," in turn, ask readers to think about the Cuban revolution as seen by a cultural insider, the twin themes of "magic and faith," and kinship (" 'The family is hostile to the individual': Discuss"). These study aids make apparent the function of island novels as teaching tools in a society that promotes multiculturalism and interracial harmony. Authors and editors seem to agree that in addition to producing literature they should provide Americans with cultural "glue."

Reader expectations shaped by the legacy of ethnography put constraints on immigrant authors, particularly on those from islands once favored by anthropologists and, more recently, by tourists. Authors who have little interest in catering to these expectations turn to community-based presses, but these may not be available in small and relatively new immigrant communities, which do not constitute a large enough readership. Other authors seek access to the "mainstream" literary marketplace. Approaching it, they soon learn that anything they write is expected to have substantial ethnographic content.[108] According to Yiorgos Anagnostou, ethnic fiction functions first and foremost as a multicultural commodity:

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[108] In his study of the American literary marketplace, John K. Young amply illustrates the claim that "the basic dynamic through which most twentieth-century African American literature has been produced derives from the expectation that the individual text will represent the black experience (necessarily understood as exotic) for the white, and therefore implicitly universal, audience" (12). Recently, mainstream publishers have attempted to correct their bias. For instance, in 1999 Malaika Adero reported that Random House appointed a senior marketing person to the position of "African American specialist," a sign that "for the first time … a book publishing sales department is focusing on and viewing black book-sellers across the country as a territory unto themselves, with special needs and concerns that are financially worth addressing" (215).

> popular ethnographies become key mechanisms through which the American public encounters and acquires knowledge about ethnic and immigrant others. They also work as venues through which audiences may reflect on practices, ideas, and images associated with their own ethnicity. In a world of generalized ethnography, market forces and the ideology of multiculturalism intersect to intensify the ethnographization of ethnicity in the American public sphere. (387)

As Brian Niiya observed, in the spirit of multiculturalism, the American public is willing to expose itself to cultural difference by reading literature, preferably in a non-threatening teleological genre like the first-person narrative of successful assimilation. Consequently, publishers steer ethnic writers towards autobiography or autoethnography – genres that are, as a rule, optimistic about America and sell well because they give mainstream readers a sense of being open-minded and tolerant of difference.[109]

Significantly, though, literature does not simply respond to external pressures and expectations. Just as readers approach literature with certain expectations, literature comes fitted with expectations which readers may or may not meet. Texts interpellate readers – ask them to play specific roles, such as that of ethnographer, resisting reader, or dupe. In the three or four decades of American multiculturalism, writers have trained their audiences. While many readers in the 1970s found Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* inauthentic because it did not conform to popular stereotypes, today's readers are much more likely to take Kingston on her own terms, which she has laid down in critical essays and subsequent fiction.[110] Several decades ago, both market readers and some academics complained about insufficient exposition, opacity, and the unwarranted use of foreign words in minority fiction; but with repeated exposure to such textual strategies, today they are more flexible and ready to do their homework.

Constraints imposed by "mainstream" readers and editors are compounded by the fact that ethnic communities also tend to exert pressure on "their own" to produce positive representations. Referring to Asian American authors, King-Kok Cheung explained that "because their work is frequently treated as ethnography by 'mainstream' reviewers, many in the Asian American community hold them accountable for 'authentic' representation" (*Words Matter* 2). Some see this as an unjustifiable assault on the artist's freedom of expression. Lois-Ann Yamanaka, a Hawaiian writer of Japanese descent, is one of many who resent being made to

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[109] See Niiya, "Open-Minded Conservatives: A Survey of Autobiographies by Asian Americans." Novelist Maxine Hong Kingston also commented on the ethnographic approach to literature adopted by some white readers of her fiction. "I met some [Chinese American] readers who get so offended when a white friend of theirs says, 'Oh, I just read *China Men*, and now I understand you!' " See Marilyn Chin, "A *MELUS* Interview: Maxine Hong Kingston" (68).

[110] Maxine Hong Kingston's 1982 essay "Cultural Mis-Readings by American Reviewers" was a decisive dismissal of her (mostly white) reviewers' narrow expectations shaped by ethnic stereotypes, as well as an assertion of her intention to write "the great American novel" – not pop-anthropology. Her *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey* certainly rise to that ambition.

bear the burden of representation: "You cannot expect one person to tell the story for everybody. I have never lived any other way than the small slice of life that was given to me … I'm not trying to represent anybody else" (Johnson 215). Yet representing others *is* what writers generally do (on the aesthetic if not on the political level). And for minority groups that have limited access to both aesthetic and political representation, a writer's freedom of self-expression may be incompatible with the group's desire to challenge popular misperceptions that justify discrimination.

Cultural nationalists within ethnic minorities feel that writers should not only be accountable for the way they represent their groups in the mainstream press but that they should also foster the community spirit by writing explicitly for the people whose cultural background and/or racial experience they share. Given the long history of ethnic writers being pressed into the role of "native informants" and "ambassadors of goodwill,"[111] the fact that minority communities would like "their own" writers to treat them as potential readers does not seem unreasonable. Kincaid, who claims that "the act of writing itself requires the writer to separate from his or her community" was described by the Black womanist critic Catherine A. John as "one of the current, tokenised, black female 'writers,' US mass media darlings" (John 37). Kincaid's unwillingness to acknowledge the sizeable Afro-Caribbean community in New York, let alone African Americans, as a potential audience clearly irks John:

> One could argue that Kincaid's entire oeuvre is pervaded by a systematic and concerted effort to escape the communal reality of her birthplace. Her belief that becoming an 'artiste' requires separation from this community seems, in some ways, to be an undisrupted continuation of the *colonially produced* individuality that she describes in her fiction and non-fiction writings. (38, emphasis mine)

This harsh assessment of a lone Antiguan woman's stunning literary career needs to be understood within the context of American race relations. It is not that John begrudges Kincaid her success, but she suspects that Kincaid is celebrated by white readers for the wrong reasons: her personal story of overcoming oppression has come to stand for the story of "all-encompassing universal female oppression" to be overcome by a triumph of individual will – not through collective action and systemic change. Based on the case of Kincaid, one could conclude that whether "colonially produced" or part of the American creed, individualism exercised by ethnic writers may clash with community expectations.

Today, universities account for a large share of the "ethnic" literature market. Most undergraduates take multicultural studies courses as part of their general education requirement, and texts by minority writers are on a wide range of syl-

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[111] The term "ambassadors of goodwill" was coined by Elaine H. Kim to cover writers like Lin Yutang, Pardee Lowe, and Jade Snow Wong, who, in the times of rampant racial discrimination wrote entertaining and diplomatic prose for white middle-class Americans. See: Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*.

labi. Kingston mentioned in a 1990 interview that "somebody just told me they did an informal survey, walking around the UC Berkeley book stores and found [*The Woman Warrior*] in twelve courses" (Kingston qtd. in Marilyn Chin 68). The immigrant writers discussed in this chapter – most of whom went through the American university system, attended writers' workshops, and became creative writing instructors themselves – have a good sense of what makes a teachable text. For instance, postcolonial studies, according to critic Chris Bongie, has a strong bias in favor of highbrow texts that follow the "twin directives of modernism," namely, "aesthetic resistance (promoting stylistic difficulty) and political resistance (promoting social radical change)" (45). The same criteria hold true for English department courses, but not necessarily for cultural studies courses, which often incorporate middlebrow and popular literature.

High-school teachers and their students are a related group of readers with their own priorities. First-person coming-of-age narratives that negotiate intergenerational as well as interracial/intercultural tensions and end in successful assimilation, are an important teaching tool in secondary education.[112] University of Texas education specialist Cynthia Allen wrote in 2008 that multicultural literature, on the one hand, helps children to understand and empathize with members of other cultures, and, on the other, allows children to "see themselves and their culture reflected in literature [and thus] experience a boost to their self esteem. If people are able to see their own self worth they are more apt to value diversity in others." In choosing multicultural literature teachers should use the criteria of "accuracy" and "authenticity." Like many educators, Allen understands "ethnic" fiction as a more or less transparent repository of cultural knowledge and authentic experience, a genre related to autoethnography. She advocates reading works by cultural insiders as opposed to those by outsiders which may lack "authenticity" (Allen, n.p.).

Trailing clouds over islands

We might assume that serious literary critics – unlike publishers and teachers with their ulterior motives – approach (ex)islanders' texts without exoticist expectations. That this is not necessarily the case becomes apparent when we read David Cowart's *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* (2006), a study that co-opts the work of minority authors in support of a conservative agenda. It is not that Cowart misreads immigrant literature; apparently certain texts themselves to being co-opted. When inserted into the American canon, they are susceptible to being read differently by those who subscribe to hegemonic

[112] Other publications in the same vein: Harriet Arzu Scarborough, "Discovering Caribbean Literature, Discovering Self " and Lyda Mary Hardy, "Who's New in Multicultural Literature: Part Two."

discourses than by those who treat such texts as vehicles for submerged or counter-hegemonic discourses. Thus *Trailing Clouds* offers an interesting counterpoint to the better-known work of cultural and ethnic studies scholars, which tends to focus on literature's subversive potential.[113]

Cowart brings to his literary analyses a genuine interest in non-canonical authors and an ecumenical reading experience. The study consists of ten chapters that cover the work of Saul Bellow, Julia Alvarez, Ursula Hegi, Bharati Mukherjee, Cristina García, Chang-rae Lee, Edwige Danticat, Jamaica Kincaid, Lan Cao, Mylène Dressler, Wendy Law-Yone, and Junot Díaz. Cowart's readings of the individual texts are engaging and nuanced. They reveal the extent to which immigrant authors are immersed in the Western literary tradition from Homer and the Bible, through Shakespeare, Milton, Joyce, Pound and Stevens, to the postmodern classics. An approach that shows immigrant writers drawing inspiration from and contributing to the Western literary tradition, rather than resisting or exploding it, is refreshing. Nonetheless, Cowart's egalitarianism is undercut by his strong preference for autoethnography, which has the effect of putting the ethnic author "back in her place."

In writing a book organized around the dominant tropes and formal elements of immigrant fiction, Cowart seems to demolish the walls of "ghettos" erected by misguided minority scholars with identitarian politics. His decision not to group the authors by race or national origin because "they have seen enough of ghettos" (12) seems to resolve the problem David Wong Louie figuratively referred to as being cooped up "in Chinese laundries"[114] (Cheung, *Words Matter* 13). Instead of relegating immigrants from Caribbean and Pacific islands to ethnic laundries, Cowart reads Alvarez, García, and Kincaid alongside Hoffman, Nabokov, and Bellow, making multiple cross-references to Western and ancient classics. For Cowart, the (ex)islanders have truly arrived: they belong among the best writers of the twentieth century – writers like Pynchon, Gardner, and DeLillo, on whom he has written extensively. He rightly attributes the recent explosion of immigrant literature to the

[113] For a wide range of interpretations of García's, Alvarez's, and Kincaid's work as counter-hegemonic, see for example: Julie Barak. " 'Turning and Turning in the Widening Gyre': A Second Coming into Language in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*"; Jacqueline Stefanko, "New Ways of Telling: Latinas' Narratives of Exile and Return"; Sabine Broeck, "When Light Becomes White: Reading Enlightenment through Jamaica Kincaid's Writing"; Edyta Oczkowicz, "Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy: Cultural 'Translation' as a Case of Creative Exploration of the Past"; Diane Simmons, "Jamaica Kincaid and the Canon: In Dialogue with *Paradise Lost* and *Jane Eyre*"; Brooke Lenz, "Postcolonial Fiction and the Outsider Within: Toward a Literary Practice of Feminist Standpoint Theory"; Keja Valens, "Obvious and Ordinary: Desire between Girls in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*"; and Günther H. Lenz, "Literary Transfigurations of Intercultural Translations: New EthniCities and Migratory Topographies in New York Fictions of the 1990s."

[114] Louie referred to the anti-Chinese legislation introduced in California in the late nineteenth century that barred Chinese immigrants from most occupations other than domestic work and its extension, laundries.

"changed … perception of ethnicity: from a quality needing to be burned away in some refiner's fire of cultural homogenization" to a prized quality that has "distinction, cachet, and a quite literal marketability" (206). While most of the texts chosen by Cowart had already enjoyed both popular and academic acclaim, others, like Wendy Law Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, had attracted little critical attention. To do justice to *The Coffin Tree*, Cowart invokes Homer, Edmund Spenser, William Cowper, James Joyce, Thomas Pynchon, Richard Rodriguez, and Joseph Campbell. His erudition allows him to bring out those intricacies of the novel which had eluded or simply kept away critics trained in Asian American studies.

If that had been the extent of Cowart's interpretive project, it would be beyond reproach. Yet Cowart also identifies in immigrant literature a number of virtues that he did not extol in, or expect from, the work of the white male postmodern writers. One of these virtues is related to the ethnographic gaze, which supposedly distinguishes immigrants from native-born authors. While justifying his selection of primary texts in aesthetic terms ("whatever their value as sociological documents, these books stand out as fully accomplished examples of contemporary literary art" [2]), Cowart valorizes the fact that

> immigrants tend to see themselves as anthropologists, and certainly their scrutiny of strange customs and practices bears no small resemblance to what the professionals call 'fieldwork.' Saul Bellow literalizes this conceit, for he actually studied anthropology … before entering that less specialized branch of social science called novel writing … As an immigrant and amateur social scientist, Sammler resembles Eva Hoffman who recognizes in herself 'an anthropologist of the highly detached nonparticipant variety,' a field observer seeking to resolve the problem of perspective. How to get under the skin of the creature being observed? (29)

As a rule, anthropologists leave home, study another culture through participant observation, and then return to report on what they have observed. Yet Cowart expects immigrant authors (many of whom spent most of their lives immersed in U.S. culture) to study their own ethnic groups for the benefit of American-born readers. For instance, one of the virtues he sees in Lan Cao's Vietnamese immigrant character Mai in *Monkey Bridge* is that she is able to survey her fellow refugees "with an anthropologist's eye … step back and watch with a degree of detachment the habits and manners of Little Saigon" (153). Presumably, then, by doing native ethnography, writers like Lan Cao help to keep the new arrivals under surveillance, and make their habits transparent to "mainstream" Americans.

Cowart also values immigrant fiction as a vehicle for authentic cultural knowledge, particularly Eastern philosophies. The high point in his analysis of *Monkey Bridge*, after several references to Confucianism, is the discussion of *karma*, illustrated with quotations from the novel:

> It is of course the book of *karmic* debts that every Vietnamese daughter must read on the eve of her marriage … The emphasis on karma here – so important to Asian consciousness – corrects for any tendency an American audience may have to read monoculturally. Americans lack a sense of karma, but for the Vietnamese it amounts to a kind of 'ethical chromosome … as

> much a part of our history as … DNA' [170]. Even language buttresses the awareness of karmic reckonings: 'Our reality, you see, is a simultaneous past, present, and future. The verbs in our language are not conjugated, because our sense of time is tenseless, indivisible, and knows no end' [252]. (155)

It is this universalizing New-Age style of interpretation that allows Cowart to steer clear of historical specificities that might complicate his reading of the immigrant's cultural legacy and her submission to "the seductive powers of an American future" (Cao qtd. in Cowart 156). Clearly, Cowart is willing to see in *Monkey Bridge* a key to "Asian consciousness," and in Lan Cao a guide to a premodern culture whose fullness stands in opposition to a perceived lack in modern American culture.

Law Yone's *The Coffin Tree* provides yet another pretext for indulging in karmic fantasies, even though the novel works hard to undercut the validity of its own fragmented references to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Cowart, however, follows his personal agenda. "Every immigrant," he argues,

> undergoes a death, and the period during which he or she struggles to be reborn, to be reincarnated as the citizen of another country, resembles the *Bardo*, or process of *torment and confusion* described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Like the religion of ancient Egypt, which has its own book of instructions for the soul newly freed from its body … the Tibetan belief system features an elaborate and detailed picture of the transitional state. (182, emphasis mine)

By retreating to a world of religious metaphors and cross-cultural analogies worthy of James Frazier's *The Golden Bough*, Cowart manages to deflect attention from the fact that the "torment and confusion" experienced by the protagonists takes place in the purgatory of modern-day U.S. Yone's narrator fixes an unflinching gaze on American society; Cowart redirects it to ancient myths and legends.

Structuralist analysis also helps Cowart to diffuse the potentially dangerous implications of immigrant fiction. For instance, he chooses to read Kincaid's *Lucy* and Yone's *The Coffin Tree* as didactic novels whose rebellious immigrant narrators eventually recant and embrace America. In *The Coffin Tree*, he argues, one sibling serves as a negative role model who fails the test of assimilation, so that the other can learn from his mistakes. Similarly, in his reading of Kincaid's *Lucy* Cowart manages to recuperate an angry immigrant voice by arguing that this narrator is "unreliable" by design. She is a difficult adolescent who matures in the novel's final pages, rather than a stand-in for Kincaid, who is well-known for her criticism of the United States. This interpretation might surprise novelist Gish Jen who in a recent interview said: "I've looked to Jamaica Kincaid for inspiration. She's very 'bad.' Whenever I hesitate to be bad, I think of Jamaica" (Johnson 90). When Cowart describes Lucy as a "disagreeable," "immature," and "unhappy teenager," he defuses her critical commentary on the life of her white liberal middle-class American employers. Describing himself as a "resistant reader" who has the sense to challenge Lucy's grievances (145), Cowart rails against Lucy for ten

pages, as if personally offended by her "ill humor." Neither her experience as a British colonial subject nor her suggestion that Americans are implicated in neo-colonialism make any sense from Cowart's transhistorical perspective:

> [P]erhaps she would do better to differentiate colonialisms – or to ask what people have not at some point been colonized. Would Antigua have fared better at the hands of Catholic Spain or Portugal? In modern times, does Antigua not see in England a colonial mother preferable to Belgium or Germany or Japan? Might Lucy – or Kincaid – not recognize that the rapacity of the English was, more than that of other colonizers, tempered by civilized restraint? By the same token, might she not see that Antigua derived as much benefit from its English conqueror as the Saxons derived from their Norman conqueror or the British Celts from the occupying Romans? (140)

Lucy only talks about Antiguan culture when she wants to bring into clear focus disturbing aspects of American culture, or to explain her anger, which Americans cannot understand. American culture, which she learns through participant observation, is the object of her ethnographic gaze. From Cowart's perspective, though, Lucy's anger cannot be taken seriously: she is out of line, her ethnography nothing more than "preach[ing] and strik[ing] poses of moral superiority" (147).

Such reading strategies allow Cowart to absorb oppositional voices into his own version of multiculturalism. It is not that he denies immigrants "the American's right to reflect positively or negatively on the nation" (3). But his appreciation is reserved for those who sagely refrain from excessive criticism because "whatever America's shortcomings in the past or present, immigrants nearly always have an acute awareness (and often personal, firsthand experience) of social, political, and historical horrors on a much larger scale" (207). *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by the Haitian Edwige Danticat serves Cowart as an example of an "evocative" narrative that "fixates" on the lost homeland only to make apparent "all that makes the homeland unlivable" (209). Taken collectively, these statements suggest that – aesthetics aside – immigrant fiction has the virtue of showing a host of unlivable foreign places from the perspective of grateful American subjects. What if Kincaid's narrator Lucy had *not* found Antigua unlivable? What if Cowart had *not* interpreted Lucy as a naïve narrator? Would Kincaid still have made it into his pantheon?

In the conclusion, Cowart makes explicit his investment in immigrant fiction: it allows him to build an argument against "the school of absolutist cultural critique that neglects to historicize the nation's occasional failures to live up to the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the body of civil legislation that made explicit what was always implicit in those documents" (209). Paradoxically, then, stories by writers like Kincaid, about the way western imperialism made their islands unlivable, are read by some American academics (and probably many non-academic readers) as simply stories about unlivable islands. Such stories make them count their blessings and appreciate their own country more.

* * *

Because the above discussion centers on external forces, such as the expectations of various readerships, multicultural agendas, the demands of mass marketing, and the mechanisms of canon formation, it may appear that the context in which (ex)islanders write precludes agency or originality. The following chapters provide evidence of literary creativity that is possible despite of or in response to those formidable – though not determining – forces. Rather than claim that market forces and reader expectations handicap the individual talent, I hope to demonstrate that they drive authors to produce more sophisticated, thematically and formally complex prose. Kincaid, whose works are discussed in Chapter 5, excels at alternately fulfilling and thwarting, anticipating and ignoring reader expectations.

Chapter 5

Coming of age in *The New Yorker*: Jamaica Kincaid

> And, after all, is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner brought to light, that the particular elements of the knowledge that one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of recodification, re-colonisation?
>
> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 86

Although we can safely say that ethnography, whether academic or literary, tends to objectify the communities in question, it is not clear whether auto-ethnography[115] (or the description of a culture by a representative insider) puts anyone other than the auto-ethnographer in the subject position. In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt argued that in a colonial situation, where there is an overwhelming asymmetry of power, the auto-ethnographic voice may be counterhegemonic and subversive in challenging dominant representations of the colonized. Yet auto-ethnography's content and manner of presentation is, to a large extent, dictated by the interests and expectations of the dominant group, even when resistance is the initial impulse. Counter-ethnography, which reverses the gaze and, consequently, the subject-object positions, may be emancipatory but only within the discursive framework set up by ethnography. The goal of this chapter is to examine the work of the Antiguan-born Jamaica Kincaid, an acclaimed writer who has made growing up in a small place the focus of several works of fiction and nonfiction. In the first half of the chapter, I juxtapose Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* with Kincaid's *At*

[115] According to Reed-Danahay, the term auto-ethnography was first used by the Japanese American ethnographer David M. Hayano in 1979 to mean the study of one's own people. Reed-Danahay's edited volume *Auto/Ethnography* covers a wide range of practices, from introspective accounts by social scientists to memoirs by members of minority groups. Reed-Danahay's own essay in this volume discusses two French authors of rural background who wrote retrospectively about their communities of origin for a mainstream French readership. Terms related to auto-ethnography are "postmodern self-as-text autoethnography" and "evocative autoethnography," as defined in 2006 by Ellis and Bochner, whose work is focused inward, on the experience of the ethnographer.

the Bottom of the River (1983) and *Annie John* (1985), whose naïve narrators perform cultural difference for the reader and offer glimpses of the customs and manners of their community as they themselves undergo the process of acculturation. I then go on to read Kincaid's non-fiction *A Small Place* (1988) as a mock-ethnography and the novel *Lucy* (1990) as counter-ethnography, in which the focus shifts to the customs and manners of white people at home and abroad. In the process, I hope to show that neither of these modes of writing is purely resistant or purely accommodationist.

The multiple and contradictory meanings of any text only become apparent when we examine it within the contexts in which it is produced, published, and read. One such context for Kincaid's writing which has received little critical attention is that of American ethnography. To demonstrate how Kincaid's auto-, mock-, and counter-ethnography relate to traditional ethnography I shall refer to Margaret Mead's classic *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and, briefly, to Bronisław Malinowski's writings. It may appear that the different histories of Samoa and Antigua, and the fact that fifty years separates *Coming of Age in Samoa* from Kincaid's early fiction, make for a skewed comparison.[116] Nonetheless, I believe that Mead's Samoan ethnography influenced the reception of Kincaid's work as it is one of the key texts that shaped Americans' notions of life on tropical islands. Addressed simultaneously to anthropologists and to a broad readership (as signaled by the subtitle *A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*), Mead's ethnography shares many thematic concerns and some formal elements with Kincaid's fiction. One is an outsider's view of a small place; the other an (alienated and self-exiled) insider's. Although Mead wrote about a Polynesian culture and Kincaid about a Caribbean one, both told vivid stories of girls' coming of age on tropical islands – stories that had considerable cultural resonance in the United States.

In her monographic study of Kincaid, critic Diane Simmons suggests that her work was initially apolitical; only gradually, after achieving literary success, did Kincaid acquire the confidence to write texts that were more politically engaged. Like Charles Chesnutt, Kincaid developed from a literary entertainer to a responsible social critic, Simmons writes, though unlike Chesnutt, she did not find it necessary give up her literary career when readers disapproved of her more assertive persona (40). In my view, Kincaid's work does not bear out Simmons's teleological argument. If *At the Bottom of the River* did not shatter American stereotypes of the Caribbean, it did raise important questions about the familiar vs. the

[116] Antigua's colonial history began with the landing of Columbus in 1493. It was a British colony from 1632 to 1967, and a dominion until 1981, when it was granted independence. Samoa was invaded by the French, British, and Americans in turn, and colonized by Germany in 1889. Ten years later, part of the archipelago became an American territory and retains this status today. Meanwhile, Western Samoa, was captured from the Germans by New Zealand, and later regained independence. Most Antiguans are the descendants of African slaves brought to work on sugar plantations and eventually freed in 1834, whereas Samoans were never enslaved.

exotic, self vs. other, modern vs. primitive. It countered readers' expectations of a generalized exotic difference by privileging the particular over the general, the unique over the recurrent. And if *Annie John* seems to evade the issue of race, it can nonetheless be read as a clear-sighted analysis of the micropractices of power. Paradoxically, in the much later *A Small Place*, Kincaid made strong political statements and voiced the hitherto repressed anger, but in order to do so she had to construct fairly homogenous racial/cultural categories, and when she did so, she positioned herself not outside or in opposition to the problematic practice of ethnography but squarely within it.

The American scene and the ambivalent performer

The 1970s – when Kincaid was a literary apprentice at *Ms.*, *Ingenue*, *The Village Voice*, and *The New Yorker* – witnessed a cultural transformation that profoundly affected Americans' attitudes towards the environment, the body, human subjectivity, race, gender, and sexuality. As the last Vietnam War film reels flickered on televisions screens, radically-minded young (mostly white) people were moving back to the land and setting up thousands of hippie communes; they extolled healthy foods over Campbell's canned soup, relative austerity over consumerism, the hand-made over the mass-produced, and face-to-face relations within small communities over the impersonal relations that prevail in postindustrial societies. The gay rights movement (largely but not exclusively white) took off after Stonewall (1969). Throughout the country, Americans attended massive Christian fundamentalist revivals. Along with these developments came an interest in non-Western spirituality. According to historian Bruce J. Schulman:

> by the late 1970s, the 'consciousness revolution' had spread across the United States, reaching far beyond the sixties counterculture. From inexpensive yoga classes at the neighborhood YMCA to 'luxurious awareness cruises in the Caribbean,' a vast network of spiritual outlets emerged, serving millions of Americans 'dissatisfied with their lives,' looking for a direct experience with God, or just plain bored. (96)

This was also the decade when a new wave of (mostly white) feminism swept across the United States and caught up far more women in its sweep than did the previous waves. Coming together in consciousness-raising groups on college campuses, women learned to talk about the politics of gender and to define their own sexuality. Having won a modicum of equal rights only to encounter strong opposition to more radical reforms, many women embraced a feminism of difference. Women's sexualities, virtually taboo in public discourse until the 1950s and submerged in the 1960s by discourses of male sexuality, found expression in mainstream literature of the 1970s, like Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*. It was in this cultural atmosphere that Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* was reprinted in 1973 as one of the pillars of constructionism. For almost five decades Mead had

been using case studies of Pacific island cultures to make Americans reflect on their child-raising practices, gender and sexuality. In the 1960s and 1970s, writes Marianna Torgovnick, "Mead was popularly known as a mother of the sexual revolution. She wrote columns for the *Redbook* on subjects like 'Bisexuality – What's it all about?' and asserted, ahead of her time, that gender identification was a matter of cultural conditioning" (239–41).

Meanwhile, for people of color the 1970s were a time of intensified community-building, with such mass events as the student protests at Howard University and the National Black Convention in Gary, Indiana, galvanizing people around the concept of Black Power. An Asian American identity was forged out of more traditional ethnic group identifications during various student protests and the International Hotel anti-eviction movement in San Francisco in the mid-1970s. Throughout the decade, in the name of their communities, Americans of color pushed for and won affirmative action measures. Women of color, finding themselves marginalized by both white women and men of color in political movements, created communities of their own. One such organization whose foundations were laid in the 1970s was the Kitchen Table Press, opened in 1980 to promote the history and writing of women of color.[117]

Kincaid kept away from the political scene and only approached "the community" when reporting on cultural events. Having severed the ties of blood and nationality by emigrating to the U.S., she was nobody's "soul sister." William Shawn's *The New Yorker* was her intellectual home. She was attuned to the interests and aesthetic tastes of its readers, and if she chose to break some of the magazine's conventions, she did not do so for political reasons. Although it would be reductive to suggest that Kincaid's success was built on her ability to cater to the new fascinations of white middle-class Americans, some of her personal thematic interests and stylistic techniques might have resonated with the current preoccupations and aesthetic tastes of her readership. Paradoxically, what enhanced her value as a writer and gave her an edge over "mainstream" authors was precisely that which she had come to see as a convenient fiction (the primitive, the exotic), had lost faith in (mother-daughter symbiosis, the matrilineal transfer of tradition, native spirituality), or had distanced herself from as unlivable (Caribbean culture, the island of Antigua). Yet middle-class Americans were interested in stories about small places that stood apart from the sprawling, homogenous, postindustrial America, and Kincaid produced them.[118] An appre-

[117] For a short history of this initiative see Barbara Smith, "A Press of Our Own: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press." Another important initiative that emerged out of this political ferment was the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, one of the most influential and enduring feminist publications of the 1980s.

[118] In March 1975, Alice Walker found a ready audience in *Ms. Magazine* for her article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," and thus initiated a revival of Hurston's ethnographic fiction set in "small places," including Jamaica (*Tell My Horse*). Walker's own "Everyday Use" (1973) espoused

ciative *Los Angeles Times* reviewer duly praised *At the Bottom of the River* for "plung[ing] us into an intensely physical world, partly remembered and partly divined, a childhood in the Caribbean – family, manners, and landscape" (cover blurb).

The existence of a niche for authentic representations of ethnicity helps to explain Kincaid's rapid rise to literary success, even if other factors also played a role. Kincaid entered the U.S. at seventeen in 1965. After working as an *au pair*, completing high school, and doing odd journalistic jobs in New York, in the 1970s she was hired by William Shawn, editor of *The New Yorker*, "who showed me what my voice was … He made me feel that what I thought, my inner life, my thoughts as I organized them, were important. That they made literature. That they made sense. There was a world for them" ("Life in the City" 93). Kincaid's "voice" and "inner life" were important to Shawn because she was a black Caribbean woman, a fact she was well aware of: "I am Exhibit A. Because I am not a man, I am not white, I didn't go to Harvard. The generation of writers from *The New Yorker* that I was a part of were white men who went to Harvard or Yale. And I was none of those things" ("Life in the City" 93). Her island stories stood in stark contrast to the rest of *The New Yorker* content, creating a non-threatening diversity in a racially turbulent era. Writing for the society column "Talk of the Town" in the 1970s, she often reported on Afro-American celebrities and cultural events.[119]

Kincaid used her "Exhibit A" status for self-advancement, but her willful and often parodic performance had subversive potential. In a 1995 article titled "Life in the City: Putting Myself Together," Kincaid described her early years in New York, when she attended a party wearing a self-made skirt of plastic bananas with "nothing to cover the rest of my body except an old fur coat that I had bought in an old-fur-coat store for $30. When I arrived at the party, of course, I removed the coat" (93). What Kincaid does not explain is that the idea for her banana costume came from the singer and dancer Josephine Baker, who impersonated Europeans' fantasies of savage femininity in the 1920s and 1930s. Unlike Baker's career-long predicament, Kincaid's banana skirt act was a one-time spoof that must have been an element of a strategy of self-exoticization. Her experiments with bleached close-cropped hair and gilded eyebrows, as well as the vintage clothing she wore later in her life, all seem part of that strategy (Bouson 19–20). Replacing her unremarkable English name Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson with the suggestive

communal values, love of tradition and the ancestral home, and women's solidarity. Her later Pulitzer prize winning novel *The Color Purple* (1982) also portrayed a "small place" and an earlier epoch.

[119] Sample topics of Kincaid's "Talk of the Town" articles in the 1970s: 7th Annual West Indian-American Day Carnival, day-time dancing at a black discotheque called La Martinique, Michael Jackson of the Jackson Five, the Three Degrees, Richard Pryor and Muhammad Ali, the first Kenya Trade Fair at the Coliseum, and a cocktail party held for Miss Jamaica. By the 1980s, Kincaid wrote far more about mainstream events: charity dinners, country and western singers, Elvis Presley, or the Antiques and Memorabilia Show.

pen name Jamaica Kincaid also contributed to her public persona. Combined with talent and hard work, this strategy helped her to win success against odds that were at least as high as for Josephine Baker.

Auto-ethnography

Kincaid's enigmatic short stories collected in *At the Bottom of the River* and her first novel *Annie John*, both set in Antigua, represent two styles of auto-ethnographic writing – "insider" representations of a small community highlighting cultural difference, written for outsiders.[120] The former text is deliberately fragmented and opaque, while the latter is thematically ordered and easier to follow. Kincaid's fiction, like her journalism, originally appeared in the "Talk Story" column of *The New Yorker*, suggesting the author's connection to an oral culture rather than to the New York literati. But the Caribbean storyteller-in-residence did much more than fulfill the fantasies of *The New Yorker* subscribers. She tapped into and subverted ethnographic conventions of representation. Like the much admired modernist ethnographies, the books that sealed Kincaid's literary career were about a community small enough to be structured by face-to-face relationships, living close to the land and sea, growing and catching most of its own food, and bartering other goods and services. Obeah spirituality pervades this community's daily life in the form of women-healers, funeral processions, spells cast by wives on their rivals, and baths with herbal infusions to break such spells. Much of Kincaid's work centers on mother-child relations, within a world still split into "separate spheres." In this colonial community on the threshold of the modern world, mothers who aspire to gentility preach chastity to their daughters, while the daughters exuberantly make love to one another in a secluded part of the old colonial cemetery. Yet the community Kincaid imagines is not an ethnographer's microcosm suspended in time, in which "primitive people" are doomed to repeating the same gestures forever. Her writing involves a persistent reinscription of colonial and neocolonial history onto an island landscape swathed in myth and rendered timeless by Western culture. If there was in Kincaid's debut a willingness to flirt with the primitive, the anti-romantic streak revealed itself more forcefully by her second book. As soon as the banana skirt had served its purpose, Kincaid cast it aside.

Telling analogies exist between Mead's and Kincaid's visions of small places. Like most anthropologists until the 1960s (and many to this day), Mead saw ethnography as a well-designed tool for understanding – and thus assuring respect for

[120] Carolyn Ellis in *The Ethnographic I* categorizes Kincaid's fiction as auto-ethnography (46) but does not analyze the text. Kincaid herself refers to *Annie John* and *Lucy* as autobiographical fiction: "The feelings in it are autobiographical, yes. I didn't want to say it was autobiographical because I felt that would be somehow admitting something about myself, but it is and so that's that" (Cudjoe 220).

– other cultures; it was also her personal view that ethnography could help to reform American society. "Primitive" communities, she believed, allowed scientists to stand back from complex American social phenomena and see how they work on a smaller scale; small places were also repositories of cultural knowledge that Americans had lost and might want to relearn from "primitive" peoples. What the Samoans might gain or lose as objects of ethnography did not seem to be a relevant question.

Kincaid never intended to hold up her version of Antiguan culture as a model for American readers, no matter how critical she was of the U.S. She did, however, write out of a conviction that fiction can help readers envisage other lifeways and kinds of subjectivity. In her early fiction, she used child narrators who played a double role: that of the "primitive" other and that of the universal child with universal fears, needs, and desires. "I am in my pupa stage" says the narrator of a story in *At the Bottom of The River* (20). "I am primitive and wingless" (24). Using child-narrators also allowed Kincaid to unobtrusively bring in a good deal of ethnographic detail, so as to initiate the American readership into Antiguan culture alongside the children.

According to an astute reviewer quoted on the cover of *At the Bottom of the River*, Kincaid's stories "make the familiar seem strange, the exotic seem commonplace" (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*) – two maneuvers that are often attributed to ethnography. The collection opens with the story "Girl," in which a mother's disembodied voice instructs and admonishes her silent adolescent daughter, preparing her for Antiguan womanhood. The intensely personal moments shared by mother and daughter "makes the exotic seem commonplace" for Americans. The story "In the Night" sustains the theme of cultural difference, but it does so by recounting what a sleepy child hears and imagines lying in bed: countless commonplace noises: "There is the sound of a cricket, there is the sound of a church bell, there is the sound of this house creaking, and the other house creaking" (7). The little girl also hears or visualizes the ghost of a neighbor, "Mr. Gishard," and "a woman who has left her skin" and turned into a bird (6). These are clearly figures from local lore. "The night-soil men" are the girl's personal bugaboos: mysterious figures she listens out for as they "come and go, walking on damp ground in straw shoes. Their feet in the straw shoes make a scratchy sound" (6). Another sound suggests the practice of obeah: "someone is sprinkling a colorless powder outside a closed door so that someone else's child will be stillborn" (11). But beneath this culture-specific layer is a layer of experiences that the American reader shares with the Antiguan girl: sleeplessness, fear of the night, passing imperceptibly from fantasies into nightmares, wetting one's bed and having one's mother, who "can change everything," remove the wet nightgown and sheets. In subsequent stories, the ethnographic function becomes less and less pronounced, while the personal and poetic comes to dominate.

Kincaid's second book, *Annie John*, has a young narrator who willingly exposes herself and her community to the ethnographic gaze. Although Annie has emerged from the "pupa stage" and spread her wings, she is still a girl (ten in the first chapter and seventeen in the last). But in the middle of the book the "sharp-eyed" narrator makes a startling statement about ethnographic observation. When in secondary school she has to read the official history of the West Indies, with Columbus as the conquering hero, Annie finds herself and other black people grossly misrepresented. This leads her to reflect: "I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a *proper interest* in the Europeans on first seeing them, and said, 'How nice,' and then *gone home to tell their friends* about it" (76, emphasis mine). We can guess what improper interest might mean to Annie: the kind that gave rise to anthropological theories of race used to justify the slave trade and the plantation economy in the New World. Kincaid would elaborate on improper interest in her later books, exposing the self-serving interest of colonists and white tourists in *A Small Place* and the exoticist interest of middle-class New Yorkers in *Lucy*. But what might "proper interest" entail? And if we read *Annie John* as auto-ethnographic, how does Kincaid "tell her friends," particularly her mentor William Shawn at *The New Yorker*, about Antiguan difference?

Telling an island to cultural insiders involves a very different optics than telling it to outsiders, a fact Mead and Kincaid were well aware of. Neither author envisaged the islanders as readers.[121] Evidently rebutting critical comments, Mead explained in the 1971 edition of *Coming of Age in Samoa* that originally she had not considered the Samoans as readers, "one, because those about whom I wrote, although they themselves wrote letters in Samoan, read no books, and second, because I was discussing their own lives, lives which they themselves were living" (xii). She had written an ethnography according to 1920s scholarly criteria, somewhat modifying the format to appeal to the broad American public in the hope of provoking reflection on American norms and values.

Similarly, Kincaid did not address Antiguans because, to use Mead's words, she "was discussing their own lives, lives which they themselves were living" (xii). Given the intimate nature of much of the material, the narrators of *At the Bottom* and *Annie John* seem to be addressing someone close but not a fellow Antiguan. In

[121] Paul Rabinow uses Kevin Dwyer's study *Moroccan Dialogues* (1982) as an ironic illustration of the fact that ethnographic texts are invariably addressed to readers in the metropolis, while the "natives" and "native informants" are not imagined as readers. Though Dwyer constructed his ethnography as a dialogue with his Moroccan informant, and even inquired "which part of their dialogue had interested him most," the reply that the Moroccan "had not been interested in a single question asked by Dwyer" is irrelevant to the project "as long as other anthropologists read the book and include it in their discourse." Evidently the fact that postmodern ethnographers embrace such notions as dialogism, heteroglossia, or polyvocality does not alter the politics of ethnography that privilege the Western writer and reader (Rabinow 251).

various interviews and, most explicitly, in the novel *My Brother* (1997), Kincaid has insisted that William Shawn[122] had been her imagined reader.

> Almost all my life as a writer, everything I wrote I expected Mr. Shawn to read … For a very long time I had the perfect reader for what I would write … The perfect reader has died, but I cannot see any reason not to write for him anyway, for I can sooner get used to not hearing from him – the perfect reader – than to not be able to write for him at all. (197–198)

Telling Antigua to Mr. Shawn involved the above-mentioned double move of "making the familiar seem strange, the exotic seem commonplace." She told of exotic difference, which had the effect of denaturalizing for Americans aspects of their own culture. Conversely, her stories also had a component of sameness or familiarity, bearing out the humanistic assumption that people of all races are essentially the same underneath their cultural veneer.

Mead believed that as an anthropologist she should research "primitive groups who have had thousands of years of historical development along completely different lines from our own, whose language does not possess our Indo-European categories, whose religious ideas are of a different nature, whose social organisation is not only simpler but very different from our own" (5). A culture that is only slightly different from the American one would not offer a sharp enough contrast, she explained. With her audience in mind, Kincaid also played up cultural difference. For instance, the opening story of *At the Bottom of the River* focused almost exclusively on those aspects of Antiguan culture that stood in sharp contrast to the daily life of mainstream Americans. In an era of sanitary pads, washing machines, fast food chains, and local ordinances prohibiting the hanging of laundry on outdoor clotheslines, Kincaid wrote:

> Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off. (3)

Thus begins a mother's litany, which continues for three pages. The world that emerges from the story "Girl" is one in which women sew and hand-wash clothes, grow or catch and cook food for the family, and repress their sexuality to avoid unwanted pregnancy but know how to perform an abortion if necessary. While it was probably interesting for Americans, "Girl" would have held little interest for Antiguans, for whom the local ways of doing things were common knowledge. In

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[122] William Shawn (1907–1992), a liberal humanist of Jewish descent, was the editor of *The New Yorker* in the years 1951–1987. Around 1930, presumably to advance his career in the publishing industry, he changed his name Chon to the anglicized Shawn ("William Shawn" n.p.). By contrast, Kincaid dropped the dignified English double-barrel name Potter Richardson in favor of one that evoked her Caribbean origin, but she did so 40 years later, at a time when ethnic origins could be a source of pride. Shawn supported Kincaid's career from the start. When he retired and accepted a position at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, this publishing house brought out her book *A Small Place*, which *The New Yorker* had rejected.

the same way, Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* served no purpose in Samoa: "I did not have to tell them what life was like in the villages of Manu'a; the young Manu'ans knew" (xii).

Kincaid's self-positioning in relation to Antiguans and mainstream Americans seems analogous to that of Maxine Hong Kingston, who in *The Woman Warrior* (1976) wrote about her love-hate relationship with relatives and neighbors in her native Stockton Chinatown. Although Kingston addresses Chinese Americans directly in the novel, and though for many Chinese Americans the publication of *The Woman Warrior* was a momentous event, white feminists constituted its largest and most ardent readership. Having found it impossible to live in Chinatown, Kingston moved closer to the mainstream and invented a compelling genre of fiction suited to "telling wrongs." She located the source of most (though not all) of the "wrongs" in the culture imported by Chinese immigrants. Critic and dramatist Frank Chin has interpreted her work as telling on her own community and all but ignoring white racism – a fact for which he has repeatedly rebuked her.[123] Kincaid, too, fictionalized her love-hate relationship with Antigua, reminiscing about the amniotic bliss of childhood but "telling wrongs" with a vengeance. Like Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Kincaid's stories about Antigua resonated with her original readers' ethnographic expectations. After being serialized in *The New Yorker*, they were reprinted in the Random House Contemporary World Literature series, where they came to represent the Caribbean on a literary globe covered by the works of Vassily Aksyonov, Julio Cortázar, Fumiko Enchi, Tadeusz Konwicki, Timothy Mo, Salman Rushdie, and Wole Soyinka among others.

As a representative Caribbean, Kincaid anticipated the fact that her work would be read ethnographically. The fact that her medium was fiction did not solve the problem, for the language of fiction and that of ethnographic description are often indistinguishable. For instance, Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* is a scholarly book with such components as a methodology section and appendices to legitimize it, yet in some passages Mead used her literary skills to captivate the general as well as the academic reader. One of the opening chapters provides the backdrop for the initiation of Samoan girls into adult life – a magic lantern show of typical sights and sounds. "A Day in Samoa" is recounted in the "ethnographic present," a convention used by ethnographers to describe everyday actions and rituals, which has the problematic effect of locating the objects of ethnography in a space outside history.[124]

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[123] Frank Chin's longest critique of *The Woman Warrior* is the 1991 essay "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," but his ideas about Kingston's work had already crystallized in 1974, when he co-edited *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian American Writers*. Chin problematized Kingston's alignment with white feminists when she portrayed Chinese American men as misogynist while ignoring the white racism that had kept Chinese emasculated and ghettoized.

[124] By suggesting that the "natives" had always done things the ethnographer had seen them do on a specific occasion, and that they would continue to do so indefinitely, the ethnographer "denied them coevalness." See the Introduction to Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other*.

> The life of the day begins at dawn, or if the moon has shown until daylight, the shouts of the young men may be heard before dawn from the hillside. Uneasy in the night, populous with ghosts, they shout lustily to one another as they hasten with their work. As the dawn begins to fall among the soft brown roofs and the slender palm trees stand out against a colourless, gleaming sea, lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees or in the shadow of beached canoes, that the light may find each sleeper in his appointed place. Cocks crow, negligently, and a shrill-voiced bird cries from the breadfruit trees. The insistent roar of the reef seems muted to an undertone for the sounds of a waking village. Babies cry, a few short wails before sleepy mothers give them the breast. Restless little children roll out of their sheets and wander drowsily down to the beach to freshen their faces in the sea. (8)

Mead's description, which unfolds dreamily over four pages, has an analogue in Kincaid's *At the Bottom of the River*. In terms of placement, imagery, as well as the use of present tense, Kincaid's story "In the Night" discussed above bears an uncanny resemblance to Mead's "A Day in Samoa." Both encapsulate the rhythms of island life by telling the story of a representative day or night. Like "A Day in Samoa," "In the Night" is clearly made up of compressed, heightened, and creatively combined memories and fantasies. Just like Mead's vision of Samoa as a last bastion of sexual freedom, where "lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees," Kincaid's ghosts and evildoers whom the child hears "sprinkling a colorless powder outside a closed door" are a figment of the imagination. But because of the unreliability of the child's perspective, "In the Night" does not purport to have the documentary authority of Mead's "A Day in Samoa" which tells us how things *are*.

While anthropologists have traditionally aimed at transparency, seamlessness, systematicity, and exhaustiveness of cultural description, Kincaid in *At the Bottom of the River* explored the limits of opacity, ellipsis, and fragmentation. There are no panoramic views to help readers get their bearings, no structuring chronology or progression, and no authoritative narrator to explain how one image or voice relates to another. The form seems deliberately unyielding, as if to suggest that the island cannot be taken in at a glance, simplified, or generalized about.

The narrator of "In the Night" has not yet learned to measure time, so the night for her "isn't divided like a sweet drink into little sips," but is "round in some places, flat in some places" (6). Also in the story "Wingless" included in *At the Bottom of the River*, the narrator is only just learning to "tell differences" and see "subtle gradations of color" (22). This can be read as making a deliberate effort to shed conventional ways of imposing meaning on experience, or to momentarily recover a time before the intrusion of racial and other categories. The present tense which dominates in *At the Bottom* seems to have nothing in common with the "ethnographic present" when combined with the limited-point-of-view narration and stream of consciousness technique. Some of the stories are narrated through alternating voices that are not easily identifiable ("At Last"); others are intertextual, inlaid with references to Kingsley's *The Water Babies* or to biology and history textbooks ("Wingless"); one or two sound like parables.

Constant repetitions unyoke language from its referential function. The effect is that of an idiosyncratic, patterned collage.[125]

While attempting to convey the Antiguanness of this experience, Kincaid also universalized it by the use of generic rather than culture-specific nouns. For instance, the language of the final story is that of a school primer: "In the light of the lamp, I see some books, I see a chair, I see a table, I see a pen; I see a bowl of ripe fruit, a bottle of milk, a flute made of wood, the clothes that I will wear … I claim these things then – mine – and now I feel myself grow solid and complete, my name filling up my mouth" (82). The sense of embodiment or subjectivity at which the narrator arrives in the last line of the story can be shared by any reader since there are no references to race, gender, or culture.

Having willfully refused to make Antigua transparent in *At the Bottom of the River*, Kincaid adopted the reverse strategy in the novel *Annie John*. Here, the narrative unfolds chronologically in the simple past tense, and is structured like a *Bildungsroman*. The writing is no longer opaque, though Annie tends to organize her ideas in terms of cross-associations whose interconnected meanings are not always immediately apparent. The precocious young narrator recalls various aspects of her socialization into Antiguan culture. Each chapter focuses on one or more cultural institutions (such as the home, market, funeral parlor, or school) and human relations within those institutions (with family, neighbors, community, girls, boys, or teachers).

Death, sex, and obeah are three of the many recurrent themes. All have ethnographic as well as literary resonance. Kincaid's method of dealing with difference (whether idiosyncratic or cultural) is described most succinctly by critic Keja Valens: by strategically deploying an established genre like the *Bildungsroman* and "a language and a grammar of the ordinary," Kincaid normalizes what white middle-class heterosexual Americans would otherwise find strange (124). "Kincaid's simplicity … is a foil: she uses the ordinary, the familiar, the commonplace only to subvert them through their own performance" (123).

Annie John opens with a chapter on death. The narrator, like children everywhere, is interested in death, but she has more opportunities to encounter death face-to-face than children in the West. She studies death systematically, testing her own hypotheses about where it strikes and how it manifests itself. Dissatisfied with observing funeral processions from a distance, she proceeds to visit funeral parlors to gaze at corpses and mourners, and then to interview her schoolmates about their encounters with death. From this account readers get a sense of Antigua

[125] If we interpreted Kincaid's use of repetition as rooted in the survivals of African cultures in the Caribbean, we could invoke James A. Snead's important discussion of the different meanings ascribed to repetition in African and European cultures. Snead explains that whereas in African cultures repetition is valorized as circulation and equilibrium, Europeans since the Enlightenment have perceived repetition as stasis, and approved of it only if accompanied by accumulation and growth (66–67). The non-teleological African understanding of repetition resonates with what Kincaid was attempting to achieve on the formal level of her story collection.

as a place with a high mortality rate, especially among children; a place where people usually die at home, and are buried in coffins made by their neighbors.

Again, like children everywhere, Annie is interested in sex. She peeps at her parents making love. Her fascination with her beautiful mother persists despite their estrangement when Annie enters puberty. Her other love interests are also homoerotic. To give just one example, Annie is initiated by older girls into an old ritual that takes place on Friday afternoons at the back of a colonial cemetery, where the girls gather after school to sit on the graves, "sing bad songs, use forbidden words, and, of course, show each other various parts of [their] bodies" (80).[126] That "off course" thrown in by the adult narrator implies that the sexual practices of American adolescents are not qualitatively different from those of Antiguans. Annie's offhand manner as she describes the girls' ritual makes it seem unremarkable – so much so that before Valens published "Obvious and Ordinary: Desire between Girls in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*" in 2004, critics had barely commented upon the cemetery scene and others involving Annie's objects of desire: Sonia, Gwen, and the Red Girl.

Valens's point about the deceptive simplicity of Annie's language, which seems to naturalize everything she does, is one explanation. Another way to explain the erasure of sexuality from analyses of the novel is that the critics brought to their reading certain expectations of "primitive" sexuality derived from ethnographic literature and film. The sheer number of written and visual texts on the sexual culture of tropical islands is overwhelming. Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* and Bronisław Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929) were just two acclaimed texts in a flood of academic and lay representations of exotic sexuality.[127] Malinowski claimed that sexuality "dominates in fact almost every aspect of [Melanesian] culture" and science *must* make it knowable (Malinowski xxiii). Both he and Mead described heterosexual and homosexual practices. After a lengthy discussion of the way heterosexual coupling is culturally regulated and yet relatively unrestricted, Mead gave several examples

[126] Dancing on the graves of slave owners and sharing intimacies, the Antiguan girls briefly slip out of the patriarchal and colonial matrix, only to be reabsorbed by it when they grow up, though some, like Annie, manage to slip away by leaving the island. As Valens argues, "Desire between girls in *Annie John* does not oppose a heterosexual norm; it simply pluralizes it. It does so not by supplanting or even supplementing desire between women and men but by shifting the focus, so that we consider not what is wrong (and colonial) about desire between women and men but instead what is right (and autonomously Caribbean) about desire between women" (124).

[127] In the first half of the twentieth century, exotic sexuality was also a favorite topic of documentary and feature films. As critic Jeffrey Geiger argues in *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the U.S. Imperial Imagination*, many ethnographic documentaries had mass distribution and were especially appreciated for their female nudity (unlike in Hollywood movies, "scientific voyeurism" was not censored). Directors like Frederick O'Brien, Robert and Frances Flaherty, and F.W. Murnau (discussed by Geiger) made feature films set in the South Seas, using native actors selected for their physical beauty, and indulging in Euro-American erotic fantasies and popularizing the myth of the "savage" as primarily a sexual being.

of same-sex coupling and concluded that "casual homosexual relations between girls never assumed any long-time importance. On the part of growing girls or women who were working together they were regarded as a pleasant and natural diversion, just tinged with the salacious" (82). Although she used standard heteronormative medical vocabulary, her treatment of Samoan sexuality (including extramarital sex and homoeroticism) indicates that she was trying to expand the boundaries of acceptable sexual behavior in American culture. Both Malinowski and Mead hoped to show that the islanders they studied had something that Euro-Americans had lost: natural, healthy sex uninhibited by the culture of gentility. By singling out Pacific islanders as sexual beings, and removing their own sexuality to the private realm where no ethnographer could possibly intrude, Malinowski and Mead contributed to the myth of the carefree hypersexual islander that can be traced back to accounts of Captain Cook's voyage. [128]

While references to sexuality abound in *Annie John*, obeah spirituality appears only sporadically. Annie's progressive mother, who makes a domestic science of nutrition, does follow certain occult rituals and occasionally share her traditional beliefs with Annie. The narrative also conjures up a powerful obeah healer, Annie's grandmother, who is doubly mysterious because she does not believe in living in houses: "A house? Why live in a house? All you need is a nice hole in the ground, so you can come and go if you please" (126). But the grandmother only makes one brief appearance towards the end of the novel. As if deliberately refusing to engage in sensation-mongering, Annie tells us the bare minimum about how Grandma Chess went about healing her. The most striking thing about Annie's Antigua is not obeah, burial customs, or sexuality, but its ordinariness. Contrary to the idyllic view of tropical islands as places where children come of age in harmony with nature and society, Annie's Antigua is the site of teenage rebellion.

Mead played a major role in popularizing the idyllic image of islands. She claimed to have conceived of *Coming of Age in Samoa* as an alternative model of child-raising for Americans and, possibly, a solution for the "difficulties and maladjustments of youth" (1) that in her view plagued American society. Based on the Samoan research, Mead argued that these "maladjustments" are a product of culture rather than nature. She further concluded that communal cultures that do not foster individualism and that limit young people's choices produce contented and well-socialized individuals. Her effort to find in a "primitive" culture something Western culture had "lost" inscribes itself in a Romantic tradition that goes back to Rousseau.[129] However, as many have observed, Mead only managed to con-

[128] Mead's biographers have contributed to our awareness of Mead as a sexual being by discussing her long relationship with Ruth Benedict, as well as her liaisons with other women and men. Meanwhile, the publication of Malinowski's *Diary* in 1968 revealed his many fantasies and dreams involving female as well as male lovers, white as well as black. As scholars, Malinowski and Mead continued to project onto the people they studied a qualitatively different, "primitive" sexuality.

[129] For a discussion of Mead's ideas about the potential uses of the "primitive" for reforming Western culture, see Torgovnick (240–243).

struct a "primitive" culture with its well-adjusted adolescents by downplaying conflicts and ignoring the fact that the American missionary and colonial presence in Samoa had already left its stamp on the older communal values.[130] Rather than brush aside the "maladjustments of youth," Kincaid made them central to her writing, from the story "Girl" to the more recent memoir *My Brother*. Arguably, exploring the "maladjustments of youth" was a way for Kincaid to explore the "maladjustments" of colonized people – the conflict within the family serving as a trope for the broader political conflict over Antiguans' right to self-determination.

In her literary debut, Kincaid seemed to have been as anxious as Mead to downplay the "maladjustments" and accompanying anger. "Maladjustments" are not addressed directly in *At the Bottom of the River*. Presumably the "Girl," who is being drilled in Antiguan culture by her mother accepts her lot, for she does not talk back, even when the orders and admonitions become abusive. If rupture or pain is mentioned at all in the text, its source is not immediately traceable to "coming of age." On the contrary, the recurrent image of the mother, and the fantasy of mother and daughter sharing a house, might suggest that harmony prevails, for "as we walked along, our steps became one, and as we talked, our voices became one … I could not see where I left off and she began" (60). Neither do the various narrators in this book distance themselves from the British culture and colonial education whose echoes resound in the stories.

By the time Kincaid wrote *Annie John*, however, "maladjustment" had become central to her understanding of Antigua. Contrary to Mead's argument about socialization in simple societies, Kincaid implicitly argues that traditional society, particularly a colonized one, breeds "maladjustment" because it forces adolescents (girls) into demeaning social roles and rewards them for suppressing their individuality. In *Annie John*, she explores the "maladjustment" caused by the rite of passage into womanhood in a colonized society. While Mead insisted on showing one particular "small place" as conducive to girls' harmonious and sexually uninhibited development, Kincaid seemed equally bent on arguing the reverse: that "small places" stifle a girl's ambitions and break her spirit. Forced to dissimulate and conceal her emotional needs and opinions, Annie first becomes rebellious, then falls into a debilitating depression, and finally leaves the island never to return.

At the heart of the conflict stands the mother who unwittingly acts as a colonial agent. As a child, Annie sees her mother as a gloriously regal woman: "her

[130] As a young ethnographer in an era when the discipline still imagined its primary goal to be the "salvage" of "primitive" cultures about to be eradicated by modernity, Mead was understandably invested in showing Samoa as virtually unaffected by contacts with Westerners. While she occasionally mentioned "the pastor's household" in the middle of a village she studied, and "the pastor's school" which some of the local girls attended, she downplayed the cultural change the missionary presence had brought to Samoa. She also never mentioned that she lived with U.S. Navy personnel while doing fieldwork, or that her license to question hundreds of Samoans about their sexual lives over the period of nine months was guaranteed by the presence of American authorities on the island (Weisberg 165–166).

head looked as if it should be on a sixpence" (18). Over time, however, the mother is dethroned and becomes merely the queen's middle(wo)man bent on shaping Annie into a marriageable "lady." A self-educated working-class housewife, Annie's mother knows all about germs, red corpuscles, and nutrition. Despite the hot climate, on schooldays she makes Annie eat a heavy English breakfast: "porridge, eggs, an orange or half a grapefruit, bread and butter, and cheese" (15). She ineptly hunts for Annie's marbles hidden under the house, to prevent her from turning into a tomboy, and she curbs her sexuality with an iron hand. None of this seems particularly oppressive in its own right. But it acquires meaning in the colonial context, where the ambitions awakened by education will have to yield to a life of drudgery. Lying, stealing money and library books, and pursuing her own interests whatever the punishment is Annie's response to parental authority.

When Annie goes to secondary school, acting up against the school authorities replaces acting up against the mother. To use Homi Bhabha's terminology, at home Annie is expected to mimic the mother, and at school she is systematically trained to mimic the colonial masters ("Of Mimicry and Man" 125–133). The girls study Latin and French in addition to arithmetic and the history of the West Indies which enshrines Columbus, Nelson, and Cabot. With twenty desks arranged "five in a row, four rows deep" Annie's classroom is a replica of classrooms across the British Empire. The teachers are mostly white women with English-sounding names, who make slow learners wear a "dunce cap" all day as a punishment (75).

Throughout the second half of the novel, Annie John intuitively distances herself from the school's "benevolent" colonialism. In one humorous episode, underneath a textbook illustration showing Columbus in chains at the ignominious end of his career, she scribbles words she has heard her mother use with reference to her maternal grandfather (presumably an aging petty tyrant): "So the Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" (78). For this act of mockery Annie is punished by having to copy Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*. The retribution is swift and severe because, as Bhabha writes in another context, "it is from this area between mimicry and mockery [that] the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" ("Of Mimicry and Man" 127).

The school, however, defuses Annie's rebellion for it encourages British-style individualism and the formation of her subjectivity through autobiographical writing. It is by being told to write a story about herself and then to read it out loud to an admiring audience that Annie experiences a heady sense of agency. In fostering individualism, the school offers Annie an alternative to the island's communal culture. Required to invent herself as both subject and object of narrative, Annie produces a miniature of what Kincaid would end up doing for a living.

Patriarchal and colonial power in the story has no center and is not distributed neatly along lines of race or gender. It suffuses all human relations, cascading down from an invisible metropolitan center and working its way from the bottom

up, with everybody down to the smallest child shifting between subject and object positions according to the context. Relations of power manifest themselves in the household, in the British educational system, and even in the games children play after school. There are no innocents, only colonial subjects performing their assigned roles and occasionally acting up. In one poignant scene, the adolescent Annie is harassed by four older boys. Glancing at them, she recognizes one of the boys as Mineu, a childhood playmate:

> Of course in all the games we played I was given the lesser part. If we played knight and dragon, I was the dragon; if we played discovering Africa, he discovered Africa; he was also the leader of the savage tribes that tried to get in the way of the discovery, and I played his servant, and a not very bright servant at that. (96)

But Annie recalls that this order of things was unexpectedly reversed when she and Mineu were reenacting a much-publicized hanging. Mineu put his head in the noose, the noose tightened, and he started swinging by the neck. "As all this happened," says Annie, "I just stood there and stared" (98). No interpretation of the incident is offered, but it seems that the memory of the moment when she had power over Mineu's life enables Annie to regain her composure and extricate herself from the company of the four boys.

One problem with the oblique power analysis practiced by Kincaid in her early fiction is that readers simply missed the point, which is apparent from all the reviews of Kincaid's early fiction. Modernist literary standards, which valorize complexity, ambiguity, and irony, preclude sharpened divisions between black and white, victims and perpetrators – the stuff of political critique. It may well be that after publishing *Annie John* and seeing that white readers habitually failed to get the point, Kincaid tried her hand at a completely different kind of writing.

Mock-ethnography

No one could fail to get the point of *A Small Place* (1988), and very few people liked it. William Shawn purchased it for *The New Yorker* but his successor refused to print it (Paravisini-Gebert 14). Generically *A Small Place* is an exercise in autobiographical criticism – part political analysis, part memoir, part diatribe wrapped in an extended essay. Salman Rushdie aptly called it a jeremiad (qtd. on the cover of the 1988 edition). Its subject is the predicament of an island whose colonial past encroaches on its "independent" present, for the land and the people continue to be exploited by a tandem of native elites and foreign capital. *A Small Place* is discussed here as a mock-ethnography because it satirizes the customs and manners of western tourists in Antigua and of Antigua's neo-colonial ruling elite. The reason Kincaid produced a mock-ethnography was clearly that her "ethnographic subjects" were inaccessible to research: even if she had wanted to do some form of "fieldwork" among the tourists (and most certainly among Jamaica's leaders),

they would not have told her what they really think or do habitually. She thus has to deduce the whole from the pattern: fragmentary evidence and rumors.

Judging by the response to Kincaid's jeremiad, the mainstream Americans to whom it was addressed had trouble identifying with the implied readers constructed by the text. Most professional and amateur reviewers were either baffled or offended by its "vitriolic" tone.[131] Although Kincaid addresses the reader using the familiar as "you," this pronoun has several referents. Initially, the "you" is identified as a white tourist who may consider visiting Antigua (4). Later, "you" refers to a broader category that encompasses any white person whose ancestors colonized the Caribbean, or who drew profits from the slave trade/labor, or who benefits from neocolonialism today (34–35). Half-way through the book, "you" is imagined as a sympathetic listener, as in the phrase: "you can imagine how I felt" (41). In the conclusion, Kincaid suggests that "you," like whiteness itself, is a position of power "you" can step out of at will, once "you throw off your master's yoke" (80–81). In addition to addressing white readers directly, Kincaid upbraids the neocolonial elite for backsliding into colonial habits. (At least some members of this elite must have read *A Small Place*, for it was banned on the island.)

If Kincaid had trouble pinning down her intended reader, she had an equally hard time defining her own position. "I" in *A Small Place* is clearly Kincaid's wrathful persona, but the pronoun "we" is more ambiguous. In the first two sections, the "we" is transhistorical and includes all Antiguans, in whose name Kincaid is speaking. For instance, with reference to the English colonists she writes, "We thought these people were so ill mannered and we were surprised by this, for they were far away from home, and we believed that the further away you were from home the better you should behave" (27). But in the last two sections of the book the "I" splits away from the Antiguans, who now become "they." Assessing the situation from a distance, the "I" berates both the naïve Antiguan voters and the predators they vote for.

The inconsistencies described above indicate the complexity of Kincaid's position as an Antiguan living and publishing abroad, yet trying to intervene in a crisis at home – a crisis brought about as much by whites as by native elites. Caryl Phillips claims that "*A Small Place* does for the Caribbean what Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* did for America" (qtd. on the cover of 1988 edition). If Kincaid's text falls short of Baldwin's as a political intervention, it is not because Kincaid is the lesser writer but because of her contorted position as an ex-islander

[131] The following excerpt comes from a representative amateur review by "Realtraveller" published on Epinions on 9 July 2000: "Awash in broad generalities and frank hate speech, this book lacks substantive facts to back its claims … I learned very little about Antigua and I completely lost any respect for this author. Whatever valid points the author may have made are invalidated by the stereotyping of people and the lack of factual citations to support her claims. Name calling and hate speech, whether from the right or in this case from the left, are equally detestable." Also see Paravisini-Gebert for a discussion of the initial reception of *A Small Place* (114–115).

employed by *The New Yorker*, an expatriate who chose not to apply for U.S. citizenship. By criticizing Americans as tourists she bit the hand that fed her – white middle-class readers. She railed against the Antiguan elites who could afford to ignore American public opinion. Ultimately, *A Small Place* was rejected by *The New Yorker* (where Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* had been published in 1962). The jeremiad did not reach Kincaid's usual captive audience, while those who bought the book version were probably already sympathetic to her message, even if they objected to the "vitriolic" tone. Yet *A Small Place* is not a failed text. Appreciated by postcolonial studies scholars, it can also be read as a powerful early contribution to whiteness studies.[132] Ethnographers who see troubling parallels between tourism and their own research practice have found theoretical insights in *A Small Place*. Nadine Dolby, for instance, uses Kincaid's "critique of tourism as a way of probing (and reframing) ethnographic practice" (58).

This mock-ethnography, which brazenly returns the tourist's gaze, opens like a parody of Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). In his introduction to *Argonauts*, Malinowski invites the reader to "imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight" (4). Some sixty years later, in *A Small Place*, Kincaid echoed: "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see. If you come by airplane, you will land at the V.C. Bird International Airport" (3). But where Malinowski invited the reader to contemplate the habits of Pacific islanders, Kincaid mirrored the habits of white tourists back to them. Merely reducing the tourist to a stereotype would have been provocative; addressing the reader-tourist as "you" is doubly so.

Both writers realized there is something inherently rude in staring at people and taking notes on the strangeness of their habits. Kincaid was particularly critical of the motives behind the ethnographic gaze, which she traced to the alienating and sterile modern urban existence. She berated the western tourist for

> marveling at the harmony (ordinarily what you would say is the backwardness) and the union these other people (and they are other people) have with nature. And you look at the things they can do with a piece of ordinary cloth, things they fashion out of cheap, vulgarly colored (to you) twine, the way they squat down over a hole they have made in the ground; the hole itself is something to marvel at, and since you are an ugly person this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you: their ancestors were not clever in the way yours were and not ruthless in the way yours were, for then would it not be you who would be in harmony with nature and backwards in that charming way? (16–17)

This narrator delights in seeing right through the reader-tourist and in being savagely rude towards the very person who automatically expects deference. This

[132] Kincaid's satirical ethnography of white people abroad could be significant for whiteness studies in that it critically examines the role Third-World tourism plays in the self-construction of white people. Whiteness here is treated as situational: a taken-for-granted privilege that can be renounced at will.

strategic rudeness must be read as a response to the rudeness of the tourist gaze. Even Malinowski confessed that his ethnographic method involved "thrust[ing] my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding" (8). But he excused his own rudeness as a necessary part of the scientific quest.

In her mock-ethnography of tourism, Kincaid deliberately constructed a straw man to whom she attributed thoughts, motives, and desires based on scant evidence. Her descriptions make use of the anthropological convention of deducing "how natives think."[133] "The Trobriander," wrote Malinowski,

> works in a roundabout way, to a large extent for the sake of the work itself, and puts a great deal of aesthetic polish on the arrangement and general appearance of his garden. He is not guided primarily by the desire to satisfy his wants, but by a very complex set of traditional forces, duties and obligations, beliefs in magic, social ambitions and vanities. (*Argonauts* 62)

Writing about "the Samoan girl," Mead explained: "Because one girl's life was so much like another's in an uncomplex, uniform culture like Samoa, I feel justified in generalizing" (6). This convention was used well into the 1960s without readers raising an eyebrow; but when people of color entered the field of anthropology "the Trobriander" and "the Samoan" of ethnography came under fire. In constructing "the tourist," Kincaid showed white readers how it feels to be written about in the mode reserved exclusively for "natives."

Explicitly political writing must categorize and generalize. It must focus on the systemic nature of social phenomena and ignore the contradictions. While in *Annie John* Kincaid subtly juxtaposed, as two interesting variants, the power of the British school teacher over the Antiguan child and the power of one Antiguan child over another, in *A Small Place* she sketched the workings of power in broad graphic strokes. The power of Kincaid's critical analysis lies in the very same generalizations that made the text unpalatable for some readers: imagined as tourists, they are deprived of individuality and reduced to a stereotype. Kincaid's tourist is an alienated modern escapist, interested only in the most superficial experience of the exotic, seeking in the Third World confirmation of his/her own superiority. As an object of Kincaid's mock-ethnography, the tourist is unthinking, unimaginative, and unable to make connections between the economy of Antigua and the global economy. He looks at Antigua through a primitivist haze. On observing a ten-year-old sign on the door of the local library saying REPAIRS ARE PENDING, Kincaid's tourist

> might see this as a sort of quaintness on the part of these islanders, these people descended from slaves – what strange, unusual perception of time they have … but perhaps in a world that is twelve miles long and nine miles wide (the size of Antigua) twelve years and twelve minutes, and twelve days are all the same. (9)

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[133] See, for example, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (1926), and Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (1995).

Unaccustomed to being positioned as objects of ethnography, some white readers protested against the patronizing tone of *A Small Place*, though the same readers might have found it unremarkable in Mead's or Malinowski's descriptions of islanders.

Not only are the reader-tourists asked to look at unflattering representations of themselves. Kincaid also alerts them to the fact that they are the object of the natives' curious gaze: "they laugh at your strangeness (you do not look the way they look) … you have bad manners (it is their custom to eat with their hands; you try eating their way, you look silly; you try eating the way you always eat, you look silly); they do not like the way you speak (you have an accent)" (17). Having reversed the lens, Kincaid erases the difference on which the logic of tourism is founded.[134]

> For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere … But some natives – most natives in the world – cannot go anywhere. They are too poor … they envy you your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself. (18–19)

It is not that Kincaid denies the existence of cultural differences, for the bulk of *A Small Place* is taken up by a discussion of what is Antiguan about Antigua. But unlike Mead and Malinowski, who polarized the world's cultures into civilized vs. primitive and ignored the "contact zones," Kincaid historicized Aniguan culture as a product of Africans' interactions with whites, first within a colonial economy and, more recently, with the neocolonial tourist industry, both of which keep the "natives" in their place.

Using broad graphic strokes may be effective for drawing attention to systemic problems. It does, however, create problems. As Audre Lorde famously cautioned the participants of a feminist conference in 1979, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (98). The second half of *A Small Place*, on "the custom of the country" (the Antiguan government's undemocratic and illegal dealings) reads like a torrent of gossip, uncontrollable, unpunctuated by paragraph breaks, and unsubstantiated. Given the nature of the subject matter, Kincaid had no other choice but to tap into informal circuits of information. Nonetheless, the epistemological status of what "Antiguans say" or "people say" about

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[134] *A Small Place* has recently been rediscovered by tourist studies, particularly its revisionist faction which objects to the all-too-easy demonization of white tourists by arguing that it is a convenient illusion that tourism is exclusively a white Western practice. For instance, Victor Alneng, who studied pilgrimages in Vietnam as a form of tourism, invokes *A Small Place* to support his argument that scholars have willfully blinded themselves to aspects of non-western cultures and reified cultural difference (119–142). Ethnographer Nadine Dolby also points out the importance of *A Small Place* to the understanding of tourism: "Kincaid's reflections on tourism in Antigua extend Hall's and MacCannell's analyses of difference, problematizing the dynamics of both disconnection and 'taming.' The difference consumed by tourists is not absolute or spatially separate. Instead, as Kincaid demonstrates, difference and distance are largely illusory" (62).

the local elite in *A Small Place* is uncertain. As one irritated reviewer observed, "whatever valid points the author may have made are invalidated by the stereotyping of people and the lack of factual citations to support her claims" (Realtraveller n.p.).

Perhaps a more serious problem raised by *A Small Place* is that of ethnographic authority. In order to be taken seriously, Kincaid needed to construct for herself a position from which she could speak both as an insider and as someone sufficiently detached to be trustworthy. Consequently, she adopted the voice of a knowledgeable adult quite unlike the adolescent Annie John who barely intuits the world around her. She eliminated potential competition by discrediting not only the white tourists but also the Antiguans as knowers:

> In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated, blown up, turned over and over, and then absorbed into the everyday, so that at any moment it can and will roll off the inhabitants of the small place's tongues. For the people in a small place, every event is a domestic event; the people in a small place cannot see themselves in a larger picture, they cannot see that they might be part of a chain of something, anything. (*A Small Place* 52)

By implication, Kincaid did see the bigger picture, unlike those who stayed behind. Her "marginal" yet central position on the staff of an opinion-forming American magazine presumably allowed her to see Antiguan domestic events in the right proportions, and to historicize them in a way other Caribbeans could not. Their image, which emerges from this narrative, is oddly similar to that of Samoans as described by Margaret Mead sixty years earlier:

> The Samoan background which makes growing up so easy, so simple a matter, is the general casualness of the whole society. For Samoa is a place where no one plays for very high stakes, no one pays very heavy prices, no one suffers for his convictions or fights to the death for special ends … Neither poverty nor great disasters threaten the people to make them hold their lives dearly and tremble for continued existence. No implacable gods, swift to anger and strong to punish, disturb the even tenor of their days. (*Coming of Age in Samoa* 110)

Both writers think of the islanders as unable to see themselves in any context beyond the local. Their lives are simpler than Western people's, their concerns trivial. If living on an island turns people into myopic subalterns, then Kincaid, an ex-islander with *The New Yorker* credentials, is entitled to speak for them, or rather about them. In the process of self-authorization, Kincaid resorts to threadbare ethnographic stereotypes of islanders. She denies Antiguans coevalness: "To the people of a small place, the division of Time into the Past, Present, and the Future does not exist" (54). She repeatedly infantilizes them: "their eyes wide with their astonishment, the people in a small place reveal themselves to be like children being shown the secrets of a magic trick" (54). This assessment of her "native informants" is contradicted by the fact that she relies almost entirely on "what Antiguans say" to build her case against the ruling elites. A complete account of Antigua may not be possible, but Kincaid reserves for herself the ability to carefully weigh, judge, and question things Antiguan. She thus performs the tradi-

tional role of the ethnographer as someone who brings back to the metropolis knowledge about faraway places to which he or she has privileged access.

In his 2003 critique of auto-ethnography as a source of "authentic" or emancipatory knowledge, anthropologist James Buzard polemicizes with Françoise Lionnet and other feminist scholars who celebrate Zora Neale Hurston for her ability to theorize her own position by getting "outside" her native Eatonville in order to get back "into" what she called "negroism" armed with "the spy-glass of anthropology." "But what about those who stayed in Eatonville, and whom Hurston goes back to study? Did they remain 'in' negroism too?" asks Buzard. "Does not the differential logic of displacement that authorizes Hurston … effectively require that we think of them that way?" (11). Hurston's authority to represent Eatonville turned out to be very tenuous: there was little interest in her work and she died in obscurity. Kincaid was more fortunate, at least in part, because her debut coincided with the rise of multiculturalism. But her positioning in the American literary marketplace is similar to Hurston's in that she functions as an insider who is also privileged by her outsider status. Thus, rather than automatically ascribe emancipatory potential to auto-ethnography, we should consider that, as Buzard observed, "somebody has to remain at home for us to register the auto-ethnographer's escape act by contrast" (11).

Counter-ethnography

It may well be that Kincaid herself felt uncomfortable playing the role of mock-ethnographer, for in her next book *Lucy* (1990) she once more exchanged the general for the particular. She dropped the authoritative adult voice and picked up the adolescent's where she had left off at the end of *Annie John*. Although her heroine has a different name this time, and she has emigrated to the United States rather than to England (Annie John's destination), she is yet another fictionalized version of the author's younger self. Picking up the life story of the Antiguan girl, Kincaid also picked up the central thread of *A Small Place*, the reversal of the ethnographic gaze. White middle-class Americans are the objects of Lucy's curious gaze. She invokes Antigua sparingly, only to create a counterpoint for some troubling aspect of American morals or manners, just as Margaret Mead invoked American culture as a contrast for Samoa.

A recurrent question in Lucy's narrative suggests that she is studying American culture. She keeps asking about her white employer (a lawyer's wife and mother of four): "How does a person get to be that way?" (17, 20, 26, 41). By "being that way" Lucy means a variety of things: Mariah's sense of entitlement which comes with a life of comfort and security (13, 26); her assumption of ownership of land, people, and history (33–37); her egalitarianism, feminism, and ecology, which do not require her to renounce any privileges; her romantic

fascination with nature (30); her appropriation of "Indian blood"[135] (39); and even the fact that something as insignificant as the weather can make Mariah happy or sad (20). Lucy's persistent questioning of her employers' fundamental beliefs and assumptions defamiliarizes them in the manner of ethnographic inquiry.

Mariah and her husband Lewis can, of course, be read as unique and eccentric; there is little to indicate that they are representative middle-class Americans. In one scene, however, Lucy places herself and Mariah in two broad social categories:

> On the train, we settled ourselves and the children into our compartments … We went to the dining car to eat our dinner … The other people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine. The people who looked like my relatives were all older men, very dignified, as if they were just emerging from a church after Sunday service … Mariah did not seem to notice what she had in common with the other diners, or what I had in common with the waiters. She acted in her usual way, which was that the world was round and we all agreed on that, when I knew the world was flat and if I went to the edge I would fall off. (31–32)

As in her previous works, Kincaid consistently avoids references to skin color, as if insisting that blackness and whiteness are historically produced. The scene in the dining car emphasizes that race is a matter of positioning: though Lucy happens to be among those being served in the dining car, outside it she is a servant like the waiters. Mariah can afford not to notice that the dignified old men who wait on her are black, like her *au pair* Lucy, and like her New York maid. But Lucy's narrative makes the pattern apparent. Her comment about falling off the edge of the world cannot be taken straight, for Lucy has a solid British education. Instead, the comment underscores the fact that mistress and servant inhabit the same world differently.

Lucy also puts Mariah and Louis's friends into a social category: "They all had names like Peters, Smith, Jones, and Richards – names that were easy on the tongue, names that made the world spin. They had somehow all been to the islands – by that they meant the place where I was from – and had fun there" (64–65). Lucy consciously reduces another member of this closed set to a "cliché": "To a person like Dianah, someone in my position is 'the girl' – as in 'the girl who takes care of the children.' It would never occur to her that I had sized her up immediately" (58). This strategy of typologizing Americans is more reminiscent of *A Small Place*, with its obtuse tourist unaware of being scrutinized by the natives, than of *Annie John*, whose narrator saw every person as unique. One could argue that this effort to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools constitutes yet another instance using the ethnographer's categorical thinking.

[135] For a discussion of the phenomenon of white people claiming "Indian blood," see Springwood, "I'm Indian Too!"

Being Paul Gauguin

In a pivotal scene at an art museum (referred to in Chapter 4) Lucy claims the white male position of the observer and rejects that of the brown women he observed. Mariah, a liberal employer who is always trying to entertain and educate Lucy, takes her to see "some paintings by a French man, who had gone half way across the world to live and had painted pictures of the people he found living there" (95). Lucy suspects that Mariah has brought her to see (Gauguin's?) paintings because they represent people from "the islands." Lucy, however, resolutely remains outside the frame of the paintings: "I identified with the yearnings of this man; I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven." As "a young woman from the fringes of the world [wearing] the mantle of a servant" (95), Lucy enjoys usurping the traditionally masculine position. After the visit to the museum she buys a camera and practices being an artist in addition to studying American customs and manners. To Mariah's chagrin, photography propels Lucy out of the nanny role; she breaks her contract after a year and leaves Mariah stranded with four children, in the middle of a divorce: "I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of the scientist" (134).[136]

What makes Lucy different from most professional ethnographers is her self-reflexivity. In classic ethnographies, like Mead's and Malinowski's, self-reflection is limited to a few introductory comments about arriving and establishing rapport with the islanders. To this day, many anthropologists consider self-reflection in the body of the text unprofessional and self-indulgent because it distracts attention from the communities in question. Lucy seems to take the opposite view. Where she comes from determines her perception of Americans and she offers frank, often unflattering verbal snapshots of herself that throw light on her ethnographic project. Rather than use the camera to distance herself from others, Lucy imagines connections between the images of others and herself. She recognizes that photographs have the capacity to make ordinary things "look extraordinary" (115) and "more exciting than the thing itself" (121). On the walls of her room, snapshots of Mariah and the children are interspersed with snapshots of her objects of everyday use: dirty panties, a necklace, an open pocketbook. Snapshots of her American others are not relegated to a separate album or gallery: they form part of her inti-

[136] An American reader of *The New Yorker*, in private correspondence with Krystyna Mazur, said that she found Lucy's refusal to put her employer's interest above her own disturbing. "As a writer, I find Kincaid very flawed because of her mean spiritedness" (May 10, 2008). "In the novel where she wrote about working as a nanny in NY, her employer was a decent, kind woman who is seen in a very unflattering, and unfair, light" (May 12, 2008). Yet in choosing an artist's career over loyalty to her employer (or cross-racial sisterhood) Lucy was simply acting out the script of Western individualism.

mate space. As anthropologist Nadine Dolby noted in her discussion of *A Small Place*: "The story of the tourist [or ethnographer] and the one reframed by Kincaid stand in stark opposition. Whereas the tourist sees and experiences a world of disconnection and spatial separation, Kincaid compels her readers to consider the stories of connections that actually link places" (65). *Lucy*, too, is a story of connections between places.

Generalizing about Kincaid's work is risky. It is elusive, multifaceted, and evolving. It refuses to stand still for a snapshot. It is much more than an ongoing polemic with ethnography. What I hope to have shown is that Kincaid's unusual positioning as an ex-islander in *The New Yorker* pushed her to experiment with form and to seek novel ways of responding to reader expectations. Writing for the magazine, Kincaid was aware that she functioned as an artist on one level and a representative Caribbean on another. This caused persistent tensions in her work between the island and the mainland, the specific and the general, the personal and the political, fiction and non-fiction, artistic freedom and responsibility for those she had left behind, color-blindness and the knowledge that race matters terribly for historical reasons. In each of the four texts discussed above the accents are distributed differently.

While ethnographies are valued for their synthesis of cultural detail and persuasive generalizations, (highbrow) literature has long been appreciated for its singularity – the capacity for conjuring up unprecedented, unique characters, images, and events. In her early fiction, Kincaid strategically used young and inexperienced narrators who have no frame of reference for comparison and know too few people to assign them to categories. She made each character so singular – so eccentric in fact – that her readers could not have generalized about Antiguans any more than they would consider generalizing about Jews based on Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Later, she experimented with an authoritative voice and constructed an entire book out of provocative generalizations, exposing her metropolitan readers to the kind of ethnographic description that was once reserved for South Sea islanders. In *Lucy*, she once again returned to the particular, but explored the politics of ethnography by allowing the islander to return the mainlander's curious gaze. Each of these literary strategies has emancipatory potential as well as limitations.

Chapter 6

Familiar places: Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Achy Obejas, and Karen Tei Yamashita

> I remember how it was dark in the basket but also how sometimes the light might come through the straw in little patterns. I could watch the little patterns flicker and change, and there was always some prism of color around the edges. And I remember there was a hole where I could peek out. I could maybe see some part of my mother bent over planting … It's amazing how much you can see with a little light through a tiny hole. Sometimes I think the inside of my head is the same way, dark like inside the basket, and I am looking out through two tiny holes.
>
> Karen Tei Yamashita, *Brazil-Maru*, pp. 194–195

> I want a feminist writing of the body that metaphorically emphasizes vision again, because we need to reclaim that sense to find our way through all the visualizing tricks and powers of modem sciences and technologies that have transformed the objectivity debates… Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.
>
> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," pp. 582–583

In a 1984 polemic with scholars who feared and spurned cultural relativism, Clifford Geertz unapologetically asserted anthropologists' imperative to pursue the exotic around the globe:

> Looking into dragons, not domesticating or abominating them, or drowning them in vats of theory, is what anthropology has been all about … We have, with no little successes, sought to keep the world off-balance; pulling up rugs, upsetting tea tables, setting off firecrackers. It has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle. Australopithicenes, Tricksters, Clicks, Megaliths – we hawk the anomalous, peddle the strange. Merchants of astonishment. ("Anti Anti-Relativism" 435)

Geertz's anthropologist resembles Ralph Waldo Emerson's self-reliant boy who "is in the parlour what the pit is in the playhouse; independent, irresponsible, looking out from his corner on such people and facts as pass by, he tries and sentences them on their merits" (Emerson 1164–1165), except that the anthropologist does not sit in a corner – he goes out to investigate the "dragons" of faraway cultures. Raising havoc in the American parlour, Geertz claims, anthropologists challenged Eurocentrism. They were the first to insist "that the world does not divide into the pious and the superstitious; that there are sculptures in jungles and paintings in deserts … that the norms of reason were not fixed in Greece, the evolution of morality not consummated in England" (436). For, knowing that there were sculptures in jungles, how could the ladies and gentlemen in the parlor deny the jungle dwellers a shared humanity?

But what if the "dragons" are largely fabrications of the "merchants of astonishment"? That is, in fact, what the Australian anthropologist Nicholas Thomas suggested in the essay "Against Ethnography" (1991). After several years of field research on Pacific islands, alternating with archival work on colonial ethnography, Thomas became skeptical about ethnography's single-minded pursuit of difference (if not about the discipline as a whole). Difference, he writes, "has been as overplayed in anthropology as has the body in the library in detective fiction" (312). When fabricating difference, anthropologists homogenize other cultures (311) and "magnify the distance between 'others' and 'ourselves' while suppressing mutual entanglement and the perspectival and political fracturing of the cultures of both the observers and the observed" (309). Studies that "might show how un-exotic and un-alien other people's worlds are are never getting written or read" (309). Anthropology thus reinforces the assumption that "others must be different." Reflections on the borrowing and creolization that take place through cultural contact, or on the differences *within* (not between) cultures, would be more productive (306). Reading Thomas's essay we come to the conclusion that in a globalized world the pursuit of "dragons" is anachronistic.

Jessica Hagedorn implies as much in her novel *Dream Jungle* (2003). The "dragon" that one of her protagonists, the Yale-trained Filipino anthropologist Zamora claims to have discovered is a Stone-Age tribe living in the mountains of Mindanao.

> O they were beautiful, powerful, strange! Their fierce, wary eyes scrutinized him in return … He had walked into a dream. Someone else's dream – perhaps Duan's – but now stolen and claimed by Zamora. The landscape of that dream – vast, ominous, shimmering blues and greens – was simply part of the loot. (5)

But though Zamora brings back in his helicopter a live specimen of the tribe, the wild boy Bodabil, and though he imports white American experts to authenticate the find, its ontological status remains uncertain. Is the tribe real or is it a dream fueled by Zamora's desire for anthropological fame? Or a carefully staged hoax, like the film set depicted in a parallel plot, where, in the shimmering blues and

greens of the Mindanao jungle, an American film crew is making the Vietnam War movie *Napalm Sunset*.[137] Hagedorn's novels abound in such cultural "dragons" for, as this (ex)islander explained in an interview, she finds the Philippines "a treasure trove" of material, "lush, stark, abundant, untainted, polluted" and so rich "you almost don't have to make anything up" (Aguilar-San Juan 6). "Almost" is the tell-tale word here: Hagedorn's fiction is demonstratively about making things up.

Minority writers like Hagedorn have struggled with the problem of difference vs. sameness, and the authentic vs. the fabricated/fake for decades. European American culture has always been available to minority writers, not just as a source of chagrin but also of inspiration. But to deny oneself the right to assert a cultural difference and insist on sameness (always measured in relation to the white middle-class norm) may be a form of internalized racism. To play up difference (also in relation to the middle-class norm) may lead to grotesque distortions.[138] When both these strategies are used within the covers of a single book, as in Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), the effect can be heart-wrenching. This autobiographical novel, written with the intent of introducing white Americans to Chinese immigrant culture, pits the exotic immigrant father against his Chinese American son – an affable American citizen. Three decades later, writers Maxine Hong Kingston and Frank Chin entered into a protracted dispute over the (ir)responsible use of the exotic. The problem started when Kingston wove into her memoir *The Woman Warrior* (1976) a good deal of ethnographic material as well as childhood fantasies of China, a country she knew only from hearsay and books. Chin promptly denounced the novel as "pop cultural anthropology" (Kim 198), countering Kingston's "fake" representations of Chinese with his own: Chinese Americans approximating not the white middle-class norm but the swagger of Hollywood cowboys and Black Power activists.[139] While Chin's "authenticity" fetish and the sexism underlying his work weaken his claims, Chin also needs to be remembered as an astute observer of race relations, who has consistently argued since the 1970s that fabricating "dragons" lends itself to hegemonic readings, that legitimate racist stereotypes.[140]

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[137] The movie-making plot of Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* is based on archival materials on Francis Ford Coppola filming *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines (1976–1977).

[138] While minority artists have every right to appropriate and modify cultural forms traditionally associated with European literature, art, and music, they must be equally free to explore local difference.

[139] See Frank Chin's play *Chickencoop Chinaman* and his essay "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake."

[140] For nuanced discussions of the Chin vs. Kingston controversy see: King-Kok Cheung, "*The Woman Warrior* versus *The Chinaman Pacific*" and Jinqi Ling, *Narrating Nationalisms* (112–114). In Poland, Kingston's mediations between Chinese and American culture were most comprehensively explored by Jerzy Durczak in *Selves Between Cultures: Contemporary American Bicultural Autobiography* (1994).

The red dragon that winds itself around the Chinese American schoolgirl on the 1977 cover of *The Woman Warrior* is emblematic of the way minority works that foreground difference are appropriated by mainstream culture. This particular dragon was entirely fabricated by the press; Kingston merely supplied several chapters (expressly based on her childhood fantasies) that are set in an imaginary China. Though Chin and Kingston have been at loggerheads for three decades, the vexing problem of representing cultural difference has not gone away.

The work of Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Achy Obejas, and Karen Tei Yamashita will be read here within the context of the dragon-chasing debate, through a set of questions normally reserved for ethnographies. Although the three novels cannot be reduced to the category of "anti-ethnography," such provisional labeling brings out themes that have not been explored in literary criticism. Each of the authors took on the task of representing members of her own minority, though not necessarily the people she grew up among. Yamanaka's interests lie closest to home: *Heads by Harry* (1999) is set in a small, mostly working-class community on Hawai'i's Big Island, not unlike the one Yamanaka grew up in on Molokai. Her work is paired here with Obejas's *Days of Awe* (2001). This first-person narrative, which explores the life of Cuban exiles in the U.S. and that of Spanish Jews in Cuba, is also partly autobiographical. I follow this comparative analysis with a narrowly focused reading of Yamashita's *Brazil-Maru* (1992), a story of a Japanese enclave in the Brazilian jungle. None of these three novels is in the business of making the strange familiar to middle-class American readers. All three are addressed to crossover audiences, and are narrated from unstable positions, from which claims to authenticity are either tentative or denied. What is remarkable about these texts is the way they render various shades of familiarity, from the plain old familiar in Yamanaka's *Heads by Harry* to the uncannily familiar yet strange in Obejas's *Days of Awe* and Yamashita's *Brazil-Maru.* Like the readers' home cultures, the cultures of the small places described in these novels are not unitary but fractured, barely held together by often contradictory memories of a communal past, and variously understood by their members.

As explained in Chapter 4, applying the category of ethnography to literary texts is not unproblematic. Since the 1980s, American theorists and historians of anthropology have been systematically rereading classic ethnographies and asking questions borrowed from literary criticism – about voice, authorial stance, narrative strategies, ruptures, elisions, overarching tropes, and underlying assumptions – as well as more overtly political questions about stakes.[141] Meanwhile, only a handful of minority literature scholars have used theoretical insights borrowed from contemporary ethnographic theory to examine American literature by and about people of color. There are reasons for this asymmetry in the willingness to borrow tools from other disciplines. In recent years, literary scholars have studi-

[141] See for example James Clifford's *Predicament of Culture* and *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge* edited by George W. Stocking.

ously avoided talking about any affinity between "ethnic" literature and ethnography because it has been so difficult to sever that connection. "Ethnic" writers have historically been expected to produce autobiographical "insider" accounts of their communities for the mainstream; the publishing industry has made it very difficult for them to publish anything else; minority communities, too, have sometimes attempted to control the way they are represented in literature; even the academic community sometimes exacts certain kinds of minority representation and penalizes wayward writers, as in the case of the Yamanaka controversy.[142]

Frank Chin shows how a minority writer was positioned within the field of American literature in the 1970s – in this case a field defined by writing instructors at the Iowa Writer's Workshop, which Chin attended as a student:

> The sessions would go, 'Well, this is a fine story, but we've all read Joyce Cary,' you know. 'This theme is already pretty hackneyed,' and so on … Most of the stuff I got was the point of view trip. 'You haven't used enough of the local color of Chinatown.' I would say, 'But it isn't about local color. I don't want to talk about neon lights and chop suey and funny music.' R.V. Cassill was one of my teachers. He told me, 'You know, you're writing about the Chinese in a way that I don't think American people would be interested in.' Because they were just like people, right? My people. I mean they're common to me. 'But don't you think you should make them interesting to the audience?' And this kind of stunned me because I thought I was just writing. But now I was being told in a backhanded way that I had a point of view and my point of view wasn't white. (Nee and Nee 375)

In Chin's view, the imperative to dwell on cultural differences to satisfy reader expectations has meant a reification of minority communities' foreignness, which, in turn, could be used to justify discrimination. For instance, Chin has repeatedly argued that Kingston, in showing Chinese immigrants to be simultaneously sexist and emasculated by whites, aggravated the situation of Chinese American men, who were already demonized and ridiculed by mainstream culture (Introduction to *Aiiieeeee!* and "Come All Ye Asian American Writers").

Any effort to read minority fiction as auto- or anti-ethnography is risky, for as critic Rocío Davis argues, treating minority literatures as either transparent ethnography or as raw material to be processed through Euro-American theoretical models can become strategies of colonization that relegate the literature to places of inferiority (5). Yet this way of reading allows us to engage in the ongoing discussion about the ethics and aesthetics of representation in the U.S., where some

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[142] Because Yamanaka writes mostly in pidgin English about marginalized communities, her novels and poetry are read by many as authentically Hawaiian. In 1998, the Filipino caucus within the Association for Asian American Studies charged her with social irresponsibility on account of her persistent portrayals of Filipino men as sexual predators. Racial stereotyping by an author with such a strong position in the American literary marketplace was felt to be particularly harmful and was used to justify the retraction of a book prize awarded to Yamanaka by the Association for Asian American Studies. A heated debate ensued about authorial license vs. accountability to minority communities, with dozens of fiction writers coming to Yamanaka's defense. See Valerie Takahama, "Controversial Adventures in 'Paradise': Bully Burgers and Pidgin," E01.

groups have traditionally been the subjects and others the objects of the ethnographic gaze. Given the fact that – outside English departments – minority texts are still read largely for their ethnographic content, and evaluated on their authenticity, it is important to ask how writers have been dealing with this predicament. This chapter is an attempt to show the continuum between auto-ethnographic fiction and anti-ethnography. *Heads by Harry* may be closer to the auto-ethnographic tradition discussed in the previous chapter, and *Days of Awe* as well as *Brazil-Maru* may be more anti-ethnographic, yet all three texts problematize knowledge and question the popular understanding of "ethnic" authenticity.

Tacking between the island and the mainland

Below is a selection of typical amateur reviews from www.amazon.com that indicate the interests and concerns of market readers:

On Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Heads by Harry* (1999):

– "This book is as close as most tourists will ever get to the elusive 'real' Hawaii promised by their vacation brochures."

– "I read this book last summer while vacationing on Maui, the almost-perfect place to read a book that takes place in Hawaii … *Heads by Harry* … takes the reader into the life of the Japanese Americans living on the Hawaiian Islands. The culture in itself is fascinating to read about."

– "Certain aspects in her book might be a little misleading to someone who hasn't grown up in Hawai'i (or lived here a long time). This can create stereotypes about the island culture."

On Obejas's *Days of Awe* (2001):

– "This book is lyrically written, emotionally wrenching, and an excellent guide into the mysterious ways of both the Cuban Jewish community and its history as well as the Cuban Revolution."

– "An enormous amount of research had to have gone into this novel, and it shows … So this is a book that comes close to greatness. The main characters never succeed in engaging the reader, however. And, ultimately, the story arc itself seems pointless. Still, the virtue of *Days of Awe* is in the details."

– "There are close to 40 million Hispanics in the United States and just a handful of books written by Latinos about the Latino experience; it is as if we did not exist. I am grateful to have found Achy Obejas. She brilliantly weaves history and fiction in such a way that *Days of Awe* becomes hard to put down." (Customer Reviews)

These amateur readings of minority fiction are clearly shaped by shared desires: for transparent cultural description of exotic peoples, for "authentic" minority experience, and, when the readers themselves are "exotic islanders," for accurate and preferably positive representation. Hence the readers quoted above tend

to praise "ethnic" writers for the wealth of cultural detail based on "insider knowledge" and to worry about the stories' potential for misrepresentation. How do experienced writers respond to the readers' desires and expectations? *Heads by Harry* and *Days of Awe* illustrate the different ways writers may approach the ethnographic legacy. The analysis below revolves around four questions the authors implicitly address as they write: What is the source of my authority to represent a community? Where, in relation to my subjects and readers do I position the narrator and my authorial voice? How do I deflect the ethnographic gaze? And finally, how do I represent the island community without exoticizing it, but also without erasing difference to produce "universal" characters?

There are numerous parallels between the two island novels that justify reading them together. Both *Heads by Harry* and *Days of Awe* have first-person female narrators. Both are the stories of daughters who insist on claiming their patrimony – the right to step into their fathers' shoes. Yamanaka's Toni becomes an apprentice to her hunter-taxidermist father and eventually inherits his business, Heads by Harry. Obejas's narrator Ale, who earns a living as a court interpreter, eventually becomes a literature translator like her father. Yamanaka's Toni is Japanese Hawaiian who has never left the Big Island; she has experimented with and rejected a western-style urban college education in Honolulu to return to the small town of Hilo. Ale is a Cuban exile who rediscovers Cuba as an adult. Both narrators belong to minorities within their already marginalized island communities. Obejas's Ale is part of the Cuban diaspora in the U.S. and a descendant of Cuban Jews. What prompts her storytelling is the discovery and exploration of her family's Jewish Cuban history going back to the Spanish inquisition.[143] Her gaze moves back and forth between present-day Cuban Americans and the crypto-Jews of Cuba. Yamanaka's narrator Toni, in turn, is Japanese Hawaiian, born into a multiethnic community of small-business owners and their families of Mamo Street, Hilo. In both texts, the narrating self is at the same time observer and observed, ethnographic subject and object. Both authors have published with large East-Coast presses and received considerable acclaim on the mainland, yet they consciously engage a cross-over audience – Hawaiian and Cuban American respectively. Despite these similarities, there are fundamental differences between the novels, most of which ensue from the ways the authors approach questions of narrative authority and the narrators' self-positioning.

Two related questions minority writers confront when they begin writing out of a personal knowledge of small places concern the source of their authority to represent and the problem of maintaining that authority in the face of the postmodern crisis of representation (discussed in the Introduction). Yamanaka relies heav-

[143] Few critical analyses of Obejas's *Days of Awe* have been published to date, but the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism has drawn the attention of several critics. Maya Socolovsky offers the fullest interpretation in "Deconstructing a Secret History: Trace, Translation, and Crypto-Judaism in Achy Obejas's *Days of Awe*" (225–249).

ily on her insider status, emphasized by the use of pidgin English in the dialogues. Together with Milton Murayama, she is credited with having reclaimed the Hawaiian vernacular, which had been displaced in schools and in literature by standard English. Much of her fiction is autobiographical, and, like Jamaica Kincaid's, can be read as auto-ethnographic. Referring to James Clifford's classification of narrative conventions (*Predicament of Culture* 31, 41) in ethnography, we might call Yamanaka a "realist" who plants her adolescent narrator in the middle of her community, where she functions like a camcorder registering the daily life of the unsuspecting Hawaiians.

Obejas's *Days of Awe* comes closer to what Clifford defines as surrealist ethnography (*Predicament of Culture* 129–130), which employs the aesthetics of the collage: it constantly moves from fictional autobiography, to philosophical meditation, to history. In the opening, the narrator named Ale claims her Cuban heritage by recounting the scene of her birth in Havana in 1959, on the day Castro launched the communist revolution. However, her right to represent Cuba is tenuous because she is taken away from the island just two years later and returns there as an adult, feeling curious but culturally aloof and disconnected. Obejas further undercuts her narrator's authority by dwelling on moments of epistemological confusion. On the one hand, Ale claims to take the reader on a privileged tour of places tourists never go: "These are the neighborhoods to the sides, away from the main avenues, the lights and the hustle. These are the places that never appear on postcards and tourist brochures" (Obejas 240). On the other, there is her mother's warning: "Don't think you'll see anything real … You'll only be allowed to go where they want you to go. You won't get to see or hear anything they don't want you to see or hear" (53).

Almost everything Ale knows of Cuba before her return is second-hand: learned from family stories and an old street-map of Havana, and tinged with the nostalgia cultivated by most communities of exiles. Her response to Cuba is preconditioned by stories told by other exiles:

> I knew – from the stories of Cuban acquaintances – that there were certain similarities to all first return trips to Cuba. I knew, for example, that at some point I would go looking for our home in Havana, that I would break down and cry at an unexpected moment, that it was assumed I would call the relatives who'd stayed on the island, buy them presents, have an emotional reunion, and promise to stay in touch. (66)

That is exactly what happens. And though her reconstructions of scenes from the life of crypto-Jews in Cuba are detailed and dramatic, Ale reminds us that they are all based on hearsay: "Moises Menach tells me…" (117); "According to Moises Menach…" (125); "What actually happened between them, whether in fact they ever became lovers, is a mystery. I heard the story from Moises. My father refused to discuss it" (152). Some of the stories have the distinctive ring of apocrypha: "In truth, my father was masterful in the garden, but it was not a talent that could be cultivated … He could spit on the ground, out of spite even, and in days, huge

white tubulars would sprout, thick tentacles pushing anxiously out of the dirt. He'd pat a hen on the head and she'd deliver egg after egg, each one with a perfect yolk and plenty of white for meringue" (142). Just as her mother foresaw, the meaning of what Ale gets to see in Cuba continues to change, as does her understanding of the people who befriend her, and her epistemological framework.

Yet another issue to resolve when writing anti-ethnographically is how to position one's narrator in relation to the subjects and the readers. Yamanaka performs a complex maneuver using two voices and two personas: that of the adult narrator who writes sophisticated, poetic prose in standard English, and that of an adolescent who communicates in clipped pidgin sentences, but who is mostly a listener – a passive object of other characters' comments, commands, and verbal abuse, also rendered in pidgin.[144] Looking at this narrative pattern in ethnographic terms, we may read the adult voice as that of the trained (auto)ethnographer and the adolescent voice as that of a native informant, one who has access to authentic, unmediated cultural knowledge. The realist convention of Yamanaka's fiction keeps both lay and academic readers from reflecting on this ventriloquism, so that most claim in their responses and reviews that "Yamanaka writes in pidgin" despite obvious evidence to the contrary. The opening lines of *Heads by Harry*, like much of the novel, are written in literary English rather than pidgin:

> A roseate sky envelops Mauna Ke'a on the Big Island of Hawai'i, the youngest in the chain of Hawaiian Islands, and the only home I have known. Through the Saddle road to Waiki'i we take the lonely drive between two mountains, sleeping volcanoes, the tallest mountains in the world from the sea floor up… (Yamanaka 3)

On the same page, next to "roseate" the narrator uses such words as "cobalt-iridescent," "vermilion," "glossy sheen" and "sated." We learn elsewhere in the novel that most of the working-class, pidgin-speaking characters are, in fact, bilingual and bicultural, and switch to standard English in the company of whites or when they want to level the class distance between themselves and middle-class characters. Nonetheless, the mainland readers who enthuse over Yamanaka's authentic use of pidgin enjoy it because it is couched in expository prose written in standard English. (Pidgin-speaking Hawaiians are more likely to appreciate the fact that their mother tongue is used on par with standard English.) The adult narrator selects, juxtaposes, and thus makes meaningful scenes and dialogues that her adolescent self barely intuits. It is through this complex relationship between the standard-English-speaking adult and her younger self that both Hawaiian and mainstream readers are allowed to access and identify with a particular local culture. Within this dyad, the voices validate each other.

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[144] In her collection of poems *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theater* Yamanaka experimented with a series of dialogues in which one of the participants, an adolescent girl, is silent. Apparently unable to talk back, she absorbs a steady stream of abuse and indoctrination from her peers and adults.

No such ventriloquism is present in Obejas's *Days of* Awe because readers know Ale to be constantly translating from Spanish into English: the "authentic" is always already mediated. Ale consciously addresses mainstream Americans, trying to define for them what it means to be an exile. It is when generalizing about this collective predicament that she uses the pronoun "we" most readily: "Anytime a Cuban returns to the island, we become couriers for those who do not … Our most precious cargo wasn't money or meat but letters. Because there is no direct mail service between Cuba and the United States" (Obejas 63). For mainstream American readers, Ale functions as an emissary, almost a spy, who blends in perfectly on account of her Cuban-inflected Spanish and the looks she has inherited from her mother.

The intrusive gaze of outsiders in the familiar world is thematized in both novels. More self-consciously than most writers, Yamanaka wrests the gaze from the outsiders and lays claim to minority self-representation. In *Heads by Harry* there is, apparently, no ethnographic gaze: no arrival scene featuring the (amateur) anthropologist on shipboard in a sea of natives with upturned faces (a standard scene in classic ethnographies). Here all the faces are those of old familiars and the gaze is usually exchanged between family members. On a hunting trip with her father the girl narrator says, "I see through my father's eyes … I follow his eyes." Yamanaka's "natives" are not the objects of the ethnographer's camera; they take the camera into their own hands. Like all American families, they make home movies. The narrator Toni says wistfully: "I wanted to be the girl … [father] lifted into the Big Island sky in the 8 mm film starring me. And in this film I see my father looking at me with his face full of calm affection … in the crackling of celluloid through an old projector, and the flickering light" (Yamanaka 7). Just as home movies are made for home consumption, with an awareness that they might be shown to non-family-members, Yamanaka's novel is addressed to a Hawaiian readership, with an awareness that it will also be read by mainlanders. The interest of the latter does not, however, determine the novel's interests.

It is in the ability to deflect and reverse the ethnographic gaze that Obejas is at her best. In a symmetrical pair of scenes Obejas subtly signals the fact that the gaze is never neutral, that the native does look back, and that ethnographic interest can be mutual. Her narrator finds herself alternately the outsider looking at Cuba and an insider caught unawares by a curious Cuban's gaze. She starts out on her "fact-finding mission" (Obejas 57) like a traditional ethnographer, mistakenly assuming that she can pass unnoticed – that her participant observation does not affect the observed: "I was invisible, I had no opinion or judgment, I was there simply to convert one language into another," she thinks on arrival (76). Soon afterwards, in a mesmerizing voyeuristic episode Ale witnesses a steamy sex scene from a toilet window:

> I scrambled up, balancing myself on the lid of the toilet tank, and poised myself at the window … there below me, amid the thick bushes and dozens of tub-sized flower pots from which large

> yellow-leaf papaya trees waved, Orlando poured the milk from his glass into a small puddle on the seat of an old metal patio chair … Then the girl – the same stunning girl who'd left so bored hours ago – parted the greenery and stepped in beside him. Her dark curls floated in the air. She lifted her white dress. Her underwear was missing and a plush patch of black appeared between her legs … Once, the girl looked up, as if to the star-filled sky, and found my blue-gray eyes instead, glistening, no doubt, like a wild animal's. She smiled with quiet surprise but did nothing more than stroke Orlando's hair with her hand. (85–86)

Both the figures in the patio are black, and the passionate scene seems to confirm the stereotype of Cubans as energized by an unrestrained eroticism. Yet a mirror-reversal of this scene, which takes place in Ale's apartment several years later, brings passion and voyeurism to Chicago. In the second erotic scene, Felix, the brother of the girl observed from the toilet window, stays overnight with Ale and her white boyfriend Seth.

> Seth … was splayed on the bed, his arms and legs wide apart, waiting to be taken … I kissed his chest, his ribs, his hips, then slowly turned him on his tummy and pushed him down, my hand still on his member … I was imagining the exquisite pleasure of his hardness inside me when Seth and I both saw Felix: a snide ghoul watching and enjoying the show, his pose relaxed against our bedroom door. (160)

The discomfort of being gazed at in a moment of intimacy is acute for the lovers. They both explode at Felix and send him running into the winter night. Having played the role of Malinowski, who peeped and pried in order to write *The Sexual Life of Savages*, Ale moves a step further and projects herself into the position of the savage. On a subsequent trip to Havana she becomes the lover of Orlando, has erotic fantasies about the adolescent Celina, and submits to the other's gaze.

For ambitious minority writers who engage the mainstream literary tradition the question inevitably arises: How do I represent my community without exoticizing it or erasing cultural difference? In a deliberate anti-ethnographic move, Yamanaka exposes the seedy underside of the industry that manufactures Hawaiian culture for visitors. After flunking out of college, her narrator Toni gets a minimum-wage job as a lei hostess. Cast in the role of the sensuous "native," she is required to put a lei around each arriving tourist's neck and "smile, smile, smile if they lean towards you for a nice peck on the lips." She is also put in charge of a tape recorder that plays the song: "I'm a little brown gal, in a little grass skirt, in a little grass shack in Hawaii" (Yamanaka 146). The irony of a Japanese American teenager performing the scene of the indigenous woman's first encounter with the white tourist/traveler (see Chapter 3) is hard to miss.

Another instance of the exotic in *Heads by Harry* can be found in the descriptions of hunting and the work of disemboweling and reconstructing animals at her father's taxidermy workshop, all rendered in disturbingly naturalistic language. Readers are not permitted to simply contemplate the finished product – the mounted pheasant or wild pig's head, made to order for tourists and locals. Arguably, Yamanaka uses taxidermy not just as a pretext to introduce disturbing non-touristy

imagery but as a way of indirectly addressing the predicament of "ethnic" representation. The connection between ethnography and taxidermy was first made by the theorist Fatimah Tobing Rony in 1996 to characterize late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century documentaries about "vanishing peoples," like *Nanook of the North*. *Heads by Harry* can be usefully read through this trope. Taxidermy here is a source of livelihood and the craft the narrator wants to learn from her father, who would rather entrust it to male apprentices from outside the family. She lays out the entire process of taxidermy for readers to contemplate, stage by stage, from the shooting of game, to making surgical incisions, skinning, disemboweling, and treating the carcass with chemicals, reconstructing the skeleton with wire, stitching the skin back together, inserting glass eyes, painting mouths or beaks, and choosing a striking pose. The final product is like the real thing, yet it is undeniably artificial and frozen in time – like any effort to photograph, film, or write about cultural difference.

By making taxidermy central to *Heads by Harry*, Yamanaka seems to be working against the tradition of salvage ethnography which produced a record of "vanishing cultures." But she feeds readers' expectations by portraying Toni's neighborhood as an almost idyllic small-town community in the tradition of Zora Neale Hurston's Eatonville. While not free of sexism, homophobia, and small day-to-day cruelties, the Mamo Street community is a familiar haven based on face-to-face relationships; it is capable of self-regulation and takes care of its own. Like the residents of Hurston's Eatonville, the people of Hilo spend their leisure hours sitting on porches, drinking beer, talking story, and resolving local problems. They do business with each other, intermarry, and party. Resistant to consumerism, they enter the marketplace on their own terms, if necessary by scavenging and recycling. At the same time, Mamo Street is no "vanishing culture." It is just an American street, whose dwellers refer to popular TV shows and celebrities, eat Vienna sausage, and fly to Las Vegas for the annual Taxidermists Convention. Its familiarity is one of the things Yamanaka's mainland readers love most about the novel, as indicated by an amateur review on www.amazon.com: "Such a lovely sentiment [is possible] only on Mamo Street."

While Yamanaka's practice of "ethnic" representation may be likened to taxidermy, Obejas's overarching trope is translation. Her narrator Ale switches back and forth between Spanish and English, language as tool and language as art. She seeks the familiar in Cuba and finds the uncanny, which she translates for herself and for her readers back into the familiar. The recurrent theme of *Days of Awe* – the clandestine history of Jews in Cuba – is undeniably exotic. To frustrate her characters' (and readers') desire to reify difference, Obejas shows how the supposedly "cultural" things Cubans do are inflected by history: the inquisition, the colonial status of Cuba, the spread of Nazi ideology in 1930s, the Holocaust, communism, the Bay of Pigs, the exodus of the balseros, and other events. Ale visits Cuba in 1987 and then 1997. The cultural practices she initially associated with

being crypto-Jewish in Cuba change drastically over time and turn out to reflect the Menach family's economic and political status as much as their faith. During the first encounter, for instance, Ale registers an idyllic picture of a multigenerational family centered around a "warmly cushioned" Jewish mama presiding over her steaming pots. Ten years later, the scene also opens with the mother stirring pots on the stove but their contents are meager. The family is broken up and ideologically divided: Moises has wrapped himself in a fanatical communism, one of his granddaughters has converted to Christianity, while most of the family's income in these hard times comes from pimping and prostitution (barely disguised as driving and entertaining Western tourists).

Unlike academic ethnographers who sought out homogenous "pure" island cultures, Yamanaka and Obejas delight in cultural impurities and syncretisms. They attempt to render the specificity of island life but prefer historical explanations of "the ways people do things" to synchronic (cultural) explanations. Both work hard to confront the ethnographic legacy and explore the contradictory ways of being Hawaiian or Cuban. Yamanaka does not thematize the issue of epistemology: her authority as a writer comes from being a cultural insider and from the fact that her work has been embraced by other Hawaiians. Obejas, in turn, writing in English for mainland readers about an island that is still relatively inaccessible to them, is in a position not unlike that of the traditional ethnographer, whose observations were virtually unverifiable. Yet she steers clear of realistic representation, and makes the narrator's unreliability one of the main themes of *Days of Awe*.

A very insular experiment

Cultural impurities and syncretisms are also a key theme in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Brazil-Maru* (1992). Esperança, the small place depicted in this novel, is not literally an island but a relatively isolated Japanese commune deep in the green expanse of the Brazilian jungle. The commune transcended the confines of "Japanese culture" by engaging the cultures, literatures, and philosophies of several continents. Yamashita herself has referred to the historical prototype of Esperança as "a very insular experiment" (qtd. in Murashige 337). Established in 1925, it was one of hundreds of urban and rural communities in Brazil that absorbed the overflow of emigrants from Japan when the United States introduced the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924. By 1975, when Yamashita came to Brazil to conduct ethnographic interviews,[145] the population of Japanese origin had risen to over a million. "My original intention when I went to Brazil was that I would do something an-

[145] Yamashita studied English and Japanese literature in the U.S. Continuing her studies in Japan, she became interested in migrations and pursued this interest in Brasil.

thropological and historical but that it would be journalistic … I could simply have done oral histories and that would have been valid. But not to me" (Yamashita qtd. in Murashige 334). With the Second Wave of American feminism just gaining momentum, Yamashita hoped to get the "women's side" of the migration story but found that her informants, most of whom were young women in the 1920s, had been restricted to field work, housekeeping, and child raising; limiting herself to their stories would force Yamashita to "hone in on this one narrow subject and not get a larger picture" (335).

Although *Brazil-Maru* is a polyvocal novel that reads like the antithesis of ethnography, the method Yamashita used to procure information is akin to ethnography. Then, out of hundreds of hours of interviews with Japanese Brazilians, she selected those with the current and former residents of Esperança. "Fiction was necessary," Yamashita explained, to protect informants as well as "to bring out ideas. You can hone a story and have it take a direction because reality won't necessarily take that direction. You can give little 'whys,' and you can ask a question within that framework. So fiction for me was a great freedom" (334). Unlike Rhoda Halperin, the anthropologist whose fiction is discussed in Chapter 2, Yamashita did not build her story out of "raw" case studies. Instead, relying closely on interview material, she meticulously composed "the larger picture" from five distinctive perspectives, based on the assumption that no member of the commune had access to the full story. In this tale dominated by men, the voice of the daughter, wife, and mother Haru was the last to be inserted into place: "It was very easy to drop into her voice. After writing this five times, her voice was the easiest to write. I knew who she was by the time I finished" (338). Although the figure of the ethnographer is missing from the text, the presence of this figure is implied throughout, as the informants clearly address an outsider, someone who listens attentively and who needs to be told how things really were back then. We can deduce the ethnographer's presence from the way the informants control what they reveal or conceal about each other and about the commune's operations.

The founders of Esperança arrive in Brazil inspired as much by Japanese philosophy as by Protestantism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile*, and socialism. Theirs is a utopian project to build a new civilization. Growing staple crops and breeding chickens to sell eggs are only the means to that end. Once all the commune members are fed, clothed, and housed in the simplest of styles, the leaders spend their energies inventing Esperança out of elements borrowed eclectically from many cultures: baseball, classical music, modern dance, and painting. Yet, it is the closed nature of the commune that binds its members together; the children are encouraged to study Voltaire and Tolstoy in Japanese translation but not Portuguese, which would give them access to the outside world. They are taught to work hard, never question authority, scorn commodities, and love ideas. All in all, Esperança is as breathtaking as it is bizarre – perfect literary material. Whereas an anthropologist would probably have selected the most typical or representative

immigrant group to research in Brazil, what Yamashita found appealing about the "insular experiment" was the fact that it was *not representative* of Japanese enclaves in the Americas.[146]

What must also have appealed to Yamashita was the narrative potential of this tale of extraordinary ambition and of no less extraordinary failure. Her interviewees shared memories of a grand utopia gone awry. If we hastily assume that the failure was caused by the absence of democratic procedures that might have prevented an autocratic leader from taking advantage of his flock, we also need to acknowledge that, just as likely, such procedures would have nipped the utopian project in the bud.

Each of the five narrators covers a different period in the commune's history, though parts of their stories overlap. Sometimes, by juxtaposing two versions of the same event Yamashita produces an ironic effect, revealing deliberate omissions, distortions, outright lies, and contradictory memories. In the first section, the elderly pioneer Ichiro (playfully nicknamed Émile by the community) recalls the scene of arrival in Brazil in 1925, and incidents from his boyhood, which coincided with the idealistic early years of Esperança. Haru, the loyal wife of the leader Kantaro, then describes the matchmaking, courtship, marriage, and intrigue during the turbulent years of World War II. Kantaro's narrative is the most informative, and, at the same time, the most contorted, for Kantaro rationalizes his misdeeds to preserve face.[147] The fourth section, which takes the story up to 1959, is narrated by Genji, an eccentric child of the commune trained as an artist. Genji describes the dissolution of the commune and its split into two destitute groups. In the four-page epilogue, Guilherme, a second-generation Japanese Brazilian raised in Sao Paulo, tells of the deaths of Kantaro and Genji in the 1970s, and the dispersal of the younger commune members. His narrative also places the story of Esperança within the broader context of South American history and politics. Each of the narrators knows both more and less than do the others, either because they were not there, or were there but as women and children were excluded from certain areas of knowledge, or as women

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[146] In the interview with Murashige, Yamashita explained: "I thought to myself, 'My grandmother never read Tolstoy! My grandfather never read Rousseau! He never asked me those questions.' It was a revelation to meet people who could say, 'I was most influenced by a book I read in my early youth, before I left Japan, a book by Jean-Jacques Rousseau called *Emile*' " (Murashige 333).

[147] Also in the interview with Murashige, Yamashita confessed that when she arrived in the commune with the intention of interviewing the leader's wife, he insisted on telling her his story. "So I sat down with him and, for the next week, day and night, he occupied my time telling me this story. I never got to the kitchen. I never got anywhere" (335). Although during the writing process she initially wanted to foreground the communal story and keep Kantaro's part small, she soon realized that "he knew what the essence of his story was. He knew exactly how it could be best told. He knew exactly what could be taken out. He could write the screenplay for his life" (337).

or children had access to certain spaces (or peeped and pryed), or looked on from a different position and understood what they saw differently, or were simply inattentive and missed certain goings on.

Brazil-Maru can be read as an attempt to rethink the idea of "culture" in a world that had become globalized long before the adjective itself was invented. Interviewing Japanese Brazilians and writing up their stories in the heyday of U.S. cultural nationalism, Yamashita asked her readers to ponder what is Japanese about the people of Esperança. Is it that they still speak Japanese and eat rice? Is it that the fathers continue to determine whom their children will marry while the mothers do the matchmaking? How Japanese is it to ride horses? How Japanese is it for young men to carve baseball bats out of Brazilian wood and play every night, using up precious energy needed for planting and harvesting? How Japanese is it to eat raw frog legs? In a childhood incident recalled by Ichiro, a Brazilian man named the Bahiano, whose land borders on Esperança, sees a young Japanese woman eating raw frog legs, and is left wondering whether this is a Japanese cultural practice.

> Haru … did a funny thing which I will never forget. She walked over to a large bowl of skinned frog legs, the shiny pink meat glistening in her mother's concoction of lime juice and salt. Right there, oblivious to the astonished stare of the Bahiano, Haru picked up a raw frog leg and began to chew noisily, ripping the meat off the tiny bones with her teeth and swallowing everything with great relish. (38)

The fact that the Ichiro describes Haru's behavior as "funny" indicates that eating raw frog legs is not a familiar practice to him. Reconsidering the event years later, he entertains the thought that the Bahiano himself may have provoked Haru's behavior by saying, "Only meat I'll ever put between my teeth is beef … You Japanese are more adventurous than most" (38). Alternately, Haru might have been performing for the benefit of her suitor Yōgu – also present in the kitchen – who was known for his "wild" manners. Or she might simply have been very hungry. The meaning of the event is left deliberately obscure.

Are the Japanese honest and hardworking folk, with a drive to succeed in the face of all adversity? That is how their neighbor the Bahiano views them after many decades. It is this preconception about "Japanese culture" that prevents the Bahiano from seeing fraud, embezzlement, theft, and even murder committed in plain sight. Fervently pleading the cause of the bankrupt commune in court, the Bahiano says,

> Judge, these aren't the people we should be punishing … They are honest people, and they have made a statement declaring that they want to make good their debts. I myself have entered into an agreement with them and I can pledge my own home and property on their good will! (Yamashita 172)

Pledging his home and property on Japanese culture turns out to be fatal for the Bahiano, for Kantaro runs both the commune and the Bahiano's business into the ground.

Yamashita's irreverent attitude to both "culture" and "community" is implicit in her portrayal of the Japanese commune as a place where the idealism and egotism of some are sustained by the naïveté of others, and where the commonplace division of people into oppressed racial minority and oppressive white majority is irrelevant. All this may account for the relative lack of interest in *Brazil-Maru* on the part of Asian American scholars. Rarely included in Asian American literature syllabi (unlike Yamashita's next novel *Tropic of Orange*), *Brazil-Maru* was required reading for an "Ethnography and Gender in Latin America" course at the University of Texas, a "History of Brazil" course at the University of Maryland, and a cultural studies course titled "Re-Imagining Community: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Belonging" at New York University. Not a novel that boosts "ethnic pride," it nonetheless has a great deal to say about ethnicity and the way it is maintained in small places.

None of the texts discussed in this chapter can be reduced to the anti-ethnographic function, for literature never merely responds to external pressures: it has other jobs to do. But though the framework adopted here has limitations, if we did not ask how Yamanaka, Obejas, and Yamashita responded to the predicament of being read ethnographically, we would miss some of the creative moves they made. Among such moves is the way they conjure up Geertzian "dragons" and show them up for what they are – close relatives of a familiar species.

Coda

Ernest Hemingway's novel *Islands in the Stream* (1970), pieced together by Mary Hemingway and Charles Scribner, Jr. from undeveloped fragments of manuscripts, includes a humorous exchange on art between the white painter-protagonist Tom Hudson and the black barman Bobby. The exchange takes place in the 1930s on Bimini in the Bahamas, and careens drunkenly for six pages. What Bobby has trouble understanding is Tom's apparent lack of ambition in the choice of Caribbean subjects:

> You sell those pictures you paint all the time?'
> 'They sell pretty good now.'
> 'People paying money for pictures of Uncle Edward. Pictures of Negroes in the water. Negroes on land. Negroes in boats. Sponge boats. Squalls making up. Water spouts. Schooners that got wrecked. Schooners building. Everything they could see for free. They really buy them?'
> 'Sure they buy them. Once a year you have a show in New York and they sell them.'
> (Hemingway 16–17)

Unaware of the market value of ethnographic genre scenes, Bobby advises Tom not to waste his talent, and to "leave all that chicken stuff behind" (19). Thinking on a grand scale, Bobby envisions a canvas the size of a mainsail on which an apocalyptic scene unfolds as he speaks:

> 'Tom, boy, do you think you could paint a full hurricane? Paint her right in the eye of the storm when she's already blew from one side and calmed and just starting from the other? Put in everything from the Negroes lashed in the coconut palms to the ship blowing over the crest of the island. Put in the big hotel going. Put in two-by-fours sailing through the air like lances and dead pelicans blowing by like they were part of the gusts of rain … Have women blown out to sea with their clothes stripped off them by the wind. Have dead Negroes floating everywhere and flying through the air.' (17–18)

On the surface, the two men are equals; in fact a comic reversal of roles takes place when Bobby addresses the white man as "Tom, boy" and pontificates on art. Meanwhile, Tom plays Uncle Tom, patiently listening to the torrent of Bobby's words but retaining his judgment. Although Hemingway makes ample room for Bobby in the dialogue, he does so only to portray a provincial minstrel, the antithesis of the modest, laconic, worldly Tom who happens to have chosen Bimini as a retreat from the modern world. In contrast to Bobby's naïve vision

of art, Tom's is austere and pure in line. Even if Bobby were a painter, not a barman, his hurricanes would probably not sell in 1930s New York. When Tom says about his paintings "*they* sell well" and "once a year *you* have a show in New York and *they* sell them" he means "I sell my paintings well" and "once a year I have a show in New York and I sell them." Arguably, the substitution of pronouns is an attempt to obscure the fact that Tom is exploiting Bimini folk through ethnographic art.

Hemingway's mode of representing small places firmly belongs in the colonial tradition. *Islands in the Stream* itself – particularly the Bimini section – is a series of genre scenes with Caribbean backdrops. That Scribner personally assisted Hemingway's wife in putting the novel together suggests that for him it had potential as a cultural commodity. But perhaps on account of the timing, the novel failed to arouse interest; only Hemingway aficionados appreciated this belated work. New writers began arriving on the scene around this period, including people from places like Bimini, with new notions about art as a mode of representation, and about the place of islands in the postcolonial scheme of things. Several of these writers – Paule Marshall, O.A. Bushnell, Jamaica Kincaid, Gloria Naylor, Russell Leong, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Achy Obejas, Jessica Hagedorn – were discussed in the preceding pages.

Wresting the power to represent small places from ethnographers like Malinowski and novelists like Hemingway was a significant goal legitimated by multiculturalism. Yet, literature by the writers discussed in this project is more than a sanctioned but problematic gesture of "giving voice" to the subaltern. The complexity of these writings, which I have attempted to bring out here, comes from the amount of thought their authors gave to such questions as: How to assert the authority to write without stepping into the shoes of Malinowski or Hemingway? How to address the politics of the gaze? How to construct narratives that reflect the multiplicity of subject positions and ways of knowing? How to read present-day island cultures with an awareness of their colonial past? Is political and aesthetic self-representation by definition emancipatory?

The latter question underlies many of the narratives discussed in this study, but it is most forcefully addressed by Karen Tei Yamashita in *Brazil-Maru*. In this novel, the leaders of the Japanese commune Esperança in Brazil realize that they will control the meaning of their utopian experiment if they can control its representations, both those intended for home use and those for outsiders. Kantaro's photographic documentation of Esperança's pioneering days helps the insiders to organize their memories and understand certain events as "important and noble" (11). This is just one of many ways Esperança holds a mirror to itself. The leaders actively promote it as a haven for creative people and manage to draw several Japanese artists who seek inspiration in communal life. One of the leaders' sons, Genji, is exempted from farm work and consecrated to art. The commune's daughters are required to study modern dance after their chores on the chicken farm.

Kantaro lends a Japanese journalist money to start up a newspaper; the paper writes favorably about the commune. A Japanese filmmaker is invited to commemorate Esperança's history in film.

Self-representation makes Esperança special but does not save it. Nor does it, as Yamashita suggests, guarantee the authenticity of the knowledge produced for internal and external use. Even in a small community, where face-to-face relationships prevail, some members end up controlling knowledge and representing others. Genji, one of the narrators, astutely observes the spatial distribution of power and knowledge in the dining hall during communal meals:

> Kantaro told [Hatomura, the filmmaker] everything because he wants [him] to make a movie. But Hatomura kept wanting to know something over and over, and Kantaro only wanted to tell it one way, even though Hatomura has heard different things from different people. Kantaro got tired of telling Hatomura the same things. First Hatomura sat next to Kantaro, then he began to sit next to my old man. Then he moved down the bench and sat next to someone else until he was way down at the end of the table. You could see Kantaro looking down the long table, looking for Hatomura's round face. Maybe he was asking everyone questions about our history, but he was really just getting farther and farther away from Kantaro. Now Hatomura moved even farther away to another table in the back. He sits with the youth, talking and laughing … Pretty soon, Hatomura will not be sitting anywhere. (211–212)

Many people in the dining hall remember the early days of the commune. Their stories apparently differ from Kantaro's, which is the hegemonic story here. The more Hatomura learns, the farther he drifts from Kantaro, who must approve the film project. Eventually, Hatomura loses heart and leaves, as do the artists-in-residence. Only the dance instructor remains. The dancing and painting become part of the routine rather than a means of individual self-expression. Gradually, Kantaro's fraud and unchecked spending ruin the commune.

At the end of the novel, Genji is left stranded alone in the jungle. Local Brazilians mistake him for an "Indian of the Lost Tribe" because he speaks no Portuguese (246). They find his "detailed drawings, sketched in ballpoint pen on pieces of paper and scattered through the forest" – cartoons that tell his story. Apparently, these efforts to communicate through "comics" fail, for the "Indian" is eventually caught stealing and "shot through the head" (248). But though Yamashita's Genji, like Hemingway's barman Bobby, fails as an artist, he is not a minstrel. As one of the narrators, he gets a chance to impose a tentative meaning on Esperança that overwrites Kantaro's story.

Multiculturalism as a national policy and educational tool has made room for the production of very different texts, including those that critically engage the main assumptions of multiculturalism. While it does, to some extent, mimic ethnography in that it encourages Americans to think about others as members of relatively homogenous cultural groups, and asks artists to represent them, it does not foreclose the possibility of insubordination on the part of writers as well as readers. Chapters 4, 5, and 6, made use of amateur and professional book reviews

to reconstruct what Stuart Hall would call hegemonic readings of minority texts – readings primarily interested in ethnographic knowledge. One goal of this study was to show that readings from "negotiated" and "counter-hegemonic positions" are also possible.

Another goal was to look over the disciplinary fence and see what has been happening in ethnography since the 1960s. The pressure to rethink ethnography's methods and assumptions has resulted in a growing body of critical theory that can be borrowed and adapted for the study of literature. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, the theories have also found expression in the form of autobiographical fiction. This body of self-reflexive writing opens itself up to literary analysis.

A century or two ago, literature and ethnography supplemented each other and were not considered qualitatively different ways of knowing. Then, for a time, highbrow literature lost interest in social representation, while ethnography cut itself off from literature, the locus of subjectivity and singularity. "We are not interested in what A or B may feel *qua* individuals, in the accidental course of their own personal experiences," declared Bronisław Malinowski, "we are only interested in what they feel and think *qua* members of a given community" (*Argonauts* 23). In *Navigators of the Contemporary: Why Ethnography Matters* (2008), David A. Westbrook took stock of ethnography's current situation in a world where "the maps have no more blank white spaces; the islands have run out" (9). He concluded that while there may be no more islands, "there are always margins, and the job of the ethnographer is, now as ever, to report from the margins" wherever they may be in the contemporary world (10). He asked the anthropologist to think of herself as a "navigator" who needs to triangulate her own position in relation to disparate points in the social geography and in relation to the narratives of her interlocutors (47). The text she produces

> should reflect the situation in question, but it cannot be seen as a mechanical reproduction of the situation, or still less, a mirror of it. In general, ethnography's raw material was not previously available, but instead was the product of negotiation and conversation undertaken by the ethnographer. In important ways, the data cannot be reproduced. One might have a different conversation, later, even involving the same people. Only this navigator, then, was in this position, from which she participated in, observed, analyzed, and reported upon what she saw, that is, the conversations in which she participated and indeed largely staged. Only this navigator could say, I was here in social space, at this juncture in various narratives … Thus, rather than a description or representation in the ordinary sense, which is in principle replicable, the expressions of ethnography for present situations are *in principle* unique. (64–65, emphasis in the original)

If Westbrook's voice can be taken as representative, a rapprochement between ethnography and literature is in sight. Much has had to change for ethnographers to be willing to admit that their experience in the field is singular and unique; that cultures can only be accessed through interlocutors who tell stories in response to questions; and that stories are what ethnographers produce when they

return from the field. Some ethnographers now understand themselves to be much closer to those fiction writers who have long been "reporting" from the margins, triangulating their positions in relation to various interlocutors and intertexts, and inventing forms to make sense of the constantly changing social topography. Likewise, literary criticism needs to acknowledge the affinity between ethnography and fiction.

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