

INTRODUCTION

The People gave her the name Euphemia or Euph-something, but when they called her that she used to toss her head like a horse and refuse to answer so they'd had to give up in the end and call her by her true-true name.

—Merle Hodge, Crick Crack, Monkey

It is the contention of this volume that, in the words of Richard A. Schweder, “we are multiple from the start” and that our true names must reflect this fact. Whatever essentializing norms may have helped shore up our sense of identity and ways of understanding each other in past ages, our entry into the twenty-first century is marked by a heightened sense of cross-cultural and interpersonal (con)fusion.

Our indigenous conceptions are diverse, whether they are centered in our official texts or our underground newspapers, in our public discourse or our psychoanalytic soliloquies, in our customary practices or our idiosyncratic routines, in our daytime task analyses or our nighttime fantasies. (Schweder 1991, 5–6)

As Schweder rightly notes, nowadays individuals typically share a double sense of “universal latency” and “manifest particularity” (6). The first refers to the postmodern sense of interconnection between cultures, in which an increasing percentage of the globe has immediate and overlapping access to artifacts produced by disparate and often conflictive systems of meaning. The common impression is, that it is all out there “to be had.” The sense of manifest particularity, however, resists such deconstruction, implying stasis and essential difference as possibilities. Fascination, fear, and hate hold these two forces together, defining not only the movement toward hegemony by large social blocks but also the insistent doubts and individual rebellions within cultures. Following Bakhtin and Levinas, we can note that postmodern men and women typically stand in awe of the strangeness of the Other, marveling at why such a cultural “oddy” should remain so intransigently singular, and

are disturbed to find polyphonic others not only in "competing" cultures but in themselves, as well.

This collection of essays explores the uneasy tension implied in this interstitching of the global and the particular, the collective and the individual. What we here discuss are not simply informed and informing documents of this culture or that, but rather site-specific strategies of resistance to the imposition of identity in the terms imposed by former colonizers or implied by present totalizing norms. At the same time, the fact that many "Third World" writers are expatriates and members of intellectual elites demonstrates the "bleeding" across borders and the ambiguous forms that much "resistance" literature inevitably takes. By drawing on a widely various set of examples from around the world, we hope to consider, on a number of levels, whether or not there is a non-essentialized addressivity common to subaltern cultures—at least among those who are given voice to speak for such cultures. We propose our collection as a bridge between recent Eurocentric postmodern discourse dealing with the breakdown of the modernist stability in art, architecture, electronic media, etc. (Adam 1991), and such groundbreaking anthologies as Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *"Race," Writing, and Difference* that problematize the issue of racial identity and literary practice (also Sollors 1986).

Richard Swiderski is among those who have conducted interesting comparative studies of people who move into a new culture and, to some extent, put it on (sometimes in both senses) like a new garment. Several of our chapters briefly discuss aspects of this "investment," but that is not really what we are about here. We are much more interested in those who have little choice in the matter, those who are inescapably of two (or more) cultures. The "cross-addressing" to which our title refers is, in fact, often as much an internal conversation as it is public. But the multiplicity that Schweder describes as a universal human characteristic is, in our essays, foregrounded less as a metaphysical or psychological *donnée*, and more as a compelling personal embodiment of the consequences of postmodern cultural exchange. We deal here in "other" words—in words of the other: with, for example, the words of those forced to speak a foreigner's tongue, or the words of *mestizaje* and *métissage*—with the experience of *be-longing* to (and for) more than one culture and hearing one's own cultural "homunculi" speaking in mutual interrogation and inscription. We see ourselves in conversation with the contributors to Alfred Arteaga's recent book, *An Other Tongue* (1994), who seek to interrogate "the processes of subjectification that define selves and others as the subjects of nation and ethnicity" (1).

Like Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar, though, we feel that a “glossy version” of a postmodern world must be reinterpreted against the backdrop of the Third World and the migrant children of that world (Calderón 1991, 7). Our focus is not upon what some would describe as the *universal* deracination of our age so much as it is upon those whose “hybridized” biology or shifting locale forces their ironic confrontation not only with uprootedness but also with *rootedness*, generally in two cultures. Our collection gives voice to those who, in the words of Françoise Lionnet, “must survive (and write) in the interval between different cultures and languages” (Lionnet 1989, 1). It is *their* autobiography that we investigate. From Australian aboriginal and Maori to Irish, Palestinian, and South African, and on to the rich ethnic mix in North America, we hope to offer a representative and suggestive demonstration of the concerns shared by quite diverse groups—issues as fundamental as one’s choice of language, one’s presentation of self in society, one’s “recovery” of a history.

The discussion is, of course, not only internal. The Janus-like view taken by many of our subject authors, the “unique positionings consciousness takes at these confluent streams,” in Gloria Anzaldúa’s words, resist accommodation to either culture:

Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an “alien” element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being “worked” on. . . . And yes, the “alien” element has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society’s clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. (Anzaldúa 1987, iii)

This oxymoron—keeping a “shifting” identity “intact”—nicely encapsulates the postmodern condition, especially, one might argue, from the “archipelagic” ontological view of many Caribbean writers (see Benítez-Rojo and Harris), the view that Anzaldúa describes as a participation in “the further evolution of humankind.” The “border” mentality, however, has little cause to celebrate this tensive coming-into-being, since it must fend off imminent annihilation. In this regard, Anzaldúa’s words sound strikingly like those of bell hooks, though the experiences they reflect clearly have their particularities as well as their commonalities:

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town,

the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. . . . Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary part of that whole. This sense of wholeness. . . provided us an oppositional world view. . . that strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity. (hooks 1984, 1)

The words of writers like Anzaldúa and hooks must remain central in anthologies such as our own, otherwise discourse among cultural elites in these matters will be all sound and fury. If one is not a member of the upper classes the crossing of borders, for those who actually make the attempt, is always dangerous and frequently violent, and the danger and violence are institutionally perpetuated. The lives we are privileged to consider here are endangered lives.

Nor is the externalized conversation merely a soliloquy. It does elicit a response—frequently unfriendly and simplistic, as in the ongoing “P.C.” debate. Societies, for their part, traditionally justify the marginalization they impose upon *mestizaje* by resorting to an emotional concoction of moral and biological arguments for the maintenance of the purity of race. But this powerful totem for exclusion becomes less viable every day. Henry Louis Gates Jr., for example, argues that “race, as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences, has long been recognized to be a fiction.” He therefore sets out to “deconstruct. . . the ideas of difference inscribed in the trope of race, to explicate discourse itself in order to reveal the hidden relations of power and knowledge inherent in popular and academic usages of ‘race’” (Gates 1986, 4–5).¹ If race itself cannot be isolated, it is little wonder that a meaningful characterization of *mixed* races is even more dubious. Françoise Lionnet notes that “certain categories, such as *créole* and *métis*, are not part of any visible racial difference for the average English speaker” (1989, 14). What the words mean is determined not by specific racial strains but by the speaker’s preconceptions of the individuals in question and the “racial” characteristics they exhibit.² Such prejudice is nothing new. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker show how the various racial terms prevalent in Europe from the time of Columbus until 1800 were hardly in agreement: “[A] sense of otherness led to the linking of the ‘wild Irish’ with the Moors, the Scots as well as Scythians as members of a ‘barbarous nation,’ and the description of Spain itself as being of ‘all nations under heaven. . . . the most mingled, most uncertayne and most bastardy’” (Hendricks and Parker 1994, 2). If these and similar emotional descriptions are now

ridiculed, they nonetheless had a simplifying and categorizing power, and marginalized peoples today still recognize them as railroad tracks they cross at their peril. The many biracial Americans whom Lise Funderburg interviews in her recent book have little more in common than ambiguity, shifting self-definition, and a sense that the world does not welcome them.

Little wonder, then, if a debate rages over the extent to which one can and should attempt a crossing. Gates focuses several of the pertinent issues, arguing that

we [African Americans] must determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. But we must also understand how certain forms of difference and the *languages* we employ to define these supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other. (Gates 1986, 15)

The strategic concerns underpinning Gates's argument reverberate throughout much of the writing under analysis in this collection. Which borders can, and must, be constantly "crisscrossed" (Martín-Rodríguez, Yaziji), and to what effect? What can be "reclaimed" (James), "transformed" (Aldama), "satirized" (Wald), "saved from extinction" (Zamora)? Which rules can be broken (O'Connor)? Which appetites dare one feed (Waxman)? As Anzaldúa notes, the place where these questions arise is never comfortable, but it is undeniably "home" (1987, iii)—a conclusion not easily come to in the essays by Yang, Quimby, and Yaziji.

As the topics of many of our chapters imply, we assert that the telling of the stories of these struggles in many cases serves as a site for their most intense realization and, sometimes, for their transformation, as well. Furthermore, while we recognize that narration is hardly the quintessence of social exchange or resistance, we believe that it historically can lead to a more conscious political struggle.³ Furthermore, without a shared narration the political movement will almost inevitably replace one brutal injustice with another. As Wole Soyinka notes, "[T]he language of [Charles] Manson to his victims was . . . a pastiche of the very rhetoric of social revolution that is shorn of the motivating essence of communal renewal. . . . [W]hen I hear that outrageously simplistic cry of 'Culture is a gun,' I feel like reaching for my culture" (Soyinka 1994, 45). As ephemeral as any defining narrative may be in our age, such narratives *will* find a voice, and it is essential that they also find an audience.

What is under analysis here—the reaching for one’s culture—is a two-tiered process. Lionnet, with Edouard Glissant, can celebrate the “recovered histories” inspiring many of these writers who are benefiting from “the egalitarian interrelations in which binary impasses are deconstructed” (Lionnet 1989, 5; Glissant 1989, 249); at the same time, with bell hooks, she will note that *métissage*, as “the site of undecidability and indeterminacy,” is the place where “solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages” (Lionnet 1989, 6). It is much the topic of essays like McCredden’s and Chao’s and, in fact, all the essays in this collection were chosen with an eye for the variety of solidarities informing the strategic responses to this positioning in the larger societies.

Most of our discussion focuses on texts, and often on those that would be considered high-cultural texts. We believe it would be difficult to offer a coherent contemporary collection of essays that does justice to all significant forms of narrative, and we acknowledge that our own approach has its in-built limitations (Nelson et al. 1992, 2). At the same time, we hope to demonstrate our recognition of the larger ramifications of the terms “culture” and “narrative” in what we write, especially in light of the developments in the past decades in the field of cultural studies (Nelson et al. 1992, 1–16; During 1993, 1–25; Blundell et al. 1993, 1–102).

Like the contributors to the recent collection edited by Janice Carlisle and Daniel Schwarz, we are therefore aware that storytelling, in the traditional definition of narrative,

is marked by its achievement of the humanistic goals of coherence, progress, and rationality. . . . [But] certain forms of recording events—in particular, annals and chronicles—fall outside such a [logocentric] notion of narrative because they do not conform to the modernist’s conception of coherence, and they fail to do so precisely because they reflect earlier, culturally specific assumptions about reality. (Carlisle and Schwarz 1994, 2, 4)

Our selection of topics, various narrative formats, and sometimes obscure(d) works hopes to raise the stakes about what constitutes literary study at the end of the twentieth century. Roger Bromley’s concluding essay partially addresses this concern.

The work of Clifford Geertz has been seminal in considerations such as ours. Following Max Weber’s lead, Geertz defines culture semiotically, as the “webs of significance” that men and women weave, and in which

humanity is suspended (Geertz 1973, 5). Following Gilbert Ryle's lead, he describes the study of these webs as an activity in "thick description" (6): a negotiation through the gestures, the "piled-up structures of inference and implication," distinguishable, within a culture, as a twitch of the eye, a conspiratorial wink, or a parody of that wink. Not only anthropologists but students of any of the liberal arts recognize that observers who do not already share the particular structure of signification that is being described will miss some of the established codes; what they consider to be data are really "constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (9). And, thus, Geertz returns to the semiotic question: "Once human behavior is seen as . . . symbolic action . . . the thing to ask is . . . what . . . is getting said" (10). Geertz specifically denies this is the examination of "a psychological phenomenon, a characteristic of someone's mind, personality, cognitive structure"; it is instead, he asserts, an attempt to gain a greater "familiarity with the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs" (13).

Not surprisingly, Geertz finds the work of an ethnographer analogous to that of a literary critic (9), and the contributors to this volume would agree. Both sorts of writers return to the same "work" again and again, to "plunge more deeply into the same things" (25),⁴ and to try in the examination of "the symbolic dimensions of social action" to "make available . . . answers that others . . . have given." In the process, both ethnographers and literary critics of a certain kind seek to "include [these others] in the consultable record" (30).

This concern for inclusion is at the heart of the present collection, and it partially explains the eclecticism of our theoretical approaches. I am not alone in this editorial preference for variety. In his latest anthology of Native American writing (1993), Arnold Krupat notes that he had, a few years ago, thought that the time for eclecticism might have passed and that it should now be replaced by collections that were rigorously feminist, or Marxist, poststructuralist, "Native Americanist," or whatever. But he subsequently concluded that such closure or regimentation was either premature or inappropriate for his subject matter—"no single thematic or perspectival orientation and no single discursive mode could be asserted" (Krupat 1993, xviii). Like Krupat, we feel that the rigorous application of a chosen theoretical approach throughout these essays would have produced an interesting book, but would have offered our collection a deceptive unity that would work against the specificity of our various subject authors. Studies in hybridity, almost by definition, demand bricolage.

Much of the literature we examine is autobiographical (Henke, especially), and in some of our analysis our own voices are also clearly audible. Using Hartwig Isernhagen's terms to characterize Western "scientific" knowledge as an insistence on "verbifying" and "meta-izing," Krupat warns that

abstracting and distancing . . . make . . . "knowledge" suspect at best or entirely inimical to those whose lives or works it is supposed to illuminate, most particularly when, as in the case of Native Americans, it encounters constructions of the categories of "knowledge" that are hardly consonant with those of "science." (Krupat 1953, xix)

Following Krupat's lead we do not wish to adopt a magisterial tone in encounters that defamiliarize. Nor are our analyses conducted "anonymously," since many of us come to these studies from personal experiences sharing a family resemblance to topics at hand. As a gay male who, for twenty-nine years, was a Jesuit and closeted, I, for example, eventually concluded that "passing" as heterosexual was a mixed blessing, at best. The silence I had imposed upon myself increasingly manifested its complicity with larger social injustices such as those discussed by Jolly in her chapter on intersecting marginalities. In our book this compelling interest in manifestations of liminal consciousness is not surprising. In an age in which past verities offer less secure cultural borders, a growing number find themselves drawn to studies of hybridity, since so many of us now find ourselves living in various intervals *between* cultures, *amid* languages, *across* borders.

We believe our book, with its various theoretical approaches and its emphasis on the personal, also echoes the current divisions in cultural studies. In their collection analyzing the developments within that protean field, Valda Blundell, John Shepherd, and Ian Taylor note that the work of the seventies was notably political. In the eighties and nineties, however, it split, becoming interested in the cultural production of meaning, on the one hand, and, on the other, becoming involved in policy debates (Blundell et al. 1993, 8–9). Our essays share both impulses, the semiotic and the political, the postmodernist and the activist, with a decided implication that the two are intricately enmeshed and express themselves in contemporary literature in explorations of *métissage*. As Lionnet herself notes, "[W]hat is at stake in the conservative resistance to *métissage* is clearly a patriarchal desire for self-reproduction, self-duplication, within a representational space—female bodies—uncon-

taminated by the presence of the other" (Lionnet 1989, 12). This is hardly apolitical. In less committed language, Blundell combines the semiotic and political impulses in a succinct description of the aim of contemporary cultural studies: its practitioners seek "to learn the value of politically engaged intellectual work in understanding how forms of awareness are mediated by and contribute to the social and cultural life in which they occur" (Blundell et al. 1993, 4).

Our volume would assert that the "forms of awareness" of the man or woman standing on the border, compelling in her or his direct gaze, is especially significant in a postmodern age of imposed distraction. It is that heightened consciousness that we hope to discuss in this collection—that painful sensitivity forced upon those who stand irrevocably in two worlds:

Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town. (hooks 1984, 1)

Imagining the tracks that map another's world, the transgressions that maintain another's dream, sometimes lays bare one's own true name.

Notes

1. Similar concerns fuel the defense of related canonical positions. In defense of her own poststructuralist epistemology and the postmodern condition it signals, Lionnet argues that "the criticisms leveled against poststructuralist epistemologies have very disturbing parallels in the nineteenth-century polygenists' discourse of racial purity. In both cases, indeterminacy, hybridization, and fragmentation are feared because of the risks of 'degeneration' of the human species, of the race, and of 'traditional' literary culture" (1989, 17).

2. In her book she seeks to "interrogate the sociocultural construction of race and gender and challenge the essentializing tendencies that perpetuate exploitation and subjugation on behalf of those fictive differences created by discourses of power" (Lionnet 1989, 15). Gates similarly notes that "race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application" (Gates 1986, 5).

3. "These linguistic and discursive relationships manifest active displacements of power, power that must be reinforced continually to maintain a particular image of the world and hierarchy of relationships" (Arteaga 1994, 1).

4. Geertz makes the distinction between "'inscription' ('thick description') and 'specification' ('diagnosis')—between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social life as such" (1973, 27).

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