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Ethnic Studies Review (ESR) is the journal of the National Association for Ethnic Studies (NAES). ESR is a multi-disciplinary international journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups and their cultures, and intergroup relations. NAES has as its basic purpose the promotion of activities and scholarship in the field of Ethnic Studies. The Association is open to any person or institution and serves as a forum for its members in promoting research, study, and curriculum as well as producing publications of interest in the field. NAES sponsors an annual spring conference.

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Table of Contents

Editor's Notei

Contributors.....iv

ARTICLES

Getting into the Game: The Trickster in American Ethnic Fiction

Helen Lock.....1

**Middle Passage to Freedom:
Black Atlantic Consciousness in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*
and S. I. Martin's *Incomparable World***

Robert Nowatzki.....12

**'The Story You Were Telling Us'
Re-Reading Love in Alice Walker's *By The Light of My Father's Smile*
through Luce Irigaray**

Özlem Görey.....29

**'Transcending the Tragic Mulatto':
The Intersection of Black and Indian Heritage
in Contemporary Literature**

Lindsay Claire Smith.....45

Chinatown Black Tigers: Black Masculinity and Chinese Heroism in Frank Chin's <i>Gunga Din Highway</i> Crystal S. Anderson.....	67
'Time is Not a River': The Implications of <i>Mumbo Jumbo's</i> Pendulum Chronology for Coalition Politics Tamiko Fiona Nimura.....	87
Breaking the Rules: Innovation and Narrative Strategies in Sandra Cisneros' <i>The House on Mango Street</i> and Ana Castillo's <i>The Mixquiahuala Letters</i> Carmen Haydee Rivera.....	108
The Politics of Faith in the Work of Lorna Dee Cervantes, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros Darlene Pagan.....	121
(Dis)Claiming Identity: Christina García's <i>The Agüero Sisters</i> and Julia Alvarez' <i>How the García Girls Lost Their Accents</i> Özlem Ögut.....	135

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *Ethnic Studies Review* reflects the important critical work being done in the field of ethnic literature, an indication that this literature is getting the attention it deserves.

Professor Helen Lock appropriately opens this issue with "Getting into the Game: The Trickster in American Ethnic Fiction." One could argue that the trickster is the most important single figure in ethnic literature, a figure bewildering and wonderfully complex, and as Lock shows, one who destroys ethnic and racial stereotypes.

Professor Robert Nowatzki in "Middle Passage to Freedom: Black Atlantic Consciousness in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* and S. I. Martin's *Incomparable World*" continues the breakdown of stereotypes as he explores the complex identities of black slaves and those who have succeeded them (such as Phillis Wheatley, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix) as a result of their contact with other cultures or what he calls "cultural blending."

Professor Özlem Görey in "The Story You Were Telling Us': Redefinition of Love in Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* through Luce Irigaray" undertakes another study of the familial relationships that are so often Walker's subject, this time through the theories of French feminist Luce Irigaray.

Lindsey Clair Smith confronts a body of earlier American Literature (including works of William Faulkner) that deals with mulatto characters and the tragedies they live in "Transcending the Tragic Mulatto" where she discusses recent American Literature (Leslie Silko, Toni Morrison, Clarence Major) that may reveal a truer "melting pot" than the early mythical one. The multi-racial characters these writers bring into being add substantially to the dynamic, the complexities, and the interest of American life.

In "Chinatown Black Tigers: Black Masculinity and Chinese Heroism in Frank Chin's Gunga Din Highway" Professor Crystal S. Anderson tackles the issue of masculinity in the United States and how Chin in mirroring another culture critiques and helps to define his own.

In "'Time Is Not a River': The Implications of *Mumbo Jumbo's* Pendulum Chronology for Coalition Politics" Tamiko Fiona Nimura discusses the implications of Ismael Reed's use of time as an extension of and an addition to history and the fact that opening up our understanding of time will add to our ability to understand the composition of cultures other than our own. The environment of *Mumbo Jumbo* also offers another opportunity for the trickster figure to appear.

Professors Carmen Haydée Rivera, Darlene Pagan, and Özlem Ögut discuss the work of Latina writers, Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Christine Garcia, and Julia Alvarez who are presenting some of the most interesting and insightful literature today. These far-ranging discussions of their work are important for critical work being done in Latina studies.

This collection of essays includes a broad range of ethnicities and an international flavor that will expand the range of Ethnic Studies.

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*Please note that the volume information of the last issue of *ESR* (*Immigration: A Special Issue*) is incorrect. It should read 2002 Volume 25 Issue 2. A correction sticker has been included.

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GETTING INTO THE GAME: THE TRICKSTER IN AMERICAN ETHNIC FICTION

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Trickster novels, especially those by Gerald Vizenor and Maxine Hong Kingston, can be used to destabilize and undermine ethnic stereotypes. As many studies show, the trickster him/herself cannot be stable and thus resists the limitations of definition as the embodiment of ambiguity. Both insider and outsider, s/he plays with the whole concept of “sides” so as to erase the distinction between them. The trickster plays the game, including the game of language, in order to break and exploit its rules and thus destabilizes linguistic markers. Kingston and Vizenor use their novels to subvert the rules of the linguistic game and free perception from stereotypic rigidity. Perceptions of race and ethnicity are frequently codified in the form of stereotypes with which we are all familiar. Once established, they, of course, prove remarkably difficult to dismantle however false or misleading they might be with regard to the race or ethnicity in question; and thus they continue to exacerbate the social tensions with which we are equally familiar. Ethnic American literature has frequently addressed this issue; in this essay I intend to look at one narrative strategy which is specifically designed to question, challenge, exploit, and even manipulate perception.

It is not hard to find examples, especially in recent ethnic American literature, of a preoccupation with racial and ethnic stereotypes and their consequences. Examples can be taken from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* in which ethnic preoccupations nearly sabotage romance, from Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" and *Paradise* in which ethnic preconceptions can sabotage the reader, or from Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, whose narrator is so preoccupied with race and racial markings that he is in some danger of sabotaging himself. He does not, however, and the way in which Kingston's trickster hero turns the sabotage around makes the novel one useful focal point along with Gerald Vizenor's *Griever*, Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*, and other recent novels, to demonstrate the function of the trickster novel in destabilizing and confounding ethnic stereotypes.

As seminal works by Paul Radin and Lewis Hyde have shown, the trickster him/herself¹ cannot be stable and thus resists the limitations of definition. According to Radin,

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being" (xxiii).

Lewis Hyde adds to this:

[T]he best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found—sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms" (7-8).

Similarly, William Willeford—in a discussion of the fool, of which he says the trickster is "a special mythological form" (132)—notes, like Hyde, that sometimes the boundary-crosser actually creates boundaries:

Since the disorder of which he [the fool] is the spirit is largely contained in his show, he serves as the boundary of which he is the enemy; and in doing this, he sometimes even demonstrates an authority proper to the central figure of the established order

Nevertheless, he is often regarded as a usurper with no right to be where he is in the ordered world (133).

Willeford goes on, with particular reference to Charlie Chaplin's *A Dog's Life* (1918), to describe the fool's comic negotiations back and forth across this social border, between order and chaos:

He is impelled by the dynamism of chaos; they [Chaplin's cop antagonists] are impelled by what they take to be the necessity of reinforcing the wall against the outside and neutralizing what has broken through it into the world they govern (135).

The comedy lies in the juxtaposition of the fool and the boundary-keepers; for the former, boundaries are arbitrary, so that the latter are continually required to renegotiate definitions of the borderland.

If the fool's spirit of disorder "is largely contained in his show," however, the trickster's is not. The primary distinction between them is that the trickster actually is everything the fool is only playing at being. Particularly for the trickster's modern literary incarnations, in penetrating and shifting the boundaries there is something at stake of the highest consequence, and it lies beyond the delimited world of play—or, indeed, of fiction—since one of his functions is to erase the boundary that separates play from "real" life. The trickster thus embodies "a method by which a stranger or underling can enter the game, change its rules, and win a piece of the action No wonder trickster is sometimes the god of those who do not control their own lot in life, but hope to" (Hyde 204, 215).

This reminder of the fundamental disruptive ambiguity of the trickster brings me directly to the American trickster novel, which in recent years has typically been produced by writers of dual ethnic or cultural backgrounds, unlike the archaic storytellers who engendered the archetypal trickster narratives. Gerald Vizenor, for example, the writer of Native American and European ancestry, centers each of his novels on a mixedblood, or (to use his word) "crossblood," trickster, brought into being through what Vizenor calls "trickster discourse." A description of its governing principles can be found in the prologue, "Tricksters and Transvaluation," to *The Trickster of Liberty* (1988):

The trickster is comic nature in a language game, not a real person or 'being' in the ontological sense. Tribal tricksters are embodied in imagination and liberate the mind; an androgyny, she would repudiate translations and imposed representations, as he would bare the contradictions of the striptease (x).

As the trickster is thus a linguistic being (as constituent of a language game, the trickster is not "playing," he is "being played" by his narrator), trickster discourse reflects this by using language in disruptive, deconstructive ways, taking aim at the kind of linguistically-encoded supposed verities that in *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978; rpt. in 1990 as *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*) Vizenor calls "terminal creeds." These "creeds" include those that demarcate ethnic boundaries by posting exclusionary markers; for example, Louis Owens says this of Bearheart:

[t]he principal target of the fiction is . . . the sign 'Indian,' with its predetermined and well-worn path between signifier and signified. Vizenor's aim is to free the play between these two elements, to liberate 'Indianness,' and in so doing to free Indian identity from the epic, absolute past that insists upon stasis and tragedy for Native Americans (231).

By containing both sides of the boundary within his own inherent duality, the crossblood trickster changes the meaning of the definitions and disrupts the rules of the game. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has said, the "discursive universe" (or as Vizenor would put it, language game) inhabited by the West African Signifying Monkey and other tricksters is "absolutely dependent on the play of differences" (53). The trickster's trickery consists in exploiting these differences, by reinterpreting, changing, and inverting meaning, shifting the boundaries between literal and figurative, switching codes, inverting conventions: generally, moving the goalposts, so that at every moment the game has a new configuration.

It is relevant in this context that Hyde describes the trickster as having, like the crossblood, or anyone of blended cultural heritage, no established "way" of conducting himself, "no fixed instinctual responses. . . . Having no way, he is dependent on

others whose manner he exploits, but he is not confined to their manner and therefore in another sense he is more independent" (45). Hence, as a linguistic being, he exploits yet is ultimately independent of the traditional connections between signifier and signified. "Language is a tool assembled by creatures with 'no way' trying to make a world that will satisfy their needs; it is a tool those same creatures can disassemble if it fails them" (Hyde 75). Thus Griever, the trickster hero of Vizenor's *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987), finds ways to dismantle overdetermined linguistic connections:

Now and then his trickeries on rough paper are cornered in popular clichés and institutions, abused by those who vest their personal power in labels and tickets to the main events. When this happens. . . he pleats and doubles, shrouds and veronicas, creases photographs, folds brochures, dictionaries, and menus, to weaken the plane realities" (201-2).

In other words, he shifts and disguises the boundaries, undoes and redraws the traditional connections.

Griever is the story of a reservation-born crossblood American trickster's deliberately disruptive (and, to many of the other characters, outrageous) sojourn at a university in the People's Republic of China. Also referred to as "Monkey" and "mind monkey," Griever recalls—is to some extent another version of—the ancient Chinese trickster the Monkey King ("the Monkey of the Mind"), who accompanied the Buddhist monk Tripitaka on a pilgrimage and was responsible for eating the Peaches of Immortality that were sacred to the Taoist deities: a story whose earliest literary retelling is the sixteenth-century Chinese novel, *The Journey To The West*. The same trickster tale informs the novel, *Tripmaster Monkey* (1987), by Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston. Jeanne Rosier Smith suggests that the novel's narrator "resembles Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy who supervises Monkey's journey" (59), and thus, interwoven with the hero's male voice, "allows the author an androgynous point of view" (63): an appropriate trickster stance, reminding us that the teller of a trickster tale—the person who incarnates the trickster in words and engenders his tricks—is inevitably a trickster her/himself.

The hero of *Tripmaster Monkey*, a sixties Berkeley graduate whose evocative name, Wittman Ah Sing, underscores his cultural duality, declares, "I am really: the present-day U.S.A. reincarnation of the King of the Monkeys" (33). His episodic adventures, which cause havoc in toy stores, unemployment offices, and parties, are permeated throughout with meditations on racial and cultural stereotypes ("Do Jews look down on men who use bobby pins to hold their yarmulkes on?" [74]; "[T]hey don't hire and cast Blacks, so Russ Tamblin [in *West Side Story*], as Riff the gangleader with kinky hair, indicates Blackness, right?" [71]; "The way Hop Sing shuffles, I want to hit him" [320]), especially with regard to Chinese Americans. His story culminates in the performance of his lengthy play based on ancient Chinese legend (but including such characters as Rudyard Kipling and John Wayne), designed to reflect the lengthy and continuous structure of traditional Chinese theatre, and performed by a multi-ethnic cast, all of whom are Americans. Toward the performance's conclusion, Wittman—having recognized the emptiness of the stereotypes that obsessed him—challenges the critics' clichéd response and the audience's assumptions: "There is no East here. West is meeting West. This was all West. All you saw was West. This is Journey In The West" (308). Rejecting Orientalism or any other such terminal creed, the trickster disproves the notion that never the twain shall meet by dismantling the "sides" that the twain supposedly demarcate. ("They wouldn't write a headline for *Raisin in the Sun*: 'America meets Africa'" [307].) Mediating between and challenging the boundaries of cultures and ethnicities, Kingston's trickster underscores their contingency, a point echoed by another child of two cultures, Richard Rodriguez, in his memoir, *Hunger for Memory* (1982): "[M]y complexion assumes its significance from the context of my life. My skin, in itself, means nothing" (137). Commenting on this passage, Lewis Hyde notes, "This is the insight that comes to all boundary-crossers—immigrants in fact or immigrants in time—that meaning is contingent and identity fluid, even the meaning and identity of one's own body" (172). The trickster here, then, reveals himself as one who has no fixed "way" but can transform himself contextually to any "way."

Hence the vein of miscegenation that runs through many

such trickster novels, emblematic as it is of shifting the boundaries to reveal the contingent meaning of “skin.” Underpinning American racism, says Hyde, “is the injunction against miscegenation, for if the races can mix, how can they be essentially different?” (353). Wittman, for one, discovers that they are not, necessarily, when yet another of the stereotypes that obsess him is shown to be meaningless:

I had thought that one advantage of marrying a white chick would be that she'd say, 'I love you,' easily and often. It's part of their culture. . . . No skin off their pointy noses to say 'I love you.' But all I'm getting is, 'I'm not in love with you, Wittman' (339).

They celebrate their marriage anyway, having revised their mutual expectations. Griever's sexual encounters are more varied: “a holosexual mind monkey,” he is described in retrospect as “the cock of the walk, and he seem[s] to love the whole wide world” (21). His most significant liaison is with his Chinese lover, Hester Hua Dan, who drowns, and with whose relative, Kangmei, he flies to freedom at the novel's end (“a mixedblood barbarian trickster in an opera coat” and “a mixedblood blonde who speaks Chinese” [233]), but his earlier encounter with the white American, Sugar Dee, is perhaps the ultimate example of race- and gender-blending, as in the course of it he actually becomes her: “He became a woman there beneath her hair” (55): the trickster as hermaphrodite, both skin- and form-changing.

In all this the mixedblood tricksters discussed so far exemplify what Warwick Wadlington calls the “fertile idea of ‘neither-both.’”

That is, the Trickster is a means of identifying, and more importantly, experiencing, an elusive fullness that is not ‘either-or’ (as, either good or evil, either cunning or stupid) nor exactly ‘both-and,’ but a margin that is in a sense both the sectors it lies between yet truly, completely, neither (19).

This is the space carved out by those with no definitive “way,” trying, as Hyde says, “to make a world that will satisfy their needs” (75). Those needs require the transformation of existing rigid and discrete definitions not into a simple combination but into something entirely new, in which former oppositions are

subsumed. Former divided selves are dismantled and reconstituted, through linguistic disruption of traditional markers, as integrated, complex selves. As Wadlington goes on to say, "the Trickster's marginal nature does not so much synthesize oppositions, as serve as a referent for them: it is what oppositions seek to capture" (19). Unlike the premodern trickster, then, "whose chief and most alarming characteristic [was] his unconsciousness" (Jung, "Trickster" 203), these modern tricksters are quite self-aware, as Wittman becomes. As Hyde says, from the "somewhat witless [premodern] character" comes "a more sophisticated trickster" (171), who can distinguish between sign and signified, and who can use the distinction consciously to redraw his world.

The linguistic tricksters on which I have focused are only some of the most obvious examples. There are many other Native American, Asian American, Latino/a American, and other ethnic American tricksters, including tricksters of European-American descent. Tricksters also abound in African American literature, taking their cue from the ancient Yoruba tricksters, Eshu and Legba, whose manipulation of language is foregrounded in Robert D. Pelton's book *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (1980), in which he calls them "writers of destiny" and emphasizes "Legba's mastery over the inner language of the human self" (113). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., further describes Eshu as "a figure of double duality, of unreconciled opposites, living in harmony. . . . the epitome of paradox" (30) who has the "capacity to reproduce himself ad infinitum" (37). Gates' book, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), charts the influence of the related African-American trickster the Signifying Monkey on the African American vernacular tradition, oral and written--the focus again being on the trickster as a linguistic being or force. Indeed, given the double-consciousness (to use W.E.B. DuBois' well-known phrase) that has informed the history of this tradition, it is hardly surprising that the ambiguous double-natured (and multivalent) trickster should so often have been chosen as the medium of its expression. He appears, for example, in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), not just as the transformative Rinehart but also as the ambiguous, unnamed narrator;

he is ubiquitous in the novels of Ishmael Reed, both as character and as informing spirit; he recently appeared in Paul Beatty's novel, *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996), the career of whose African American protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman (a name again indicative of his blended heritage), surpasses Wittman's in its capacity to wreak havoc: as he says on the first page,

If a movie mogul buys the film rights to my life, the TV Guide synopsis will read: 'In the struggle for freedom, a reluctant young poet convinces black Americans to give up hope and kill themselves in a climactic crash 'n' burn finale. Full of laughs and high jinks. Some violence and adult language' (1).

(Gunnar also echoes Wittman's and Griever's miscegenation, in his marriage to a mail-order Japanese bride, who arrives via UPS.) More subtle in approach (not that tricksters are under any obligation to be subtle) is Toni Morrison's short story about two girls of different but unspecified races, "Recitatif" (1983), which disrupts and confounds received notions of ethnic markers to the extent that it becomes a prime example of the kind of narrative of which Lewis Hyde says, "The trickster in the narrative is the narrative itself" (267).

This is true to some extent, though, of all trickster narratives, given that the trickster is an imaginative and linguistic being, and as such seems most at home in writings generated in the context of duality and ambiguity, especially as a consequence of ethnic and cultural identity.

This ancient penetrator of boundaries continues to inhabit the literary imaginations of modern boundary crossers and erasers, disrupting the game of language to confound and transform its traditional fixities and expectations, freeing the possibilities of perception by subverting the rules of the game. In this, the trickster engages in an imaginative pursuit of rights: the right not to be limited, not to be prejudged, not to be restricted, not to be static, the right not to be left out of the game—and, of course, being a trickster, the right to be all of these if one chooses.

NOTE

1. Trickster and gender is a related, and highly vexed, issue, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay. For largely opposing views, see Hyde's appendix "Trickster and Gender" (335-343) and

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

Landay. The salient point, however, seems to be that tricksters are culturally specific.

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Lock–The Trickster

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**MIDDLE PASSAGE TO FREEDOM:
BLACK ATLANTIC CONSCIOUSNESS
IN CHARLES JOHNSON'S *MIDDLE PASSAGE*
AND S. I. MARTIN'S *INCOMPARABLE
WORLD***

**Robert Nowatzki
Ball State University**

Charles Johnson's novel, *Middle Passage*, and S.I. Martin's novel, *Incomparable World*, illustrate through mobile, culturally hybrid protagonists Paul Gilroy's notion of Black Atlantic consciousness, which is based on cultural hybridity and physical mobility across the Atlantic between Europe and Africa, America and the Caribbean. I argue that both novels blur the line between freedom and slavery, between oppressed and oppressor, and disrupt the links between blackness and slavery, between mobility and freedom. In both novels the diasporic Black Atlantic experiences privilege masculinity, since neither novel includes black women who can experience the mobility that the male protagonists do.

In his 1993 book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy emphasizes the creolized identity of persons of African descent since the opening of the African slave trade. Gilroy points out that black cultural identity has been shaped not only by Africa but also by contacts with the peoples and cultures of Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas, by interactions among these peoples and cultures, and by numerous forced and voluntary movements across the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, Gilroy argues, modern black identities are not defined by geographical boundaries but by movement, hybridity, and a fluidity that is both enabled and symbolized by the Atlantic itself. This essay will examine the creolized identities of the black protagonists of two novels published in the 1990s through the lens of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic theory: Middle Passage* (1990) by the African American author Charles Johnson and *Incomparable World* (1996) by the black British author S. I. Martin. Before doing so, however, I would like to flesh out Gilroy's theory in greater detail.

Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic resists the essentialist and dualistic logic that racially has defined and oppressed people for the past few centuries. He states that "in opposition to nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). This emphasis on mobility and cultural blending places Gilroy's Black Atlantic concept in line with much recent postcolonial theory and at odds with the racial determinism of Afrocentrism. He later argues this:

The history of the black Atlantic . . . continually criss-crossed by the movements of black people—not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, citizenship—provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory. They all emerge from it with special clarity if we contrast the national, nationalistic, and ethnically absolute paradigms of cultural criticism to be found in England and America with

this hidden expression, both residual and emergent, that attempt to be global or outer-national in nature (16).

Such an approach rejects the notion that all persons of African descent living outside of Africa and in the Atlantic world are essentially African underneath the layers of imposed European, Caribbean, or American identities. Nor does Gilroy accept the idea that black Africans, African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Afro-Europeans are fundamentally different from each other. Instead he sees the Atlantic Ocean as a bridge rather than a boundary between the continents bordering it and the islands within it and argues that by crossing the Atlantic (as captured slaves, as sailors, or as free passengers), persons of African descent develop a hybrid black identity rather than maintaining a monolithic African identity or wholly assimilating to an American, Caribbean, or European identity.

One early example of the Black Atlantic experience is the 1789 narrative by Olaudah Equiano, who spent his life in Africa, the West Indies, North America, and England, as well as on the Atlantic itself. Equiano begins his narrative with a positive description of his native Africa, in which he foregrounds his African identity, but by the fourth chapter he claims that his attempts to embrace English culture as a slave in the British West Indies have made him “almost an Englishman.” In fact not only does Equiano adopt Christianity, become a missionary, acquire literacy, and engage in capitalism, he also becomes involved in English imperialism and works on a slave ship, despite his later abolitionist commitments.

This Black Atlantic consciousness that Equiano gained was forced upon him and other slaves who endured the Middle Passage to the New World; however the Black Atlantic also shaped the identities of emancipated and free-born people of African descent who traversed the Atlantic. Gilroy gives as examples abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and William Wells Brown; musicians like the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Miles Davis, and Jimi Hendrix; and authors like Phillis Wheatley, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin. Likewise in his book, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*,

the identities of black sailors like Equiano and Crispus Attucks also were shaped by their transatlantic experiences. Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic extends W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness, the idea that African Americans are torn between their African and American identities, by expanding the canvas beyond the U. S. and Africa and by emphasizing hybridity over conflict. It also provides a middle ground between white European and black identities that have often been overlooked by Du Bois' intellectual descendents, as Gilroy argues:

. . . where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and event oppositional act of political insubordination (1)

The Atlantic Ocean can be seen as a symbol of the cultural space between discrete, "pure," cultural identities that people of African descent have transgressively occupied.

Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic provides the ideal framework in which to read *Middle Passage* and *Incomparable World*,¹ since they undermine the dualism of African/Western as well as other dualisms such as white/black and slavery/freedom, upon which racial logic and practice has been based. Both novels focus on ex-slaves of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who gain culturally hybrid identities as a result of crossing the Atlantic. These novels offer alternative black identities to those bound by nationality and also resist the racial essentialism that has often informed characterizations of persons of African descent. The Black Atlantic hybrid identities portrayed in both novels, however, like Gilroy's theories of the Black Atlantic, are limited in terms of gender, in that they do not extend this notion of mobility and fluidity to women of African descent. Both novels do suggest that the concept of hybrid Atlantic identities are not necessarily restricted to persons of African descent, a possibility which Gilroy does not explore in his book.

Johnson's philosophical, Melvillesque adventure tale, *Middle Passage*, which takes place in 1830, is narrated by a literate, dishonest ex-slave named Rutherford Calhoun who has left

southern Illinois for a career as a thief in New Orleans. There he is forced by Papa Zeringue, a corrupt and powerful black creditor, to marry his black girlfriend, Isadora Bailey, against his wishes. His only escape from matrimony is to stow away on the Republic, which turns out to be a slaver that transports a group of captured Allmuseri people from Africa. Johnson's novel undermines or inverts many of the interrelated binary oppositions that structure the discourses of slavery and race: black/white, African/Western, North/South, and freedom/slavery. One example of Johnson's reversal of binary logic is Calhoun's earlier journey south from Illinois, a Northern state where he was a slave, to New Orleans, the slave-trading capital of America, a journey that, like that of Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, inverts the more traditional northern journey from slavery to freedom. Johnson depicts Calhoun's slave life in Illinois as relatively benign, and his master hates slavery and manumits him on his deathbed. Still it is surprising that he and his brother were enslaved in Illinois, where slavery was forbidden by the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, and Johnson historically situates Calhoun's Illinois enslavement (ending in 1829) before Dred Scott's residence there between 1833 and 1838 (Johnson and Smith 417); thus, Johnson does not suggest that Calhoun would have been affected by the 1857 Dred Scott ruling that denied civil rights to African Americans. Johnson does not explain this anomaly, but some whites did hold slaves in Illinois and Indiana, either because of a lack of enforcement of the Northwest Ordinance or because of legal loopholes. At any rate, Johnson reverses the geographic dualism of slavery and freedom. Although New Orleans does not turn out to be the land of opportunity that Calhoun hopes for, he is not re-enslaved; rather he becomes complicit in the slave trade, an action, of course, that diminishes his moral authority. While he crosses the Atlantic on a slave ship, he does so on deck, not in the hold, and begins by sailing east, not west. These facts alone place Calhoun between black slaves and white slaveholders and illustrate Gilroy's argument that Black Atlantic consciousness is not only experienced by slaves during the middle passage.

Johnson also reveals how the racial identities and loyalties

of Calhoun and the other characters resist the dualisms that inform racial ideologies and institutions. Despite his racial identity and his former slave status, Calhoun does not naturally side with the captured Allmuseri people on board, and in that sense he resembles Equiano as a black man who participates in the slave trade.² In fact, *Middle Passage* reverses the notion of white magic in Equiano's *Narrative* (itself a reversal of European notions of African magic) by describing the Allmuseri as a tribe of sorcerers. Because of his cultural similarity to the white crew and his racial similarity to the Allmuseri captives, Calhoun is invited to participate in both a crew mutiny and a slave mutiny, and he never decides which side to join. His indecision reveals the conflict that can occur concerning race and culture and illustrates Gilroy's idea of Black Atlantic hybrid consciousness. Likewise the equations of whiteness with slaveholders and of blackness with slaves are inverted when the white Captain Falcon complains to Calhoun that he has to grovel before prospective investors, one of whom is Papa Zeringue. Falcon serves as a foil to the anti-dualistic quality of the book in a conversation with Calhoun:

Dualism is a bloody structure of the mind. Subject and object, perceiver and perceived, self and other—these ancient twins are built into mind like the stem-piece of a merchantman. . . . They are signs of a transcendental Fault, a deep crack in consciousness itself (98).³

To his list of dualisms Falcon could have added black/white, slavery/freedom, African/Western, poverty/wealth—dichotomies which both Gilroy and Johnson seek to undermine in their respective works.⁴

Calhoun is not the only black person on the ship whose identity is hybrid, however. Indeed, the fluidity of Allmuseri identity that can be seen in the quotation in the following passage resembles that of the Atlantic Ocean itself:

Stupidly, I had seen their lives and culture as a timeless product, as a finished thing, pure essence or Parmenidean meaning I envied and wanted to embrace, when the truth was that they were process and Heraclitean change, like any men, not fixed but evolv-

ing and as vulnerable to metamorphosis Ngonyama and maybe all the Africans, I realized, were not wholly Allmuseri anymore. . . . No longer Africans, yet not Americans either (124-25).

This dynamic identity is not only applicable to persons of African descent, however. In addition to the anti-essentialist description of the Allmuseri, the logic of this passage suggests that white sailors and officers on the Republic might be somewhat Africanized by their contact with the Allmuseri. Because black people were not the only group whose identities became complicated by the transatlantic trade industry—consider, for instance, the cultural identities of white sailors and of Indian indentured servants shipped to the Caribbean⁵—one may argue that the phrase, “Black Atlantic,” is racially limited.

Johnson emphasizes the notion of cultural hybridity even more through the self-consciousness of his protagonist. Calhoun recognizes that his own identity has been shaped and destabilized by his experiences on the Atlantic:

I was open, like a hingeless door, to everything. . . . I peered deep into memory and called forth all that had ever given me solace, scraps and rags of language too, for in myself I found nothing I could rightfully call Rutherford Calhoun, only pieces and fragments of all the people who had touched me, all the places I had seen, all the homes I had broken into. The “I” that I was, was a mosaic of many countries, a patchwork of others and objects stretching backward to perhaps the beginning of time (162-63).

If Calhoun ever felt that his identity as an African American was stable and monolithic, his experience on the Atlantic has fractured that self-image. Culturally and linguistically, the African identity that he inherits from his forebears is complicated by his experience in the U. S., and his advanced literacy not only refutes white racists who equated literacy with humanity and argued that black illiteracy was a mark of their humanity but also shows his adaption to Euro-American culture. More recently his experience on the Republic complicates his position in the slavery economy and the ideological terrain that surrounds slavery.

In a later passage he again emphasizes the hybridity of his identity as a result of his Black Atlantic experience:

Looking back at the asceticism of the Middle Passage, I saw how the frame of mind I had adopted left me unattached, . . . The voyage had irreversibly changed my seeing, made of me a cultural mongrel . . . (187).

No longer American but not African either, Calhoun's identity changes as it moves from port to port in the Atlantic world.⁶

This notion of fluid, hybrid identity is also symbolized by the ship itself. As with Calhoun's description of his identity, his description of the ship suggests violence and disintegration:

The Republic was physically unstable. She was perpetually flying apart and re-forming during the voyage, falling to pieces beneath us, the great sails ripping to rags in high winds, the rot, cracks, and parasites in old wood so cancerously swift, spring up where least expected, that Captain Falcon's crew spent most of their time literally rebuilding the Republic as we crawled along the waves. In a word, she was, from stem to stern, a process. She would not be . . . the same vessel that left New Orleans, it not being in the nature of any ship to remain the same on that thrashing void called the Atlantic (35-36).

We can read this passage not only as a rather obvious symbol for the messy process of democracy in the American Republic, but also as a symbol for the Black Atlantic identity. The only constant entity in Calhoun's world is the tempestuous Atlantic itself, which threatens the physical and ontological integrity of everyone and everything floating on its surface. Johnson's description of the Republic may remind us of Gilroy's claim about the importance of ships in the Black Atlantic consciousness:

. . . ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected (16).⁷

While Gilroy's notion of the ship suggests connection rather than disintegration, both Johnson and Gilroy emphasize the disparate nature of the Black Atlantic experience.

Like Johnson's *Middle Passage*, Martin's historical novel, *Incomparable World*, focuses on ex-slaves who have traversed the Atlantic as freemen, though unlike Calhoun, they are not involved in the slave trade. Instead, the three main characters—Buckram, William Supple, and Georgie George—are trying to carve out their existence as freedmen after fighting on the British side in the American Revolution. After the war, they crossed the Atlantic, but unlike their ancestors they traveled east and as freedmen; however, instead of returning to their ancestral homeland, they traveled to London.⁸ Because of Lord Mansfield's 1772 ruling in the Somerset case that forbade the forced deportation of slaves from Britain (a ruling that has often been misinterpreted to mean the abolition of slavery in Britain), these former slaves are purportedly free, but their freedom is severely limited by poverty, as Georgie George points out: "Free? Free? We're all in prison here, Buckie. You're just out of gaol" (6). The narrator later comments that when the war ended,

. . . as they boarded the troop-ships that would take them to exile in London none of the black fighters could have imagined the so-called freedom to which they would be doomed (10).

Their freedom is as tenuous as that of Calhoun in *Middle Passage*; Georgie George warns Buckram that despite their nominal freedom,

They're killing black people in [the sickhouse], y'know. If you get better in there, they'll sell you off to some sea captain bound for America. You'll end up back in chains (11).

The characters are actually neither enslaved nor free but live in an uncertain world in which they are sometimes dehumanized because of their race and sometimes accepted because of their adopted Englishness. On the one hand, English authorities see them as a social problem that can be solved by deporting them to Sierra Leone; on the other hand, like Equiano (who makes two appearances in the novel), they have become "almost Englishmen." For instance, when Buckram happens upon and assaults his former American master, he wins the approval of onlooking white Londoners because he uses "London English,"

despite his master's appeal of racial solidarity to the Londoners.

Toward the end of the novel, Englishness trumps race again when Georgie George and William end up in Recife, Brazil. They are followed by Portugese soldiers, who intend to capture them and sell them into slavery, but they are rescued by white English soldiers. Language links these black Britons to their white countrymen, as Georgie George explains:

. . . this is an English inn and we are English speakers. Until we blacks use our original African language, our lives are linked with these people and theirs with ours, even against our proper interests, with the best will in the world. . . . To these drunken seafarers, it mattered less that we are black men than that we have a common tongue. Language fosters conspiracy (162).

In this sense, language undermines binary racial categories because unlike skin tone or origin, it can be shared by people of different races. While this passage neglects the ways in which the English language has changed by the contact between white Britons and Africans or African Americans, the fact that William and Georgie George are able to use the language of their erstwhile masters is more important than the fluidity of the language itself. The concept of Black Atlantic identity is perfectly illustrated by these two English-speaking black men who were slaves in North America, migrated to London and then to South America, where they are helped by white British sailors.

Martin also switches back and forth between promoting essentialist notions of blackness and destabilizing and parodying them. At one point in the novel, Martin emphasizes William's African identity and that of other black people in London: "Bambara, Mandinka, Wolof, Fulani, Ibo, Whydah, Ashanti, Coromantee, Fanti, Ga, Hausa, Yoruba, Angola, William knew them all, even if they didn't know themselves" (76). Buckram also has a dream of Africa which suggests that there is his true home, even though his notion of "Africanness" is filtered through his experiences as a slave in Carolina:

The scene was a forest clearing—everywhere was hot and damp, with rotting vegetation just like Virginia in August. Smoke rose from the chimneys, grass huts had

windows and all the people dressed in the same cloth, the slave material: buckram. Roasting, fatty meats turned on spits. The whole village sang, call and response, with the rhythms knocking out in the background. . . . Warm breezes gathered under his outstretched arms and carried him, spiralling slowly into the sky (28).

This suggestion of a stable African essence appears later, when an old slave named Gullah “talked of a world so unlikely William took it to be imaginary. It was a black world of black kingdoms where black people did black things” (76). Later in the novel, however, William and Georgie George swindle an American ambassador by posing as an African chieftain and his interpreter. William, an actor who plays the chief, performs an act of cultural blackface by disguising his American and British identities from the naïve American ambassador. His performance as an African dignitary highlights his lack of African essential identity, in that the only thing “African” about him is his skin color. As a result of his Black Atlantic cultural identity, performing “Africanness” is a difficult theatrical feat for this black Englishman.

Martin uses transatlantic crossings to complicate not only the identities of persons of African descent, but also English national identity itself. For instance, at one point the narrator explains that Buckram

was suddenly seized by a delirious vision of this land, this London, in time to come, teeming with generation after generation of his kinfolk, freedmen, English-born and bred; transforming this wet, cold island with African worship and celebration. Imperial orphans in communion with a fractured past—his present—leading Albion’s hag-masses to a greater, more wholesome dance of life (40).

Buckram’s vision foreshadows the cultural hybridity of Britain that would result from the immigration of formerly colonized people from the West Indies, Africa, and India in the second half of the twentieth century. This perspective leads Buckram to a new understanding of where he belongs that con-

flicts with his earlier idea of African essentialism; he sadly, slowly realizes,

This is home: London. This is my home: London. My friends are here. My life is here, and I live in this, our home: London town (42).

Martin later uses a conversation between two famous eighteenth-century Africans to emphasize the cultural hybridity of the English in their partial absorption of African people and culture. Equiano tells Ottobah Cugoano that

(O)ur numbers here [England] increase and . . . we will become, if indeed we are not already, an ineradicable element of this nation's character (98).

Cugoano adds that the English are “a composite of those they've conquered, and nothing more. Mongrels all . . . (98). Such a passage certainly resonates in Martin's contemporary Britain, in which Britons of various racial origins are debating the connections between race and nationality. Both in Martin's time and in the late eighteenth century, the people conquered by the English, including Africans, are cultural “mongrels” as much as their English conquerors are.

Despite the relative freedom that the Black Atlantic brings to Calhoun, Buckram, William, and Georgie George, however, such freedom is not as available to female characters in the two novels. *Middle Passage* opens with Calhoun, Johnson's Ishmael-like narrator, claiming that “[o]f all things that drive men to sea, the most common disaster, I've come to learn, is women” (1). He says that Isadora “was . . . a woman grounded, physically and metaphysically, in the land” (5).⁹

While Calhoun is on board the Republic, the fact that the Atlantic is no place for women of any race is emphasized by his offhanded remark about the captain's homosexual activities and by his rare references to the captured Allmuseri women. Predictably, the crew of the Republic—including the black Calhoun himself—perform masculinity to extreme degrees for each other:

The Republic was, above all else, a ship of men. Without the civilizing presence of women, everyone felt the pressure, the masculine imperative to prove

himself equal to a vague standard of manliness in order to be judged “regular.” To fail at this in the eyes of the other men could, I needn’t tell you, make your life at sea quite miserable. It led to posturing among the crew, a tendency to turn themselves into caricatures of the concept of maleness: to strut, keep their chests stuck out and stomachs sucked in, and talk monosyllabically in surly mumbles or grunts because being good at language was womanly. Lord knows, this front was hard to maintain for very long. You had to work at being manly; it took more effort, in a way, than rigging sails (41).

While Calhoun shows his awareness of the performative element of nautical masculinity, he is not shut out from such a fraternity because of his race, and therefore his status as a sailor on the Atlantic enables him to cross racial boundaries.

While it is little surprise that Johnson’s seafaring novel focuses mostly on men, *Incomparable World* also includes few female characters despite the obvious presence of women in eighteenth-century London. Martin uses one black female character, the beautiful, middle-class schoolteacher, Charlotte Tell, to disarticulate blackness from slavery, since she seems to be the most English and one of the most educated and refined characters in the novel; however like Johnson’s Isadora, she is grounded in the land. In fact when she and her friends cross the Thames River, she becomes sick. Shortly after they arrive on land, Buckram is accosted by Hullside Harriet, a white prostitute who formerly worked for him and whom he discovers is the mother of his child. The fact that she abuses him verbally and physically, combined with Charlotte’s seasickness, suggests that he would be safer on the water while Charlotte would be safer on land. William Supple’s wife, Mary, (who never appears directly in the novel) is also tied to the land, in that she does not follow him to London. Although she wants to move to Nova Scotia with William and their children, William’s plan to bring her and the children falls through when he loses his money in a fire.

The lack of mobility of these black female characters is not unique to these novels, however; rather, they are symptomatic of

the restrictions placed on black women that prevented them from crossing the Atlantic like their male counterparts. Though Gilroy's theory of Black Atlantic consciousness does not explicitly exclude black women, in practice it applies mostly, if not exclusively, to black men. In fact, despite brief mentions of Phillis Wheatley and Ida B. Wells, Gilroy's focus is primarily on black men such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Delany, and Richard Wright. The two novels discussed here undermine many binary oppositions such as black/white, African/Western, and slavery/freedom, but unfortunately the male/female dualism seems to remain intact. Although it would be valuable to examine how the Black Atlantic has informed the experiences of women of African descent such as Wheatley, Wells, Harriet Jacobs, and Ellen Craft, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations to the notion of the Black Atlantic as a gendered, and therefore limited, concept.

Despite their exclusion of women from Black Atlantic consciousness, however, both of these novels are worth analyzing in themselves. However, reading them together may be even more fruitful. Because Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic crosses and even erases national boundaries, it makes sense to examine the works of a two authors of African descent from opposite sides of the Atlantic, one British and one American. In other words, reading these novels in tandem will help break down the national boundaries that Gilroy sees as obstacles to an understanding of the Black Atlantic phenomenon. Such a juxtaposition demonstrates how not just the fact of Black Atlantic consciousness but the very concept itself has been put to literary use on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

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NOTES

¹ Unlike Johnson's *Middle Passage*, Martin's *Incomparable World* seems to have attracted little notice among U. S. literary scholars, perhaps in part because of the lack of distribution of the novel in the U. S.

² See W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seaman in the Age of Sail* for information on African seamen involved in the slave trade. Bolster writes that "African mariners in the slave trade exhibited the nervous detachment of men simultaneously smug about their own favored position and constantly leery of their European employers' potential duplicity or of other Africans' revenge" (52). Bolster also writes that "[t]he process of cultural adaptation referred to as 'creolization,' through which Africans transformed themselves into African Americans, began, not on the shores of America, but on those of Africa, and aboard the slavers that bridged the two" (53).

³ Gilroy briefly compares *Middle Passage* to Martin Delany's novel *Blake, or the Huts of America* in *The Black Atlantic* (218).

⁴ In his review of *Middle Passage*, Gilroy writes that "Middle Passage

seeks to wrench [Falcon’s theory of dualism] apart. First, by showing it to be ‘adrift from the laws and logic of the heart’ and second, by demonstrating the power of process, movement, and cultural ‘creolization’” (qtd. in Fagel 632).

⁵ In Britain “black” often includes persons of Indian descent as well as persons of African descent; in that sense, the Black Atlantic may include persons of Indian descent in the Atlantic world. In this article, however, I use the word “black” in the American sense to denote only persons of African descent.

⁶ Brian Fagel’s article “Passages from the Middle: Coloniality and Postcoloniality in Charles Johnson’s *Middle Passage*” does not refer to Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic, but offers an excellent discussion of postcolonial hybridity in Johnson’s novel. For instance, Fagel argues that “Calhoun cannot identify with the borders, where culture exists, because he is excluded from every community; he only mediates, mapping out the constricted space in-between. One site of Calhoun’s middle-ness is between the Republic’s crew and the Allmuseri: This is the uncharted space between America and Africa, white and black” (626).

⁷ Earlier, Gilroy writes that “[t]he image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs” (4).

⁸ See Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life before Emancipation* for information about black ex-slaves who migrated to London after fighting for the British in the Revolutionary War (136).

⁹ In her analysis of Johnson’s depiction of Isadora, Elizabeth Muther argues that “[t]he love story between Isadora and Rutherford, when read across these intertextual spaces, comes to seem an act of historical commentary on the Middle Passage, the Atlantic transportation of slaves. Far from remaining a static feminine icon of shore-grounded

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

conservatism, Isadora becomes a partner with Rutherford in treacherous refigurations of identity and relationship across historical reaches” (650). However, her alliance with Calhoun’s enemy Papa Zeringue only spurs Calhoun on his journey into Black Atlantic consciousness, while she does not appear to leave New Orleans herself.

**‘THE STORY YOU WERE TELLING US’:
RE-READING LOVE IN ALICE WALKER’S
BY THE LIGHT OF MY FATHER’S SMILE
THROUGH LUCE IRIGARAY’S THEORY**

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This article considers Alice Walker’s novel *By the Light of My Father’s Smile* in the light of the theories of French feminist Luce Irigaray. It concentrates particularly on the redefinition of love through the creation of a maternal genealogy. It explores how the severe punishment of one of the daughters, as a result of her love affair with a young Indian boy, results in the deep scarring of all the family for the rest of their lives. Interpreting this traumatic event as a metaphorical Oedipal break from the mother, this discussion aims to show the ways in which both the novelist and the theoretician explore the possibility of redefining the term ‘love’ through the mother-daughter relationship.

Alice Walker needs no introduction as she has been a forerunner in the arena of the feminist movement and feminist studies or “womanism,” a phrase coined by the author herself, not only with her fiction, poetry, and prose, but also with her prominent role in civil rights activism. *The Color Purple* (1982) placed her in the literary canon as a writer who centralizes the experiences of black women against both racism and violence inherent in societal patriarchy. She went on to explore these issues in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* which dealt with the physical and

psychological brutality of female circumcision. Her novel, *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998), further delineates the harmful ways in which the culture we live in suppresses female sexuality and presents alternatives through which the overused concept of love could be redefined in relation to the female experience.

Walker's definition of the term, "womanism," in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, informs the analysis in this article. A womanist, Walker argues, is a "black feminist or feminist of color." She is a "woman who loves other women sexually and/or non-sexually [and who] appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility. . . women's strength." She further explains the phrase as "usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one." More importantly within the context of this article, a womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Ixi-xii).

By the Light of My Father's Smile could be read as a tentative step towards the above-mentioned goals identified by the author. One of the constant themes throughout the industrious career of Alice Walker seems to be the urgent need for the redefinition of love through the creation of a maternal genealogy. It could be argued that the feminist imperative to propose new ways of conceptualizing women's relationship with each other individually and as a community serves as a significant guideline for Walker in this novel. The mother-daughter relationship in its metaphorical sense could be placed at the core of all these issues. *By the Light of My Father's Smile* demonstrates how the abandonment of this intimate relationship results in the impossibility of self-love on behalf of the woman and also becomes the foundation for the myth of the selfless woman.

I interpret this novel using the theories of the French feminist, Luce Irigaray, who also underlines the necessity of recovering the broken, or rather the abandoned and forgotten, bond of love between mother and daughter as well as between women as sisters, as hard as this is to establish within a patriarchal system of thought. In order to be regarded as a 'normal' woman, Freud tells us, the girl's Oedipus complex must lead to the abandonment of her attachment to her primary love object, her moth-

er, in favour of the father and divert her love and desire towards the man-father; however she must at the same time also retain some identification with the mother in order to acquire the necessary feminine attributes. Hence she must preserve a degree of identification with the “castrated” mother, a position that cannot enable her to possess an autonomous identity. What needs to be contested is not the description of this model but the necessity and the inevitability of it. According to the Freudian model the forceful abdication of the mother as the primary love object serves as a vital gesture that sustains the male-oriented understanding of the concept of love that involves domination and possession. Ultimately, as Irigaray explains in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, love between women cannot occupy a space of its own within this concept. According to French feminism lack of positive feminine representation stems from the severed mother-daughter bond. As a theoretician Irigaray does not break away completely from the Freudian model but instead advocates a return to the pre-Oedipal phase of development, a time before patriarchal divisions have taken place, to recover the bond between the mother and the child. Such a recovery would allow her to move away from the compulsory identification with the submissive mother who is powerless and passive under the law of the father; hence both the mother and the daughter could be provided with an adequate space for a specific female subjectivity through which love between women can exist.

Alice Walker also embraces the need for a genealogy of women, a history of maternal connections and relations, which would lead to a definition of love by and for the female self. She seems to locate a possible place from which to maneuver and initiate change in her exploration of the mother-daughter relationship and female relations. What both Irigaray and Walker are struggling to envision, however, is not a project limited to the maternal function but rather a genealogy of women which is based on the recovery of maternal connections and a bond of love that have been effaced throughout a dominantly white patriarchal history.

With these ideas in mind I turn to *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. The father mentioned in the title is Robinson, an anthropologist who has to masquerade as a Christian missionary in

order to fund his research on the Mundo people, a mixed race of escaped Black slaves and native Indians in Mexico. During the time the family spends in Mexico an event takes place which effectively ruins the lives of Robinson and his family, his wife Langley, and their two daughters, Magdalena and Susannah. The elder daughter, Magdalena, has a love affair with a beautiful Indian boy called Manuelito. When the father discovers the affair he beats Magdalena with a belt severely punishing his daughter for an act of love. Psychologically estranged from both of his daughters for the rest of his life as a result of his actions, Robinson only has access to his daughters' real feelings as an angel after his death.

The father's act of punishment of the daughter for her own good, which is referred to as the 'breaking of her' in the novel, also results in the alienation of the sisters from each other and from their mother. The severe beating of Magdalena serves as the entry into the symbolic order which necessitates the abandonment of her mother. It is through the power and violence of the father that the girls, Magdalena in particular, are introduced to the so-called realities of life. This act of violence, a sort of painful and prescribed Oedipal break, is the embodiment of the girls' entry into patriarchal order. The lack of power and the submissiveness of the mother fits within the Freudian model and further secures the break. The transition from the loving and secure nature of the Mundo tribe with its deep respect for both physical and spiritual love into the patriarchal Christian world of the father could be read in terms of Irigaray's insistence on the return to the pre-Oedipal stage. The final resolution of the novel, however, has its roots in the confusion of the father through this act. Robinson is a man who appreciates and adores the physicality of love in his wife but abhors it in the case of his daughter. He is aware of his dilemma when he says: "I did not understand her spirit. I yearned for guidance. It seemed to be necessary to tame her"(18). His words imply that, surrounded by the Mexican Black/Indian tribe and the ideals they live their lives by, he senses the error of his ways but cannot think of an alternative. The possibility of not interfering at all does not occur to him as the figure of authority. Faced with a situation he cannot fully comprehend, he resorts to physical power as the only course of

action available for a man representing patriarchal order. His received understanding of power dictates the suppression of female sexuality and love by the male; thus he turns to the age old tried and tested way of giving Magdalena a furious and violent beating. Magdalena recalls the incident and the subsequent scars it has left on her soul as she says: “He trashed me in silence. I withstood it in silence. I sent my spirit flying out the window” (26). Unfortunately for everyone concerned, Robinson is not able to relate to and be guided by the traditions of the Mundo people or his own black heritage.

It is also at this point that the girl begins to feel enmity towards her sister and mother who says that she will leave her husband because of what he has done to Magdalena, but she never does. Even worse is the aftermath that Magdalena recalls: “Within a month, or less, my father loved my mother back to himself” (27). This will be perceived by Magdalena as an act of ultimate betrayal by her mother. Langley, who only had accepted to bear a child after making Robinson promise that they would never lay a hand on their child, and after the beating had wept “as if her heart would break” and screamed “We were beaten in slavery!” (31) is gradually won over by her husband.

Years later when Langley is dying of cancer, Magdalena reminisces about the bond that was lost between them. She says: “I was trying to remember how it felt to love her. For I ceased loving her when she abandoned me” (120). Susannah, too, carries this treachery like a wound in her body throughout her life and becomes a woman broken in body and spirit. Believing her own sexuality to be ultimately harmful to her being, she deliberately makes herself uglier by being obese, getting fatter by the day, as well as piercing herself in various parts of her body. The pierced cross through her labia could be read both as a protest against her father’s pretence of priesthood and simultaneously as a revolt against the patriarchal religion with which he justifies his actions towards her. As Irigaray points out in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, patriarchal religion takes the supremacy of the male and the suppression of the female as the foundation stone. Another French feminist, Julia Kristeva, emphasizes the same issue when she writes in her article, “About Chinese Women,” that “monotheistic unity is sustained through a radical separation

of the sexes: indeed, it is this very separation which is its prerequisite" (141). Hence, the female is marginalized within established religion unless she is defined in relation to the male. Her access to divinity is restricted strictly both in physical and spiritual terms. The only position she can occupy safely is that of being a vessel for the male. Within her allocated space the role of the female body is to be the bearer of Son/God. Susannah's cross pierced through her labia could be understood as a metaphor for this circumscribed relationship between the female body and patriarchal religion.

The traumatic course of events in the novel also severely damages not only Magdalena, the primary recipient of his violence, but also the relationship between Robinson and Susannah, his younger daughter. It could be argued that Susannah, along with her sister, also goes through the prescribed Oedipal break from her mother as well as from her sister. Moreover they are further alienated from each other because Magdalena believes that their father loved her more. This point on the rivalry between women for male approval and love constitutes an important step in the formation of the prescribed notions of female identity. In "Love of Same, Love of Other" in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* Irigaray tries to construe this impossibility in terms of the competition between women for the maternal function which is the only female trait that is universally valued. She argues that since the mother has a unique place and being a mother means to occupy that place, the relationship with the mother becomes an impossibility; hence the issue evolves into an either/or, her/me requirement. As Irigaray posits, even this specifically female rivalry is played out in terms of male norms:

If we are to be desired and loved by men, we must abandon our mothers, substitute for them, eliminate them in order to be same. All of which destroys the possibility of a love between mother and daughter. The two become at once accomplices and rivals in order to move into the single possible position in the desire of man.

This competition equally paralyzes love among sister-women. Because they strive to achieve the post of

the unique one: the mother of mothers, one might say (102).

However there can be no winners in such a rivalry. Admitting that “Father thinks Susannah beautiful only when she was moving very slowly, or when she was still” (92), Magdalena implies that father’s love is not unconditional for Susannah either. It is likely that this is the underlying reason for the girl’s fascination with Princess Diana. The appeal of the late Princess for the girl is indeed interesting because Princess Diana was haunted and criticized throughout her adult life by her nation. Unlike her namesake, the Roman goddess Diana, she became the hunted instead of the hunter. It is only after Princess Diana died and became perfectly still that she became almost a saint. Such a reaction to the death of a woman reminds the reader of the idea that the female is perfect when she is speechless and even dead. Robinson, too, seems to prefer Susannah because she can keep her spirit under control. The necessity to mould the female self according to the imperative imposed by the patriarchal thinking is an issue that is dealt closely by Irigaray as she writes in *This Sex Which Is Not One*: “The feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects” (86). The female is not capable of thinking herself in feminine terms, as the only path to her imagination is via masculine terms, which leads her to impossibility.

The only thing that sheds any light on the possibility of healing and the establishment of identity for these women, as well as their ability to enter into rewarding relationships with men, is the recovery of the bond between themselves and their mother along with their relationship with other women. The novel has many different women characters who differ in race, nationality, age, and experience. Although they do not share a common language, at times there is still communication between women without the use of words. When Susannah asks her Greek husband to be introduced to the Greek dwarf woman, Irene, who will play an important role in her understanding of herself and the world she lives in later on in the novel, she is refused with the excuse that she does not speak English. For Susannah this is not a valid point, as she states: “Oh, but she has eyes” (43). Her words imply that communication is not limited to language and

can be achieved through alternative means, through the body in the case of Susannah and Irene. The identification with different women allows the female characters to share their experiences and a kind of kinship is formed among them, as their lives have been so different but still so similar to their own. For instance Susannah shares a special moment with her white Greek mother-in-law when she questions and reminds the old woman about violence towards women in her youth. Her husband Petros recalls the moment as follows:

As she [Susannah] forged ahead, I saw a shift occur in my mother's look. Very odd. For I had known it all my life to be a face with a certain limited range of emotional expression. I did not recognize the looks she was beginning to give to my inquisitive wife. I saw my mother begin to awaken, against her will. As if from ancient sleep. To shake herself as an animal after hibernation might do. I saw her rouse her memory (46).

Unfortunately Petros dismisses the communication between the two women as unimportant. He quickly forgets the spiritual awakening in the eyes of his mother. He even draws Susannah away because he believes that his mother is uncomfortable. Petros, as a product of traditional patriarchal thinking, is unable to comprehend the importance of the bond that is established between his mother and Susannah. Two women separated from each other due to age, background, and culture, establish a connection as women through their bodies. Petros's lack of understanding marks a turning point in his relationship with Susannah as husband and wife. From then on Susannah begins to draw away from him.

The most striking and impressive of these female characters is Irene who is condemned to be the caretaker, or rather the servant, of a small church on a Greek island. Irene, putting forward alternative myths that predate the traditional patriarchal ones which allow woman to have a position of subjectivity, almost shakes Susannah back to herself. While arranging lilies for the service at the church, Irene says: "The lily is the flower of Lilith, the first mother. The rough one who was bored by Adam and went off to have adventures elsewhere. The one before Eve" (178). The reference to a time before the beginning of history and

before the patriarchal binary oppositions have been established would serve as a metaphor for the pre-Oedipal stage in human development as well. In this stage the mother and the child are still in a continuum, and the bond between them has not been forcefully severed yet. Sexuality, both female and male, has not been forced into well-defined and hierarchical dichotomies. Irene reminds Susannah, as well as the reader, of the necessity to remember this long forgotten past when she says: "I think the human spirit needs to believe that someone has escaped the general pressing down of life that passes for the male notion of civilization" (141). Perhaps Irene, Langley, Magdalena, and Susannah, when they can achieve love for their own selves and for each other and be together as a community, can serve as that guiding spirit who struggles to remember and to remind.

Carried throughout the novel as a strong theme is another aspect in the process of healing: the act of making love. It is presented as an act that has the potential to eliminate the impossibility of self-love on behalf of the woman. The female characters in the novel are all trying to find a position to accommodate love of their own female identities. The theme of impossible female self-love could be read in terms of Irigarayan theory in which touching is a predominantly female activity. As the theoretician discusses in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, predominance of the visual lies in the realm of patriarchal thinking as the boy sees that he has a penis. The girl, on the other hand, does not possess visible sexual organs; hence she is branded as the castrated one. Irigaray attempts to explain this complex issue through the concept of visibility: since the male sexual organs are external, self-love remains attainable for man as he has a validated relation to exteriority, whereas this is not valid for the female. The female does not have the same relation to exteriority as the male, whose sexual organs are continuously on display. The woman's experience, on the other hand, is limited to the production she achieves through her body. In *An Ethics* she writes: "Woman is loved/ loves herself through the children she gives birth to. That she brings out" (63). This statement is particularly valid for the relationship between a mother and her son: the most perfect configuration love can take in terms of traditional psychoanalysis. Such a model by definition cannot result in self-love in the

woman's case in the true sense but only in the love of woman for her production; hence seeing could be considered further away from femininity compared to the sense of touch. Irigaray in *This Sex* argues this point as such:

Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopoc economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation. (25-26)

Walker, along with Irigaray, prioritizes touch rather than sight. Throughout *By The Light of My Father's Smile* the act of touching is emphasized over and over again. It is a novel that is loaded with explicit descriptions of physical acts of love, and the scene between Susannah and her lover, Pauline, is a powerful one that concentrates on the multiplicity of female sexual organs (9-13). The prioritizing of touch dominating the scene shifts the attention away from the "nothing to see" attitude towards female sexuality. Instead of nothingness or insufficiency the reader is led towards an understanding of multiplicity, discovery, and acceptance.

Trying to establish a maternal genealogy has a part to play in this wide ranging and difficult task of redefinition of love. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* Irigaray posits that in order to displace the father (in the traditional patriarchal understanding of the term) from his central place, a quest for maternal genealogy is necessary even though it might be almost impossible, as it is a history which has been rendered invisible by the patriarchal system; therefore the task of the author is not only to clear up the rubble under which women have been buried and forgotten but to try to create a maternal genealogy through which they can relate to each other as women. A genealogy of mothers would again circumscribe woman within motherhood and would constitute the same hierarchy that women are trying to break through but with radically different reference points. Irigaray once again draws attention to this in *This Sex* when she writes about the urgent need of trying to imagine an identity for woman and rejecting such restricting representations:

So many representations, so many appearances separate us from each other. They have wrapped us for so long in their desires, we have adorned ourselves so often to please them, that we have come to forget the feel of our own skin. Removed from our skin, we remain distant. You and I, apart (218).

This might be the reason why only through death, after they pass into another realm where the traditional definitions of sexuality are not valid any more, can Magdalena and Susannah make some sort of peace with their mother, for after death they meet according to more maternal tribal traditions of the Mundo people which allow such a reconciliation to take place, not the patriarchal Christian expectations of the father, Robinson. It is in the realm after death that Langley talks to Magdalena about her father's heart: "It was a frightened heart, she said. His people were enslaved people who in fact became slaves. You do not become free again by wishing it" (158). As can be seen, the morality which has been perpetuated by Robinson does not actually belong to him. He has internalized the prescriptions that have been imposed on him. Likewise the resolution between the father and the daughter can take place only when Robinson subscribes to the beliefs of the tribe that has connections with his own black heritage as well as his feminine side.

Women's lack of access to and failure to communicate with each other in genuine terms is somehow bridged in this other realm as was exemplified above through the communication between Langley and Magdalena. It is the only sincere dialogue between the mother and the daughter. Even though they do not achieve closure, as Magdalena still blames her mother for her abandonment, they take a few timid steps towards reconciliation.

As opposed to the possibility of reconciliation in the realm after death, the need for such a connection in real life is quite problematic within the existing status quo. This is an issue both Walker and Irigaray dwell upon in their work. In her essay, "Love of Self," in *An Ethics* Irigaray's comment, "The possibility that the female could be many; that women would form a social group" (67), points up one of the lifelines which the two authors agree upon, a goal not attainable: they are abandoned to a state of nei-

ther knowing each other nor loving each other, or themselves; love remains impossible for them (67).

This idea of love of self for a woman is quite subversive, as traditionally woman is the bearer of selfless love for everyone but herself. She has been the epitome of love as a mother, wife, and daughter. These are all positions that are defined in relation to the male; therefore historically she has been the building block of man's love for self. Such a role is a very restricting one denying woman access to love for her own self; hence seeking other women out and associating with them is an important step towards discovery of the female love for her self as the idea is explored throughout the novel.

Walker in the same vein works toward locating a female tradition and establishing a bond between women in order to make possible a redefinition of love. In her essay, "Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life," collected in Mary Eagleton's *Feminist Literary Theory*, the author traces the footsteps of her maternal predecessors in order to give an order to her own self both as a woman and as a writer. She recalls how writing a story about her own mother was made possible through her discovery of other authors who paved the way for her. She says: "It is, in the end, the saving of lives that we writers are about. Whether we are 'minority' writers or 'majority.' It is simply in our power to do this. ... We care because we know this: The life we save is our own" (33). By making a vital connection between herself and her female ancestors Walker puts forward the idea of self love attained through connection and continuity. It is only through locating oneself in relation to others that are the same that the state of the loving subject can be attained. The short Mundo prayer quoted in the beginning of the novel also points out such an understanding. It reads:

Mama
help us
to help
you.

The prayer is significant in that it captures the connection between women as a community with a strong healing bond between them. The foundation stone in such a process of healing is identified as the mother who has the power to initiate

change. The prayer also serves as a starting point for Walker's novel in the quest towards an alternative understanding of love as opposed to its patriarchal definition in terms of power and domination.

The words of the poet, Adrienne Rich, are also quite useful in such a context. In her powerful essay, "When We Dead Awaken," collected in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, Rich writes:

The choice still seemed to be between "love"—womanly, maternal love, altruistic love—a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture; and egotism—a force directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so. For weren't they men, and wasn't that their destiny as womanly, selfless love was ours? We know now that the alternatives are false ones—that the word "love" is itself in need of re-vision (46-47).

Being the guardian of love for everyone but herself is indeed a very costly duty for the woman. In order for the act of re-vision to be achieved, woman has to be free of the complete reliance on man for the return of self-love. Self-love by definition has to come from within the woman's body and through her connection with the mother. Self-love can be attained in relatively simpler terms for man. He has to renounce his mother so that he can love himself. This act of renunciation does not forbid him to love himself; however a woman not only has to renounce her love of her mother but also her own identification with her. She is obliged to follow this path so that she can love a man, the father figure. This is the formula that Magdalena goes through in the novel. The outcome, however, is not so straightforward, as the abandonment of the mother and the encounter with the male violence result in the loss of her self. This foundation that affects every relationship in her life turns out to be insufficient and actually harmful. As Magdalena says referring to her mother: "I was trying to remember how it felt to be her. For I ceased loving her when she abandoned me" (120).

Exploring these ideas, as well as emphasizing the need for a woman-to-woman relationship with the mother and other women implies the commitment of Alice Walker to the female principle. Irigaray terms these relationships "vertical" (daughter-

to-mother, mother-to-daughter) and “horizontal” (among women, or among “sisters”) in *An Ethics* (108). The term, “female principle,” in my understanding, involves love of the self as well as love of the other without domination or destruction. These are issues to which both Irigaray and Walker are deeply committed in their work. Such explorations would enable us to claim love in its revised understanding for ourselves and the people around us, as the abandonment of the mother is harmful not only for the woman but also for the man, as their relationship is deeply hurt. The following words uttered in regret by Robinson underline the idea that it is not only woman but woman and man together who are damaged irreparably. He says:

There was something in me, I found, that followed ideas, beliefs, edicts, that had been put into practice, into motion, before I was born. And this ‘something’ was like an internalized voice that drowned out my own. Beside which, indeed, my own voice began to seem feeble. Submissive. And when I allowed myself to think about that submission I thought of myself as having been spiritually neutered. And thought, as well, of the way Langley, Magdalena, and even the all-accepting Susannah sometimes looked at me. In dismay and disappointment. Daddy, the girls seemed to ask, where is your own spark? Langley seemed resigned to the fact that it was missing. (30)

Walker widens this view globally and attacks all of Western civilization by emphasizing the fact through Irene when she says: “Europe lost her strong mother. By doing that it killed off its mother and was made to shrink its spirit to half its size” (186). The quotation is a good example of Walker’s critique of Western patriarchal thought based on the exclusion of the feminine. Manuelito explicitly emphasizes the point when he says: “The Story you were telling us, Señor Robinson, was strange” (147). Robinson’s story, learned from patriarchal establishments such as religion, fails to make sense for the Mundo people. They feel confused with the prescribed exclusion of the sexes leading to hierarchy. For a tribe which considers both male and female sexuality as sources of joy and healing, Western European tradition does not present itself as a promising alternative.

Gorey–Re-Reading Love

The resolution of the novel that takes place for all the characters involved is symbolized by the Mundo initiation song taught to Robison by Manuelito who are both dead. This song of crossing is what enables the characters to resolve the conflicts between their own selves and each other as well as the clash of the cultures that is embodied in the person of Robinson. Only by making a long lost connection with the mother, re-establishing the positive and fruitful relationship between man/woman and mother/father through the tribal guidance of Manuelito can Robinson, Langley, Magdalena, and Susannah achieve peace. The following section from the song of crossing explains how such a peace becomes possible for them:

Anyone can see that woman is the mother
of the oldest man on earth
is it not then a prayer
to bow before her?

Anyone can see that man is the father
of the oldest woman on earth
is it not then a prayer
to bow before him? (161)

By unearthing the long abandoned maternal bond, the author creates a space through which she can maneuver. In order to be able to break through the values and behaviors that seem to be repeated generation after generation, Walker seems to propose to re-establish our union with the mother and with other women in order to exist in a happy relationship with men and our community on earth. This simultaneously vertical and horizontal connection will enable us to name and claim self-love for ourselves as daughters and mothers, instead of succumbing to the myth of the selfless woman whose identity and sexuality is prescribed by foreign terms. *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is the embodiment of Walker's efforts to involve mother and daughter together in this exploration. Such an involvement, which has the potential to redefine the understanding of the term, "love," has wide and positive implications for the future.

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TRANSCENDING THE ‘TRAGIC MULATTO’: THE INTERSECTION OF BLACK AND INDIAN HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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The supposed plight of multi-racial persons is widely depicted in modern American literature, including the works of William Faulkner, whose stories follow the lives of multi-racial characters such as Joe Christmas and Sam Fathers, who, reflecting characteristics of “tragic mulatto” figures, search for acceptance in a racially polarized Mississippi society. Yet more contemporary literature, including works by Michael Dorris, Leslie Marmon Silko, Toni Morrison, and Clarence Major, reference the historical relationship between African Americans and American Indians, featuring multi-racial characters that more successfully fit the fabric of current American culture than do more “traditional” works such as Faulkner’s. While an outdated black-white binary still lingers in American perceptions of race, increasingly, racial identity is now informed by self-identification, community recognition, and acculturation. As a result, black and Indian characters, as well as multi-racial authors, provide varied and insightful glimpses into the complexity of America’s racial landscape.

The historic connection between African Americans and Native Americans has long been recognized by members of both groups

and has recently attracted greater attention by scholars. Historians such as William Loren Katz and Jack D. Forbes have rightly called for further study of this important relationship, emphasizing the inaccuracy of a continued focus on a black-white nexus in discussions of race in America. Both Katz and Forbes have pointed toward contact between Africans and Natives of the Americas prior to the American colonial period, shared experiences of slavery at the hands of both Europeans and Natives,¹ the development of unique black Indian communities on the American frontier, and cooperation in revolts against European control as evidence of cultural affinity, amalgamation,² and shared senses of purpose among the two peoples, the basis of a kinship that endures in modern times. Echoing Edward Said's binary of "Orient" v. "Occident," widespread recognition of the rich interplay and exchange among various racial or ethnic groups in America nonetheless has historically been suppressed, as people with complex and dynamic heritages have been relegated into categories of "white" and "non-white." Forbes asserts:

The ancestry of many modern-day Americans, whether of 'black' or 'Indian' appearance, is often (or usually) quite complex indeed. It is sad that many such persons have been forced by racism into arbitrary categories which tend to render their ethnic heritage simple rather than complex. It is now one of the principal tasks of scholarship to replace the shallow one-dimensional images of non-whites with more accurate multi-dimensional portraits. (271)

Not surprisingly, one-dimensional, images of non-whites have been standard in American literature, particularly Southern literature, in which race is most often the dominant theme. In the Modern period, reflecting the Jim Crow era's stringent enforcement of black and white as opposite, polarized racial demarcations, this black-white binary is present in the works of both white and black writers, authors who situate themselves at either racial extreme. Among many examples are Richard Wright and William Faulkner, each of whom writes from his involvement in the horrific brutality that has characterized American, and particularly Southern, racism, but each writing

Smith–Black and Indian Heritage

from an opposite vantage point: Wright reflects his desperation and the physical and psychological hunger imposed by inescapable white oppression in works such as *Black Boy*, *Native Son*, and *Twelve Million Black Voices*, and Faulkner reports the guilt and sense of implicit responsibility for that oppression against Blacks in works such as *Go Down, Moses*, *Light in August*, and *The Sound and The Fury*.

Faulkner's works in particular impose this black-white polarity even in their portrayal of characters of mixed racial heritage, emphasizing that the two extremes cannot be reconciled. Characters such as Joe Christmas face a dual black and white racial background, struggling to develop an acceptable sense of identity in the face of a racially polarized Mississippi society. In Faulkner's works this existence is ultimately one of tragedy; Joe Christmas becomes a murderer largely due to this conflicted identity, epitomizing the stock figure of a "tragic mulatto."³ Even Faulkner's "wilderness" stories, which feature Sam Fathers, a black Indian character, reflect a limiting focus on black-white polarity. Fathers, who is a lone practitioner of disappearing tribal ways, is somewhat alienated from the black community with which he is associated as well as from the white culture that is quickly encroaching upon the wilderness and thereby his traditional way of life. While Fathers is clearly a more positive character than Joe Christmas, he is nonetheless an anomaly and a figure for whom there is no longer a place in Mississippi society, despite the wisdom he imparts to young Ike. Faulkner's characters of black and Indian ancestry, much like tragic mulattos, are objects of pity, with no legitimate place in either culture and thereby no real place in American society.

While it is to works by authors such as Faulkner and Wright that we often turn when we investigate literary presentations of race, these texts, while obviously critical to a mapping of the history of American race relations, should not continue to stand as the only reference points for writing about race. More recent work has pointed to a multi-racial reality, particularly the strong connection between Native Americans and African Americans, which has always permeated American society. Importantly, more contemporary texts by African American authors such as Toni Morrison, Clarence Major, and Alice Walker and Native

American writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko and Michael Dorris contain black Indian characters who reflect a shift from a “tragic mulatto” model to one in which a varied racial background is a source of pride and key to contemporary definitions of heritage. These contemporary models are informed by the authors’ notions of their own racial backgrounds and senses of ethnic heritage.

Toni Morrison’s patterning of “rememory” is widely acclaimed and central to her literary explorations of African American experiences. Importantly, this process involves acknowledgement of Indians as involved in these African American experiences. In Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Paul D’s escape to the North is facilitated by his stay in a camp of Cherokees who have resisted removal to Oklahoma. Coping with the devastation of disease and broken promises, the Cherokees are a solace to Paul D and his fellow prisoners from Alfred, Georgia, and one of the tribal members offers direction and almost prophetic reassurance to Paul D when he decides to head north: “That way. Follow the tree flowers. Only the tree flowers. As they go, you go. You will be where you want to be when they are gone” (112). Later, Paul D expresses his jealousy of four families of slaves who have remained together for years and have many racial backgrounds, including white, black, and Indian: “He watched them with awe and envy, and each time he discovered large families of black people he made them identify over and over who each was, what relation, who, in fact, belonged to who” (219). Paul D thereby reflects his own longing for a sense of family lineage, of heritage, and ultimately of community, which is not represented as “purely” African. Considering Morrison’s presentation of this multi-racial alliance, her dedication, “sixty million and more,” takes on another nuance. Not only does the text explore the “rememory” of sixty million enslaved Africans but also the oppression of Native Americans, the disruption of families, and the potential for community that slavery deposed.

Similar to Paul D’s longing for a sense of heritage, Milkman also embarks on a journey to retrace the origins of his family in Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977). Milkman’s travel from Detroit to Shalimar, Virginia, leads him to a discovery that his

Smith–Black and Indian Heritage

great-grandmother, Heddy, and grandmother, Singing Bird, were Indians and that his great-grandfather, Solomon, was a “flying African” who leaped back to Africa. After listening to local children chant Pilate’s song, which tells the story of his family, and learning more about his background from his cousin Susan Byrd, Milkman is invigorated: “He was grinning. His eyes were shining. He was as eager and happy as he had ever been in his life” (304). On his way back to Detroit, Milkman is newly appreciative of the importance of his history, which he recognizes in Indian geographical names:

How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country. Names that had meaning. No wonder Pilate put hers in her ear. When you know your name, you should hang onto it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do. (329)

As in *Beloved*, Morrison depicts the process of rememory as inclusive of Native Americans, who shared families and often similar circumstances as African Americans.

Clarence Major’s works also contain references to Indians, reflecting his own sense of varied heritage. *In Such Was the Season* (1987), Major’s novel about a young man’s reconnection to his familial roots in Atlanta, Aunt Eliza’s recollection of her grandfather’s Cherokee roots is key to her sense of the importance of homecoming, a value that propels her excitement at the arrival of Juneboy. Highlighting cooperation among Native and African Americans, Eliza remembers her grandfather, Olaudah Equiano Sommer (“Olay”), emphasizing the pride that Olay felt for his Cherokee heritage, particularly for his father, Grandpoppa, “an important man in the Cherokee Nation, who helped collect money to send colored families to Liberia” (4). Eliza recounts her favorite story about Grandpoppa, which describes his handcrafted wooden bird’s ability to grant wishes. Frustrated that his request to the bird for the best of everything for the Cherokee Nation has seemingly gone unfulfilled, Grandpoppa goes to the bird and has the following experience:

The bird laughed and said change was everywhere, change for the better, there in the Cherokee Nation, and that he only had to learn how to see it. The bird told

Grandpoppa to go on back and try again. This time he began to notice how peoples was smiling and speaking kindly to each other and how even the little bitty children wont fighting over toys or nothing. The mommas making corn mush looked happy and the boys going out for the rabbit hunt looked just as happy. This noticing that Grandpoppa was doing went on for days, and before long he started believing the bird's magic had worked. (4-5)

Citing what she perceives to be Native American wisdom, Eliza associates this story with the value that she places on her own family:

I member being struck by that story that I dreamed about it over and over for a long time. So homecoming was a time of happiness, storytelling, a time when we all come together and membered we was family and tried to love each other, even if we didn't always do it so well (5).

In addition to her application of the values espoused in her great-grandfather's Cherokee community to her perception of her present-day family, Eliza also finds personal relevance in a television report about Cherokee history. She observes,

He said that in 1715 there was a war called the Yamasee war. In that war the white mens got a whole bunch of black mens to help them invade the Cherokees but the black mens stayed on even after the invasion and become part of the Cherokee Nation. They settled down and married Cherokee womens. . . And when the Cherokee come just a fighting the Creeks, the black mens fought right along with the Cherokee mens. The white mens couldn't understand why the black mens had stayed; so pretty soon the white mens stopped taking slaves to fight the Indians. I thought all of that was pretty interesting stuff. (108)

Eliza clearly finds personal relevance in this description of the historical alliance between Blacks and Indians, identifying with the blending of cultures indicated. Rather than finding her dual heritage to be confusing or alienating, she recognizes it as valuable to her own sense of empowerment and accentuates herself

as a product of union between blacks and Cherokees, a union that has succeeded somewhat in fighting oppression. It is important to note, however, that Eliza's Indian heritage does not preclude her from firm grounding in the black community. Like her father, who "always passed for colored anyways cause that's the way he thought of hisself" (145), Eliza interacts primarily with black friends and family rather than with Cherokees. But importantly, Eliza's sense of identity is not merely tied to her skin color; her sense of ethnicity encompasses both parts of her family history.

Like Eliza, Clarence Major identifies himself as having both Indian and black heritage, and *Such Was the Season* thus reflects to a certain degree his own assertion of this dual racial background. As he explains in his autobiographical essay, "Licking Stamps, Taking Chances," Major was inspired to write the novel when he briefly served as writer-in-residence at Albany State College in Georgia in 1982 and had the chance to visit with his relatives in Atlanta, much as Juneboy does in the novel. He explains, "the novel . . . had been coming for a long time, especially out of the voices I grew up listening to in the South and in the North" (197). Major's recognition of Indian heritage is more explicit in the "Introductory Note" of his poetry collection, *Some Observations of a Stranger at Zuni in the Latter Part of the Century* (1989):

These poems were inspired by spending time at Zuni and by living with the spirit and history of the Zunis and with the spirits of Southwestern Indians. They also, in a way, come out of my memory of my grandparents telling of the Indians among our own ancestors in the Southeast.

Major also writes of Native Americans in his metafictional works, *My Amputations* (1986) and *Painted Turtle: Woman with Guitar* (1988), which both follow the life of a Navajo guitar player. Major thus transcends the black-white paradigm in these works and achieves what Bernard Bell calls "transracial, transcultural, expressionistic narratives that thematize a self-reflexive process of creation of a dynamic, multifaceted self and art" (6). Underscoring this multi-faceted self, Major states in his introduction to the short story collection, *Calling the Wind*, "The

American presence is so varied and so complex that exchange and conflict between the black image and the white image tend absurdly to diminish the richness of a network of ethnic cultures that truly is the American human landscape" (xviii). Major thus navigates the American landscape more fully than many of his literary predecessors and contemporaries through his recognition of race as more than simply black or white.

Similarly, Alice Walker's novels and essays contain a significant Indian presence, which comes out in part because of her own multi-ethnic identity. Walker's *Meridian* (1976) begins with an epigraph taken from John Neihardt's translation of Black Elk Speaks:

I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now . . . I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream . . . the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

As Anne Downey has argued, the events in Walker's text parallel Black Elk's words, conflating the "spiritual journeys" of both Black Elk and *Meridian* (37). Like Black Elk's mourning for the death of his people, *Meridian* is acutely aware of widespread death and dehumanization that has resulted from slavery and segregation, which is vividly apparent to her in the life of Louvinie, the enslaved woman of the Saxon Plantation whose tongue was cut out and buried under a large magnolia tree in the middle of the Saxon College campus. For *Meridian*, the Sojourner tree, which has grown immensely and taken on magical qualities, is a revered emblem. Like the sacred tree that Black Elk speaks of, the Sojourner tree dies, sawed down by rioting students, signifying that like Black Elk's people, *Meridian*'s community is broken.

Meridian mirrors Black Elk's spiritual experience of his people's tragedy chiefly through Native American mysticism. At a young age, she is impressed and initially frightened by her

Smith–Black and Indian Heritage

father's fascination with and sorrow for the Indians of Georgia, as he frequently argues with her mother about the continued relevance of the Indian experience and keeps a room full of books about and photographs of Indians. Meridian later learns from a conversation between her parents that her father's land rests on the Sacred Serpent, an Indian burial mound with mystical significance. According to a story that has been passed down to Meridian, her father's grandmother, Feather Mae, had a transformative experience at the Sacred Serpent, which caused her to renounce Christianity and embrace "the experience of physical ecstasy" (57), prompting her to walk around nude and worship the sun toward the end of her life. Meridian seeks to better understand this mysticism by going to the Sacred Serpent herself, watching her father, and entering the hallowed area:

She was a dot, a speck in creation, alone and hidden. It was as if the walls of the earth that enclosed her rushed outward, leveling themselves at a dizzying rate, and then spinning wildly, lifting her out of her body and giving her the feeling of flying. . . . When she came back to her body—and she felt sure she had left it—her eyes were stretched wide open, and they were dry, because she found herself staring directly into the sun. Her father said the Indians had constructed the coil in the Serpent's tail in order to give the living a sensation similar to that of dying: the body seemed to drop away, and only the spirit lived, set free in the world.

But she was not convinced. It seemed to her that it was a way the living sought to expand the consciousness of being alive, where the ground about them was filled with the dead. . . . Their secret: that they both shared the peculiar madness of her great-grandmother. It sent them brooding at times over the meaning of this. At other times they rejoiced over so tangible a connection to the past. (58)

From this spiritual initiation, which resembles Black Elk's vision that began his role as a holy man, Meridian begins her role as a holy woman, which drives her work for Civil Rights and for stronger communities. As Joseph Brown explains, Meridian "fashions herself not into an authentic witness, but into the very

presence of God, a presence that defies all telling" (312), and as the Sojourner has been destroyed, "she must take on the name and responsibility of the tree itself" (315). Significantly, Meridian's calling comes about not through her time with other black civil rights workers but through a sense of solidarity and identification with Native Americans, as she actually becomes somewhat of a mystic. In this way, though Meridian does not have Native American blood lineage, she is both Native and African in her sense of identification with both cultures, and this duality fuels her work to mend the "broken hoop" of her people.

Walker's novel, *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), further develops this theme of alliance between blacks and Indians, specifically emphasizing the cultural and spiritual links between the two peoples. The major black Indian characters, Carlotta and Arveyda, are drawn together by their mutual embodiment of many cultures, including Arveyda's African American and Native American ancestry and Carlotta's African and Native South American ancestry. As their relationship proceeds, Carlotta enjoys and is able to identify with the multiple cultures of San Francisco that Arveyda introduces to her, and the couple's intimacy is accented by their sharing of multiple cultures rather than identification with one particular race or ethnicity. This multi-cultural alliance weathers even Arveyda's affair with Carlotta's mother, Zede, who develops a bond with Arveyda because of his similarity to her African lover, Jesus, who was enslaved in South America and murdered by Europeans. Significantly, Carlotta's reconciliation with her mother is affected by her care for the three precious stones given to Zede by Jesus' people, stones which are "the last remaining symbols of who they were in the world" (75).

Walker also highlights the co-mingling of African and Native cultures in her characterization of Lissie and Fanny, who both assert that they have lived several lives throughout time. Lissie explains that through a dream sequence, she recognizes a temple for "her familiar," her mythic fish/bird pet, her source of comfort during her dream memories in different worlds and unrecognizable centuries. She describes her temple as

very adobe or Southwestern-looking . . . It was painted a rich dust coral and there were lots of designs—many,

turquoise and deep blue, like Native American symbols for rain and storm—painted around the top. . . .The other thing my temple made me think of was the pyramids in Mexico, though I'm satisfied it wasn't made of stone but of painted mud. (116)

Notably, while Lissie strongly identifies herself as essentially a black woman, her source of spirituality is grounded in Native American imagery. Much like Meridian, she does not receive her strength for her “particular concentrated form of energy” (44) from an African tradition but rather from a mystic experience associated with aboriginal people of the Americas. Similarly, Fanny, a kindred spirit to Lissie, develops relationships with spirits from various historical periods. She becomes enchanted with Chief John Horse, a black Indian Seminole leader, and actually comes to embody him:

Fanny Nzingha found the spirit that possessed her first in herself. Then she found the historical personage who exemplified it. It gave her the strange aspect of a trinity—she, the spirit, the historical personage, all sitting across the table from you at once (185).

As Fanny explains, this falling in love with John Horse is empowering: “It becomes a light, and the light enters me, by osmosis, and a part of me that was not clear before is clarified. I radiate this expanded light. Happiness” (186). Fanny thereby finds her life to be enriched by actually internalizing this prominent Native American leader, as she does with spirits of other cultures. Overall, for Fanny and Walker's other multicultural characters, rather than finding this multiplicity confusing or ostracizing, it is the source of freedom.

In the same way that Clarence Major's work is informed by his own sense of multi-raciality, Walker's novels also reflect her strong identification as an embodiment of many racial heritages, and various cultures, particularly Native American cultures, inform her personal beliefs. Walker explains her dynamic sense of identity throughout her essay collection, *Living by the Word* (1988), in which she cites passages from *Black Elk Speaks* to frame her views on the environment and the importance of community, writes of her relationships with Native Americans such as Dennis Banks and Bill Wahpepah, and describes her own Native

ancestry. In her essay, "My Big Brother Bill," which she wrote in memory of Wahpepah, she cites James Mooney's description of the enslavement of Indians in all of the Southern colonies and the intermarriage of Blacks and Indians to emphasize the close relationship of the two peoples. She explains that during the eighties Indians were "very much in my consciousness" (43), as she confronted the presence of her Cherokee great-grandmother in her own lineage and was feeling drawn to Indian art, history, and folklore. Finally in the essay, she explains that her closeness to Bill can be explained by their "common intuitive knowledge that, in a sense, all indigenous peoples are, by their attachment to Mother Earth and experience with Wasichus, Conquistadors, and Afrikaners, one" (49). But Walker does not set up these indigenous peoples as in strict opposition to whites. In "In the Closet of the Soul," she explains, "We are black, yes, but we are 'white,' too, and we are red. To attempt to function as only one, when you are really two or three, leads, I believe, to psychic illness. . ." (82). Similarly, in "On Seeing Red," she calls for a Whitman-esque celebration of diversity: "There are few 'white' people in America . . . and even fewer 'black' ones. . . . In our diversity we have been one people—just as the peoples of the world are one people—even when the most vicious laws of separation have forced us to believe we are not. I, too, sing America" (128). Therefore, like Major, Walker avoids limiting herself to a simple black-white opposition in her writings about race. Instead, like many of her fictional characters, she finds spiritual and intellectual strength in recognizing herself as a multicultural individual.

Likewise, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) is a mammoth investigation of the intersection, confrontation, and shared experiences of Whites, Natives, and Blacks in the Americas. Clinton, a homeless Vietnam veteran raised in Houston, is driven in his beliefs and his self-understanding by his dual heritage. As Sharon Holland describes, he "give[s] voice to a crossblood existence denied to most in the retelling of colonial rule" (344). Silko writes:

blacks had been Americans for centuries now, and Clinton could feel the connection the people had, a connection so deep it ran in his blood. . . . He and the

Smith–Black and Indian Heritage

rest of his family had been direct descendants of wealthy, slave-owning Cherokee Indians. . . . Clinton had liked to imagine these Cherokee ancestors of his, puffed up with their wealth of mansions, expensive educations, and white and black slaves. Oh, how ‘good’ they thought they were! (414-5)

Unlike the other black Indians heretofore discussed, Clinton avoids a strictly positive account of his Indian heritage. Although he is clearly proud of his Indian lineage, his understanding of this influence is not fuel for bragging, like it is for the old women in his family. Rather, his Cherokee ancestors project a valuable lesson:

So pride had gone before their fall. That was why a people had to know their history, even the embarrassments when bad judgment had got them slaughtered by the millions. Lampshades made out of Native Americans by the conquistadors; lampshades made out of Jews. Watch out African-Americans! The next lampshades could be you! (415)

In this way, Silko avoids romanticizing Indian ancestry as merely a connection to the past or a discovery of family secrets; instead, she gives Clinton’s multiracial nature a clear purpose: it serves as his call to action.

Clinton is deeply interested in his genealogical routes not only to better understand himself but also to prompt others into an appreciation for their history and for the value that alliance between Blacks and Indians, and more broadly, “the poorest tribal people and survivors of European genocide” (749), holds in terms of activism, of “reclaim[ing] democracy from corruption at all levels” (410) and “show[ing] the remaining humans how all could share and live together on earth, ravished as she was” (749). To accomplish this, Clinton makes tapes that he plans to use for a radio broadcast that will be dedicated to the descendants of escaped African slaves and Native Carribbeans, whom he calls the first African-Native Americans. Included in his “Liberation Radio Broadcasts” are accounts of slave revolts in the Americas, during which Blacks and Indians cooperated to throw off European oppressors, revealing, “The spirits of Africa and the Americas are joined together in history, and on both continents

by the sacred gourd rattle" (429). Clinton thus recognizes that "If the people knew their history, they would realize they must rise up" (431).

Integral to this impetus to rise up is Clinton's belief in the close association between the African and Native American spirit worlds. He explains that escaped African slaves discovered hidden indigenous tribes and found that their African gods had found their way to America, cementing the peoples' inclusiveness of each other: "Right then the magic had happened: great American and African tribal cultures had come together to create a powerful consciousness with all people" (416). Clinton stresses that like the physical union of Natives and Africans, those of the spirit world are also united, so that the ancestors' spirits still surround black people in the United States. He expands this idea of intermingled spirit worlds in his conception of what he calls "Black Indians at Mardi Gras." Clinton characterizes these paraders who, apart from the middle class participants of the Negro Mardi Gras parade, celebrate the spirit of cooperation between African and Native Americans as black Indians who represent spirit figures, frightening Whites and creating a scene in which "No outsider knows where Africa ends or America begins" (421). This display is in microcosm what Clinton hopes will happen when Blacks realize that indeed their homeland is America, spiritually and historically: "All hell was going to break loose. The best was yet to come" (749).

Clinton's reconfiguration of accepted history in America echoes Silko's underlying objective throughout the novel. Shocking, confusing, and confronting her readers through this unique text, Silko challenges the dominant view of American culture, one that is often informed by the kind of polarization of black and white that disregards much of America's culture as well as its inhabitants. As Elizabeth McNeil suggests, "Silko deconstructs the dominant culture's anthropological view of Native America, past and present, as she prophesies a degenerating, yet transformative future for the global community" (1-2). Envisioning the world as a global community is indeed crucial to the text, as various characters, representing various cultures and ethnicities, are each connected to each other and must suffer, enjoy, or exploit the actions of others. As a result, the novel

Smith–Black and Indian Heritage

asserts an integrative view of race and culture similar to Walker's and Major's, reflecting on some level her own Laguna Pueblo and white background. Like those of the other writers, Silko's presentation of this multi-raciality is not the instigator of confusion or violence, as it is for Faulkner's tragic mulatto, but instead it is a means of confronting and rejecting a European hegemony and instigating a more just world.

Michael Dorris' *A Yellow Raft on Blue Water* (1987) and *Cloud Chamber* (1997), present Rayona, a black, Indian, and white adolescent, who also breaks Faulkner's tragic mulatto mold. In the earlier novel readers learn of Rayona's struggle to fit in on the Indian Reservation she lives on and in the white world that surrounds it. With her uncontrollable hair and darker skin Rayona is ostracized from the other, more "purely" Indian inhabitants of her native area as well as from white inhabitants of the nearby state park to which she runs away. Additionally, she struggles to be accepted by and to accommodate her Indian mother and aunt, Christine and Aunt Ida, as well as her black father, Elgin. Through *Yellow Raft on Blue Water's* three-section framework, which provides narrative voice for Rayona, Christine, and Aunt Ida, Dorris presents each character's experience of inter-racial contact, from Rayona's varied racial heritage to Christine's relationship with Elgin to Aunt Ida's relationship with Father Hurlburt. But while this novel introduces the implications of these cultural intersections from the Indian characters' points of view, it is in Dorris' later novel that the story expands and reaches its fruition.

In *Cloud Chamber* Dorris pursues more fully Rayona's genealogical lineage, including multiple narration from her Irish ancestors, which include Elgin's mother, as well as from Elgin, whose perception of his own multi-racial heritage as well as his relationship to Christine is illumined. Elgin's process of confronting his varied racial background involves his recognition of the world's estimation of race as merely black or white:

You broke the rules, Mom, and I'm exhibit 'A.' You and Aunt Edna and Grandma never made me feel bad about myself, but the world is bigger than this house and I've got to live in it as who I am. I've got to learn how. Not as a white boy who goes black on vacation. Not as a

Greek. Not as the band leader in the St. Patrick's Day parade. I'm who I say I am. I'm who you say I am. But I'm also who everybody else on earth says I am, and somehow that's got to add up to a single sum. (203)

In addition to his black and white ancestry, Elgin also identifies as part Creek Indian, which he ponders as he enters into his relationship with Christine. Because of his relationship, Indian heritage is more to him than merely a link to a distant past or romanticized predecessors, and eventually it provides a better avenue for participating in Rayona's life. As Rayona explains before the naming ceremony:

He'd no doubt appear in some understated Indian-themed vest or belt buckle to advertise his right to be present, a little caption that communicated "Married In." There were times when Mom would have liked to add her own parentheses—Divorced Out—but in the end she forgave him . . . Dad was my link to Mom, the only other person besides me who could remember those rare and amazing times when the three of us were a family. And, to be honest, he was more than that, too. He was family. (272)

Ultimately, the single sum that Elgin is seeking takes shape in his daughter.

Rayona's naming ceremony is the culmination of her own process of seeking a single sum. After meeting and surviving a KFC nightmare with her white grandmother and great aunt, accepting more fully her father, coming to terms with her mother's legacy, and expressing her love for Aunt Ida, Rayona is able bridge successfully the many cultures, what she calls her "own personal ethnic rainbow coalition" (273), that shape her. Her summation of these many influences is emblemized in her acceptance of her great-great grandmother Rose's Irish cut-glass vase as well as her adoption of Rose's name at the ceremony, her receipt of an eagle feather and Pendleton blanket from her mother's friend Dayton, and her donning of the non-traditional dress that Aunt Ida fashions for her for the pow-wow:

when you start mixing up rawhide and satin and calico and tanned deerskin, when you make a red-and-black statement in a shawl and expect it to complement a

turquoise and magenta zigzag in a dress, when you sew snuff lid jingles and tiny cowbells to any square inch that isn't otherwise occupied with neon yarn fringe, when you interchange floral and geometric in the same beadwork pattern, when you simultaneously push the traditional and the fancy dance buttons, when you give equal nods to plains, woodland, southwest, and north-west coast design motifs and then throw in a little *Dances with Wolves* glitz to spice them up, you get . . . well, you get what I'm wearing. (305)

Rayona's making peace with her heritage is thereby finally and poignantly reflected in her statement, "There's room for everybody" (316).

Rayona's, and by implication Dorris', message at the conclusion of this novel is a bold one. While black Indians in other works are significant because of their connection to the past and embodiment of alliance against Europeans, Rayona is an acknowledgement that these cultures—white, black, and Indian—can coexist in the present. As Gordon Slethaug notes, "the second novel . . . suggest[s] that whites and blacks also share losses, and that racial groups can work together to ameliorate those losses and gain a new sense of community" (18). Dorris' projection of this ideal likely stems from his own embodiment of white and Native ancestry. As Thomas Matchie explains, Dorris' own Irish lineage and home place of Kentucky provides material for much of *Cloud Chamber*, and Dorris' Modoc ancestry, academic work in Native American studies, and marriage to Native author, Louis Erdrich, were widely recognized before his death.⁴ Through his works, then, Dorris is offering a contemporary view of multi-raciality in America that is somewhat more personal and somewhat less politicized than the views presented by other authors, yet this more personal view has nonetheless important political implications, suggesting that individuals cannot always be labeled as either white or "Other." While Rayona's life is certainly made difficult by racism, her integration of ostensibly opposing cultures is hopeful, even reassuring. But is it realistic? In an America still impeded by an obsession with black and white, how plausible are Rayona's personal fulfillment, Clinton's call to action, Fanny's and Lissie's entering the spirit

world, Meridian's transformation into a goddess, Eliza's veneration of homecoming, or Milkman's journey to Virginia?

In America's tableau of widely varying peoples and their histories, these portraits of multiracial individuals are certainly more realistic and of increasing value to our discussions of race in this country than the tragic mulatto model that has been a presence in those discussions throughout the twentieth century. Perhaps the most important reason for this shift is that in addition to America's growing racial and ethnic diversity, more Americans are identifying themselves as multi-racial. In the 2000 Census, when for the first time individuals were allowed to check more than one box to identify themselves racially, the results were as follows: 6,826,228 Americans identified themselves as of two or more races.⁵ Of those, 6,368,075 were of two races, 410,285 were of three races, 38,408 were of four races, 8,637 were of five races, and 823 were of six races (Grieco and Cassidy 4-5). While these numbers provide no narrative of the lives behind them, they reflect the fact that given a situation in which respondents are free to present themselves racially in whatever manner they choose, almost seven million Americans made a deliberate decision to affirm a multiplicity in their racial identities rather than aligning themselves at either end of a black-white binary. As these Americans as well as the literary characters discussed reveal, while cross-cultural alliance often has empowered the oppressed against the dominant society, the dominant society is not always simply lined up in polar opposition to that alliance, as a "white-Other" polarity still excludes many individuals from embracing the entirety of their identities.

This is certainly not to say that living with a multi-racial identity is easy or that it frees one from racism, especially since the majority of Americans still identify themselves as of only one race. What it does mean is that the literary models we have traditionally used are not sufficient (and never really have been) to tell the whole story of race, and more specifically multi-raciality, in America. Moreover, just as Henry Louis Gates has interrogated "the ideas of difference inscribed in the trope of 'race'" (6), the perspectives of those with multi-racial heritage challenge assumptions about racial difference, as they challenge abstract and arbitrary racial categorization. And just as Gates called for

Smith–Black and Indian Heritage

development out of the black tradition of criticism for African American literature, criticism of much contemporary American literature, as well as future literature that will no doubt reflect greater ethnic plurality, also will require new thinking about race, drawing on the historic and continued convergence of various peoples in America.⁶ As William S. Penn suggests, “a renewed diversity of imagination of thinking is something mixblood writers—whatever their backgrounds or disciplines—offer postmodern America and Western culture” (3).

Ultimately, it is clear that while Faulkner’s “tragic mulatto” model sheds light on our past and still influences American consciousness, contemporary perceptions of dual or multi-ethnicity have become much more dynamic. In the words of Rainier Spencer, “There is a vast difference between wondering whether one is black or white and questioning whether anyone really is” (127). As a result, black Indian characters, as well as multi-racial authors, provide varied and insightful glimpses into America’s complex racial landscape. Rather than merely embodying tragedy, these figures encourage ever-greater recognition that our collective heritage cannot be seen only in black and white.

NOTES

¹ *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, edited by Lindsay T. and Julie P. Baker, offers fascinating portraits of the cultural exchange that accompanied African Americans’ enslavement by members of the Five “Civilized” Tribes (excluding the Seminole tribe), including African Americans’ adoption of Native cooking techniques and medicinal practices that endure among their descendents.

² The Lumbee tribe of North Carolina is one Native American tribe that reflects the influence and integration of a range of cultures, including European and African American. The Lumbees’ continued failure to attain federal recognition as a tribe reflects the way in which the United States has often refused to recognize the dynamic and unique nature of each Native American tribe. See Chapter Two, “We Ain’t Got Feathers and Beads,” of Fergus Bordewich’s *Killing the White Man’s Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*.

³ Significantly, Forbes reveals that the term “mulatto” referred to people of mixed African and Native American descent in the sixteenth century (181). Samuel Johnson’s 1756 dictionary was the first instance of the

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

definition of "mulatto" as indicating black and white racial lineages (193).

⁴ David T. McNab calls Dorris' Modoc ancestry into question in his article "Of Beads and a Crystal Vase: An Exploration of Language into Darkness, of Michael Dorris's *The Broken Cord* and *Cloud Chamber*." *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 47 (2001): 109-19.

⁵ A staggering 1,082,683 respondents identified themselves as "White; American Indians and Alaska Native." Many, including Native American leaders, have called this number into question, as it's likely, in consideration of numbers compiled by tribes, that many of these individuals retain no tribal affiliation (either community recognition or tribal membership). Yet even if many of these individuals have no substantiated claim to Native heritage, it is nonetheless worthy of note that they do not see themselves as only white. Other numbers relevant to the discussion of Blacks and Indians are as follows: 784,764 respondents were "White; Black or African American," 182,494 were "Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native," and 112,207 were "White; Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native."

⁶ Bernadette Rigal-Cellard has discussed Louis Owens's integration of both Western and Native American literary traditions in his novel *The Sharpest Sight* (1992) as a "com[ing] to terms with the complexities of . multicultural legacies" (164). See Rigal-Cellard's "Western Literary Models and Their Native American Revisiting" in *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*. Ed. Gretchen M. Bataille. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. 152-165.

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**Chinatown Black Tigers:
Black Masculinity and Chinese Heroism in
Frank Chin's *Gunga Din Highway***

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Images of ominous villains and asexual heroes in literature and mainstream American culture tend to relegate Asian American men to limited expressions of masculinity. These emasculating images deny Asian American men elements of traditional masculinity, including agency and strength. Many recognize the efforts of Frank Chin, a Chinese American novelist, to confront, expose, and revise such images by relying on a tradition of Chinese heroism. In *Gunga Din Highway* (1994), however, Chin creates an Asian American masculinity based on elements of both the Chinese heroic tradition and a distinct brand of African American masculinity manifested in the work of Ishmael Reed, an African American novelist and essayist known for his outspoken style.¹ Rather than transforming traditional masculinity to include Asian American manhood, Chin's images of men represent an appropriation of elements from two ethnic sources that Chin uses to underscore those of Asian Americans. While deconstructing the reductive images advocated by the dominant culture, Chin critiques the very black masculinity he adopts. Ultimately he fails to envision modes of masculinity not based on dominance, yet Chin's approach also can be read as the ultimate expression of Asian American individualism.

Frank Chin is no stranger to the world of Asian American literature and controversial topics regarding race and ethnicity. In works like *Year of the Dragon* (1981) and *Donald Duk* (1991) Chin explores the negative ramifications of pressures on Asian Americans to assimilate into the mainstream culture. Yet his work increasingly explores the interaction between African American and Asian American cultures. *Chicken Coop Chinaman* (1981) tells the story of two Asian American men who admire an African American boxer and seek out his father as a part of their documentary film, while *Gunga Din Highway* has as a motif the intersections between Asian American and black masculinity.

In general the interplay between black and Chinese/Chinese American cultural elements in Chin's work have not been explored in depth. While scholars of Chinese American literature often attribute such characteristics as Chin's caustic style in addressing Chinese American concerns to his affinity for African American rhetoric, they stop short of satisfactory analyses. An example of this is Sau-lin Cynthia Wong who describes Chin's dramatic work as "inspired by the heroics of the Black Power movement," but does not elaborate further.²

Some forms of multicultural literary criticism also fail to provide adequate tools to investigate the cultural hybridity in Chin's work. Christopher Newfield and Avery F. Gordon assert that a particular brand of multiculturalism de-emphasizes difference:

The culturalism of multiculturalism threatens to shift attention from racialization to culture and in doing so to treat racialized groups as one of many diverse and interesting cultures. . . . Given existing racial inequities and the continuing segregation of most social institutions, the reduction of all racial groups to a nonexistent level playing field poses serious problems.³

Instead of focusing on the complex ways distinct ethnic groups interact, certain brands of multiculturalism lump their histories and cultures under the heading of "Other." Such a move obscures the bicultural dynamic in Chin's work that depends on acknowledging the differences in black and Asian American expressions of masculinity. His work demands to be read with

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

critical strategies designed to hone in on the way those cultures interact and reveal the way Chin mines the African American tradition. Laurie Grobman argues that “rather than choosing one method of interpretation over another, this approach recognizes the complexity of an ethnic writer’s positioning within a wide range of cultures and subcultures.”⁴ Chin’s use of both Chinese heroism and African American masculinity demonstrates his knowledge of multiple cultural spheres. An interpretative strategy based on a working knowledge of several ethnic spheres allows readers to compare, contrast, and identify sites where black and Asian American cultures come together in both conflict and consensus.

Gunga Din Highway demands this cross-cultural work. The novel weaves a loose narrative thread through a collection of stories, narrative voices and references to fiction, newspaper articles and films. The novel begins not with its chief protagonist, Ulysses S. Kwan, but with his father, Longman Kwan, an actor who specializes in stereotypical roles. Longman goes to Hawaii to convince Anlauf Lorane, the last white man to portray Charlie Chan in cinema, to make an appearance at a music festival. Their encounter reveals Longman’s desires to assimilate into American culture, for he dreams of being tapped as the first Chinese American to portray Charlie Chan.

The novel then abruptly switches to Ulysses’ recollection of his early childhood. As a youngster he meets Benedict Han and Diego Chang, two other Chinese American boys who become the closest thing to life-long friends that Ulysses will have. The novel alternatively traces the adventures of these friends. Ulysses’ path seems the most convoluted: attending Berkeley, working on the railroad, covering a riot in a black neighborhood, participating in the Chinese version of the Black Panthers, and writing Chinese American activist theatre. When he becomes disillusioned with the state of Chinese American drama, he gives up on cultural reform and becomes a writer of zombie movies for Hollywood.

The centrality of several male characters reveals the tension between traditional notions of masculinity and the limited masculinity conferred on Asian American men by American society. Traditional masculinity defines men as strong, dominant, coura-

geous and brave individuals. Richard Majors and Janet Billson assert in *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America* that "being a male means to be responsible and a good provider for self and family,"⁵ while Courtland Lee in *Black Male Development* implies that traditional masculinity is based on the expectations of white men, who, "from boyhood are socialized by family, school and the dominant culture in general, with a masculine sensibility that is composed of an awareness that power and control are their birthright and that they are the primary means of ensuring personal respect, financial security, and success."⁶

Chin acknowledges such normative masculine elements in naming his primary protagonist, Ulysses, the Greek Odysseus, the most famous heroic figure in Western literature, thus demonstrating his awareness of the characteristics that define men in mainstream Western culture. The fame of Ulysses is based on his manly virtues of courage and pride. His quests, the cause of his fame, are feats of masculine prowess. By naming his protagonist Ulysses, Chin seeks to imbue him with these manly characteristics.

Such a strong mode of masculinity contrasts greatly with the weak masculinity the dominant culture actually expects from Asian American men. Unlike Ulysses, Longman Kwan, his actor-father, wholeheartedly embraces a masculinity that stereotypes Asian American men as substandard, weak, and dependent. He gladly accepts roles that portray Asian American men as helpless or inferior. As the "Chinaman Who Dies," Longman Kwan portrays a stock Asian actor in war movies who always ends up dead to elicit a sentimental response from the audience.

It is Longman's desire to portray Charlie Chan that best represents his embrace of a weak Asian American masculinity. Charlie Chan functions as the ultimate metaphor for weak Asian American masculinity because he is an Asian American male character deliberately created to be inferior. If the hallmark of a "real" man is his ability to provide for a family, then it follows that Charlie Chan is not a man. Richard Oehling makes the astute observation that "there is always a romance in the Chan movies, but it never involves either Charlie or his children."⁷ Chan has sons, but no wife, which is implied in the concept of

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

family for traditional masculinity. His asexual stance assures his bachelor status, as Elaine Kim notes, since his approval by the public is based on him “as a non-threatening, non-competitive, asexual ally of the white man.”⁸ Chan fails to secure personal respect or control that real men possess. In the novel *Anlauf* Lorane explains that Charlie Chan was designed to provide comic relief to white men. Initially Charlie Chan represented an amalgam of Chang Apana, a famous Chinese gun slinger, and Charlie Chaplin, comic of the silent screen. As such the figure does not incorporate the traditional masculine attributes ascribed to Chang Apana and takes more comic characteristics from Chaplin. Jeffery Paul Chan and his colleagues in *Three American Literatures* cite a general lack of agency in this image of Asian American masculinity:

The white stereotype of the acceptable and unacceptable Asian is utterly without manhood. . . . At worst, the Asian-American male is contemptible because he is womanly, effeminate, devoid of all the traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring, physical courage and creativity.⁹

To demonstrate his rejection of this weak Asian American masculinity, Chin negatively characterizes Longman. He comes off as a sycophant with no racial pride or dignity. Even his own son, Ulysses, refuses to be connected with him or follow in his footsteps. While Ulysses’ best friends do not seem to mind Longman’s quest to be embraced by mainstream culture, Ulysses deplores it.

Chin not only identifies the ways that traditional masculinity bans Asian American men from manhood by conferring a weak masculinity upon them, he also suggests that it bars them from the dominant culture itself. Chin acknowledges the discourse of assimilation represented by the figure of Gunga Din, which appears in the title and metaphorically underscores the entire novel. Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “Gunga Din,” like most of his work, invites a colonialist reading. In the following passage, the British soldier narrator assumes an imperialist position over the native Gunga Din in describing his character:

If we charged or broke or cut,
You could bet your bloomin’ nut,

'E'd be waitin' fifty paces right flank rear.
With 'is mussick on 'is back,
'E would skip with our attack,
An' watch us till the bugles made "Retire,"
An'for all 'is dirty 'ide
'E was white, clear white, inside
When 'e went to tend the wounded under fire!
(Kipling, "Gunga Din")

The narrative voice in the poem embodies traditional masculinity that gives him the authority to define Gunga Din. The only thing that makes Gunga Din acceptable is the fact that he is "white, clear white, inside," suggesting that he had assimilated the dominant society's characterization of him as a servant. The narrator praises Gunga Din for his service to the British soldiers, which mirrors the service of the Indian people to the British empire. Gunga Din is a good man, not because of intrinsic characteristics, but because he serves his masters well in a war to promote British imperialism. The western voice of the British soldier confines Indian men, and by extension, all Asian and Asian American men, to the position of servant. B.J. Moore-Gilbert in *"Kipling and Orientalism"* suggests that Kipling's poem falls into Edward Said's conception of orientalism, which "has as its aim dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. . . . It conceives of the East as radically 'other' and alien to the West."¹⁰ Gunga Din only becomes acceptable as a member of the dominant culture if he acquiesces and loses any hint of his masculinity. In this way traditional masculinity becomes linked with cultural membership and is used to bar men of Asian descent from the dominant culture.

Fu Manchu represents another figure of Asian masculinity that underscores the chasm between Western culture and men of Asian descent by reinforcing the foreignness of men of Asian descent. Elaine Kim describes the Asian villain as an individual "who has mastered Western knowledge and science without comprehending Western compassion and ethics. . . . Fu Manchu is the diametrical opposite of the white hero: he is, in [Sax] Rohmer's words, 'not a normal man. . . . [he is] unbound by the laws of men."¹¹ Fu Manchu emphasizes the alien nature of Asian

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

men. Because he does not embrace Western values and chooses to pursue depravity, he is barred from mainstream culture. So are men who look like him.

Chin revises the Fu Manchu and in doing so rejects the assumption that Asian American men are not part of American culture. As an Asian American artist, Ulysses consciously refuses to portray Fu Manchu as a perpetual alien. Instead, he chooses to depict the figure to reflect “a Chinese American culture that kicks white racism in the balls with a shit-eating grin” (261). His use of the figure is a form of satire “where you make fun of how they think and what they say in order to make them look stupid” (257). Such strategies are necessary to counteract the distance that such figures create between Asian American men and the dominant culture.

While Chin finds little to emulate in the images of Asian American men perpetuated by the general culture, he is drawn to African American culture for models of ethnic masculinity. Both African American and Asian American men have similar experiences at the hands of the dominant culture. Historically, black men have been typecast as sexual threats to white women and the moral inferiors to white men. Jacqueline Jones notes in her study of black families that any potential sexual advance on the part of black men “provided white men as a group with an opportunity to reaffirm their own sense of racial superiority and ‘manhood,’” resulting in the “mutilation and castration of lynching victims (invariably accused of raping white women) [which] brought into explicit focus the tangle of ‘hate and guilt and sex and fear’ that enmeshed all southerners well into the twentieth century.”¹² Chinese immigrant men embodied a similar danger to white racial purity, which was reflected in anti-marriage laws of the 19th century. Historian Sucheng Chan argues that “elaborate ‘scientific’ explanations of nonwhite ‘inferiority’ . . . provided an ideological justification for treating not only Asians, but other people of color, in a discriminatory and exploitative manner. To preserve Anglo-Saxon purity, it was argued, no interracial mixing should be allowed”;¹³ thus, men of both ethnic groups have similar motivations to define their own masculinities.

Regarding ethnic masculinity, Chin’s work resonates specifically with the ideas of African American writer Ishmael Reed.

The author of several novels and works of non-fiction, Reed has gained a reputation for being outspoken. From his 1960s novel, *The Freelance Pallbearers*, to his 1990s novel, *Japanese By Spring*, Reed demonstrates his penchant for critiquing the status quo. Discrimination, the black middle class, and academia are only a few of his targets. These subjects also recur in his nonfiction, which bear titles like *Writing is Fighting: Thirty Years of Boxing on Paper*. His aggressive tone and caustic style are designed to provoke and challenge accepted ideas.

Chin's usage of Reed's approach to ethnic masculinity is not unusual, given that they share a professional and creative relationship.¹⁴ In 1974 Reed stated in an interview that when editing a special issue on Asian American writing for the *Yardbird Reader*, his literary journal, he not only worked with Chin but also recommended him to readers who wanted a "true" multicultural account.¹⁵ In one of his frequent tirades against the American literary establishment, Reed observes that "another group neglected by the American Writing Establishment [is] the Asian-Americans, descendents of the Chinese who came to the West to build railroads." He goes on to call Chin by name and reveal his distinction of having written the first play by a Chinese American produced in a New York theater.¹⁶ In the foreword to the Literary Mosaic Series that features Asian American literature, Reed identifies Chin as one of "the four horsemen of Asian American literature" for his fiction and nonfiction contributions to the field. Reed also occupies a prominent place on Chin's cultural radar screen, as evidenced by the dedication in Chin's most recent essay collection, *Bulletproof Buddhists*: "To Ishmael Reed: Writing is Fighting."

In addition to professional admiration, Chin's writing mirrors Reed's aggressive rhetoric, which identifies the dominant society as the enemy that must be defeated. In describing his writing, Reed meditates on characterizations of himself as a boxer:

I don't mince my words. Nor do I pull any punches, and though I've delivered some low blows over the years, I'm becoming more accurate, and my punches are regularly landing above the waistline. . . . A black boxer's career is the perfect metaphor for the career of a black male. Every day is like being in the gym, spar-

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

ring with impersonal opponents as one faces the rudeness and hostility that a black male must confront in the United States, where he is the object of both fear and fascination.¹⁷

Reed asserts that he engages in combat with the dominant culture. The culture engages in racial slights that black men receive. Significantly this metaphor of boxing empowers the black male who may feel a lack of agency as an object and allows him to fight back. Reed's pugilistic rhetoric represents an affirmative response to his opponent that attempts to exclude black men from manhood.

Similarly, Chin indicts the dominant society as an adversary. He captures this aggressive rhetoric in his essay, "Confessions of a Chinatown Cowboy":

White America is as securely indifferent about us as men, as Plantation owners were about their loyal house niggers. House niggers is what America has made of us, admiring us for being patient, submissive, esthetic, passive, accommodating essentially feminine in character. . . . what whites call 'Confuciusist,' dreaming us up a goofy version of Chinese culture to preserve in becoming the white male's dream minority.¹⁸

Chin's rhetoric bears the imprint of Reed with its aggressive style. His words resemble punches as he accuses "white America" of making Asian American men "niggers." He complains about the passivity conferred on Asian American men, which robs them of masculinity. Because the dominant society has the power to define, it is ultimately at fault in the emasculation of Asian American men. Like Reed, Chin aggressively confronts mainstream America and by his very strong words, reclaims agency and control for Asian American men.

In addition to identifying the enemy, Chin's work also mirrors Reed's assertion of agency based on ethnic men's own terms. In Reed's novel, *Japanese by Spring* (1993), Benjamin "Chappie" Puttbutt, the protagonist, is initially conservative, but when he is denied tenure and through a fluke subsequently placed as the right hand of the new president of the college, he exercises the agency his new position affords him. When confronting the English professor who argued against his tenure, Chappie notes

that "he was sounding like his father. Accepting his father's vision of the world. As a battleground between the strong and the weak."¹⁹ After rebuffing the chair of the Women's Studies Department, Chappie asserts: "Life is war. And on this campus, he was second in command."²⁰ Chappie exhibits agency in retaliation to those who exploited him because of his race. He exudes strength against a racialized enemy. His new position of power gives him the wherewithal to assert himself as a black man to those who previously denied him power.

While such strength and agency are hallmarks of traditional masculinity, they can become hallmarks of black masculinity when they function against racial discrimination and perceived disrespect. Marginalized from conventional masculinity by racism, Clyde Franklin suggests black men may "develop measures of masculinity based on other traits such as physical strength, aggressiveness, dominance, sexual conquest, conspicuous consumption and exterior emotionless."²¹ Majors and Billson describe a set of behaviors exhibited by black men as the "cool pose," "a potpourri of violence, toughness and symbolic control over others."²² Defiance and a condescending attitude towards anything that does not acknowledge the status of the black man represent an aggressive form of black masculinity. Chappie's responses to the English professor and Women's Studies chair exude a sense of symbolic control.

Chin's Ulysses also enacts this defiant attitude as a response to what he perceives as disrespect. In Chinese after-school, Ben Han describes Ulysses' challenge to their teacher:

None of us had ever heard Ulysses or anyone talk back to a teacher like this. The only way I could describe Ulysses at the time was to say he talked to the Horse [Mr. Mah] as if he were the boss. Every day they argued. . . . Ulysses never gave an inch, never stopped fighting once he started" (92).

Rather than "staying in his place, Ulysses defies Mr. Mah as a figure of authority. He talks back, exhibiting the same symbolic control, dominance and aggressiveness found in Reed's black masculinity.

Such defiance derived from black masculinity is particularly attractive for Asian American men, who risk being subsumed

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

by the model minority stereotype, which Jinqi Ling notes is “a term that distinguished Asian Americans from blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans during the political ferment of the 1960s because the latter’s back-talking militancy is typically viewed as a sign of male potency.”²³ Because this stereotype paints men of Asian descent as passive and docile, Chin expresses a sense of admiration for the boldness of black masculinity:

And there we Chinaman were, in Lincoln Elementary School, Oakland, California, in a world where manliness counts for everything, surrounded by bad blacks. . . who were still into writing their names into their skin with nails dipped in ink. They had a walk, a way of wearing their pants on the brink of disaster, a tongue, a kingdom of manly style everyone respected.”²⁴

Chin later asserts that “the going image of Chinese manhood wasn’t swordsman. It was a sissy servant, Charlie Chan.”²⁵ To compensate, Asian American men may exhibit the rhetorical aggressiveness of black masculinity to offset the emasculating effects of the feminine stereotype of the model minority.

Chin takes his cultural project one step further by blending this aggressive form of black masculinity with aspects of Chinese heroism. This aggressive masculinity complements the heroic tradition in Chinese culture because both are in part based on strength and agency for ethnic men. The cultural privilege given to men by the Chinese heroic tradition breeds feelings of dominance. As with black masculinity, this promotes the values of extreme individualism, alienation, and aloofness. The result is a tough Asian man, and like his tough black brother, Chin argues, that “true” Chinese heritage is marked, not by submissiveness but by a warrior tradition:

All of us—men and women—are born soldiers. The soldier is the universal individual. . . . Life is war. The war is to maintain personal integrity in a world that demands betrayal and corruption. All behavior is strategy and tactics. All relationships are martial.²⁶

As a result Ulysses’ challenge to Mr. Mah discussed earlier also can be read as an example of Chinese heroism, for his behavior hearkens back to Chinese heroes. The argument is sparked by Mr. Mah’s implication that Ulysses has nothing use-

ful to say; he tries to silence him. Earlier, Ulysses and his friends declared themselves Brothers of the Oath of the Peach Garden, alluding to the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, where Lowe Bay, Kwan Yu and Chang Fay “swear to serve China and save the people” (73). Chin elaborates in an essay that Kwan Yu, the brother Ulysses emulates in the novel, “is the exemplar of the universal man, a physically and morally self-sufficient soldier who is a pure ethic of private revenge.”²⁷ When Ulysses asserts his independence to Mr. Mah, he enacts Kwan Yu’s self-sufficiency. Just as those heroes fight for China, Ulysses fights in Mr. Mah’s classroom and demonstrates a form of Chinese heroism, for just as they fought for the honor of China, so too Ulysses ‘fights’ for his own Chinese American identity in Mr. Mah’s classroom.

While the characters cannot pick up swords and start a war against those they perceive as their enemies, they can use language to enact their Chinese heroism. In his encounter with Mr. Mah, Ulysses uses language to create his own reality and wrestle control from those who exercise power over him. This can be seen when Ulysses later challenges Ben Han’s girlfriend about the ‘true’ Chinese tradition:

The fact is that Chinese literature—*The Three Brothers of the Oath of the Peach Garden*, *Sam Gawk Yurn Yee*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Fung Sun Bong* and *Kwang Kung*—has nothing to do with your fiancée’s strange tales. The stories she says are Chinese aren’t and never were. She’s not rewriting Chinese anything, man. She’s just doing a rewrite of Pearl Buck and Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu. . . . This isn’t Chinese. This isn’t the *Three Brothers*. This isn’t Kwan Yin. How does she get away with this bullshit? (261, 275)

Ulysses is upset because he knows the power of language. By butchering the stories, Ben’s girlfriend compromises Chinese culture and its value for Chinese Americans. Ulysses counters by referring to ‘true’ Chinese literature made up heroic sagas and daring acts of bravery. He advocates retaining the battles and courageous deeds of the heroes. These attributes, Cheung asserts, “show further that Chinese. . . have a heroic—which is to say militant—heritage.”²⁸ By doing so, he himself acts heroically

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

to save Chinese culture, just like the *Three Brothers of the Oath of the Peach Garden*.

Furthermore, Chin and his colleagues highlight the relationship between language and an Asian American masculinity that incorporates elements of Chinese heroism:

Language is the medium of culture and the people's sensibility, including the style of manhood. Language coheres the people into a community by organizing and codifying the symbols of the people's common experience. Stunt the tongue and you have lopped off the culture and sensibility. On the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he is no longer a man.²⁹

The quest to use language to describe Asian American cultural expression becomes the measure of a man. The articulation of cultural expression recaptures masculinity taken away through language by the dominant culture. Language holds the power of the Asian American community, and without it, Asian American men are not men. Chin and his colleagues view language as a weapon they can use to articulate their experiences as Asian American men.

As Asian American men, they also recognize the negative ramifications of language for their masculinity. Language in this sense refers not only to a general means of communication but also to English specifically as a linguistic system which excludes Asian American men. In the eyes of Chin and his colleagues language becomes a weapon wielded against them, a two-edged sword that may put them at a disadvantage in their quest to enact a masculinity based on heroism:

Minority writers, specifically Asian American writers, are made to feel morally obliged to write in a language produced by an alien and hostile sensibility. . . . Only Asian Americans are driven out of their tongues and expected to be at home in a language they never use and a culture they encounter only in books written in English. This piracy of our native tongues by white culture amounts to the eradication of a recognizable Asian American culture here.³⁰

Language functions as a tool against Asian American men to

force them into a homogenous cultural discourse that silences them as ethnic men. This use of language is wholly imperial and oppressive, presumably providing nothing of value culturally for the minority writer. It is also less of an issue for the African American writer, who is more at home because s/he speaks the same language. Chin and his coauthors also link language and the dominant culture that produces it, indicting both for their imperialism toward Asian American men.

While Chin's conflation of black masculinity and Chinese heroism results in a complex response to emasculation of Asian American men by the dominant culture, it fails to offer alternative definitions of masculinity outside the aggressive vein. Elaine Kim in *Asian American Literature* observes that "Chin flails out at the emasculating aspects of oppression, but he accepts his oppressor's definition of masculinity."³¹ So does Ulysses, for within the confines of the novel he does not challenge the dominance that defines masculinity nor does he explore alternative masculinities such as the scholar, the teacher, and the humanitarian.³² A more flexible form of heroism would create a more comprehensive discourse on masculinity rather than just one that confronts emasculating forces. King-kok Cheung in his study of Chinese masculinity points to the Chinese male image of the *sushen*, or poet-scholar, as a Chinese alternative to masculinity:

The poet-scholar, far from either brutish or asexual, is seductive because of his gentle demeanor, his wit and his refined sensibility. He prides himself on being indifferent to wealth and political power and seeks women and men who are his equals in intelligence and integrity. . . . Surely reclaiming the ideal of the poet-scholar will combat [the] cultural invisibility [of Asian American men].

Chin's conflation of masculinities also dissociates Ulysses from the very black masculinity that informs his identity. During his formative years, Ulysses feels distanced from African Americans. While covering a riot in a black neighborhood, Ulysses thinks about his estrangement:

I don't know this ghetto. This ghetto doesn't know me. . . . I'm a Chinaman. Why am I trying to feel like I've been here before? Everywhere outside of the Mother

Anderson—Chinatown Black Tigers

Lode country I have been a stranger all my life. . . .
'Home,' the way the Negro dishwasher standing at a
urinal talks about 'home' in New Orleans, is not the
Oakland ghetto or Chinatown" (142).

Given that his character takes so much from black masculinity to form his identity, this seems curious. Despite Chin's assertions in his essays that the plight of African American and Chinese American men are similar, he directs his protagonist to question any attempt to draw parallels between the experiences of the two groups of ethnic men. To a certain extent, Chin describes Ulysses' alienation in the black neighborhood as equal to the alienation he feels as a Chinese American in the dominant culture. Since Chin has already declared the dominant society the enemy, he implies a similar characterization for the African American community as well.

Chin in addition uses Ulysses to characterize the Black Panthers' brand of heroism as superficial. Ulysses recalls his involvement in the Chinatown Black Tigers, an Asian American activist organization loosely based on the Black Panthers. In doing so, he emphasizes the outer trappings of black masculinity over the oppression of the dominant culture by parodying the silver shades, the mustache and the black revolutionary turtle-neck as superficial elements of the movement. Ulysses reduces the movement to a catchy slogan. Such depictions are reductive, for as Robin D.G. Kelley suggests, the Black Panther Party were also viewed as models for positive change despite their flaws. Part of the revolutionary stance of street gangs can be traced to the roots of the Black Panther Party and to members like "Brother Crook (aka Ron Wilkins) [who] founded the Community Alert Patrol to challenge police brutality in the late 1960s."³⁴ Chin does not address the very conflicted legacy of the Black Panther Party, but only picks on its flaws. How bad can they be if they espoused many of the principles he does in his defensive posture against The Man?

While this seems contradictory, Chin's final move may represent yet another lesson gleaned from Reed: the paramount value of the individual vision. Sharon Jessee recalls that "Reed has a well-documented antipathy for any kind of strict regimen of objectives," choosing instead to "advocate that every individ-

ual create his own aesthetic for himself.”³⁵ Similarly, Chin champions ultimate authority for the individual. In the novel *Ulysses* takes a giant step away from communalism when he quits activist theatre, declaring, “no more doing it for the people. No more organized poetry” (346). *Ulysses* goes from directing Chinese American activist theater to writing Hollywood zombie movies: “If *The Night of the Living Third World Dead* brings in just \$30 million, I can quit writing for the Four Horsemen [Hollywood executives] and be rich enough to be forgotten” (345-346). *Ulysses* embraces the self-serving art of commercial writing. He wants to make enough money to be able to make his own brand of art without any responsibilities to an audience. Because *Ulysses* is ‘pure self-invention,” he is free from cultural obligations and expectations, including those imposed even by Chinese American culture. By choosing to produce zombie movies, *Ulysses* does not have to engage racial issues at all.

This shift towards individualism diverges from the communalism advocated by many Chinese American critics. A concept like Asian American panethnicity underscores communalism: Yen Le Espiritu sees within it large-scale identities, concerted action against dominant groups, and challenges to the allocation of power in society where all benefit under the Asian American umbrella.³⁶ Conversely, Chin sees individuality as a strategy to combat racism and discrimination. Such individuality also appears to disavow complete allegiance to any ideology, including that of African American masculinity.

Frank Chin’s unconventional defense of Asian American masculinity may act as a lightning rod for a wide range of scholars and critics, but it also affords a unique opportunity to witness interethnic dynamics at work. Chin embeds some of Reed’s key elements regarding ethnic masculinity in his novel and writings, adapts others to complement Chinese heroism, and rejects still others. In doing so he provides a complex response to the emasculating figures promoted by the dominant culture.

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Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

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NOTES

- ¹ Chin, *Gunga Din Highway*. All pages.
- ² Wong, 48
- ³ Newfield, 79
- ⁴ Grobman, 236
- ⁵ Majors, 30
- ⁶ Lee, 126
- ⁷ Oehling, 197
- ⁸ Kim, . 18
- ⁹ Chan, 211
- ¹⁰ Moore-Gilbert, 1-3
- ¹¹ Kim, 8
- ¹² Jones, 149
- ¹² Chan, 54
- ¹⁴ Discussion
- ¹⁵ Reed, "Interview", 248
- ¹⁶ Reed, "Multicultural", 254
- ¹⁷ Reed, "Boxing", 6
- ¹⁸ Chin, "Confessions", 67
- ¹⁹ Reed, "Japanese", 98
- ²⁰ Reed, "Japanese", 110
- ²¹ Franklin, 58-59

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

- 22 Majors, 33
- 23 Ling, 315
- 24 Chin, "Confessions", 64
- 25 Chin, "Confessions", 64
- 26 Chin, "Come All", 39
- 27 Chin, "Come All", 39
- 28 Cheung, "Warrior", 241-2
- 29 Chen, 226
- 30 Chen, 271-2
- 31 Kim, 90
- 32 Harris
- 33 Cheung, "OF Men", 190

**‘TIME IS NOT A RIVER’
THE IMPLICATIONS OF *MUMBO JUMBO’S*
PENDULUM CHRONOLOGY FOR COALITION
POLITICS**

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Ismael Reed’s 1972 novel, *Mumbo Jumbo*, proposes a unique chronological theory that requires a multiple-grounded understanding of time. An analysis of what could be called this “pendulum” chronology leads to a more complete understanding of the novel and has important implications for a coalition of American ethnic studies and other identity-related work in the academy.

Arna Bontemps was correct in his new introduction to *Black Thunder*. Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around. (Locomobile rear moving toward neoned Manhattan skyline. Skyscrapers gleam like magic trees. Freeze frame.)

Jan. 31st, 1971

3:00 PM

Berkeley, California

Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*¹

To begin at the end of Ishmael Reed’s novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) is entirely appropriate for a discussion of its chronology. The novel’s final lines, quoted above, seem to leave us with a puzzling collage: part musings, part clichés, part screenplay, part

logistics. Here *Mumbo Jumbo's* main character, PaPa LaBas, muses: "Time is a pendulum. Not a river."² A few lines later Reed draws attention to the novel's completion, naming its specific date, time and place: "January 31st, 1971. 3:00 PM. Berkeley, California."³ Following this pronouncement, such detailed attention to the novel's completion shows Reed's preoccupation with chronology: a struggle not only with monolithic narratives of history but also with an understanding of unidirectional time itself.

Though literary critics have considered *Mumbo Jumbo's* sense of history, few have developed an extended reading of its chronology or the implications of this chronology. Theodore O. Mason characterizes Reed's view of history as "cyclical, yet simultaneously linear."⁴ I would broaden Mason's characterization from "history" to "chronology," allowing for fictional as well as non-fictional events. Following the binary logic of poststructuralism, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. posits one "story of the past" and one "story of the present." Gates contends that the novel's structure is dualistic: it "[draws] upon the story of the past to reflect upon, analyze, and philosophize about the story of the present."⁵

In this paper I extend Gates' characterization of *Mumbo Jumbo* by suggesting that the novel draws on the story of several pasts, both to reflect upon the story of the novel's multiple "presents" and to prophesy about the future. And indeed in a 1974 interview Reed remarked that this was one of his main purposes in writing the novel: "I wanted to write about a time like the present, or to use the past to prophesy about the future—a process that our ancestors called 'Necromancy.' I chose the 20s because [that period was] very similar to what's happening [in the late 1960s/early 1970s]."⁶ The novel's final lines ground *Mumbo Jumbo* in several time periods, including the 1920s Harlem Renaissance and the early 1970s. The chronology represented in these lines might appear to be another confusing aspect of an already confusing novel. How are we to understand time as a "pendulum" while paying static attention to one time period (1971)? And what will such simultaneous grounding do for our understandings of the novel? To answer these questions we must read the novel according to its own chronological theory.

I argue here that *Mumbo Jumbo* proposes its own chronological theory; it argues for a multiply grounded understanding

of time and for a long-term understanding of coalition. Reed's novel draws parallels between earlier and contemporary multiracial coalitions, shifting our sense of coalition from a one-way, linear process with a desired end product to a continually dialectical process. Examining several examples in the text will allow us to excavate *Mumbo Jumbo's* chronology and to identify the broader implications of that chronology not only for an understanding of the novel but also for coalitions of American ethnic studies and other identity-related work in the academy.

Mumbo Jumbo's "Pendulum Chronology"

Mumbo Jumbo is an intertextual collage, full of photographs and illustrations, diagrams, excerpts of dance manuals, letters, newsflashes, *Time-Life* history books, and even a partial bibliography. It is a satire, a detective novel,⁷ ostensibly set in the Harlem Renaissance, about the appearance of a plague, or an "anti-plague," "Jes' Grew."⁸ Jes' Grew is an anti-plague because it is an "enlivening" plague, one that causes its carriers to be emotionally moved and to dance. Though Reed specifically mentions "Jes' Grew carriers" like Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, anyone is susceptible to catch Jes' Grew; anyone can be emotionally moved, and anyone can "shake that thing." A doctor attending Jes' Grew "victims" agonizes, "There are no isolated cases in this thing. It knows no class no race no consciousness. It is self-propagating and you can never tell when it will hit."⁹ The large cast of characters includes PaPa LaBas (an incarnation of the African trickster, Legba), Set, Isis, and Osiris (several Egyptian gods and goddesses), the Sufi Abdul Hamid, and the Mu'tafikah (a coalition of art-nappers). A new reader of *Mumbo Jumbo* confronts not only a bewildering array of texts and characters but a quicksilver movement between time periods. This quicksilver movement is what I call pendulum chronology: the novel's chronological theory.

The novel's chronological theory proposes that time does not simply flow forward, like a river, but like a pendulum. To envision the immediate implications of pendulum chronology, it is necessary to enumerate a few principles.

1. If time is "a pendulum" and "Not a river," then time never moves solely in one direction; it moves back and forth.

2. "Time as a pendulum" can imply a varying range of motion. A pendulum's range of motion includes shorter sweeps, as well as longer sweeps. In pendulum chronology the sweeps include shorter reaches of time (year to year, decade to decade) as well as longer reaches of time (century to century).

3. A "jump" from one time period to the next is not abrupt movement but a sweeping motion from one part of a continuum to the next. A pendulum's path is inclusive, encompassing the time periods between each endpoint of each sweep.

4. Pendulum chronology implies a Fanonally dialectic¹⁰ pendulum. That is, it moves between not just one past and one future, but among multiple pasts, multiple presents, and multiple futures along the same continuum. The novel moves between pasts and presents and futures, syncretically taking what is relevant from each time period, generatively engaging the binaries of past and present yet refusing any easy synthesis of thesis and antithesis.

5. A pendulum is defined through motion and movement. If it stops moving, it is no longer a pendulum; thus pendulum chronology insists on constant, fluid motion among time periods. If we return to the novel's final lines, understanding the logic of pendulum chronology, the references to multiple time periods are not so puzzling; instead we can see smaller sweeps of the pendulum in the twentieth century. "Arna Bontemps was correct in his new introduction to *Black Thunder*. Time is a pendulum. Not a river." In the first line of this passage, Reed refers to Arna Bontemps' novel, *Black Thunder* (1936), the story of a slave revolt in the 1800s. The "new introduction" here is the introduction that Bontemps wrote for the 1968 re-publication of *Black Thunder*. Bontemps's 1968 introduction begins "Time is not a river. Time is a pendulum. The thought occurred to me first in Watts in 1934."¹¹ Thus Reed's epilogue is Bontemps's introduction; Reed's ending is Bontemps' beginning.

Mumbo Jumbo's final lines, then, put several dates into play: the date of the novel's completion (1971), the date of the slave revolt portrayed in *Black Thunder* (1800), the writing and publication of *Black Thunder* (1936), and Bontemps' "new" introduction (1968), looking back to the production of *Black Thunder* (1934). Here pendulum chronology offers a fluid, but not inde-

terminate, sense of time. It offers time as a continuum. In this case time is a coalition among several texts, texts like *Black Thunder* and *Mumbo Jumbo*, which look backwards in time to tell us about the present.

Moving backward from the novel's final lines, we can also see a pendulum sweep from the 1920s "present" of the novel back to ancient times. The central mystery, the reason why *Mumbo Jumbo* is a detective novel, revolves around Jes' Grew. What is it? Where did it come from? For the enemies of Jes' Grew carriers, also known as the Atonists, the question is this: how can Jes' Grew be stopped? For if everyone catches Jes' Grew, it could be "the end of Civilization as we know it."¹² Near the end of the novel, PaPa LaBas is about to explain the origins of Jes' Grew, in true 1940s detective fashion. Rather than beginning his explanation from a few months earlier, in the 1920s, he traces the "crime scene" to ancient Egypt: "Well if you must know, it all began 1000s of years ago in Egypt, according to a high up member in the Haitian aristocracy."

The next two chapters, interestingly both labeled Chapter 52, (161-191) proceed to explain the origins of the conflicts between the followers of Osiris (who later become people like PaPa LaBas and the Mu'tafikah) and the followers of Set (who later become Atonists, leading to the its "military arm," the Wallflower Order¹⁴). Throughout these two chapters, Reed's pendulum chronology is at work, drawing on references from John Milton¹⁵ to Sigmund Freud¹⁶ to parallel phenomena from different pasts. In the middle of this section, PaPa LaBas explains the origins of the Atonist, monotheistic, single-minded church. As LaBas describes it, the Egyptian god Set begins to create a religion of his own, moving away from the Egyptian pantheistic tradition:

If you can understand Los Angeles you can almost get the picture; imagine 2 or 3 Los Angeleses and you got Heliopolis. The legislators lay around in the Sun all day and developed a strange Body Building scene on the beach. Set decided that he would introduce a religion based upon his relationship to the Sun, and since he was a god then the Sun would also be a god. Of course this was nothing new because the Egyptians had wor-

shipped the 'heat, light, orbs, and rays' had worshiped the Sun in a pantheistic manner. With Set, the Sun's flaming disc eclipsed the rest of its parts.¹⁷

Throughout history, the followers of Osiris and Isis follow their multiply focused cosmology, the "heat, light, orb and rays." These followers maintain that their connection to multiple life forces like the loas; "feeding the loas," or honoring the many ancestral spirits, is essential to the Work of LaBas's Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral. Such connection sometimes leads to Jes' Grew outbreaks like the 1890s "flair-up"¹⁸ and the 1920s "flair-up" as the novel begins. The followers of Set, on the other hand, promote monotheistic cosmology and try to discourage all outbreaks of Jes' Grew. They worship only "the flaming disc" rather than "the rest of its parts." As Benoit Battraville, a leader in the Haitian aristocracy, explains, "There are many types of Atonists. Politically they can be 'Left,' 'Right,' 'Middle,' but they are all together on the sacredness of Western Civilization and its mission."¹⁹ By tracing the "crime scene" back to Set's individualistic act, rather than an egalitarian act, Reed's pendulum chronology tells us that coalition cannot be created based on one individual's needs and desires.

In an early interview Reed has said that his intention in reaching far back to ancient times was to be humorous. "You're supposed to laugh when the detective goes all the way back to Egypt and works up to himself in reconstructing the crime. When he finishes the summary, everybody's asleep."²⁰ Yet there is also a telling wisdom in this humor. PaPa LaBas's exposition changes from crime resolution to history lesson. Such a pedagogical strategy insists on the continuity of history, arguing that events have long genealogies. It also requires an exuberant willingness to ride the sweeps of pendulum chronology.

Moving still farther back in the novel, PaPa LaBas encounters the Sufi Abdul Hamid at a "Chitterling Switch," a party to raise money for anti-lynching legislation.²¹ Through the 1920s-situated Hamid, Reed uses necromancy, predicting the future by using the past. Hamid prophesies:

A new generation is coming on the scene. They will use terms like 'basic' and 'really' with telling emphasis. They will extend the letter and the meaning of the word

'bad.' They won't use your knowledge and they will call you 'sick' and 'way out' and that will be a sad day, but we must prepare for it. For on that day they will have abandoned the other world they came here with and will have become mundanists pragmatists and concretists. They will shout loudly about soul because they will have lost it. And their protests will be a shriek. A panic sound.²²

Here Reed is able to comment on his authorial "present," the artists involved with the Black Aesthetic.²³ Thus, as Abdul Hamid prophesies about the "future," this anachronism triggers a recognition about the 1960s/1970s. Here, through its pendulum chronology, the novel reworks common connotations of anachronism. Other critics²⁴ have suggested that these are two major strategies that Reed uses throughout *Mumbo Jumbo*: the novel's "juxtaposition" of the 1920s and the 1960 or the anachronistic references to the 1960s during a novel ostensibly set during the 1920s. The OED definition here is "the attribution of a custom, event, etc. to a period to which it does not belong." Yet "belonging" or "wrong" periods of time signify differently in the continuum of a pendulum chronology. Anachronisms are not "wrongly" placed but deliberately placed.

In this pendulum sweep, *Mumbo Jumbo* challenges its readers with its pedagogy, with the way it decides to teach (or not). It requires so much context: the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Power movement of the 1960s, a working knowledge of ancient Egyptian goddesses and gods. It will not present a glossary of terms and translations or guide to intertextual references. As literary critic Sami Ludwig argues, the novel will not even present quotation marks to guide precisely who's speaking: "he said, she said."²⁵ In order to learn *Mumbo Jumbo* we must remain vigilant detectives ourselves: constantly referring back to clues, constantly inferring who is speaking, constantly working in pendulum fashion. The most it will give us is a bibliography—a partial bibliography—so that we can do some detective work, ourselves. So if we do not respect the novel's theories, it may well remain "mumbo jumbo," in the Atonist sense. If we do respect the novel's theories, it can actually lend itself to the purpose of community/coalition building: part of what PaPa LaBas and his fol-

lowers call "The Work."

Moving still farther back in the novel, my final example of pendulum chronology in *Mumbo Jumbo* appears in Reed's portrayal of the multiracial coalition, the Mu'tafikah. The Mu'tafikah are a group of art-nappers; they remove artifacts from museums, or what they call "Art Detention Centers." Their mission is to return these artifacts to their original nations and cultural contexts. In a footnote, Reed calls the Mu'tafikah "the bohemians of 1920s Manhattan."²⁶ Chapter 23 focuses on the North American branch of the Mu'tafikah, which sets up shop in a building at the edge of Chinatown.²⁷ They are multiracial, including African Americans, Chicanos, Chinese Americans, and Whites, or, in keeping with late 1960s terminology, "Blacks, Reds, Yellows, and Whites."²⁸ Their leadership is collective; they rotate leaders monthly. In Chapter 23, we encounter a meeting of the Mu'tafikah, preparing for their next art-napping. A black Mu'tafikah, Herman Berbelang, reminds the Chinese American character, "Yellow Jack," of what led the Mu'tafikah to create their coalition:

You remember in that Art History class at City College. The pact that we made that day...that we would return the plundered art to Africa, South America and China, the ritual accessories which had been stolen so that we could see the gods return and the spirits aroused. How we wanted to conjure a spiritual hurricane which would lift the debris of 2,000 years from its roots and fling it about.²⁹

The fact that the Mu'tafikah met in an Art History class is significant: this meeting signifies on the interconnection of art and political action. Their meeting at a community college, an education designed specifically "for the people," indicates the grassroots activist component of their coalition. Moreover, the Mu'tafikah wants to play with chronology. They want to summon a "hurricane" that involves thousands of years, and "fling" that chronology around. At work in this exchange is a collective, shared memory: "You remember," says Berbelang to Yellow Jack. Such a memory carries implications for the past and for the future. Though it appears that this coalition has an end goal, the Mu'tafikah also see their coalition work as having long-term con-

sequences over thousands of years.

This brings me to the most important aspect of pendulum chronology in *Mumbo Jumbo*: its implications for coalition. If “time is a pendulum,” pendulum chronology means that coalition must be rethought as long-term processes, rather than as short-term relationships with finite goals. “Coalition” often connotes an alliance for a common political cause, a safe space that minimizes differences among the diverse parties involved. Like the Mu’tafikah, coalitions come together because there is something urgent that demands collective labor. However, this very urgency often forecloses the development of longer working relationships. Coalitions are typically short-lived. In an interview with cultural critic Lisa Lowe, Angela Davis calls coalitions “ephemeral.”³⁰ Davis prefers not to think about women of color activism in terms of coalition because it is a place where different agendas must be negotiated and compromised. Following Bernice Reagon’s famous speech, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” I argue that these activities need not always be detrimental for different groups; such negotiation and compromise remain necessary for coalition work.³¹ A “coalition” in its original etymological sense is not a temporary, linear process that ends with a product; it is a continual process.³² Taking that intent seriously, then, I define coalition work as a place of creative and generative struggle, where differences are neither merely celebrated nor elided altogether, but worked through. Such an understanding comes from theories of coalition in women of color feminism, framed in anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back*³³ and, more recently, *This Bridge We Call Home*.³⁴ Rather than framing activism in terms of static “unity,” or “solidarity,” progressive thinkers must frame their work as Reed’s Mu’tafikah have, within the dynamic, dialectical process of coalition. We must hinge our understanding of pendulum chronology in *Mumbo Jumbo* with our understanding of coalition—partly because the novel portrays coalition (through the Mu’tafikah) and because it is a novel that should represent our conception of the lifespan of coalition.

The importance of the Mu’tafikah’s work having long-term consequences cannot be underestimated. If we take pendulum chronology as a theory, it must not only have implications for

Mumbo Jumbo; it must also have implications outside the novel. Reed's "pendulum" chronology and my application of that chronology raise several principles for progressive coalitions in the academy. Though the connection between chronology and coalition may seem tenuous at first, I suggest that Reed's novel insists on connecting "real world" politics and signifies on the history of ethnic studies coalitions through the Mu'tafikah. In the next section I offer three possible directives that pendulum chronology holds for American ethnic studies.

Pendulum Chronology and American Ethnic Studies

1. The first implication of pendulum chronology is that ethnic studies scholarship must look back to its own origins, drawing on these origins and gleaning lessons for the future.

As an example of looking "back and forth" in ethnic studies, I connect *Mumbo Jumbo* to the historical events of the late 1960s. Doing so means reading the recuperative work of the Mu'tafikah coalition as signifying on the work of the cultural nationalist "third world coalitions." As I indicated earlier, the novel asks us to pay close attention to the context of its own production.³⁵ Thus we can read *Mumbo Jumbo* as an allegory for early ethnic studies on the West Coast; Reed completed the novel two years after the famous 1969 "Third World" strike at San Francisco State University, where students demanded the institutionalization of ethnic studies. Through Herman Berbelang, Reed describes another early imperative of institutionalized ethnic studies. "We vowed. We began to see that the Art instructor was speaking as if he didn't know we were in the room. We felt as if we were in church, stupid, dull sculpture being blown up to be religious objects."³⁶ Reading Berbelang's statement in context of American ethnic studies, then, we see a frustration that still brings students to ethnic studies classrooms. One of the important drives of late 1960s multiculturalism was to give students of color a sense of themselves as agents in mainstream history.³⁷ Berbelang's frustration also points out the resistance to exoticization that also drives much of ethnic studies. That is, ethnic studies aimed to change the subject of "social studies" from an invisibly white subject to racialized ethnic subjects.

The multicultural composition of the Mu'tafikah in Reed's

novel also recalls the multiracial group of “third world activists” in the 1960s. In Reed’s own publishing career, we see a commitment to multiracial coalitions in places like Reed’s own journal, the *Yardbird Reader*, which published a special Asian American issue in 1972. Another is the placement of two pictures: one of a 1920s African American wedding; the other, of Reed himself and other writers of color, including Asian American writer Shawn Wong. We also see a longterm commitment to coalition in Reed’s collaboratively operated Before Columbus Foundation, a non-profit organization devoted to publishing multicultural works, both by white authors and authors of color. One of the photographs in the novel, in fact, portrays the original Board of Directors of the Before Columbus Foundation, most of whom remain on the Board today.³⁸ Such multiracial coalitions helped to generate some of the central work of ethnic studies: the recuperation of forgotten or marginalized histories. This attention to recuperation is one of the debts that American ethnic studies owes the cultural nationalists such as Reed. It is a debt that remains important to remember; though cultural nationalists are currently dismissed as proponents of “identity politics,” they also campaigned strongly for recuperative work. The recuperative work of ethnic studies is not finished—and in fact, this recuperative function is part of what enlivens and invigorates ethnic studies scholarship: the possibilities of rediscovering what has been forgotten.

2. The second implication of pendulum chronology for American ethnic literary studies is a holistic view of texts and scholarship, taking both “success” and “error” into account.

As I have argued, pendulum chronology operates on a Fanonian dialectic, refusing a Hegelian end to the synthesis of thesis and antithesis. Taking the Mu’tafikah chapter of *Mumbo Jumbo* as a case study will illustrate what I mean here. If there is a mistake that the Mu’tafikah chapter makes, it is in its gender dynamics, exemplified in the Mu’tafikah coalition. The Mu’tafikah chapter focuses on the “actions” and dialogue of the Mu’tafikah’s male membership, but there is a brief mention of the “women Mu’tafikah.”³⁹ The “mistake” that I refer to here is that adding “women” as an adjective here is sexist, akin to a “lady doctor.” Thus it is easy to forget that the Mu’tafikah was com-

prised of women as well as men. Such a “mistake” perhaps reflects the limited roles and choices that women of color often faced in cultural nationalist and feminist movements,⁴⁰ and remarks on how these women were often asked to choose between their race and their gender. By examining one of the novel’s “errors,” I employ a postpositivist realist conception of “error.” This U.S.-based coalition of scholars in minority studies argue for reexamining the relationships between “personal experience, social meanings, and cultural identity”⁴¹—in academic debates. Briefly, they posit a form of knowledge-making that allows epistemologies of cultural identities to change, “based on new or relevant information.”⁴² As a result of this pedagogical process, literature can be both based in the context of its historical production and as theory open for revision and interpretation. Postpositivist realist theorists also place value on the room for error in intellectual inquiry. As philosopher Caroline Hau maintains,

Taking error seriously implies that when we reposition the issue of error and mystification within the framework of theory-mediated knowledge, we necessarily shift the debate about the status of error away from a consideration of error *per se*...to a consideration of the uses of error Being wrong even in the most important way does not mean that one’s judgment cannot in other cases be relatively reliable in referring to facts about the world.⁴³

For Hau teaching and learning from others involves careful dissection of their worldviews, rather absolute dismissal of a problematic epistemology—in short, the pedagogical uses of error cannot be underestimated. Insisting on the usefulness of error means that error can generate constructive action rather than invite attack. Using error also generates the possibility for literary criticism that need not be destructively antagonistic. We might see this as mistaken, but we carefully ask how it might be mistaken, leaving our own hermeneutics open for revision in the process. In short, though *Mumbo Jumbo* might be “wrong” in its representation of the Mu’tafikah’s gender dynamics (and even this statement must be subject to careful scrutiny), this error does not mean that *Mumbo Jumbo* might not be reliable in other

cases, such as Western civilization's struggle to maintain hegemony.

Pendulum chronology relies on both "failure" and "success," allowing for more balanced readings of American ethnic literatures. Thus it is only appropriate to move to the "success" of the Mu'tafikah chapter, focusing on its success in portraying coalition. Perhaps surprisingly, the Mu'tafikah, like other "third world coalitions" of the 1960s, is not a coalition based on identity politics. Though contemporary critics often accuse multiculturalism of slavish fidelity to a politics based on identity,⁴⁴ the Mu'tafikah is instead, in George Lipsitz's famous words, "an identity based on politics."⁴⁵ The European branch of the Mu'tafikah includes (but is not limited to) white members. It includes women as well as men, white members as well as students of color, and crosses national boundaries. As literary critic Reginald Martin points out, "The Atonist order does not simply war against non-whites and non-Christians. It is equally intolerant of whites who will not follow the Atonist path. . . . Thor Wintergreen, a white member of the Mu'tafikah. . . . is killed by another white [because he] was audacious enough to side with those of different ethnic backgrounds."⁴⁶ For my purposes here, Reed's portrayal of coalition implies that multicultural coalitions have not always been, and are not always currently, based on essentialist identity politics. Anti-racist work here is not only for people of color.

It is also notable that the Mu'tafikah are what might now be called a transnational coalition—though during the late 1960s this would have been called "third world." In *Mumbo Jumbo* there are at least four branches of the Mu'tafikah: African, European, North American and South American.⁴⁷ Such a transnational connection suggests a debt that current transnational thought owes to the "third world" movement of the 1960s. That is, earlier transnational strains of the "third world" movement should be acknowledged before we discount the "third world movement" as cultural nationalists. Among critics on the Left, it is now fashionable to critique multiculturalism, without engaging the variety of practices within multiculturalism.⁴⁸

Perhaps most importantly the composition and politics of Reed's multicultural Mu'tafikah suggests that there are and have

been varieties of multiculturalism. The Mu'tafikah is multiracial; it is a coalition of identity based on politics, and it is transnational. Rather than portraying coalition as a "we all get along" space, *Mumbo Jumbo* also pays attention to the difficulties of coalition politics, as exemplified by Fuentes, Yellow Jack, and Berbelang's fight later in the chapter. If this multicultural coalition contains elements that progressive thinkers now value, it is a variety of multiculturalism that should not be so easily dismissed now. To put it another way, I argue that blanket critiques of multiculturalism do not always serve anti-racist projects, and agree with American studies scholars such as George Lipsitz⁴⁹ and Paula Moya⁵⁰ who argue that such dismissals are premature. Even though sympathetic critics (such as the contributors to the important anthology *Mapping Multiculturalism* [1996]) offer important and incisive critiques of multiculturalism, I must respectfully offer a poststructuralist critique of the anthology's title. The editors of this anthology, by titling it *Mapping Multiculturalism*, posit multiculturalism as one concept and one movement, rather than presenting multiculturalism as a series of movements and practices. Yet in addition to novelists like Reed, progressive scholars such as David Palumbo-Liu have offered us other varieties of multiculturalism; Palumbo-Liu's introduction to *The Ethnic Canon* offers us a "critical multiculturalism," "[one that] explores the fissures, tensions, and sometimes contradictory demands of multiple cultures, rather than (only) celebrating the plurality of cultures by passing through them appreciatively."⁵¹ Though it remains to be seen if ethnic studies can accept the challenge of a critical multiculturalism, I contend that such a step is necessary before discounting multicultural discourses altogether. Going further, I would like to suggest that not all work that calls itself "multicultural" insists on such a separation of cultures. As *Mumbo Jumbo* also illustrates, there have been and are varieties of multiculturalism that perform this kind of work, difficult and fraught as it may be.

As one way to accept Palumbo-Liu's challenge, I offer the strategy of reading and teaching of American ethnic literatures as "dynamically multiracial."⁵² I borrow this term from Ronald Takaki, who presciently coined it in the preface to his multiracial study *Iron Cages* (1976):

Like many other scholars, I had parceled out white attitudes toward different racial groups almost as if there were no important similarities as well as differences in the ways whites imaged and treated them. Yet I knew that the reality of white America's experience was dynamically multiracial.⁵³

Takaki is referring to the dangerous tunnel vision of ethnic studies scholarship: the tendency to remain within one racialized cubicle of study. Here I expand the scope of Takaki's term: it is not solely white America's experience that is "dynamically multiracial," but all of America's experience. Takaki's explorations of "similarities as well as differences" indirectly provides useful groundwork for cultural historian Vijay Prashad's later interracial study, *Everybody was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (2001). In Prashad's important study, he rejects the term "multiculturalism" in favor of historian Robin Kelley's "polyculturalism."⁵⁴ Central to Prashad's critique of multiculturalism is the fixed and separate nature of cultures inherent in multicultural paradigms. Yet Prashad's own *Preface* echoes, perhaps unconsciously, Takaki's mission/mandate: "The task of the historian is not to carve out the lineages but to make sense of how people live culturally dynamic lives."⁵⁵ What is remarkable about both historians' studies is their dynamic sense of multiracial imbrication. Reading Takaki and Prashad together, as I have done briefly here, offers one model of dialectic scholarship based on pendulum chronology. Looking back to past scholarship and ahead to current scholarship, I am able to suggest directions for future scholarship.

Like Takaki and Prashad, I argue that we should teach racialization interracially: that is, teach race as interdependently and multidirectionally formed, which varies over time. In short, ethnic studies scholarship such as recent studies of African/Asian connections is moving towards a comparative model; this move to the comparative has its roots in earlier "multicultural" scholarship,⁵⁶ emphasizing that the pendulum can also swing between histories of racialized minorities. Reading *Mumbo Jumbo* in terms of pendulum chronology reminds us of the intertwined histories of Whites and people of color; it is not relevant solely for African American studies, but American studies and

American ethnic studies as well. By broadening the relevant scope of *Mumbo Jumbo*, I do not intend to suggest that the novel should not be studied within the context of African American studies. Rather, I suggest that the novel's sections on the Mu'tafikah might be taught as part of an Asian American studies course, for example. This is one way that we might read various racializations (including Blackness, Whiteness, Asian-ness, for example) and their imbrications.⁵⁷

3. Pendulum chronology includes the travel of literature. Scholars of American ethnic literature must remember that without action, there is no pendulum.

Literature travels between what is and what might be, and in that traversal it sometimes makes mistakes, giving us time and space to realize that we make mistakes. A pendulum does not and should not rest because, as Reed's novel points up, "What goes around will come around." Thus scholars of American ethnic studies must talk to each other and to others who do identity-based work in the academy, such as scholars in women/gender studies. Under an anti-affirmative action White House administration, it is abundantly clear to progressive thinkers that multiracial coalitions matter, or, as George Lipsitz puts it, "interethnic anti-racism" matters.⁵⁸ During this administration's "War on Terror," the term "coalition" has come to signify a group of nations at war. "Coalition" also has deep significance for progressive grassroots organizations. Literature theorizes multiracial coalition by describing it, representing it, but also by taking fictional license and signifying on what multiracial coalition might be. As an example, though much of the current scholarship on Afro-Asian connections is historical, scholars seeking coalition must marshal all the resources possible in order to do coalition work.

"Part of the racial problem today," Lipsitz argues, "is a knowledge problem."⁵⁹ Some of this urgent coalition work can and must take place in the classroom. Scholars of American ethnic studies must look multidirectionally, using not only past models of coalition but theorizing future models of coalition. As Reed's novel shows us, we must look backward and forward to understand how coalitions have worked and can work, understanding that we need not reinvent the wheel of coalition work

every time the need for coalition arises. We must use as many lenses for coalition as we can: using not only historical but literary models of coalition. As books like *Mumbo Jumbo* and historians like Gary Okhiro propose,⁶⁰ multiracial coalitions have existed, and probably for longer than we know. If, as *Mumbo Jumbo* contends, “Time is a pendulum” and “Not a river,” those who work in the coalitions of American ethnic studies must be aware of the pendulum-like motions such as politics, rather than a unidirectional motion. The danger for us, as for the pendulum, is inaction.

The political pendulum insists that we need broader ways to think about and to work in multiracial coalitions. Scholars of American ethnic studies must, in Jacqui Alexander’s words, “become fluent in each other’s stories.”⁶¹

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NOTES

¹ Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Scribner, 1972), 218, original italics.

² *Ibid.*, 218. For an extended reading of the italicized final lines, see Shadle (26). While Shadle emphasizes the screenplay aspect of these lines, I take them as another aspect of the novel’s play with chronology.

³ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴ Theodore O. Mason. “Performance, History, and Myth: The Problem of Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 34, no.1 (1988): 100

⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “‘the Blackness of Blackness’: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey.” In *Studies in Black American Literature*, ed. Joe Weislmann et al. (Greenwood, FL: Penkevill), 1984, 163, orig. italics.

⁶ Ishmael Reed, interview by [NAME], in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, eds. Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh, (Jackson: University of

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

Mississippi Press, 1995), 60.

⁷ For an extended typology of *Mumbo Jumbo* as detective novel, see Gates' treatment (161-64).

⁸ *Jes' Grew* is named after Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Topsy. Topsy is, of course, an enslaved Black orphan who does not know who her parents are; when asked about her origins, she replies that she "jes'-grew." With this intertextual reference, Reed moves us back to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), in keeping with the novel's multiple chronologies.

⁹ Reed, *Mumbo*, 5.

¹⁰ I take this concept from Lou Turner's article. Through Turner's account, my understanding of a Fanonian dialectic, as opposed to a Hegelian dialectic, is that a Fanonian dialectic is constantly open for revision; it does not rest with a final synthesis.

¹¹ Arna Bontemps, "Introduction." *Black Thunder* (New York: Beacon Press, 1968), vii.

¹² Reed, *Mumbo*, 4. For the Atonist doctor, Civilization "as we know it" can only be Western civilization.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁰ Reed, Ishmael Reed interview, 15-16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²² *Ibid.*, 39.

²³ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "nitty gritty" made its first appearance in print around 1963.

²⁴ Gates characterizes this narrative mode as "discontinuous and frag-

mentary" (169).

²⁵ Sami Ludwig, "Ishmael Reed's Inductive Narratology of Detection," *African American Review* 32, no.3 (1998): 435.

²⁶ Reed, *Mumbo*, 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

³⁰ Angela Davis, interview with Lisa Lowe. "Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA. In *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997: 316.

³¹ Berenice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics; Turning the Century." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith. Latham, NY: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.

³² According to the *Oxford Dictionary of American English*, the Latin root of the verb "coalesce" is *coalescere*, which means "to grow together."

³³ Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*. Latham, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981.

³⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds. *This Bridge We Call Home*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

³⁵ Reed submitted *Mumbo Jumbo* to the publisher on January 31, 1971 (Interview 62).

³⁶ Reed, *Mumbo*, 89.

³⁷ Director Spike Lee highlights this frustration in *Do the Right Thing* (1989). "Why are there no [Black] brothers on the wall?" an African American character, Mookie, asks the white neighborhood pizzeria owner." The issue here is about representation in Pizza Man's cosmology: not a simplistic matter of token inclusion, but recognition that noteworthy American figures exist outside of White America.

³⁸ Shawn Wong, personal communication with author, Seattle, Washington, 5 May 2003.

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

³⁹ Reed, *Mumbo*, 82.

⁴⁰ See Aída Hurtado's study for more discussion of women's roles in the Chicano and Black Power movements. By characterizing the cultural nationalist movements in this fashion, I do not mean to discount the efforts of women who were able to play important roles in these movements, such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Angela Davis.

⁴¹ Paula Moya. "Introduction." *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000: 30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³ Caroline Hau. "On Representing Others: Intellectuals, Pedagogy, and the Uses of Error." In Moya and Hames-Garcia 160.

⁴⁴ For an excellent summary of other leftist critiques of multiculturalism, see Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield's introduction to *Mapping Multiculturalism*. I do not mean to discount this anthology completely; it takes the implications of multiculturalism seriously, weighing both its advantages as well as its disadvantages.

⁴⁵ George Lipsitz "to tell the Truth and Not Get Trapped: Why Interethnic Antiracism Matters Now." In *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, eds. Kandace Chuh and Karen Shimakawa, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001: 296.

⁴⁶ Reginald Martin. "Hoodoo as Literary Method: Ishmael Reed's 'True Afro-American Aesthetic.'" In *Ishmael Reed and the New Black Aesthetic Critics*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988: 87.

⁴⁷ Reed, *Mumbo*, 84.

⁴⁸ See, for example, E. San Juan, Jr.'s recent study *Racism and Cultural Studies*.

⁴⁹ Lipsitz 308-9.

⁵⁰ Moya, *Learning*, 130

⁵¹ David Palumbo-Liu. "Introduction." In *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995: 5.

⁵² Grace Hong's groundbreaking essay on transracial solidarity in Hisaye Yamamoto's short stories is a good example of such a reading.

⁵³ Ronald Takaki. *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in the 19th Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Reprint with new epilogue: vi.

⁵⁴ Vijay Prashad. *Everybody was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001: xi-xii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xii.

See Johnella Butler's model of "American ethnic studies as matrix" in *Color Line to Borderlands* as a potential model which echoes my emphasis on comparative work.

⁵⁶ In my introductory course on Asian American literature, I have devoted a unit to African American characters in two novels: Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1997) and Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995).

⁵⁷ Lipsitz, 296. Following this imperative, scholars in Asian American Studies, for example, have turned to a multiracially comparative Asian American Studies. Several historians are tracing genealogies of Afro-Asian coalitions. A few examples include Gary Okihiro's *Margins and Mainstreams*; Vijay Prashad's *Everybody Was Kung-fu Fighting*; Moon-ho Jung's forthcoming work on coolie labor and slave labor in the American South and Caribbean; and the *Journal of Asian American Studies*, which recently published a special issue last year on African American/Asian American cross-identification.

⁵⁹ Lipsitz, 308.

⁶⁰ See Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, Chapter 2, "Is Yellow Black or White?"

⁶¹ Lowe, 317.

**Breaking the Rules:
Innovation and Narrative Strategies in
Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango
Street* and Ana Castillo's
*The Mixquiahuala Letters***

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Conventional approaches to literary genres conspicuously imply definition and classification. From the very beginning of our incursions into the literary world we learn to identify and differentiate a poem from a play, a short story from a novel. As readers we classify each written work into one of these neatly defined literary genres by following basic guidelines. Either we classify according to the structure of the work (stanza; stage direction/dialogue; narrative) or the length (short story; novelette; novel). What happens though when a reader encounters a work of considerable length made up of individual short pieces or vignettes that include rhythm and rhyme and is framed by an underlying, unifying story line linking the vignettes together? Is it a novel or a collection of short stories? Why does it sound and, at times, look like a poem? To further complicate classifications, what happens when a reader comes across an epistolary format with instructions on which letters to read first: letters made up of one-word lines, poetic stanzas, or italicized stream of consciousness; letters that narrate the history of two women's friendship? Is this a novel or a mere collection of letters?

To encounter these two formats is to do away with conventional classifications and divisions but not to do away with the work. To come across these unconventional formats is to accept the challenge set forth by two contemporary Chicana writers, Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo, whose works defy literary classifications. The juxtaposed and overlapping literary modes found in *The House on Mango Street* and *The Mixquiahuala Letters* enable both writers to come to terms with their identity as Mexican American women straddling two countries and two cultures. By incorporating Hispanic dialect, impressionistic metaphor, social commentary, as well as by addressing such issues as poverty, cultural suppression, and gender roles, Cisneros and Castillo reveal the fears and doubts unique to their experience as Chicanas and their relationship to their community. Through writing Cisneros and Castillo also communicate the possibility of overcoming obstacles brought about by stereotypical images of women and the inevitable clash between Mexican and American cultures. The fragmented, non-linear, unconventional structure of their work provides a means for expressing and reconciling their multi-faceted life experience.

From its first publication in 1983 by Arte Publico Press, Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* posed a problem for critics and their reviews. Gary Soto described the work as "poetic prose . . . but foremost a story telling" (144). Penelope Mesic saw it as "vignettes of autobiographical fiction written in a loose and deliberately simple style, halfway between a prose poem and the awkwardness of semiliteracy" (281). Cisneros herself pointed out in an interview that she "wanted to write a collection which could be read at any random point without having any knowledge of what came before or after. Or that could be read as a series to tell one big story. I wanted stories like poems, compact and lyrical and ending with reverberation" (77). Cisneros creates the voice of the adolescent Esperanza Cordero as a poetic persona and ponders the sense of confusion brought about by growing up with Mexican customs and traditions in American society.

Three main issues preoccupy Esperanza as the narrator from whose perspective the events of the story unfold: her identity, her surroundings, and her emotional release through writing. Early

in the work Esperanza expresses her discontent with her name in defining her identity:

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She looked out the window all her life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window. (11)

With the story of Esperanza's naming Cisneros points to one of the essential cultural traits associated with women in the Mexican community: the encoded lesson of enduring submissiveness passed down from one generation to another. Esperanza describes her great-grandmother as "a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry" yet who was forcibly carried away by her great-grandfather "like a fancy chandelier" (10). While remembering her great-grandmother's sadness, Esperanza is able to deconstruct the encoded lesson related to her name and revise its content. Though she would have liked to have known her great-grandmother, Esperanza does not "want to inherit her place by the window" (11). Consequently Esperanza searches for an identity outside of the confines of a dominant patriarchy that only offers her "sadness" and "waiting." The section titled "My Name" ends with her desire to adopt a new name in an attempt to change her own destiny and move away from the constraints inherent in the Spanish meaning of Esperanza:

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Zeze the X will do. (11)

Her desire to baptize herself under a different name reflects her resistance to cultural imposition and the suppression of female self-identity. This rebellious attitude characterizes Esperanza's increasingly assertive and non-conformist stance throughout the work.

Another key element of concern for Esperanza is the space she inhabits. Though she longs for a room of her own and a house she can be proud of, Esperanza's family constantly moves from one dilapidated neighborhood to another. Even when the

father finally buys a house, it is far from the one “Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket” (4). Esperanza often links the houses she has lived in with a sense of degradation as if the tight steps, crumbling bricks, and small windows were emblematic of her impoverished condition. Bonnie TuSmith accurately points out the situation:

The house on Mango Street can be seen as an ‘ethnic sign’ that can easily close off the future for the young protagonist If she accepts it as her lot in life, then she is conforming to the dominant culture’s definition of who she is. Her refusal to accept this house as home, however, indicates that she has the capacity to look beyond her present conditions and continue to dream (161).

Esperanza’s dreams and illusion of a real home come forth in one of the most poetically evocative sections of the work in which Cisneros combines rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, and similes to reflect Esperanza’s yearning for her own space:

A house of my own. Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a daddy’s. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem. (108)

Unable to adapt to the harsh environment that surrounds her, Esperanza also dreams of leaving Mango Street behind, of escaping the neighborhood’s limiting powers. Esperanza’s critical eye notices all too well the fate of the women who decide to stay within the confines of Mango Street. They either choose marriage over education (Sally), become abandoned mothers with a house full of children (Rosa Vargas), feel out of place and grieve over memories of a previous home (Mamacita), remain locked in an apartment by a jealous husband (Rafaela), or end up as victims of repeated domestic violence (Minerva). Yet it is precisely through women that Esperanza begins to understand and come to terms with her role within her community. One of the enigmatic Three Sisters, who appears almost at the end of the work, reminds Esperanza of her mission:

When you leave you must remember to come back for

the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are. You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. You will remember? She asked as if she was telling me. (105)

At this point, the English meaning of Esperanza's name reveals itself: she symbolizes hope. As a Chicana who rejects the stereotypical roles of submission, suffering, and victimization, Esperanza represents the possibility of change and hope for a different future; nevertheless she does not totally reject her culture or her heritage. Jean Wyatt points out that "viewed from the perspective of the collection as a whole, the stories can be seen as parts of a dialectical process of negotiating with cultural icons that are both inalienable parts of oneself and limitations of one's potential as a woman" (266). Esperanza internalizes the Three Sisters' message and will return, time and again, through her own storytelling and writing, to Mango Street. She combines her own story with the stories of the other women on Mango Street. Esperanza's storytelling takes on characteristics of a communal narrative in which each component/story is essential to the other. Esperanza can easily become Marin, Mamacita, Sally, or Rafaela. Her determination to follow a different route, akin to Alicia's goal of attaining an education, prevents her from falling into a recurrent pattern of disenfranchised and suffering women. The Three Sisters' message, in a way, becomes a metaphor for the artist/writer's responsibility to his/her community. Even if Esperanza leaves Mango Street behind, the people whom she met and the experiences shared with them will always form a part of her memory and of who she is. It is this memory of past experience that infuses her writing.

Emotional release through writing becomes, consequently, the unifying force behind the narrative. In the last section of the work Cisneros places Esperanza within a circular framework by ending where she begins: telling a story. Yet Esperanza also puts stories "down on paper" (110) which reminds the reader of Aunt Lupe's prophetic words: "You must remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free. And I said yes" (61).

Esperanza echoes Aunt Lupe's advice in the work's final section and she also reveals how seriously she has taken the Three Sisters' advice:

I write it down and Mango says good-bye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free One day I will say good-bye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. They [friends and neighbors] will not know that I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out. (110)

Esperanza transcends her social condition through writing yet what she writes about reinforces her solidarity with her people, especially the women, of Mango Street. TuSmith remarks, "While *Mango Street* does not endorse certain culturally sanctioned patterns of behavior—namely, those that are restrictive and abusive to women—its orientation and message are clearly communal" (167). Consequently Esperanza can reject stereotypical roles imposed on women by patriarchy yet at the same time feel solidarity with the women caught in such restrictive roles. Lodging this realization in a young Chicana's seemingly naïve perceptions allows Cisneros as author to expose and critique the cultural, social, and economic subordination of confined and abused women. With a collection of vignettes characterized by their poetic and lyrical quality, Sandra Cisneros manages to create a distinctive narrative discourse that empowers the female protagonist to define what she thinks is best for her instead of what her culture dictates. In this sense the unconventional structure fits the unorthodox account of a young Chicana's coming of age story. The work also captures the dialectic between self/writer and community. Esperanza finds her literary voice through her own cultural awareness and experience with other Chicanas. The self-empowerment she seeks through writing coalesces with her commitment to community and with her promise to pass that power on to other women.

Similar to Cisneros's work, unconventional narrative structure is also evident from the very first address to the reader in Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*. Before the initial letter, Castillo declares:

It is the author's duty to alert the reader that this is not

a book to be read in the usual sequence. All letters are numbered to aid in any one of the author's proposed options.

Castillo's instructions give way to three possible readings: for the conformist (29 letters), for the cynic (32 letters), and for the Quixotic (34 letters). As a whole the work only contains forty letters. Some letters repeat themselves in two or the three categories while other letters are left out from any of the three categories. Through the device of letters exchanged over a ten-year period between Teresa, a California poet, and Alicia, a New York artist, Castillo explores the changing roles of women in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. Castillo also reveals the negative reactions many conservative Hispanic and Anglo American men felt toward female liberation during this era. Patricia De La Fuente describes the novel as "a provocative examination of the relationship between the sexes; a far ranging social and cultural expose" (63). Norma Alarçon, on the other hand, sees the novel as "Castillo's experimentations with shifting pronouns and appropriative techniques for the purpose of exploring the romantic/erotic" and suggests that the female narrator "is betrayed by a cultural fabric that presses its images of her upon her" (64). Culture, heritage, gender roles, and a reaction to stereotypical images are once again in conflict in Castillo's work as they are in Cisneros' writing.

The three primary concerns discussed in Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (identity, surroundings, and writing) can also be traced in Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, yet, unlike the adolescent Esperanza Cordero, the narrator/letter writer, Teresa, is a thirty-year old Chicana who has had her share of experience in both the Mexican and North American cultural contexts. In Letter One Teresa comments:

At thirty, i [sic] feel like I [sic] am beginning a new phase in life: adulthood. The twenties were a mere continuation of adolescence. But as grown-up life begins, society wants to make one believe that thirty is the beginning of the end. (21)

Though she is much older than Esperanza, Teresa is still struggling with unresolved issues she carries from her past. Alicia, the narratee and receiver of the letters, is an important part of this

past since she has shared pivotal moments in Teresa's life. Teresa's continuous search for identity, for a response to clarify hidden doubts concerning her female self and sense of worth, also becomes Alicia's search from the very moment they meet in Mexico City. Hector Torres comments that "the Letters subvert the patriarchal desire to dominate identity, to keep it linear, uni-dimensional, bound to a logocentric address. In this view the Letters become a space in which Teresa and Alicia share an always never simple identity, in opposition to patriarchal discourse" (129). Since Teresa and Alicia move in and out of two countries and two cultures, they search for a sense of identity that can capture both their realities as Mexican-American and Anglo-Spanish, yet at times their identity is determined for them by others based on the fact that they are two women traveling alone in Mexico without a male escort. This dilemma appears from the very first letter and reappears in Letter Eighteen and Letter Nineteen. When Teresa and Alicia return to Mexico after a five-year absence, the same circumstances await them as they travel through the country. In Letter Nineteen Teresa comments:

. . . we have abruptly appeared in Mexico as two snags in its pattern. Society could do no more than snip at us. How revolting we were, susceptible to ridicule, abuse, disrespect. We would have hoped for respect as human beings, but the only respect granted a woman is that which a gentleman bestows upon the lady. Clearly, we were no ladies. What was our greatest transgression? We traveled alone. (65-66)

(The assumption here is that neither served as a legitimate companion for the other). Along with this assumption comes a host of other preconceived ideas that relate to gender roles and female sexuality. Men, in particular, see them as free and willing targets of their (the men's) own sexual desires. This is certainly the case with the prosperous Veracruz businessman, Ahmad, who invites them to visit his mansion (Letter Eighteen, Letter Twenty-One, Letter Twenty-Two). Even the open-minded Sergio Zamora, Teresa's suitor, is eventually overpowered by his ingrained chauvinism, consequently leading to their broken engagement.

In spite of the reception and treatment, Teresa and Alicia

remain bonded and confront each obstacle encountered in their path. Teresa refers to Alicia as “my sister, companion, my friend” and regards their relationship as an “allegiance in good faith passion bound by uterine comprehension. In sisterhood. In solidarity. A strong embrace. Always. We were not to be separated” (24). Critic Erlinda Gonzalez-Berry sees the close relationship between Teresa and Alicia in psychoanalytic terms and proposes the argument that “Alicia is Teresa’s double, the split occurring on her first trip to Mexico. Alicia would thus represent Teresa’s ‘Anglo’ self, a self that often emerges when we come in contact with Mexicans and realize that they view us as ‘pochos’” (123). Yet neither the Mexicans nor the Americans treat the women kindly. Each society presents its own set of problems that the women must eventually confront. This leaves them with an unresolved sense of identity despite their strong and independent characters. Their discontent also surfaces as a product of failed relationships with men and their emotional depression and frustration.

There is only one place depicted in the novel where both women find a peaceful and alluring atmosphere. This place becomes the sole reason why they return to Mexico after a five-year absence. During their enrollment at a North American institution in Mexico City that turns out to be “a notch above fraudulent status” (24), Teresa and Alicia spend a weekend visit in Mixquiahuala, “a Pre-Conquest village of obscurity, neglectful of progress, electricity notwithstanding” (25). In Letter Three Teresa describes that, amidst Toltec ruins and monolithic statues, a rugged hike took them to the edge of a muddy river where they saw the native inhabitants:

There, native women washed, beat clothes against polished stones; Indian [sic] children with streaks of blond in their hair bathed and splashed carefree. At the arch of the crude bridge, a rustic cross tied with the vines of trees, marked abrupt death. (26)

The simplicity and carefree nature of this environment immediately contrasts with the crowded and aggressive ambiance of Mexico City. Castillo juxtaposes the description of Mixquiahuala with the illusion that Teresa is part of the foliage. The site relates to in Teresa’s words “the exotic tinge of yellow and red in my

complexion, the hint of an accent in my baroque speech, and most of all, the indiscernible origin of my being" (26). An interesting aspect of the Mixquiahuala description is the absence of male figures that seems to suggest that this peaceful, idyllic environment can only exist outside the confines of patriarchal structures. This would justify, in part, its appeal to Teresa and Alicia who conserve the memories of the place intact long after having been there.

The name Mixquiahuala never appears again in any other letter; nonetheless it appears as the novel's title. Consequently there is an intricate relation between the name and the process of writing. The question of narrative strategy comes to mind when reviewing this relationship. Raymund Paredes addresses the issue as he comments that "the letters that constitute the novel are written by Teresa to her friend and traveling companion but often rehearse the physical facts of the women's experience together. What is not clear is why anyone would write such elaborate letters simply to retell, without analysis, what the recipient already knows" (Torres 128). Yet the process of letter writing involves much more than just a simple retelling. First of all, the writing establishes a connection between the two women who are separated by physical distance but who will not allow this distance to weaken or obliterate their friendship. Letter Thirty-One and Letter Thirty-Seven, among others, are examples of how they keep their communication going despite the fact that they have not seen each other in a long period of time. Since Teresa is the poet, the writer, it makes sense for the letters to come from her. Another important aspect of the letter writing is that, through the process of reminiscing and recreating pivotal moments of self-awareness and self-growth shared by the two women, Teresa experiences an emotional release through writing similar to Esperanza Cordero's story telling/writing. Teresa comes to terms with many issues that have hitherto stunted her growth (insecurity, weakness, dependence, disillusion, indecision). Although she does not claim to have resolved every issue, she at least transcends them. By the end of the novel (and the letter-writing process), Teresa emerges as a different person, one much more in control of her life and her mental/emotional state. The fact that Alicia functions as narratee to Teresa's letters binds

the women even more in a relationship of mutual love and understanding.

The question, then, is not why anyone would write such elaborate letters but why the writer would call them the Mixquiahuala letters. Mixquiahuala takes on a symbolic significance. Out of all the locations mentioned in the novel, Mixquiahuala is the only place where Teresa and Alicia find a lifestyle in communion with nature, a serene environment, noble for its simplicity. In this sense the surroundings represent for the women moments of shared freedom from disturbing thoughts or emotions, even moments of pleasure as they later recall Teresa's ruined tennis shoes, muddy slacks, and slip down the riverbank. Mixquiahuala, in Torres' analysis, embodies "everything that is worth saving in their relationship. . . , the core of their experience together, what has allowed them to be allies" (137). Mixquiahuala, then, represents a special place for Teresa and Alicia, evoked through their memories and effectively alluded to in the novel's title.

At the authorial level Castillo deliberately strays from conventional narrative techniques in the framing of these letters. She experiments and plays with beginnings, endings, line spaces, paragraph structures, capitalization, and often includes verse as part of her narrative. The letters are at times anecdotal. Yet at other times the writing sways into the territory of stream of consciousness (usually italicized) depicting a mental rather than physical state. Irony, sarcasm, and humor blend with pathos, suffering, and anger to express the bittersweet quality of a bicultural experience. Similar to Cisneros' work, Castillo's novel also depicts a coming of age story, not so much in the terms of young adolescence to adulthood but more in terms of adulthood incorporating self-recognition, maturity, and acceptance.

Scott Russell Sanders points out that one of the primary reasons we enjoy stories is "because they are a playground for language, an arena for exercising this extraordinary power" which reminds us of "the ambiguous potency in words, for creating or destroying, for binding or setting free" (54). This assertion implicitly describes Cisneros' and Castillo's major accomplishment. Both writers experiment with language and narrative techniques until they come across a mode of writing that better

reflects their experience as contemporary bicultural, bilingual Chicanas; an experience that is far from conventional and refuses to be encased within orthodox narrative forms. Through their depictions of social environments, their search for identity, and their emotional release through writing, Cisneros and Castillo align themselves with other Chicana writers in their attempt to give voice to their struggles as well as their strengths. As readers we must accept the challenge set forth by writers such as Cisneros and Castillo. We can then join Hector Torres in concluding that “this calls for a vast redefinition of what it means to be an American and calls into question the narrow boundaries that confine the American literary canon” (143).

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The Politics of Faith in the Work of Lorna Dee Cervantes, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros

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If Chicanas are perceived as a communal threat because they are closer to the carnal, according to the Church, they paradoxically are worshipped as the female divine within indigenous practices like Yoruba or Mexica as well. In the works of Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and Lorna Dee Cervantes women's religious commitment is revealed through their possible responses to cultural multiplicity: 1) the rejection of one tradition over another, 2) syncretism, or 3) the continual migration between practices despite contradictory impulses. Using irony to address the tension and seeming impossibility of maintaining distinct traditions simultaneously, these writers intimate how women derive strength and a stronger sense of self primarily by moving between traditions.

Used as a term to identify a population, Chicano/a embodies a multiplicity of cultures—Indian, Anglo, Mexican, Spanish—and the history associated with them. For some Mexicans born in the United States, Chicano/a is a preferred term because, unlike the terms Mexican American, Hispanic, or Latino/a, it includes cultural plurality and a sense of the strife and struggles

marked by the social and political upheaval of the 1960s, the history of which reaches back to 1848 when the Treaty of Guadalupe shifted the U.S./Mexican border further south. Although little in their daily lives immediately changed, the border shift opened the way for a unique community of American citizens whose language, heritage, beliefs, and practices drew from multiple cultural communities. In some cases the points of contact meant wholly new entities, as in the case of language, where new dialects arose like Pachuco Spanish or Spanglish, or in the case of religion, where multiple practices and beliefs gave rise to traditions like the Day of the Dead or the cult of the Virgin Mary, both of which combine indigenous and Catholic practices.

In the case of the latter religion continues to be a contested point of contact for the Chicanos/as, and recent critical attention has focused on more widely known traditions like the cult of the Virgin and its affects on communities in Mexico and the U.S. But how can Catholicism, which has been identified as a colonizing force by the Spanish Conquistadors, absorb traditions and practices that reflect radically different perspectives about forms of worship and men and women? As Bettina Aptheker notes, for example, at the heart of colonization is a "belief in the superiority of men; in the superiority of male judgment and authority; and in the absolute priority given to achieving male approval and validation" (135-36). This perspective is juxtaposed to many indigenous traditions and rituals, such as Mexica or Yoruban, that derived guidance from goddess worship or the belief that spirits of the dead are accessible on earth.

Of primary importance in the present discussion is how the supplanting of religious practices and beliefs meant particular changes for women, their roles, and their perceived roles. How do women fare, for example, when confronted by traditions and practices that alternately worship and denigrate them? According to Gloria Anzaldúa, women especially suffer under the Church because it insists that women are "carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine" (17), which means that they must be protected by the Church and by men; however, this protection is more often translated as subservience when women are expected to conform to rigid gender roles (17). If women risk their salvation simply by being women, then they especially must com-

mit themselves to the values of their culture, including those of the Church. Thus the situation for Chicanas in light of the tensions between different cultural practices has serious implications for their daily lives in terms of their freedom, strength, and power as women. My concerns are with how these tensions are attended to in the poetry of three writers who identify themselves as Chicana: Lorna Dee Cervantes, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros. In these writers' works women's religious commitment is revealed through their possible responses to cultural multiplicity: 1) the rejection of one tradition or practice over another, 2) syncretism, which combines or blends the practices of one or more traditions, and 3) the continual migration between practices despite contradictory impulses and situations. Little discussion has occurred on the last point that concerns not only a migration between practices and traditions but between cultures.¹ These writers intimate how women derive strength and a stronger sense of self when they move between traditions rather than considering them separate or melded. At the same time irony does not escape these writers as a tool to address the sheer tension and seeming impossibility of maintaining such distinct traditions simultaneously.

In the work of Cisneros the notion of faith is more often a primary subject in her fiction though her poetry offers a concise engagement with the notion of faith as tied to characters' sense of self as women. Cisneros uses irony especially to reveal that she does not accept Catholic doctrine that relegates the body to the carnal and animal, thus to the base and vile. In her poetry faith is aligned not only with the body but with sexuality specifically. Sexuality, love, and intimacy are discussed in the language of faith in terms that are both ecstatic and blasphemous. Cisneros' poem, "Christ You Delight Me," includes a direct address to Christ that also plays on a blasphemous colloquial expression that might be directed to anyone. In this poem, the cultural migration that occurs is between traditions of faith that use the body as a site of both worship and denial. The religious terminology is used to describe the sexual body: "Christ you delight me, / Woolen scent of your sex, / ...Blessed resurrection of thigh" (25). The language is on one hand blasphemous in a Catholic context, and yet it has been adopted to worship the

body in a literal sense. There is more than the enjoyment of sexuality at work here, as the return of the body to its place as sacred, particularly as it is connected to the earth and to traditions where the earth, another body, is also sacred and something to be worshipped. At the end of the poem the narrator squats over the earth, her "little pendulum...Ringing, ringing, ringing" (25). Like the tolling of a bell that signals gathering parishioners, the narrator's bell is her sex, inviting and tolling the earth's body. The reclamation of the body as both earthly and sacred is extraordinary considering that Catholicism itself has been marked historically by an abnegation of the body, particularly its pleasures. Yet in "Christ You Delight Me" Cisneros not only invokes the body of Christ in a playful manner, exploding the traditional emphasis on his physical suffering, but she also invokes his name as slang, questioning the religious authority that fails to recognize the sex and sexuality of women.

In Cisneros' "Something Like Rivers Ran" a couple's physical intimacy turns them into not one but many religious figures to de-legitimize the authority of a single practice of faith and thus of a singular view of sex and sexuality. The couple's sexual union culminates in their emerging from multiple traditions: "and we were Buddha / and we were Jesus / and we were Allah / at once / a Ganges absolving / language woman man" (20). While the scenario might suggest that through sexuality the narrator becomes God, this is not the case; their union maintains the sacredness of the various religious and spiritual traditions and removes the language that separates them both physically and spiritually, maintaining the truth and sacredness of each tradition and thus of each person. Each tradition is separate and fraught with language that distinguishes and separates it from others, but beneath both is a sense of the sacred, an awe for what is above, beyond, and outside of the body. The running of the rivers, particularly one that is holy, dissolves the differences that separate one body from another while at the same time recognizing them one by one. The sexual act may be considered sacred or adulterated, depending on any given context, but Cisneros removes that dichotomy to insist on the inherent sacredness of the body and sexuality in a context of faith.

"Love Poem for a Non-Believer" through its title directly

connects notions of love to faith using the absence of faith to do so. This absence has a direct set of consequences in terms of how the two characters engage their bodies. Outside of any context of faith their relationship is one that verges on violence. The poetry rejects metaphor and symbol, using language that is direct and straightforward, with the narrator articulating in specific terms what her lover enjoys about her body and thus what she touches now that he is absent. She imagines his hands over hers, but soon recognizes what he might be capable of: “My neck is thin / You could cup / it with one hand / Yank the life from me / if you wanted” (29). The absence of faith in any cultural sense leaves the intimacy between them open to the possibility of violence; the narrator is somehow more vulnerable because of his lack of faith. She is at his mercy because there are no guiding force or moral underpinnings from which she can assume either his motivations or behavior when he physically lays his hands on her. No specific system is named, but the abstract sense of a “non-believer” indicates less that a particular system is warranted than that some system is required in this situation; by the end of the poem the couple cannot hear the “prayer call / of a Mohammed” because they have no word for it but religion. Religion is understood as an abstract construct, a system they know formally but not in body or soul, which removes it from any sense of the sacred or the physical. The sounds, like the words and traditions and practices they stand for, are empty.

While critics articulate the movement between religious traditions as syncretic or ambiguous, as do Gloria Anzaldúa and Carmen Aguinaco, for example, the above portrayals of faith as tied to the body seem anything but entirely syncretic or ambiguous. The Chicana or mestiza’s experience is certainly multi-layered but these layers seem to me to function more like an onion, each layer whole and necessary even if not directly visible. In her essay, “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess,” Cisneros returns the Virgin to her original incarnation before the conquest, the Nahuatl deity, Tonantzin, to articulate her desire and her capacity for reproduction as it reflects women’s perspectives and not those of the church. Thus Cisneros reincarnates the body and sexuality into the sacred without diminishing the individual contexts where women or the sacred appear. Depending on the

poetic context, Cisneros' work migrates between traditions and practices that leaves each whole but allows her to engage and also to interrogate each.

Though akin to Cisneros' work, which identifies the feminine with the sacred, Castillo is in some ways more direct about the specific traditions of faith that her poems engage and how. The loss of indigenous traditions is one of the primary focal points of her work and in her poem, "Ixtacihuatl Died in Vain," the author names the site and articulates reasons for the loss keeping a tradition alive through her very words. In the poem the women are connected to what is deemed folklore and mythology, while the men are more closely associated with the sacred and the blessedness associated with traditional Catholicism. Women, she asserts, are Ixtacihuatl, the "sleeping, snowcapped volcanoes / buried alive in myths / princesses with the name of a warrior / on our lips" (39). The story she refers to is about the twin volcanoes in Mexico, who were once warrior and princess but who die together in a Romeo and Juliet fashion (41). When the male volcano speaks, he accuses his bride of loving too vastly and wide and denies that she was his bride at the wedding where their mothers and fathers were not invited. He identifies the fathers here as "the fourteen / stations of the cross" (39). The stations of the cross indicate uninvited wedding guests but men specifically who are partially responsible for the death of Ixtacihuatl in the same way that they might have been responsible for the death of Christ. As if to sacrifice her son in the religious tradition of the fathers, Ixtacihuatl offers up her son's "palpitating heart" so that his father might replenish himself (39). Ixtacihuatl forgives him for the act, and in the end when she says, "the tremor of a lie" is in even the "greatest truths" (41), she suggests that the traditions of faith work under both truth and lies, and that, as a result, both life and death result. Ixtacihuatl's death is marked, for example, "in the book of myths / sum of our existence" (40), as if to say that one faith is now simply considered a myth by some in favor of another faith marked by stations, rigidity, and held in place by the station of men, that might one day also be considered myth. Ixtacihuatl wants to place the myths and legends beside other traditions, not supplanting one with another and perhaps suggesting that all myths are based on

a truth. She wants both recognized for what they espouse, for good and ill. If only the supplanting of tradition occurs, death is inevitable, not only of tradition in general but of the existence and subsistence of a cultural past, particularly women's.

While there is on one hand a faith in Catholicism there is simultaneously a sense of loss in Castillo's poetry based on cultural context, but it is not a loss of a tradition per se. In "Guadalupe" the narrator addresses the Virgin in Spanish like a friend, and in fact the poem is dedicated to Lupe Gárnica at the end, which invokes both the Virgin as sacred figure and Guadalupe as friend in flesh and blood. In the poem the narrator insists that Guadalupe will fail her despite being she whose "vela que nunca se apaga / ...poderosa y llena [whose candle is never extinguished...powerful and full]" (53).² If Guadalupe fails her, the source of that failure seems to be her new cultural context in the New York City streets where her figure's esteem as a sacred icon is diminished; she walks the streets followed by a line of cats, dogs, and children (53). The narrator says that she does not call Guadalupe "Mamá," this woman who is no saint, but that ultimately "cuando llamen / tu nombre: yo responderé [when they call / your name: I will respond]" (53). The narrator will be the one to recognize the Virgin so far from their homeland, so far from "el otro lado / de la luna [the other side of the moon]" (53), even if others see her as any woman in a crowd. The survival both of self and tradition in "Guadalupe" is dependent in part on the context in which she appears and what is needed by the faithful in that context, but the survival of Guadalupe as a woman and icon, and the spiritual guidance she represents is not.

In "In My Country" the narrator refers to the homeland that she is far from and asserts that in her original country, "there is no god / crucified to explain / the persistence of cruelty" (88), though ironically, one of the ways Catholicism became so entrenched in the community was through an allegiance to Christ based on suffering as a shared experience from which there was relief only through faith. At the same time the country to which the narrator refers is one that appears to combine the best of all worlds and condemn the worst; in fact, the country in which there is no need for a Christ like the one named is the

same one in which the traditions that do survive are those based in love, charity, and celebration. In an assertion of ancient practices, the narrator explains: "In my world, Mesoamerica / was a magnificent Quetzal, / Africa and its inhabitants / were left alone. Arab women / don't cover their faces or / allow their sexual parts to be / torn out. In my world, / no one is prey" (90). The world is both imagined and real in that it represents real possibilities. Here is not only the plight of Mexicans but also of any who suffer cultural and religious conquest or persecution. At the end the narrator, in speaking all languages, speaks all traditions, particularly those that do not ground either the body or its experiences in suffering. Only in a Christian context is there relief from suffering through death alone, though her point is not to denigrate the worst aspects of traditions of faith solely but to disparage the persecution of people in all its guises.

Castillo's work urges a larger conversation concerning religion and its effects on daily life and the wider net needed to encompass multiple traditions. At the same time Castillo is concerned with reclaiming women's sexuality in positive and self-affirming ways, both as related to issues of faith and in its own right. Her poetry and critical work attest to her concerns about the ways, for example, that Catholicism teaches women to be ashamed of their bodies and their sexuality because of women's "relation to Evil Eve" (Massacre 122). Indeed, the sexual woman is the "woman begging rape, begging vulnerability to society, begging to be treated as nothing more than as what she was born: a female who merits no respect for her emotions, her mind, her person" (123). Castillo eschews any culture—Anglo, Arab, Mexican, or otherwise—that asks young women to deny their own sexuality if they are to avoid the "punitive taboos surrounding the female" (124). The solution is not to further deny by eschewing faith or religion in general but by claiming and reclaiming; only Chicanas themselves can begin to explore what this means for their "erotic selves" and what it means also to "remain true to the Mexican/Chicana/Latina/India/mestiza aspects of our sociopolitical identity" (141). Every woman must decide how to negotiate her sexual self and space, beginning with acceptance and understanding.

Choice in many of the poems we have been exploring is

often what multiplicity and plurality imply. Lorna Dee Cervantes' work is no exception, and in her poems in particular, the theme of migration that choice allows is a frequent controlling metaphor. "Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway" articulates the narrator's perceptions of faith as analogous to the traditions of women in her life, specifically her mother and grandmother, all three women representing differing spiritual traditions resulting from the connections each feels to a particular or to multiple culture(s). The narrator uses the language of fairy tales to narrate these traditions and indicate how her own traditions derive from these and from the added arena of the language of books connected directly to an American education that neither her mother nor her grandmother had. The narrator's mother is tied to the life of the freeway and to America and is identified as "the Swift Knight, Fearless Warrior" who "wanted to be Princess instead," and who hardens as a result primarily against the men with whom she has had a series of negative relationships (11). The mother's advice to her daughter is not to count on anyone, otherwise: "You'll get nothing but shit" (13). On the other hand, the grandmother is an "innocent Queen" who attempts to live by the old traditions in the new world of California and who remained "with a man who tried to kill her" (12). The grandmother "believes in myths and birds. / She trusts only what she builds / with her own hands" (12). Her innocence derives from her inability, or refusal, to live outside of old traditions, wherein she reads birds to tell the weather, seemingly blind to the freeway shadow that represents progress and America.

While the mother seems to have rejected the old to adapt to the new culture, relying on cynicism to make her way in the world, the grandmother clings to the old, relying on her faith in her hands, birds, and myths, seemingly oblivious to the fact that she is in a new world. Both the mother and grandmother adhere to traditions and beliefs that prove both useful and damaging. They make their way in the world, but for the mother, the cost is her being alone and, for the grandmother, the cost was a continual threat to her life by her husband because it was tradition to remain married. The narrator, caught between what her mother and grandmother represent, turns to books, becoming the family "Scribe: Translator of Foreign Mail, / interpreting letters from the

government, notices / of dissolved marriages and Welfare stipulations. / I paid the bills, did light man-work, fixed faucets, / insured everything / against all leaks" (11). By insuring against leaks, the narrator does what is traditionally a man's work in the home, though she neither rejects men entirely nor assumes that she is not whole without a husband; rather, she adopts her mother's faith in herself and her grandmother's faith in something larger than herself, something outside of male/female relations. As scribe the narrator has the added benefit of being able to (re)write her definitions of self and inhabit the role of creator and storyteller in which she is the central character.

One of the most important relationships for the narrator in Cervantes' collection is not solely with a mother or grandmother but with a near mythic character she calls Caribou Girl. In the lengthy poem of the same name, the narrator is in awe of this girl to whom crows speak and send poems, who speaks "her own mythology, her own sanity" (21). Caribou Girl is perceived by unnamed others in the world as "too strange" but also as beautiful, in part because she is the one who seems able to inhabit the space of cultural plurality safely and comfortably. Not only does she communicate with crows, she relies on the language and tradition of the Plains tribes by asserting that the "Wankan Tanka is nothing / but the mockingbird" (21).³ She then invokes two Aztec and one Native American god-figure: "Quetzalcoátle, Ometeótl, the Great Manitou" (22); the first two gods derive from Aztec civilizations, also called Mexica, and refer to the Precious-Feather Snake and the god of duality (time and space, female and male, spirit and material), respectively.⁴ Caribou Girl's successful metaphoric flight through life is in part because everything and all traditions for her are sacred. In the suggestion that the Wakan Tanka is the mockingbird, for example, Caribou Girl recognizes that a translation occurs between cultures that apply separate names to similar god-figures. What is called the Wakan Tanka or Quetzalcoátle in one culture might be called the mockingbird or the Great Manitou in another. The figures are not equivalents but rather translations of distinct figures with shared features that Caribou Girl can call on as she sees fit, as she needs to. Caribou Girl recognizes the strength to be derived from multiplicity and learns "the serenity / of a mockingbird, the justice /

of a crow, blue jay's strength; / I've dipped their feathers in blood / to seal the pact—my path" (22). She belongs to all traditions as they belong to her.

Caribou Girl's path is to walk the fine line between cultural traditions, just as the narrator does earlier in the poem, and thereby recognize multiple versions of faith that are not as radically different as they may appear on the surface though they are distinct. However comfortable Caribou Girl is as cultural translator, the narrator perceives this position as possible through "little tricks of the sane . . . the balance of hooves / and the wade through ice" because she has not yet defined her faith according to the multiple cultures within which she too participates (22), though she wants to. The use of irony to articulate faith returns, not in terms of the existence of contradictory practices but in their dangerous balance. While the narrator believes that the Caribou Girl "will drown" in her dizzying dance over water among divergent traditions, the poem's concluding image is ironically of the narrator drowning in Caribou Girl's world. The narrator says that she must "leave her [Caribou Girl] / for another breath / before I plunge / with her again" (23). The metaphorical plunge is not into water but into the world of Caribou Girl, which the narrator can visit but to which she does not belong. The narrator yet has to negotiate fully the slippery and seemingly "insane" terrain in which such divergent traditions might co-exist comfortably, but she is provided an example of how to successfully do this through Caribou Girl. In the same breath that she believes the terrain impossible, she finds herself inside of it.

The Caribou Girl represents multiple cultural traditions that are a threat to both the dominant culture and to the narrator, though for entirely different reasons. While Caribou Girl knows the books of the dominant culture, she represents a threat to it because she participates in religious traditions historically identified as pagan by Anglos and non-whites. That Caribou Girl might drown in a contemporary setting suggests that there might be little room for the kind of faith she practices in a world where boundaries are sharply drawn. The narrator also fears Caribou Girl because the narrator has not been able to do what Caribou Girl has done, which is to successfully negotiate multiple cultural traditions and use them as she sees fit. The narrator is well

aware of the contradictions between these traditions.

The narrator in Cervantes' collection is the same throughout, and her journey in the poems is one of negotiating her sense of self. As the narrator moves physically and metaphorically between north and south, between the United States and Mexico, she negotiates the cultural and spiritual traditions of each locale, often as it is passed down through the hands of women. The narrator gains greater wisdom and understanding regarding her role and connection to her culture and to the traditions espoused by her ancestors. More important, the characters around her, whether family or friends, provide examples of the options from which the narrator can choose, and by extension, readers are provided with just as many examples and options for how women occupy cultural roles and spaces.

Migrating between cultural traditions is no easy feat. The terrain is often uncertain and dangerous, as these poems indicate, but negotiation is both possible and useful. For women especially, at stake is not only cultural subjectivity but the embodied experiences of women who must negotiate the kinds of roles they can or will inhabit given the divergent expectations of their culture and their church. Syncretism is certainly one of the options and all three of these writers in some form or another intimate that practice in their work; clearly, the very notion of folk Catholicism as expressed or experienced by Mexican-Americans, Latinos, or Chicanos/as suggests how a tradition can absorb and adapt to include new ideas and practices and still remain a single tradition. But there is yet another option that these three authors offer that is especially relevant for women who are ironically both denigrated by certain religious ideology because of their perceived carnal nature and also celebrated for many of the same aspects. Cervantes, for example, points to this irony through the experience of menstruation that, in some cultures, signals women's power, and yet, "civilized society would call the blood that creates life a curse" (124). In accepting and embracing particular traditions, the emphasis is on the migration between as opposed to the casting off or diluting of one in favor of another; to denigrate syncretic practices works against the notion of choice and migration that is key to cultural and self-affirmation. Migration emphasizes movement that maintains life

as opposed to stasis. And as the ones to give life in the literal or the creative sense, women especially are in a position to reclaim without sacrificing self or other.

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NOTES

1 I am grateful to Juan Bruce-Novoa, whose work with Puerto Rican writer Judith Ortiz Cofer inspired my use of the term migration—as taking place between the mainland and the island—in this distinct context. See "Judith Ortiz Cofer's Rituals of Movement." *The Americas Review*. 19.3-4 (Winter 1991): 88-89.

2 All translations of this poem are my own.

3 See Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine*

Ethnic Studies Review Volume 26: 1

in American Indian Traditions. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. 61-2.

4 Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Christine Garcia's The Aguero Sisters and Julia Alvarez's How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents are novels that revolve around the conflicts and tensions among the members of the two immigrant families, the Aguero sisters from Cuba and the Garcia sisters from the Dominican Republic, arising mainly from their need to come to terms with their ambiguous identities. This article focuses on the ways in which the Aguero and Garcia sisters through their hybrid identities overcome boundaries and exclusive categories so as to challenge homogenizing, hegemonic systems, and open vistas into new, non-essentialist modes of identity that still can be represented in their specific configurations..* Santa Barbara: U of California P, 1995. 179-81.

**(Dis)Claiming Identity:
Christina García's *The Agüero Sisters*
and Julia Alvarez' *How the García Girls Lost
Their Accents***

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Christine Garcia's *The Agüero Sisters* and Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* are novels that revolve around the conflicts and tensions among the members of the two immigrant families, the Agüero sisters from Cuba and the Garcia sisters from the Dominican Republic, arising mainly from their need to come to terms with their ambiguous identities. This article focuses on the ways in which the Agüero and Garcia sisters through their hybrid identities overcome boundaries and exclusive categories so as to challenge homogenizing, hegemonic systems, and open vistas into new, non-essentialist modes of identity that still can be represented in their specific configurations.

How to make a case for identity without affirming essentializing categories has preoccupied the minds of scholars from a broad range of disciplines such as cultural, ethnic, and gender studies, especially after the upsurge of post-structuralism and theories of hybridity that constitute a strong link between post-colonial, post-modern, and post-feminist conceptions of identity.

Critics from this wide interdisciplinary pool have focused on how to resolve the tension between claims to authenticity or autonomy on the one hand and multiplicity or hybridity on the other as far as various frames of identity are concerned, particularly in the face of the long, multi-faceted history of oppression, colonization, and subordination. Dissolving identity in discourse in an attempt to undermine categories, despite its liberating aspects, has dismayed marginalized groups who had not yet found the opportunity to construct themselves as subjects nor to represent their specificities since they consistently had been defined in relation or in negativity to the subordinating groups.¹ Thus a major concern has been to find ways in which the pre-established hegemonic orders could be challenged without generating new modes of hegemony and hierarchy.

Attempting to overthrow the hegemonic power structure by using its very strategies of naturalizing or fixating identity only reverses the hierarchy. Audre Lorde writes, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (108). By the same token if the postmodernist project to dispense with categories and universalized conceptions of identity in favor of a fluid, hybrid, de-centered and de-essentialized identity is understood to have no room for autonomy or authenticity, therefore none for resistance, it may prove equally restrictive.² As Gerry Smith argues, "[T]he dissolution of border is far from unproblematic" and "hybridity is also hegemonically recuperable, easily absorbed by those with an interest in denying the validity of a coherent discourse of resistance" (43).

The dialogue between Néstor García Canclini, Raymundo Mier and Margarita Zires concerning the concept of "hybridity" as it pertains to cultural and national identity throws light on the controversial nature of this term. Canclini detects two different movements in Mier and Zires' interpretations of his notion of hybridity: that the hybrid is something indeterminate and constantly changing and that the hybrid becomes formalized during the process of hybridization.³ Canclini underscores that the hybrid is subject to constant de-territorialization and re-territorialization even in contemporary societies where the intensity of

cultural crossings have led to the collapse of paradigms and the difficulty of grasping meaning.⁴ He claims, "The hybrid is almost never something indeterminate because there are different historical forms of hybridization" (79).

The dialogue between the works of Simon During and Linda Hutcheon concerning the relationship between post-colonialism and post-modernism displays a similar pattern: During underlines the paradox of post-modernity that "refuses to turn the Other into the Same" thus providing a theoretical space for "otherness" which it actually denies but also recognizing that "the Other can never speak for itself as the Other" (125). During's thesis is "that the concept post-modernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity" (125). He remarks, "[P]ost-colonialism is regarded as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts or images" (125). In her "Circling the Downspout of Empire" Linda Hutcheon complicates During's definition of post-colonialism, noting that "the entire post-colonial project usually posits precisely the impossibility of that identity ever being 'uncontaminated'" (135). She contends that both the post-colonial and the post-modern resist any totalizing system or hegemonic force that presumes centrality by "granting value to (what the centre calls) the margin or the Other" and that both post-modernism and post-colonialism undertake a dialogue with history (133).

After modernism's ahistorical rejection of the burden of the past, post-modern art sought self-consciously (and often parodically) to reconstruct its relationship to what came before; similarly, after that imposition of an imperial culture and that truncated indigenous history which colonialism has meant to many nations, post-colonial literatures are also negotiating (often parodically) the one tyrannical weight of colonial history in conjunction with the revalued local past (131).

Hutcheon proposes irony and parody as powerful subversive tools which, in their capacity to represent doubled identities, can challenge the paradoxical move by colonialism to enforce cultural sameness while at the same time producing differentiations and discriminations (133).

The tension between authenticity and multiplicity with reference to identity also constitutes the focus of gender and feminist studies as reflected in the works of Teresa De Lauretis and Judith Butler.⁵ Linda Alcoff writes that in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* Teresa de Lauretis spells out the dilemma between a post-structuralist genderless subject that erases sexual difference from subjectivity and a cultural feminist essentialized subject" (109). Alcoff underlines that De Lauretis develops the beginnings of a new conception of dynamic, "positional" subjectivity that involves "the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality" and a "political, theoretical self-analyzing, reflexive practice". As such the subject can "alter discourse and be altered and reconstructed by it" (109-110). Alcoff highlights the importance of De Lauretis' work as follows:

Gender is not a point to start from in the sense of being a given thing but is, instead, a posit or construct, formalizable in a nonarbitrary way through a matrix of habits, practices, discourses. Further, it is an interpretation of our history within a particular discursive constellation, a history in which we are both subjects of and subjected to social construction (114).

Judith Butler's view of gender identity as "performing" with historical/cultural discourses so as to produce agency to subvert them constitutes another significant challenge to making essential and universal conceptions of gender, which, however, does not disregard or exclude gender specificity nor the possibility of resistance. As Robert M. Strozier points out, Butler holds that discourse is prior to and constitutes subjective identity but that discursively mandated performance produces agency from within itself through the periodic repetition of the received categories, the supposedly "original" or "natural" roles:

[G]ender as performance over time necessitates repetition; and repetition inevitably involves failure or slippage, which in turn creates a self-reflexive stance; the consequence is produced agency-by the same discursive regulations which produce gendered subjectivity (Strozier 88).

Strozier further remarks that according to Butler, "Agency and (the possibility of) resistance are not assumed as properties

of the pre-given subject; the subject constructed by discourse-postdiscursive-has produced in it the capacity/or positionality for resistance to the constituting discourse" (83). He describes Butler's argument in her *Gender Trouble* as "based on the belief that any a priori conception of the 'we' as essentializing notions of 'female' and 'woman' work to the detriment of 'feminist political theorizing'; they are an employment of 'the imperialist strategies' that feminism must eschew, and most important they operate as a constraint on 'the very subject' feminist theory hopes to represent and liberate" (82).⁶

The two novels to be explored here, Christina García's *The Agüero Sisters* and Julia Alvarez' *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, are concerned with the issues of origins, change, resistance, and identity construction. They open vistas to new conceptions of subjectivity that respond to the pressing issue of how to resolve the dichotomy between authenticity and multiplicity, representation and discursion, so as to engender the most liberated and egalitarian forms of identity. The notion of identity that emerges in both novels does not conceive of these above-mentioned categories as mutually exclusive but embraces both, thereby doing justice both to specificity and hybridity. It does not seek to separate but engage "self" and "other" in such a way that their interaction not only transforms both but also accentuates the specificities of each. As eminent examples of immigrant literature, *The Agüero Sisters* and *The García Girls* challenge both in form and content the pre-established categories, constantly reinscribing them but never erasing them or prioritizing one over the other.

The four García sisters, Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía, who are in their early thirties and late twenties, and the two Agüero sisters, Reina and Constancia, who are in their late forties and early fifties respectively have something very significant in common. The characters in both novels experience an almost traumatic separation and displacement, which expose them to completely different life styles than the ones they were used to and trigger a process of self-reflection along with their ongoing attempts to come to terms with their past and to accommodate it to the present.

Both the García and the Agüero sisters come from well-edu-

cated and wealthy Hispanic families, the descendants of the Conquistadors, who have continued the tradition of colonizers after the independence of their countries, the Dominican Republic and Cuba respectively. The García girls, as daughters of the prominent de la Torre family, live snugly and carefree in their mansion surrounded by large areas of land adjacent to those of their relatives, all of whom keep Haitian servants and chauffeurs. Father García de la Torre, a doctor, conducts research in collaboration with American doctors who later make arrangements for him and his family to flee the country and move to the United States due to the increasing threats from the dictator Trujillo. This marks a dramatic change in the lives of the Garcia sisters who now struggle to cope with the tension between their Dominican and American identities, the past and the present, and the conflicting impulses to conform and rebel. The novel may initially seem to delineate the girls' successive experiences of foreignness, "Americanization" and "Americanness" that parallel their painful separation from, their rejection of, and finally estrangement from their Caribbean origin, but in fact the gradual expansion of their cross-cultural experiences will increase the deeper-lying urge on the part of the girls to embrace and incorporate their past into their current identity. The fact that Yolanda, the third sister who also appears as the protagonist of the novel, decides to return to the island with the intention to stay longer, perhaps even for good this time, by itself indicates that the immigrant experience of the García girls cannot be considered in linear or exclusive terms.

Ignacio Agüero, the father of the Agüero sisters, is a well-known naturalist coming from a family of classical musicians and intellectuals. He takes frequent excursions to forests and swamps to explore rare species with his wife and colleague, Blanca. They lament the imminent extinction of various species as well as their already extinct ancestors due to the growing ecological imbalance in Cuba; therefore they preserve samples of rare species in the spacious Agüero household after shooting and stuffing them. When their daughter, Constanca, is five months old Blanca disappears for months and when she comes back she is pregnant by a black man, which is not explicitly stated in the novel but suggested by references to Reina's darker skin and her

Ögüt–(Dis)Claiming Identity

encounter with a black man by her mother's grave years later, who, as she hears from people there, visits Blanca's grave every day, only to disappear after that encounter. When Reina is born and receives all the attention from her mother, Constanca becomes frustrated and attempts to hurt the baby, whereupon her parents send her to her uncle's ranch where she lives until she emigrates to the US with her husband. The Agüero girls lose their parents when they are still very young. Ignacio shoots Blanca during an excursion to the Zapata Swamp, and "starts telling his lies" as he confesses in his letter to the girls who do not see it until the end of the novel, and he commits suicide two years after the event. Reina is devastated when her mother dies. She never believes his father's explanation of her death. Constanca, on the contrary, remains rather cold and indifferent. Reina refuses to leave the country before and after the Cuban Revolution despite all the hardships that it brings with it and insists on spending the rest of her life in the former Agüero household, in fact, in one of its rooms piled up with her parents' books and relics, since the house accommodates several other families after the Revolution. The two sisters remain separated for over three decades other than their occasional correspondence until Reina, after many years of unwavering dedication to her past, the study of her father's work, her endless rummaging among his books, papers, notes, stuffed bats and animal skins, leaves Cuba to visit her sister in Miami where Consancia tells her that Reina was not Papi's daughter, a secret that she intuitively expected to unravel. For the first time after many years of insomnia Reina can sleep uninterrupted through the night. Constanca herself returns to Cuba to bury her husband, Herberto, who went there to participate in a counter-revolutionary movement and to uncover the secrets of her family as they would be revealed in her father's letter and some items he had left with her uncle shortly before he died. For the first time Constanca finds solace in the Cuban landscape "where every origin shows. For the first time in her life, she's grateful it's a part of her past" (296).

Before going into an in-depth discussion of the García and Agüero sisters' unbroken, sometimes anxiety-laden, and sometimes reassuring and fulfilling relation to the past, and how it fuels their hybrid identity as well as their potential for resistance

in line with the theories described above, it is important to emphasize the way in which the narrative structure of both novels reflects the intimate and inextricable bond between the past and the present. The themes of exile and return, acceptance and resistance, and constant de-territorialization and re-territorialization of identity also find expression in the non-linear and polyphonic structure of both novels. The narrative in both novels involves a dialogic link between the past and the present, and the polyphony consists in the repetition of the narration of certain experiences from different perspectives, with varying emphases and nuances so as to render them ambivalent and call into question their original form in the history of numerous discourses.

The García Girls consists of three sections in reverse chronology, the first (1989-1972) including episodes from the girls' adult life in the United States, the second (1970-1960) covering their adolescence marked by a rather difficult process of their assimilation to American culture, and the third (1960-1956) relating their childhood memories in the Dominican Republic beginning with the time shortly before their immigration. Only the chapters in the third section that comprise their childhood years in the Dominican Republic are told in the first person indicating that the girls' identities have become so hybrid after their encounter and interaction with the foreign culture that the use of the first person remains exclusive in the face of the plurality of their selves. Even the fact that Yolanda considers returning permanently to the Dominican Republic almost thirty years after their immigration at the beginning of the novel, which is at the same time the end of the story, does not shift the narrative to the first person since she has been transformed irrevocably and since she will keep changing in her new interactions with the people on the island who in turn will undergo changes in their interactions with her. The use of the first person in the last section of the book is also ironic because it is particularly the events in the last section which the girls cannot remember with precision because they were too young then; therefore their accounts of the past are partly inventions. So is their first person subjectivity. There is only one chapter in the novel that is told by the Haitian maid, Chucha, who has served the de la Torre family for over three decades and

who can well imagine the way the girls will feel when they leave the island and how they will react to it. Chucha cannot help but associate the family's exile from their home with her own from Haiti and predicts, "They will be haunted by what they do and don't remember. But they have spirit in them. They will invent what they need to survive" (223). Chucha, "Haitian blue-black, not Dominican café-con-leche black" as Sofía describes her, whose family and relatives were executed by Trujillo's soldiers and who experienced severe racial discrimination in the Dominican Republic before she was employed as a maid by the de la Torre family, cannot help but fear for the girls now:

They are gone, left in cars that came for them, driven by pale Americans in white uniforms with gold braids on their soldiers and on their caps. Too pale to be living. The color of zombies, a nation of zombies. I worry about them, the girls, Doña Laura, moving among men the color of the living dead (221).

Chucha's emphasis on the skin color of the Americans not only expresses her worry that the girls will experience discrimination in the United States due to their race and ethnicity but also implies that the girls' distinct Dominican identity, their relation to their past, may gradually fade during the course of the assimilation process, whether it be overtly or covertly imposed by the Americans or desired by the girls themselves. Chucha who has always maintained her Haitian traditions and rituals despite her assimilation to the Dominican household and her subject position, also knows deep inside that the girls will never completely break their ties with their past. Indeed the reverse chronology of the novel emerges as an attempt to reconstruct the past although it also problematizes the notion of a recoverable past as well as an original, uncontaminated identity.

The Agüero sisters also are haunted by the past, by what they do and do not remember and what they do and do not want to remember. The major irony in the novel is that the memories that the protagonists would rather forget impress themselves with greater force upon them, and that the "truths" they would like to remember or find out escape them. As in *The García Girls*, the polyphonic structure of *The Agüero Sisters* and the abundance of irony emerge as strategies that challenge the traditional forms of

narrative and the closure of meaning. The novel consists of two alternating series of narrative, both abounding in flashbacks: one by an omniscient narrator who relates chapters from the lives of the two sisters and another by Ignacio Agüero, their father, who gives an account of his life, marriage, how he murdered his wife, and his suicidal thoughts. The chapters are preceded by a "Prologue" that describes the day when Ignacio killed his wife, yet reveals nothing about why he did that or whether or not it was an accident. The episodes that contain Ignacio Agüero's narrative are in fact parts of his letter to his daughters, which remain in their uncle's possession for over three decades until Uncle Dámaso decides to write to Constancia about it. As the novel draws to a close Constancia returns to Cuba after thirty years of separation to uncover the secrets of her family as they would be revealed in her father's letter. The novel ends with Ignacio Agüero's account of the incident at the Zapata Swamp, which was described in the "Prologue" yet remains rather ambivalent as to the reasons for his act and is far from unraveling the secrets surrounding the history of the Agüero family: What compelled Blanca to leave home? What was the nature of her relationship with the black man, Reina's real father, who had given Blanca bruises but visited her grave every day for years? Was it love or was it the same urge to know the "other," the "endangered," the "unknown" that was also the stimulus for her excursions into the woods? What was the black man's motive? Was it love? Was it rape? If so, was it revenge on the oppressor or an act on impulse? What was Ignacio's reason for killing Blanca? Was it jealousy? If so, was it because of her adultery or her intuitive relationship with nature, which made her a better scientist than himself? Or did he want to preserve her youth and beauty like the animal samples in his house? What caused Blanca's estrangement from Constancia and Ignacio's closeness to Reina although she was not his daughter? The answers to these questions are irretrievably lost to Reina and Constancia as well as to the reader.

Christina García's *The Agüero Sisters* and Julia Alvarez' *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* not only resist totalizing meanings by blurring the distinction between the past and the present, the beginning and the end, the real and the imagined/invented. They also suggest a new mode of hybrid

identity whose authenticity resides in its multiplicity. The characters in both novels attain and display the kind of subjectivity that De Lauretis, Hutcheon, and Butler proposed as multi-faceted and non-essentialized, yet possessing the capacity to resist dominant orders and to represent its specificities. In the two novels, identity emerges as “positional” in the sense De Lauretis uses it, as “performative” and “self-reflexive” in the sense Butler conceives of it, and as “doubled” by parody and irony in Hutcheon’s terms. As noted earlier, in order for all this to happen, the characters had to experience one or several displacements and exposure to different cultural, social, and political environments. In their attempts to accommodate themselves to changing situations and new cross-cultural frameworks, they discover and expand their capacity to resist and challenge all totalizing and/or hegemonic systems, including the ones their pre-exile situation involved.

The García girls’ earlier immigrant experiences are rather frustrating mainly because they had to leave their relatives and the conveniences of de la Torre household behind. For the first time they find themselves in a subordinate position, submitting to the demands of the foreign culture and the native citizens of the host country who regard them as different, exotic people. The discriminatory attitude of some of their neighbors and school-mates makes them feel displaced and peculiar and therefore nostalgic about their life back at home.

You can believe we sisters wailed and paled, whining to go home. We didn’t feel we had the best the United States had to offer. We had only second-hand stuff, rental houses in one redneck Catholic neighborhood after another, clothes at Round Robin.... Cooped up in those little suburban houses, the rules were as strict as for Island girls, but there was no island to make up the difference (107).

However, it does not take long for the girls to develop a taste for the American teenage life:

“Soon, Island was the hair-and-nails crowd, chaperones, and icky boys with all their macho strutting and unbuttoned shirts and hairy chests with gold chains and teensy gold crucifixes” (109).

During this period of time when they feel “more than adjusted” they became reluctant to spend the whole summer on the island although they “wouldn’t mind a couple of weeks.” They revolt against their parents’ overprotective attitude and obsessive attempts to maintain Dominican family values and traditions, which contradict their simultaneous encouragement for assimilation and Americanization on the premise that it’s “a free country.”

The idea of America as “a free country” is constantly parodied and emptied of its content; it is shown to be a myth perpetuated by the hegemony of both the parents and the empire. One of the most striking instances of the repeated suggestion of the “the free country” concerns Yolanda’s Teacher’s Day address that she is asked to deliver at the school assembly. The quotes in her first draft from Whitman’s poetry, “I celebrate myself and sing myself.” and “He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher,” infuriate her father whom she in turn accuses of being a dictator although he himself fought against and fled from dictatorship and men in uniforms. Yolanda has to revise the draft of her Teacher’s Day address. The audience applauds enthusiastically because the text stands out as a true homage to American patriotism. Yolanda’s experience is an instance of “the interrogation of the narrative of nation by the strategy of repetition and rehearsal through which the narrative is performed” and displays how the term “free” in the narrative of “the free country” is “repeated by the multiple and contending voices of the people with such differing inflection” in the narrative of migration and settlement (Stoneham 82). Geraldine Stoneham stresses Homi Bhabha’s notion of the Nation as “in a state of cultural liminality—of perpetual rehearsal—always radically alienated within It/Self” (82) referring to “a split between what Bhabha calls the authoritative pedagogical construction of the people as ‘historical object’ (the People as One)” and “the people as ‘subjects’ of a performative function, that is, ‘the living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process’”(82).⁷ Having to reproduce and perform the conventional narrative of freedom without the freedom to modify it, Yolanda learns that the rhetoric and truth of freedom, the idea

Ögut-(Dis)Claiming Identity

and the act are two different things, which testifies to Bhabha's notion of the nation as alienated within itself.

Another episode from Yolanda's life, in which the idea of "the free country" is parodied revolves around her relationship with her arrogant boyfriend, Rudy, who tries to convince Yolanda to sleep with him by reminding her that she lives in a free country and should rid herself of Dominican taboos. In fact all that Yolanda needs to be persuaded is deep feeling and sensitivity, which Rudy seems to lack. She thinks that Rudy is incapable of understanding her notion of love and her expectations from a relationship. Rudy's directness about sex, or "lovemaking" as Yolanda would prefer to call it, irritates her: "But the guy had no sense of connotation in bed. His vocabulary turned me off even as I was beginning to acknowledge my body's pleasure" (96). She is equally annoyed by the attitude of Rudy's parents who are always conscious of her foreignness and treat her "like a geography lesson for their son" (98). After her painful break-up with Rudy she says, "I saw what a cold, lonely life awaited me in this country. I would never find someone who would understand my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles" (99).

Yolanda's marriage with her "monolingual husband" Joe is also far from fulfilling and ends rather dramatically. She writes him a note, "I'm going to my folks till my head-slash-heart clear," revises it, "I'm needing some space, some time, until my head-slash-heart-slash-soul-" (78). She does not finish her sentence because she does not want to divide herself even more. Soon after this incident she becomes institutionalized, and there she receives the doctor's confirmation that "we constantly have to redefine the things that are important to us. It's okay not to know" (82). Owing to her "positional" identity Yolanda becomes an acclaimed "poet-slash-writer".

The fact that Yolanda achieves such great success as a poet in a language that is not her own indicates that she can transform the dominant culture. She has always been aware of the discriminatory attitude behind the extremely caring and condescending behavior of her teachers towards her who are in fact overly conscious of her difference/otherness and try to assist her in her assimilation process. The disconcerting effect on Yolanda

of this kind of attitude displays parallels with Wolfgang Welsch's discussion of the concept of multiculturalism, which presumes "the existence of clearly distinguished, in themselves homogeneous cultures" that must live together within one society. He holds that multiculturalism affirms the traditional conception of cultures as autonomous spheres, accepts and even furthers social barriers. "The concept seeks opportunities for tolerance and understanding, and for avoidance or handling of conflict" (196-197). At first Yolanda refrains from speaking in public because of her foreign accent in high school, but as her stories and compositions receive credit and are read out loud in her English classes she gains self-confidence. Although she initially feels rather self-conscious, like "an intruder upon the sanctuary of English majors,"(89) at college she starts co-authoring poems with the self-assured Rudy and finally establishes herself as an eminent poet/writer. Homi Bhabha's argument that hybridity "displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" finds expression in Yolanda's assessment of American culture and language.(8) Yolanda operates within "the hybrid space of cultural difference, an ambivalent encounter between the pedagogic and the performative within the language of nationalism itself. The rehearsal of the narrative of the identity of the US only serves to emphasize the split within the idea of the nation itself" (Stoneham 91). Yolanda's position displays "transculturality" which Wolfgang Welsch defines as "the cross-cultural development [that] will increasingly engender a cultural constitution which is beyond the traditional, supposedly monocultural design of cultures"(206). By overcoming social and cultural barriers and thereby demoting the monolithic conceptions of culture, Yolanda's poetry exemplifies transcultural interaction which Welsch describes as follows:

The concept of transculturality aims for a multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive, understanding of culture. It intends a culture and society whose pragmatic feats exist not in delimitation, but in the ability to link and undergo transition. In meeting with other life-forms there are always not only divergences but opportunities to link up, and these can be developed and extended so that a common life-form is fash-

ioned which includes even reserves which hadn't earlier seemed capable of being linked in (200-201).

The García girls' immigrant experience intensifies their transculturation process to which they have been subject since their birth although they do not take a self-reflective stand toward their hybrid identity when they are younger. They are descendants of European colonizers, Spanish conquistadors; Sandra, the third daughter, does not even look Hispanic with her "fine looks, blue eyes, peaches and ice cream skin" which she inherited from her Swedish great-grandmother. However they have been exposed to the indigenous culture of the island ever since they were born, owing to their interaction with the domestics who were natives of the island. The three eldest sisters, Carla, Yolanda, and Sandra, are alarmed by the way their youngest sister, Sofía (Fifi), looks after she spends a year on the island, but they do not realize that their description of Fifi's looks as being typical of a different category entails the deconstruction and hybridization of that very category itself:

Fifi--who used to wear her hair in her trademark, two Indian braids that she pinned up in the heat like an Austrian milkmaid. Fifi--who always made a point of not wearing makeup or fixing herself up. Now she looks like the after person in one of those before-after make-overs in magazines....She's turned into a S.A.P.... a Spanish-American princess (117-118).

Carla, the eldest sister, a psychoanalyst who analyzes people who suffer from maladaptation or lack of self-confidence, interprets Sofía's decision to stay on the island as "a borderline schizoid response to traumatic cultural displacement" (117). However where does she place displacement, in the US or the Dominican Republic: in Sofía's case, "the Spanish-American princess who used to wear her hair like an Austrian milkmaid"? The girls' assessment of their youngest sister's situation displays the absurdity of such generalizations, which, as is the case here, are bound to refute themselves.

The three sisters also are upset by Sofía's relationship with their Dominican cousin, Manuel Gustavo, whom they see as the embodiment of Dominican machismo and launch a "revolution" against his "tyranny." Sofía's relationship with Manuel reveals a

very significant aspect of Alvarez' novel: the deconstruction of male identity by the demonstration of the ways in which men are themselves oppressed by the patriarchal system and therefore resort to various forms of transgressions in collaboration with women who suffer from the same restrictions. This becomes evident in the case of Munding, another cousin, who, despite the role of the chaperone assigned to him by the family, participates in the little escapades of the girls and creates occasions for Sofía and Manuel to enjoy some private time. The girls comment on Munding's situation as follows: "For just as we, his American cousins, are threatened with island confinement, military school is what's in store for Munding should he step out of line" (129). Both girls and boys get around regulations and restrictions with each other's help. When Munding starts enumerating the taboos they can break Carla, Yolanda and Sandra, who call themselves "feminists" cheer in excitement. The three sisters' feminism displays close affinities with Gayatri Spivak's approach to feminism. Spivak stresses the necessity of resistance that consists in deconstructing the hegemonic system, but without affirming the supremacy of another category that is sought to replace it. She points out that the project of feminism to assert female identity and autonomy may result in the reversal of hierarchy rather than its dismissal and emerge as another form of institution:

As in all instituting. . . the subject of feminism is produced by the performative of a declaration of independence, which must state itself as already given, in a constative statement of women's identity and/or solidarity, natural, historical, social, psychological. When such solidarity is in the triumphalist mode, it must want 'to celebrate the female rather than deconstruct the male.' But what female is the subject of such a celebration, such a declaration of independence? If it entails an unacknowledged complicity with the very modes we refuse to deconstruct, a persistent critique may be in order (112-113).

The three girls' deconstruction of the patriarchal order without substituting it with another hegemonic system finds its most striking example in the way they subvert the chaperoning tradition in Dominican society and use it to separate Fifi from their

Ögüt–(Dis)Claiming Identity

cousin. The girls, their cousin Mundin, and his sister, Lucinda, chaperon Fifi and Manuel only to allow them some private time as opposed to what their parents intended; all of the girls in the group find an excuse to send Mundin home. He feels obliged to do that due to the requirements of male courtesy but is also reluctant to go because he is not supposed to leave the girls alone. When they all go back home together without Fifi and Manuel it raises havoc in the family which results in the couple's separation, thus the fulfillment of the three girls' purpose. After Sofía is pulled out of her consuming relationship with Manuel by her sisters' cunning plans, she takes to traveling and marries a young German whom she met in Peru. Thus Fifi's transculturation continues.

As the Garcia girls grow out of their teenage years and become more and more exposed to cultural diversity they start problematizing generalizations, stereotypes, and uniformity. Carla describes American boys:

the blond, snotty-nosed, freckled-faced boys who looked bland and unknowable, whose faces betrayed no sign of human warmth and whose pale bodies did not seem real but were like costumes they were wearing [and who will join] the vast indistinguishable group of American grownups" (156).

At the same time they reconcile with their ambiguous identities. Rather than trying to belong to either side of the threshold they cherish their existence on the boundaries, their embodiment of non-exclusive opposition, which in fact constitutes their freedom. As illustrated in the case of Yolanda, they transform society and become transformed at the same time. Yolanda's return to the Dominican Republic years later indicates that she is conscious of the power of her hybrid identity that can challenge any hegemonic system anywhere, be it at home, in America, or any other place.

Constancia's return to Cuba after three decades of separation and Reina's decision to leave Cuba for the first time in *The Agüero Sisters* can be explained similarly. Not much is revealed to the reader regarding Constancia's early years of her immigrant experience in the United States as in the case of the García girls. Her story starts with her last few months in New York City where

she and her husband lived for nearly three decades and established themselves as successful business people, Constanica selling her cosmetics in the major department stores of the city and Herberto selling cigars to her prominent customers in his store. After Herberto's retirement they move to Miami where Constanica's business prospers immensely due to the increasing demand from her customers from all over the country. Throughout the story Constanica appears as the successful, well-integrated Cuban-American woman who, however, is tormented by her childhood memories, particularly her abandonment by her mother whom she tries to erase from her mind.

Constanica's vain attempts to forget the memories of her past constitutes the major irony of the novel since those memories haunt her with ever increasing intensity. Whenever she looks at the mirror she is greatly disturbed by her resemblance to her mother. Even the plastic surgery she undergoes enhances the resemblance between her and Mama's face although she would rather see the opposite. On the other hand Constanica names all her perfumes and beauty products after Cuba, using ingredients that are native to Cuba. Furthermore she labels the cans and bottles which contain her products with Mama's picture. Her cosmetic business thrives on her ability to combine science and nature that involves both intuition and precise research, all of which were characteristic of her mother. She mixes, produces, and sells potions, emollients, and creams to protect the human body from the effects of old age, to renew youth and life just as her mother tried to preserve species. Ironically enough there is a very thin line between preserving youth and preserving the past from which she is trying to escape. Constanica's inner peace is restored after her acceptance of the fact that she both was and wasn't Mami's girl just as Reina feels relief after she hears that she both was and wasn't Papi's girl. In fact Reina has always cherished complexity.

What she enjoys most is the freedom from a finality of vision, of a definitive version of life's meaning. After all, it seemed futile to chase what was forever elusive, when reality remained so largely unexplored (12).

The complexity of history and reality also marks identity. In Cuba Constanica realizes "how close we are to forgetting every-

thing, how close we are to not existing at all" (288). The only way to preserve life consists in embracing the past and integrating it into the present. As a matter of fact, Constanca has always experienced the enriching effects of the past, but it is only toward the end of the novel, as her resemblance to her mother becomes more obvious and her sister who now learns English and enjoys her new relationships with men from different nationalities becomes part of her life again, that her self-reflective process begins. Her business has flourished due to her successful integration of Cuban and American identities. Her greatest mental support has always been her Santero Oscar Pinango, and she has taken inspiration from the radio program *La Hora de los Milagros*. This is how she manages to compete with American businesses in an American way. She launches big advertising campaigns for her products and promotes them in major department stores. Her products constitute a link between two different cultures, fostering cultural diversity in the sense Wolfgang Welsch uses it:

[Diversity], as traditionally provided in the form of single cultures, does indeed increasingly disappear. Instead, however, a new type of diversity takes shape: the diversity of different cultures and life-forms, each arising from transcultural permeations (203).

Welsch points to the interconnectedness and entanglement of cultures with each other and the emerging hybrid identities:

Wherever an individual is cast by differing cultural interests, the linking of such transcultural components with one another becomes a specific task in identity-forming. Work on one's identity is becoming more and more work on the integration of components of different cultural origin. And only the ability to cross over transculturally will guarantee us identity and competence in the long run (199).

The past and the present can only be appreciated and enjoyed in their interrelation and mutual exchange. Just like the García girls, The Agüero sisters become truly liberated only when they recognize and embrace their hybrid identity.

Christina García's *The Agüero Sisters* and Julia Alvarez' *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* are novels which provide

valuable insights into a new, non-essentialist conception of ethnic, cultural, and sexual identity, whose authenticity resides in its hybridity and the specific constellations of forces operating on it, be they social, political, cultural or emotional. The characters in the two novels develop their strengths from the very aspects of their identities that lead to their subordination – as women and/or immigrants for example– by various hegemonic systems that are effectual in different cultural environments that they inhabit. They challenge those hierarchical orders by deconstructing them through periodic repetition of their premises, and as such displaying their artificial character thus fostering self-reflexive processes in the members of society with whom they come into contact. This ultimately leads to the conception of identity as multi-faceted, dynamic, inclusive and inexhaustible rather than essential, exclusive and reducible.

NOTES

1 Discursive identity entails the post-structuralist or deconstructive notion of identity as socially constructed rather than being natural, original and pure. Feminism as a movement that was launched by white European women and evolved from essentialising to de-essentializing stages are now challenged and complemented by black feminists whose theories I would like to characterize as post-feminist theories here. The discursive notion of identity as posited by the poststructuralist or anti-essentialist line of “Western” feminists, particularly Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, themselves of mixed ethnic and cultural heritage, contributed much to the cause of marginalized cultures by dismantling hierarchical gender categories and displaying that they were by no means natural but construed and consolidated by dominant, totalizing discourses. Thus, they undermined universalizing attitudes to identity. The black feminists took the discourse on identity one step further emphasizing the need to recognize the differences among women and to deconstruct male identity to affirm specific identities of women, which have been flattened by totalizing discourses.

2 Linda Alcoff notes, “Applied to the concept of woman, the post-structuralist’s view results in what I shall call nominalism: the idea that the category “woman” is a fiction, [a non-identity] and that feminist efforts must be directed toward dismantling this fiction [...] [Women’s] resistance will not be at all effective if she continues to use the mechanism of logocentrism to redefine woman: she can be an effective resister only

Ögüt–(Dis)Claiming Identity

if she drifts and dodges all attempts to capture her [...] To assert an essential gender difference as cultural feminists do is to revoke this oppositional structure. The only way to break out of this structure, and in fact to subvert the structure itself, is to assert total difference, to be that which cannot be pinned down or subjugated within a dichotomous hierarchy. Paradoxically, it is to be what is not. Thus feminists cannot demarcate a definitive category of ‘woman’ without eliminating all possibility for the defeat of logocentrism and its oppressive power” (105).

3 Raymundo Mier’s assessment of Canclini’s definition of the hybrid in his *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar l salir de la modernidad* is as follows: “a frontier species, a happening, the sudden eruption of a morphology still without a well-established place in the taxonomies. The entrance of the hybrid to the taxonomy necessitates the abandonment of this category in favor of another, less drastic, one, which might be the variant, species, et cetera. The hybrid designates a liminality, a material whose existence exhibits the dual affirmation of a substance and its lack of identity, that which is in the interstices, which profiles itself in a zone of shadow, which escapes, at least in appearance, repetition. The hybrid is the name of the material without identity, of an evanescent condition” (77).

4 The use of and emphasis on the terms ‘de-territorialization’ and ‘re-territorialization’ mark my assessment of Canclini’s argument. These terms have play a prominent place in various works by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, such as *Kafka: A Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

5 Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) and Teresa De Lauretis’ *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) will be discussed here via Robert M. Strozier and Linda Alcoff respectively.

6 At the core of Strozier’s discussion of Butler vis à vis Foucault lies Butler’s efficient employment of Foucault’s genealogy “in the service of dismantling any claim that might be made for a gender determination which emanates from a natural sex” (81) According to Strozier, the significance of Foucault’s genealogy lies in its concern with process and change, and in that it raises “the issue of origins, however displaced it may be” (81). Strozier underlines that this discursive notion posits that culture precedes nature and that “the ‘prior’ nature is generated by the discourse as its justification” (80)

7 Stoneham draws upon Homi Bhabha’s views in his “Signs Taken for

Wanders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" in 'Race', Writing and Difference. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986).

8 Again Stoneham refers to Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wanders." It is important to note here that there are striking parallels between Yolanda's performance and resistance as a hybrid in Alvarez's novel and the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* as discussed by Geraldine Stoneham in her article. Stoneham describes the novel as follows: *Jasmine* (1989) is the story of a young Indian woman's survival of and through the process of hybridization, first in postcolonial India and then in the cultural melting pot of the United States. *Jasmine* undergoes multiple hybrid transformations, signalled by successive changes of name [...] each new identity reflecting her adaptation to a new set of cultural circumstances. Importantly, however, *Jasmine's* intervention in the life of the metropolis also transforms the people and cultures who come into contact with her" (83).

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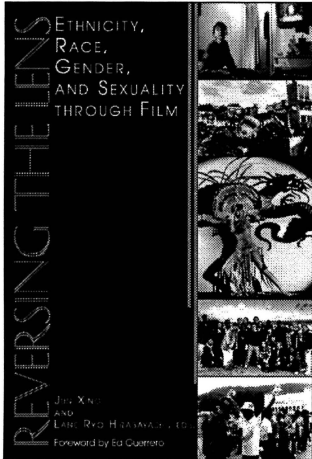
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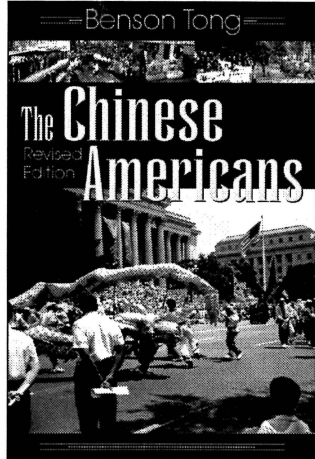
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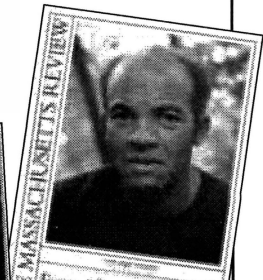
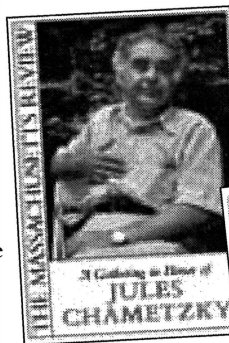
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