

Susheila Nasta, ed. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 365 pp., \$36.00.

In recent years writings by black women outside of the US have gained acceptance, and many such works have been included in syllabi. *Motherlands* provides critical, comparative analyses of several important black women (Asian women are included in this category) writing throughout the world, and as such, sets a precedent as it is probably the first such collection. Divided into three sections, Mothers/Daughters/Mother(land), the essays examine writers who have become icons, Bessie Head, Jean Rhys, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Nawal el Sa'adawi, Michelle Cliff, Joan Riley, Lorna Goodison, and Nayantara Sahgal. Some of the essays, however, explore use of language, Velma Pollard's "Mothers Tongue Voices in the Writing of Olive Senior and Lorna Goodison," and the theme of nationalism in Ranjana Ash's "The Search For Freedom in Indian Women's Writing." Describing the writers and the different terrains they occupy, Susheila Nasta, the editor, provides a framework for this collection:

Women writers from these areas inhabit a world where several "languages" co-exist and a number of complex issues are involved. It is not only a question of redressing the balance; the reclamation is more than simple shifting the ground of a series of opposition and areas of struggle: whether male/female, colonizer/native, black/white, feminist/womanist, post-colonial/post-structuralist, Third World/First World, traditional literary canons/counter-discourses and forms.

The critical analyses are salient yet lucid, being accessible to scholars and lay people. In "'Something Ancestral Recaptured': Spirit Possession as Trope in Selected Feminist Fictions of the African Diaspora," one of the few essays that compares across geographic boundaries, North America and the Caribbean, Carolyn Cooper interprets how Sylvia Wynter, Erna Brodber, Paule Marshall, and Toni Morrison "recuperate identity" through "reappropriating devalued folk wisdom." Cooper suggests:

In all of these feminist fictions of the African diaspora the central characters are challenged, however unwillingly, to reappropriate the "discredited knowledge" of their collective history. The need of these women to remember their "ancient properties" forces them, with varying degrees of success, to confront the contradictions of acculturation in societies where "the press toward upward social mobility" repress Afro-centric cultural norms.

Whereas I am familiar with all of the writers from the Caribbean, North America, and Africa covered, I know of only a few Indian writers, so Ranjana Ash's "The Search for Freedom in Indian Women's Writing" is most informative in providing a range of themes and the prolific body of work by Indian women. Exploring the works of Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Nayantara Sahgal that span over almost half a century, she

situates their works within the context of mother(land):

The motherland provides an anchor for the writers; it provides perspectives on India's complex past; its religious and philosophical contributions and the ethical percepts of sacred texts and popular mythology.

While the collection is not evenly represented by black women from the African continent and the diaspora and South Asian women, it sets a precedent and legitimizes the need for comparative analysis across ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic boundaries. Judie Newman's critique reflects the tone of not only the writers, but of the critics as well,

Post-colonial writers frequently embark upon writing with a self-conscious project to revise the ideological assumptions created by Euro-centric domination of their culture, and to undermine and delegitimize the centrality of that of the West.

— Opal Palmer Adisa  
University of California, Berkeley

**Elsie Clews Parsons. Introduction by Joan Mark. *American Indian Life*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) xv, 419 pp., \$12.95 paper.**

In Joan Mark's introduction to the Bison edition of this classic work, she offers a good analysis of the impact of these twenty-seven fictional stories written by anthropologists and first published in 1922. Anthropology's radical change in methodology at the turn of the century—of which Parsons and Franz Boas (twenty of these stories can be identified with Boasian anthropology) were noticeable figures in the transformation—led Parsons to attempt to tackle the problem of the relation of the individual to the culture. Consequently, she asked her fellow anthropologists to write fictions about Native Americans in which they could speculate how individuals would think and feel in certain situations, issues that were lacking from strictly scientific descriptions. The result was this volume with the message that "every society both supports the individuals born within it and at the same time exacts a toll on them."

The twenty-seven stories are divided by geographical tribes: the Plains tribes, the tribes of the Middle West, Eastern tribes, tribes of the Southwest, Mexican tribes, Pacific Coast tribes, Northern Athabaskan tribes, and Eskimo. The collection includes "A Crow Woman's Tale," a traditional tale of a Crow woman who is taken from her husband by the Lumpwood society; "How Meskwaki Children Should Be Brought Up," a rendition of a Meskwaki text; and "The Chief Singer of the Tepecano," a study of a male's conflict with the traditions of his people and Catholicism.

The stories range in their literary merits, but that is beside the point. It is perhaps more useful to consider this collection as a turning point in anthropologi-