

Cheryl A. Wall, ed. *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989) 253 pp., \$36.00; \$12.95 paper.

Cheryl Wall's edited volume, *Changing Our Own Words*, is comprised of the proceedings of a conference held at Rutgers University in October 1987 entitled "Changing Our Own Words: A Symposium on Criticism, Theory, and Literature by Black Women." A group of scholars and critics—who included Abena P. A. Busia, Barbara Christian, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, Gloria T. Hull, Deborah E. McDowell, Valerie Smith, Hortense J. Spillers, Claudia Tate, Cheryl A. Wall, and Susan Willis—were asked to reflect upon such questions as: What are the most fruitful contexts for the analysis of writing by black women? What can be learned from recent developments in literary theory? Can and should theories particular to black women's writings be developed? If so, what would the source of such theories be?

Wall's introduction reminds some and informs others of the "transformative moments" in black female writing and feminist criticism. These "moments" included introspective works by black women that signaled a recognition and rise in the scholarly interest in black women's writings. These and many other historical notations make *Changing Our Own Words* a valuable resource for scholars in ethnic studies, black studies, women's studies, American studies, literature, and even popular culture studies and musicology; it provides several innovative theories and analyses on black women's writing that will indeed facilitate the study and comprehension of this unique area of literature.

For instance, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's essay, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," suggests that black women in general and black women writers in particular (and their characters) tend to speak in a plurality of "tongues," or voices, as well as in a multiplicity of discourses. That is, black women first are stigmatized by the greater American society for being black (racism) and second for being a woman (sexism). These stigmatizations have cultivated a language and various discourse modes that have allowed them to speak to black men, other black women, white women, and white men. Basically, Henderson's essay will allow scholars of the ethnic experience to gain a better understanding of why black women writers write the way they do and how to possibly interpret what they are saying.

Another insightful analysis is Susan Willis's essay, "I Shop Therefore I Am: Is There a Place for Afro-American Culture in Commodity Culture?" which examines the influence of white-dominated consumer culture industry on the lives and identities of black Americans. Willis's essay is particularly interesting because she shows that writers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison comment on how the American media industry and consumer culture have affected African American women especially. This essay proposes insightful theories and criticism for scholars of black women writers: (1) by briefly outlining the psychological implications of being *black* and *woman* in American consumer society, and (2) how that may affect the writers themselves, the characters they

create, and the kinds of stories they tell.

Changing Our Own Words will be useful for the scholar of the ethnic experience because it brings together diverse ideas and yet converges toward a single goal: a formation of theories for the study of black women's writing. The black women critics contributing to this volume synthesize for us the latest criticism in literature in general and African American women's literature in particular. The references to other critics and the endnotes that follow the essays alone will be an asset to the reader of this volume. In addition, *Changing Our Own Words* will provide ideas for scholars in areas not directly related to literature but to African American culture in general.

— Angela M. S. Nelson
Clarke College

Sylvia Watanabe and Carol Bruchac. *Home To Stay: Asian American Women's Fiction*. (Greenfield Center, NY: The Greenfield Review Press, 1990) 319 pp., \$12.95 paper.

Frank Chin, a Chinese American playwright and essayist has written, "no one . . . was going to tell them [Asian Americans] that America not Asia was their home, that English was their language. . . ." The women writers collected in this volume are claiming America as their home and English as their language. These writers fashion and refashion the American experience from their ethnic perspective. This publication brings together many Asian American women writers in one volume. The contributors are not only of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino ancestry, but also of Malaysian, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, and Pakistani heritage.

The range of the stories is excellent, from the humorous tone of Elizabeth Gordon's (Vietnamese American) "On the Other Side of the War: A Story" to explaining interracial marriage to a nine-year-old boy in Tahira Naqvi's (Pakistani American) "Brave We Are." And Jessica Hagedorn's "The Blossoming of Bong Bong" is a penetrating analysis of cultural disorientation. Predominantly short stories, the collection also contains writings by such famous authors as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, and Bharati Mukherjee. As the works of these writers can be found in almost any bookstore, they seem to be included to lend credence to the project.

Also, the title, *Home to Stay: Asian American Women's Fiction*, is misleading as several Euro-American women writers have been included, "non-Asian women who have experienced close contact with Asian cultures." Although these women record the Asian American experience, perhaps they should have been included in another volume. Further, there is no standard biographical information, only one page of acknowledgements. On the other hand, there are short biographical sketches and photographs of most writers.

The theme of the United States as their home and their place in it is continually enhanced. None of the writers embrace an exotic Asian homeland but rather the