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Intimate Observers:
American Women Writers in an Ethnographic Tradition

by
Kimberly Engber

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2003

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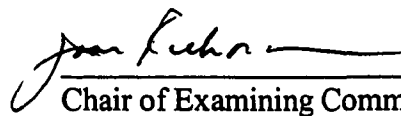
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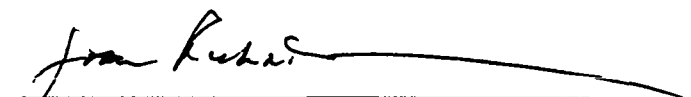
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Acknowledgements

Imagine yourself set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. Since you take up your abode in the compound of some neighbouring white man, trader or missionary, you have nothing to do, but to start at once on your ethnographic work. Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you.

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski issued this invitation in 1922 to readers of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. I now think back and imagine myself set down in graduate school in much the same way. For guiding me through the acculturation process that led to this dissertation, I am grateful to my teachers, family, and friends. My greatest intellectual debt is to my adviser, Joan Richardson, whose imagination is only exceeded by her ability to analyze it. Her vision has fostered this work and has fostered me. My ideas would not have taken shape without the inspiration of: Nancy K. Miller, who first encouraged me in graduate school and who never let me rest in it; Bill Kelly, a generous intellect, at home in the country and the city; Neil Smith and Cindi Katz who urge me to think geographically.

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Abstract**Intimate Observers:
*American Women Writers in an Ethnographic Tradition***

by

Kimberly Engber

Adviser: Professor Joan Richardson

This dissertation focuses on the writing of early women ethnographers, a category I define somewhat broadly as including fiction writers and anthropologists. Using the work of feminist literary scholars as a preliminary model, I argue that fictions and personal narratives by American women of the nineteenth century should be read—as travel narratives and the monumental, individualistic quest novels of Defoe and Conrad have been—as precursors to modern ethnographies. I first examine texts published in the late 1830s and 1840s as a mass visual culture was emerging in Europe and America, and I argue that these texts register the related emergence of what I am calling a “naïve ethnographer” in narrative. After establishing an analogy between narrative perspectives in fiction and anthropology, I devote the larger part of the dissertation to reading modern ethnography and modernist fiction as genres with some distinct functions but with common origins in the nineteenth century. I suggest that women writers who were seemingly confined to writing intimately about the domestic consciously extend the

boundaries of this sphere. A number of women writers claimed authority from their experience as participant observers within American culture and abroad in order to defamiliarize American domestic and sexual practices.

I began this dissertation research in order to understand recent contentious discussions about ethnography and literary analysis. I wanted to ground these controversies by considering more carefully the relationships among ethnography, fiction, and the real world of their readers. More particularly, in response to theorists who initially refused to understand classic ethnographies by women as experimental in form, I wanted to use literary analysis to show how experimental modernist fiction directly influenced professional women ethnographers. Ultimately, I question the use of the term “experimental” simply to designate the incorporation of literary style and sensibility into ethnographic monographs. It has become clear to me that ethnography developed at least in part out of fiction and other literary forms, and it has also become clear that women contributed greatly to the development of ethnography as a method of recording and—in some ways more significantly—of critiquing culture in the twentieth century.

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CHAPTER ONE

Intimate Observers

The Galapagos is a paradise in peril according to the April 1999 issue of *National Geographic*. A bird's wing extends across the top of the feature article's opening double-page photograph. Caught in the top left corner of the photograph, the bird's eye looks along with the camera's eye out over a harbor cluttered with boats. The opening text of the article, written directly over the photograph, urges readers to create a different image:

*Imagine Puerto Ayora without fishing and touring boats
and that concrete albatross, and you get a picture of the
pristine South American islands Charles Darwin visited
in 1835. But the picture has since been developed.*

This photograph and text together court misunderstanding. Looking first at the photograph, we seem to be following the line of sight of a real bird and thus viewing cultural development from the perspective of a natural inhabitant. However, the overlapping text reveals that this bird is manmade and emphasizes the extent to which human industry has "developed" a formerly "pristine" environment. The text exposes the artificiality of the object central to the photograph and also alludes to the chemical development of the photograph itself as evidence of human intervention in nature. Viewers may have been tricked into thinking they stood with the camera within nature; readers must realize that they participate in the destruction of nature and that only an act

of imagination can recreate the “pristine islands” that inspired Charles Darwin to revolutionary scientific discovery.

In sharp contrast to the world *National Geographic* urges upon the popular imagination, Darwin himself paints a less-than-inviting picture of his initial encounter with the Galapagos in his journal of September 1835:

In the morning (17th) we landed on Chatham Island, which, like the others, rises with a tame and rounded outline, interrupted only here and there by scattered hillocks--the remains of former craters. Nothing could be less inviting than the first appearance. A broken field of basaltic lava is everywhere covered by a stunted brushwood, which shows little signs of life. The dry and parched surface, having been heated by the noonday sun, gave the air a close and sultry feeling, like that from a stove: we fancied even the bushes smelt unpleasantly.

To Darwin, the island seems disturbingly lifeless rather than pristine. And even when he does encounter life, it is not because he has stumbled upon undisturbed indigenous inhabitants. On the contrary, on his second stop, on September 23rd, he more than likely discovered a fishing boat moored in the harbor. He records, “The Beagle proceeded to Charles Island. This archipelago has long been frequented, first by the Bucaniers, and latterly by whalers.” Clearly, Darwin was a traveler seeking adventure in far away lands, but he was also a natural historian, recording details of geography, landscape, animal *and* human inhabitants as he found them. The American world, North and South, explored by natural historians such as Darwin in the mid-nineteenth century was not pristine. Darwin

acknowledges this. The imaginative recreation of Darwin in the pages of the popular contemporary *National Geographic* magazine does not.

I. Introduction

Ethnographers and Ethnography

The rise of specialized fields of study at the end of the nineteenth century precipitated the decline of such a broadly defined practice of natural history as Charles Darwin's.¹ This historical trend, among others—including the development of photoengraving technology and growing interest in foreign lands—seems to have contributed to the success in the United States of such magazines as *National Geographic* that could “operate effectively on the boundary between science and entertainment and whose subject matter was America’s place in the world.”² The contemporary *National Geographic* discussed above continues to operate on this boundary between science and entertainment, exploiting what literary critic Annette Kolodny, among others, has identified as a pastoral yearning central to an American cultural and literary tradition.³ This general yearning is based upon a belief in the existence of land unspoiled by human contact. As a consequence of this belief, the role of discoverer and developer traditionally has been awarded to the European American traveler. Through the pages of

¹ See Robert Bruce on the *Launching of Modern American Science*.

² Jane Collins and Catherine Lutz, *Reading National Geographic*, 16.

³ See, for example, Lawrence Buell *Environmental Imagination*, Leo Marx *The Machine in the Garden*. For a development of these ideas, see Linda Sumption who finds “expressions of the

National Geographic, therefore, white, middle-class, American readers willingly become armchair explorers. And such a model as Kolodny's explains the way in which the *National Geographic* historically has provided its readers pleasure in imagining a return to an unspoiled Edenic nature and pride in their position of dominance over nature; it has provided a bird's eye view of the rest of the world from within their own living rooms. However, both Darwin's written record and the recent photograph of the Galapagos, analyzed more closely in conjunction with its accompanying text, also work to create feelings of defamiliarization, potentially uncomfortable feelings not described within a pastoral tradition. Darwin and the recent *Geographic* introduce unfamiliar places and peoples into American homes, marking a tradition more accurately described as ethnographic than pastoral.

In this dissertation, I focus on early women ethnographers, defining this category somewhat broadly as including fiction writers and professional anthropologists. Using the work of feminist literary scholars as a preliminary model, I read fictions and personal narratives by American women as travel narratives and the monumental, individualistic quest novels of Defoe and Conrad have been read: as precursors to modern ethnographies. Therefore, I analyze a range of texts from Caroline Kirkland's narrative about life on the American frontier in the 1830s and Zora Neale Hurston's novels and novelistic ethnographies of the 1930s to the writing of the infamously literary anthropologists, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. The first set of texts—published in the late 1830s and 1840s as a mass visual culture was emerging in Europe and America—registers the related emergence of what I am calling a “naïve ethnographer” in narrative.

new and unknown...invariably linked to concepts signifying domestic comforts” in early American travel narratives (5).

The second set of texts (which form a larger part of this dissertation) appeared in the early twentieth century during and just after the period of time that art historian and visual culture theorist Jonathan Crary marks as “the onset of the ‘society of the spectacle.’”⁴ I consider the “onset” of the society of the spectacle as in some important ways parallel to the emergence and popularization of visual technologies in the early to mid-nineteenth century.⁵ Moreover, I consider women not only as objects of observation but as observers and recorders of the domestic culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the following chapters, I analyze fictions and ethnographies together, paying particular attention to textual representations of domestic practices and of scientific experiments performed in the domestic sphere. And, although I place modern ethnography at one endpoint of an earlier, more explicitly literary tradition, I am not suggesting that anthropological ethnography should be subsumed under literature or literary studies. Nor do I attempt to define the genre of ethnography. Rather, I am interested in how writers self-consciously combine methods of experimental science and

⁴ See Crary *Techniques*, n. 26, p. 18: “Following up on a brief remark by Debord, I have discussed the case for placing the onset of the ‘society of the spectacle’ in the late 1920s, concurrent with the technological and institutional origins of television, the beginning of synchronized sound in movies, the use of mass media techniques by the Nazi party in Germany, the rise of urbanism, and the political failure of surrealism in France.” See chapter two for more on optical devices and fiction in the nineteenth century.

⁵ Designating these two periods as parallel and violating historical contiguity in this dissertation, I examine analogous features of texts that precede and exceed photographic and literary realism. In violating historical contiguity but suggesting continuities, I am following Crary as well as the anthropologist Deborah Poole who looks at the visual analogues in these same periods in *Vision, Race, Modernity*. For a related discussion see Armstrong *Fiction in the Age of Photography*.

conventions of fiction.⁶ I am attempting to understand distinctions made between fiction and ethnography by professional anthropologists who read and/or wrote both of them.

In addition, I argue that ethnographic texts by women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries share several distinct features.⁷ Women writing about domestic cultures often write for an explicitly-defined audience of women and often aim to educate their readers. A number of women writers claim the authority of their experience as participant observers within American culture and abroad specifically in order to defamiliarize American domestic and sexual practices. Their narrators lead the reader through a process of becoming familiar with an unfamiliar culture in order to demonstrate how a shift in perspective from observer to participant in one culture should produce a corresponding shift from participant to observer in another.

By the early twentieth century, the term “ethnography” in anthropology had come to describe the writing produced by a researcher living in and observing a culture other than her own for the purpose of documenting that culture and its inhabitants. Behind this description of ethnography lies an understanding of the struggle necessary to produce it. The ethnographer must struggle between the particular or, in many ways, microscopic

⁶ Recently, some literary scholars have begun to use the term “ethnographic” more narrowly to distinguish between analyzing literature as an aesthetic object and reading for empirical descriptions of culture. At the 2002 Modern Language Association conference, for example, Deborah Nelson presented an incisive analysis of Cha’s *Dictée* and protested against reductive “ethnographic” readings of the novel. She argued for the necessity of reading ethnic studies texts both for unfamiliar ethnographic content and for formal innovation. (For a related discussion of content and form see Nancy Armstrong *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism*.) I accept Nelson’s conclusion, but I question further the presumed antagonism between reading ethnographically and reading aesthetically by demonstrating how early ethnographers work through this distinction.

⁷ This specific analysis of women writers follows the broad historical and theoretical work of Christopher Herbert, George Stocking, Jr., James Clifford, George Marcus, Mary Louise Pratt, and James Boon, among others.

reality of what she sees when she goes into the field and the general, macroscopic principles she must generate to make her experience useful to other academic anthropologists.⁸ The production of ethnography (the “writing up” of data collected in the field) depends in part upon the anthropologist skillfully and consciously moving between the unfamiliar and the familiar. For this reason, James Clifford argues that the term “ethnographic” suggests “a characteristic attitude of participant observation among the artifacts of a defamiliarized cultural reality.” Emphasizing the dual position of the ethnographer as a participant in and observer of a culture and emphasizing equally the potential effect of ethnography on its readers, Clifford’s defines particularly the ethnographer emerging with the professionalization of anthropology in the early twentieth century. Yet, this definition does not depend on disciplinary training or geographic location but on perspective: the “ethnographic” is an attitude about culture that might just as well be cultivated at home.⁹

⁸ I owe these ideas to a conversation with anthropologist Glenn Petersen, December 7, 2000 and to his related ethnographic and theoretical work.

⁹ The term “defamiliarization” describes the effect of metaphor, according to the formalist literary critic Victor Shklovsky. Clifford does not attribute this term to Shklovsky. However, given Clifford’s predisposition to relate the literary and the ethnographic both historically and stylistically, I read this direct connection between his ideas and those of Russian formalism of the 1920s (concurrent with the rise of anthropology) as more than suggestive or accidental. Further, the use of this term links the emergence of professional anthropological ethnography and the ethnographic perspective to developments in visual technology. Shklovsky dedicated himself to careful structural analysis of fiction and poetry, forms in some ways opposed to a “documentary” impulse. Yet, he wrote scripts for one of the earliest Soviet filmmakers Dziga Vertov who famously declared his dedication to film-truth (Kino-Pravda).

“On the whole the intervention of the formalist writers and critics led to at least a partial reintegration of literary values into Soviet cinema,” according to Natalia Nussinova. “But Shklovsky also contributed to the transfer of some of the cinematic and anti-literary values of Vertov’s ‘fact films’ to the fiction film, as in his work on Abram Room’s *Bed and Sofa*...a film showing careful attention to the detail of everyday life” (*Oxford History of Cinema* 172). Nussinova suggests that the collaboration between literature and film led to a productive cross-fertilization of factual and fictional forms. She defines “fact” as “the detail of everyday life,” similar to a general understanding of what ethnography contains and conveys to its readers. In

Typically, an ethnographer is defined as a social scientist who does fieldwork using the methodology of participant observation, or rather, someone who lives in a culture other than her own and collects data through observation of special rituals and of daily activities and interactions, often collecting data from native informants who tell stories or interpret events for the ethnographer. Thus, according to Clifford Geertz, the ethnographer in the field most closely resembles the literary critic. He suggests in *The Interpretation of Cultures* that “[d]oing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a reading of’) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior” (10). The ethnographer is not recording observable phenomena, such as “the physical aspect of closing the eyelid” but instead aims to record “the web of affinities that make it possible to understand the twitch, the wink and the parody of the wink.”¹⁰ Ultimately, the ethnographer must present the observable data and the interpretation to her colleagues (and often to the public). Since the early twentieth century this has been done most

contrast, Vertov expressed a more nuanced understanding of the content and effect of documentary film: “My mission is the creation of a new perception of the world,” he wrote in his film manifesto. “Thus I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you” (quoted in Eric Barnouw *History of the Documentary Film*, xx). Vertov suggests that presenting the truth requires effecting a shift in audience perception, a commitment to formalism that he shares with modernist writers and artists of the early twentieth century. See also Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach to metaphor, narrative time, and the effect of a text on its readers, especially in “The World of the Text and the World of the Reader,” and see Christopher Herbert’s brief discussion, in *Culture and Anomie*, of metaphorical comparisons as governed by necessity rather than chance (6).

¹⁰ See Roger Sanjek’s Introduction to *Fieldnotes* for more on Geertz, particularly his ideas about the ethnographer as author. See Darwin “On the Nature of the Affinities Connecting Organic Beings” in *Origin of Species*. He concludes: “We shall never probably disentangle the inextricable web of the affinities between the members of any one class; but when we have a distinct object in view, and do not look to some unknown plan of creation, we may hope to make sure but slow progress” (412).

commonly in the form of an ethnographic monograph, a textual rendering of the culture as a comprehensible whole. Given that anthropology is thus in some ways a textual discipline, Geertz clarifies in *Works and Lives* the resemblance of ethnography to literature. He argues that ethnographers are authors because in anthropology, “it still very much matters who speaks” (7). But he points out that comparing ethnographers to authors (or literary critics, as in his earlier formulation) does not make the ethnographer “into a novelist any more than constructing hypotheses or writing formulas makes us, as some seem to think, into physicists” (8). At the same time, such a broad understanding of the ethnography as a text with some “family resemblances” to literature supports an ongoing critique of the more scientific claim to objectivity in ethnographic practice and its textual product, the ethnography.¹¹

According to Geertz, the practice of the ethnographer and the resulting ethnography should be understood as interpretive or much more subjective than objective. Yet, he does not dispense with the concept of accuracy; he describes learning to read a culture as learning a new way of seeing: examining the product of ethnographic research as a textual production teaches anthropologists to “read with a more percipient eye” (24). In response to Geertz and to even broader applications of the theory that lived experience succumbs most readily to the habits of reading developed in literary studies, art historian Barbara Stafford insists on a corresponding ability to think through images. In *Good Looking*, she points out that “the efficacy of appearances—whether old or

¹¹ See *Fieldnotes* for further analyses of the multiple genres that ethnographers move between. The essay by James Clifford contains a useful delineation of types of writing done in “the field.” Clifford troubles the apparently transparent definition of the field itself, questioning the wisdom of treating fieldnotes as (unmediated) raw data partially because they originated in a particular location, the field. See also James Boon on symbolic anthropology.

new—and the imaginative possibilities of thinking in, through and with them is not anachronistic. Imaging may even begin to formulate its own questions and confidently say something about its own ends. It might think about itself instead of just being thought about by others. In spite of incessant talk concerning interdisciplinarity, something is wildly out of kilter when, at the end of the twentieth century, no alternative metaphor of intelligence counters the nineteenth-century standard of the *printed book*” (*Good Looking* 10-11). Stafford’s work, along with theories that comprise the interdisciplinary field of visual culture, reminds us to consider how the visual image and visual experience can function *in* text. Her suggestion of a method of analysis or understanding potentially counter to methods used to analyze print and text challenges (or supplements) the theory that cultures actually experienced by the anthropologist have been interpreted in the same way *as* text.¹²

Traveling in the Ethnographic Present

In her recent essay, “The Anthropology of Water,” Anne Carson attends to the most basic question of where and how to look within a text. She chooses a classic literary setting, the pilgrimage, within which to ask questions about her own life. And she uses descriptions of photographs as anthropological artillery to disrupt the temporal progress of her life narrative. She consistently interrupts her narrator’s attempt to fix meanings, in other words. She writes this essay in the first person, in autobiographical fragments, about a spiritual pilgrimage to Compostela, Spain, “the most venerable

¹² See also Carol Armstrong.

pilgrimage in Christendom.” But she ranges freely across lines generally drawn between genres, mixing elements of romance, autobiography, lyric, and narrative poetry. These collected fragments attempt to answer the question posed to her by the man who first told her about Compostela: “How can you see your life unless you leave it?”

From the outset, Carson realizes that this question belongs more to the anthropologist than to the traditional autobiographer. Even more so than the autobiographer, the anthropologist attempts to stand at a distance from lived experience. And anthropologists try to draw general and publicly useful meaning from the fragments of cultures and individual experiences within them. Most importantly to Carson, however, anthropology is work dedicated to wonder.¹³ “Anthropology is a science of mutual surprise” (117), she declares, transcending the question of power dynamics that troubles many in the discipline of anthropology today. After all, Carson recognizes that the surprise of first encounter is mutual.¹⁴ She simply turns to anthropology as the most fitting methodology with which to leave her own life and to look back at it at the same time. “To look for the simplest question, the most obvious facts, the doors that no one may close, is what I meant by anthropology,” Carson writes. “I was a strong soul! Look I will change everything, all the meanings! I thought” (123). In Carson’s rendering of it, anthropology has the capacity to uncover the fundamental elements of language and

¹³ In *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that “the frequency and intensity of the appeal to wonder in the wake of the great geographical discoveries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries helped (along with many other factors) to provoke its conceptualization” (19). In this precise yet imaginative analysis of texts of New World discovery, Greenblatt turns to Spinoza to define wonder as “a mode of conception” that “depends upon a suspension or failure of categories...The object that arouses wonder is so new that for a moment at least it is alone, unsystematized, an utterly detached object of rapt attention” (20). Carson appeals to anthropology as a science of wonder in part in order to create and to conceptualize discoveries about herself. See also Mary Baine Campbell *Science and Wonder*.

experience and to alter “all the meanings” through exposing the particular and intimate details of an unfamiliar culture. So, to supplement her literary journey, she incorporates elements of the ethnographic.

“Look...” the narrator interjects in one of the chronological, dated, diary-like sections of Carson’s essay. Addressed directly to the reader, this sudden demand to try to see reveals a desire to make the reader pause and notice that a visual experience has been translated into verbal text. The narrator points away from herself to expose the scaffolding underneath the text, to suggest that there are boundaries to her textual narrative.¹⁵ Using the verbal photograph as a lyrical device, Carson stops the temporal narrative of her pilgrimage. “An effect of immediacy” is achieved through the insertion of a photograph of herself and her companion in front of a looming mountain.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity* on “The Magic of Western Gear,” particularly p. 177.

¹⁵ For an analysis of such verbal/visual processing and its intended effect on readers, see MaryAnn Caws *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction*. Caws points out that framing is a modern (broadly, as in Renaissance) device, quoting for support the work of Rudolf Arnheim who suggests in *Art and Visual Perception* “the lintels and pilasters that surround the Renaissance altarpieces led to the frame’s development.” These original frames were conceived of as windows “looking out onto a supposedly limitless space” (15). Caws is most concerned with the development of framing in the novel, however, and with the “techniques enabling a concentration on a specific passage” (21). Ultimately, she argues that the texts of modernism differ from earlier, “pre-modernist” texts. Instead of using frames to draw attention to “the substance and field included,” the principal modernist texts “emphasize the very idea of framing as it calls attention, above all, to itself, and to the frames rather than what they include” (xi). Caws’s theory of frames in modern fiction informs my reading of Carson as well as the analyses in the following chapters of Conrad, Hurston, Benedict, Mead, and Woolf.

¹⁶ For some intriguing parallel ideas see Deborah Poole’s discussion of the roots of modernity and visual culture in early scientific writing. This discussion provides the context for her more specific examination of the use of photography in twentieth-century Peruvian culture. She focuses on how Alexander Von Humboldt “isolated specific ‘physiognomies’ within the shifting visual panorama of nature” and Cuvier “distilled the endless variation of individuals into a stable structural form. Humboldt’s method resulted in the concept of the view as a replicable image through which the traveler could encounter nature as a series of interchangeable visual experiences.” See also Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion in *Imperial Eyes* of Humboldt’s rendering of mountains in a way influenced by Andean vertical agriculture. Pratt argues that European Romanticism was constituted in part by encounter with South America. In this same work, she

Somewhat similarly, ethnographers traditionally have achieved an effect of immediacy by describing primitive cultures in the present tense. The use of the “ethnographic present” in written ethnographies renders primitive cultures as frozen and thus outside historical time. Recalling the fixity of museum artifacts, these textual renderings reinforce distinctions between the Western self, set safely within the narrative of history and historical progress, and the other, now described safely outside of this same narrative.

Carson’s essay questions the assumed objectivity of such cultural and self-representations even as it pushes the reader to recognize the self-reflexivity inherent to the production of modern ethnography. Writing in short, object-like sections, Carson makes continuous reading of her essay difficult, and she further disrupts the temporal narrative with extended descriptions of visual representations, such as photographs. The precise way in which the descriptions of what I am calling, for reasons of brevity, verbal photographs can be understood as interrupting Carson’s text and disrupting habits of reading and interpretation depends upon both the physiology and the culture of perception. Occasionally, an actual, visual photograph frames an instant in time so brief that the human eye may not even have perceived it; thus the camera historically has been promoted as an optical apparatus even more refined and reliable than the human eye. The persistent idea that a photograph has truth value has everything to do with the fact that photographs originally were produced by nature—by chemical reaction to light reflected off of objects—and with the fact that photographs so closely resemble the objects to which they refer. Or as art historian Carol Armstrong puts it in her recent writing on the photograph and the book:

defines “autoethnography” as the native explaining his own culture in language or terminology learned from the dominating culture.

The photograph is first and foremost an indexical sign—that is, an image that is chemically and optically caused by the things in the world to which it refers. Thus it is predicated on its relation to nature before it is mediated by a code of legibility. This is the basis on which we, at the moment of the photograph's replacement by its digitally conceived simulacrum, continue to believe in some form or other of the "truth" of the photograph (2).

Because viewers habitually assume that photographs have captured an actual event, the presence of a photograph can make a specific truth claim within a verbal text. Yet, at the same time, viewers understand without reflection that the creation of a photograph depends upon decisions made by the photographer about distance, angle, light, and focus, and they recognize that these decisions make a photograph a particular representation not an objective rendering of an event or object. Additionally, Armstrong suggests that "early thinking about photography was as magical and anti-industrial as it was positivistic, and as often as not it set the photograph's vaunted powers of authentication in tension with its capacity for reproduction and its ability to be read, rather than linking them" (5). From its beginnings, photography was somehow understood to be realistic and authentic yet magical, replicable, and subject to interpretation. Given such a dual (and seemingly contradictory) understanding of the process of photography, what is the intended effect of a photograph reproduced or, as is the case in the writing under consideration here, produced in language only?

Production of texts inaugurated visual culture in many ways. After all, as Walter Ong points out, writing is a technology. "It initiated what print and computers only

continue, the reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent space, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist” (82). The invention of writing meant a shift from an oral-aural base of knowledge to a visual one. And the much later invention of print technology “situate[d] words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did.” (117). Print had subtle but significant effects such as this increased fixation of language and thought as well as the creation of an individual/interiorized reader. Both of these effects in turn meant that reading produced a greater sense of closure: reading produces the impression that a text is “closed off in a world of its own” (133). In addition, print technology altered social and intellectual life more concretely. It led to a more general diffusion of knowledge, to the rise of modern sciences, and to the less benevolent rise of modern capitalism and increased European exploration of the globe. Print made the modern author and the modern ethnographer possible. In fact, Ong argues, “what is distinctive of modern science is the conjuncture of exact observation and exact verbalization: exactly worded descriptions of carefully observed complex objects and processes. . . . Ancient and medieval writers are simply unable to produce exactly worded descriptions of complex objects at all approximating the descriptions that appear after print and, indeed, that mature chiefly with the Age of Romanticism, that is, the age of the Industrial Revolution” (127). Print made possible the sense of accuracy and repeatability now commonly associated with modern science and to some degree with photography.¹⁷

¹⁷ The development of experimental science had consequences for literature as well. Yet it was not until the advent of New Criticism in the 1930s (and Russian Formalism slightly earlier) that literary texts were analyzed as discrete visual objects—analyzed quasi-scientifically, that is. The practitioners of New Criticism refused to consider historical and biographical context when interpreting a text. They read the text as self-contained and looked for literary elements and internal logic, for example. However, Ong points out that “Marxist criticism maintains that the

In contrast to the photograph, however, printed text is symbolic: a word stands for an object. It does not resemble that object.¹⁸ Armstrong points out that historically “the word anchors the photograph and ties it to a system of signification” (2). In keeping with this historical link between word and photograph, the textual rendering of photographs in Carson’s essay suggests the limits of the visual representation of an experience. The photograph without verbal representation or interpretation remains ambiguous. At the same time, because it refers to a competing, nonverbal representation of the narrator’s original experience, the verbal photograph also points the reader to the limits of the text.

The difficulties inherent to reading and interpretation (to which Carson consistently draws her readers’ attention) become most obvious when the narrator finds herself looking at women. In a photograph she has taken, she wants to see the women, called *emparedadas*, who “once placed themselves inside [a] pit and lived there, taking as sustenance only what was offered by those passing by. Many a pilgrim on his way to Compostela shared his meager rations with the women, handing in water or pieces of bread” (162). However, she cannot see these women in the photograph as clearly she has described them in the text. And, in fact, as her account of looking at the photograph proceeds, it becomes unclear if she is attempting to see women who were there as she passed on her pilgrimage or women who used to be there on ancient pilgrimages.

self-reference of the New Critics is class-determined and sycophantic: it identifies the ‘objective’ meaning of the text with something actually outside the text, namely the interpretations it imagines to be the ones supported by the sophistication, wit, sense of tradition and poise of what is essentially a decaying aristocracy” (162). In the estimation of academic Marxists, in other words, doing a New Critical reading depends upon occupying a particular class position, or rather, it depends upon believing that there is an objective standard for determining and understanding good writing, a standard which is actually although not admittedly derived from the “decaying aristocracy.”

Ultimately, Carson uses this set of verbal photographs to expose and complicate the process of looking. The narrator has to ask the reader, "Can you make it out?" And the reader must imagine she is looking not at a concrete object but at an uncomfortably feeling: "Shame. Look at the photograph. Yes, it is a picture of a hole in a wall." To capture this image, the narrator reports she had to angle her lens and position the camera facing the light; she had to commit "a fundamental error." When she looks at the result, she admits that "the photographs of the emparedadas are something of an embarrassment." Referring to the narrator's own lack of photographic skill as well as referring to the "shame" of the women in the photograph, the word "embarrassment" has a curious resonance. It loosely echoes the Spanish word "embarasada" to suggest that this imagistic moment is "pregnant" with meaning, a meaning that remains hidden and inscrutable.

In this imagined or imaginary looking, the commonly assumed distinction between subject and object becomes blurred. Finally the narrator must admit that the photograph under her scrutiny could be "a woman with something in her hands," or it could be "a drowned dog floating in bits of stone." With this mention of a dog, she refers to a moment earlier in the narrative, when, during breakfast, no one else seemed to notice a dead dog floating in the river below her hotel. In narrating this process of looking, Carson mixes the photograph—a representation of a visual perception of a hole in a wall—with an earlier memory of looking out the window of the hotel at something no one else could see. While initially the verbal photograph seems to offer a concrete image, the narrative reveals the ambiguity of the visual representation. The attempt to

¹⁸ This is a brief summary of information treated in more detail and with more subtlety by Armstrong in her introduction; see especially p. 2 and n.4, p. 434.

capture the women in a photograph has been undermined by the narrator's flawed photographic process, her obsessive attention to her own perception, and her uncorroborated and thus unreliable memories. Carson invokes the photographs throughout this essay as traces of the narrator's actual presence in Spain because her written account of the pilgrimage cannot provide adequate evidence. Yet the subsequent description of the narrator's attempt to determine the contents of one photograph also undermines the conventional assumption that a photograph evidences presence in the way a text cannot.¹⁹

Carson depends upon the reader's educated perception of photographs as both authenticating and magical in order to assert the authority of experience, of having "been there." By failing to reprint these photographs, leaving open the question of whether or not they exist in visual form, she emphasizes the need for an authorial presence as well. Presenting multiple representations of individual experiences and multiple interpretations of these representations, then enclosing representations and interpretations in a printed text that resembles a series of discrete visual objects, almost a photographic album, Carson makes evident the persistent tension between experience and its textual representation. She points directly to the position that the professional ethnographer must continue to negotiate at home and abroad. For as much as Carson questions the ability of photographs to represent, she relies upon the attempt. Rather than producing an endlessly proliferating set of meanings, Carson wants to "change everything! All the meanings."

¹⁹ See *The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space* on the relationship between captions and photographs. See also Allan Sekula "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning"; Charles Sanders Peirce "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs" on icon (resembles), index (physically caused by object), and symbol (stands for); Walter Benjamin "A Short History of Photography" in Trachtenberg *Classic Essays*: all cited as influencing Carol Armstrong's argument for understanding the photograph as a print technology closer to the book than to painting.

She presents anthropology as the best method for effecting this semantic transformation, and literary language as the best structure within which to register it. Somewhat like Carson, I present anthropology and literature in the following chapters as interdependent disciplines that record and critique human experience. Often the distinguishing features of each can only be identified through juxtaposition to the other.

II. Methods

Anxious Observation

As early as the sixteenth century, voyagers such as Jean de Lery write about what they have seen in the “New World” and consciously attempt to distinguish their empirical observations from the “fabulous tales found in books of certain people who, trusting to hearsay,” had written things that were “completely false” (quoted in Greenblatt *Marvelous Possessions* 22). By the nineteenth century, experiencing another way of life becomes insufficient to establish the integrity of information, however. Ethnologists recording natural and human populations on the American frontier and abroad treat existing data supplied by travelers and missionaries as “hearsay,” as information unsystematically acquired. At this same moment, the camera and other visual technologies emerge to record objects seemingly without human intervention or interpretation. However, as visual anthropologist Anna Grimshaw points out in *The Ethnographer's Eye*, “the development of the camera, contrary to much opinion did not solve the problem” of validity that faced those who studied human culture. Instead, “the new technology merely generated a different kind of data—visible evidence” (52). This

visible evidence still required interpretation, and so, early twentieth-century anthropologists inherited what Grimshaw calls “the anxiety about vision and its status.”

Then, in 1922, at the height of the modernist movement in literature and art, Bronislaw Malinowski published a relatively detailed and somewhat unprecedented explanation of his field methods in the introduction to his first ethnography, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. To differentiate his ethnography and the scientific field of anthropology from earlier amateur accounts, he proclaimed the need for the ethnographer to participate in as well as observe the culture under study. This emphasis—and the subsequent emphasis in modern anthropology—on intensive, individual experience in the field makes subjective experience somewhat paradoxically essential to the project of gathering accurate data and producing scientific ethnography. Therefore, Grimshaw argues that the persistent anxiety about vision seems to have disappeared “in the wake of the Malinowskian revolution” (52). “Malinowskian anthropology” transcends the problem of objectivity and becomes “visionary or romantic” (53). Grimshaw underlines the romanticism of this method by drawing attention to the “central role accorded to experiential knowledge.” Malinowski’s characterization of his own method is slightly more complicated.

Initially, Malinowski privileges the anthropologist over the amateur observer of human culture by emphasizing the need for scientific observation and quantification of details. He declares the “first, cardinal point of method”: that “each phenomenon ought to be studied through the broadest range possible of its concrete manifestations; each studied by an exhaustive survey of concrete detailed examples.” After collecting this abundance of examples, the ethnographer must make the data yet more concrete in order

to comprehend their significance. Therefore, Malinowski consults, “if possible, the results ought to be tabulated into some sort of synoptic chart, both to be used as an instrument of study, and to be presented as an ethnological document” (*Argonauts* 17). The synoptic chart serves principally as an instrument for analysis—meaning, in other words, that an ethnographer thinks through his tables. By his own reckoning, Malinowski “writes up half a dozen outlines of the Kula institution” both in the field and in the intervals between. Each outline proves incomplete and leads on to new work (13). Thus the synoptic chart transforms observed data into an analyzable arrangement and at the same time maps out new routes of inquiry. It leads the anthropologist back into the field and then out of the field again. “Indeed, the object of scientific training” prior to fieldwork, “is to provide the empirical investigator with a mental chart, in accordance with which he can take his bearings and lay his course” (13), Malinowski argues. And with this map of the mind, that “ought to be transformed into a real one,” he suggests the “visionary” turn in his investigative methods.

For Malinowski’s second methodological principal arises from his conviction that “there is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning of computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality.” He advocates, therefore, nearly complete immersion in the unfamiliar culture, a practice more common among amateur missionaries and travelers than anthropologists at the time. He points out that “the amateur has often excelled. . . in the presence of *intimate* touches of native life, in bringing home to us these aspects of it with which one is made familiar only through being in close contact with the natives, one way or the other, for long periods of time” (18, emphasis mine). So, Malinowski combines the amateur’s habit of

immersion or participation in culture with the scientist's habits of observation and quantification. In other words, while advancing the need for immersion in and experiential apprehension of a culture, Malinowski also posits the anthropologist as better able than earlier ethnologists who often worked in teams, than natives, or than amateurs to transcend this apprehension and achieve full comprehension. In this, he tends toward a romantic sensibility, as Grimshaw points out; he worries less about the objectivity of the ethnographic data and more about the method and mind necessary to comprehend their significance.²⁰

By his own account, Malinowski is the first Romantic hero of anthropology.²¹ Throughout his landmark introduction, Malinowski calls for an anthropology of "intimacy"; he wants to write ethnography that will lead his readers to "imagine" themselves in the place of the Trobrianders. He wants to write ethnography that assumes some of the functions of fiction. I present Malinowski's ideas and language in relative detail here in order to establish something of a conceptual and stylistic norm against which to measure the ethnographic work of women in science and fiction. To Anna

²⁰ I describe Malinowski's method using the terms of Margaret Fuller in *Papers on Literature and Art* (1846). In "Short Essay on Critics" she divides critics into three categories: the "subjective," the "apprehensive," and the "comprehensive." Malinowski's portrait of the anthropologist in the field most closely resembles Margaret Fuller's "comprehensive" critic "who must also be apprehensive. They enter into the nature of another being and judge his work by its own law. But having done so, having ascertained his design and the degree of his success in fulfilling it, thus measuring his judgment, his energy, and skill, they do also know how to put that aim in its place, and how to estimate its relations. And this the critic can only do who perceives the analogies of the universe, and how they are regulated by an absolute invariable principle" (*Papers*, pt. 1, p. 3). See Chai for more on Fuller's writing and "the German and English influence upon New England Transcendentalism," especially pp. 375-391.

²¹ However, there are precursors to his research methodology. Some—such as Seligman and Rivers and even to some degree Joseph Conrad—he acknowledges. Others have been suggested by historians such as Christopher Herbert who locates nineteenth-century "naïve" adherents to a "culture concept" more commonly accepted in the twentieth.

Grimshaw's reading of Malinowski as visionary Romantic and historian Christopher Herbert's suggestion that methods of modern anthropology are dramatized first in the nineteenth century, I add the category of intentionally "intimate" ethnography that has as its object a critique of "home" culture.

Looking at Women

I focus this analysis on women ethnographers in part in response to a specific controversy that arose with the publication in 1986 of James Clifford and George Marcus's seminal anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Clifford argues in his introduction to this well-circulated and generally well-received volume that "feminist ethnography has focused either on setting the record straight about women or on revising anthropological categories (for example the nature/culture opposition). It has not produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developing reflection on ethnographic textuality as such" (21). Of course, many practitioners and theorists of anthropology have disagreed with Clifford's assessment and subsequent dismissal of feminist ethnography as insufficiently experimental. While agreeing that much of classic feminist ethnography is formally "conventional," for example, Lila Abu-Lughod attempts to dismantle the framework Clifford uses to justify the exclusion of women's writing.²²

²² Abu-Lughod's first ethnography, *Veiled Sentiments*, precedes the Clifford and Marcus anthology. In a thoughtful introduction, Abu-Lughod identifies her role as "daughter" in the Bedouin community she researches, and she is self-conscious about this "self-reflexivity," referring to the work of Crapanzano and Marcus and Cushman on conventions of professional ethnography. Her response to Clifford and Marcus is informed, in other words, by her ethnographic data collection in Egypt. Although she had not planned to collect Bedouin poetry

In “Writing Against Culture” in 1991, Abu-Lughod explains why “feminist scholars have been interested in the old political sense of representation. Conservatism of form may have been helpful because the goal was to persuade colleagues that an anthropology taking gender into account was not just good anthropology but better anthropology” (151). At the same time, Abu-Lughod identifies a distinct women’s tradition consisting mainly of nonprofessional ethnographic writing that “might only reluctantly be claimed and explored by feminist anthropologists uncertain of their standing.” She is “referring to the excellent and popular ethnographies written by the ‘untrained’ wives of anthropologists...Directing their works to audiences slightly different from those of the professional writers of standard ethnographies, they have also followed different conventions: they are more open about their positionality, less assertive of their scientific authority, and more focused on particular individuals and families” (152). In emphasizing “different conventions,” Abu-Lughod seems to be placing this nonprofessional tradition under Clifford’s “experimental” rubric. Conversely, she concludes by advocating an ethnographic practice that is not experimental in Clifford’s sense of the term but that instead produces more intimate “ethnographies of the particular.” In opposition to “new forms of writing—pastiche, dialogue, collage, and so forth—that break up narrative, subject identities, and

before she began fieldwork, in the course of her eighteen-month residency she discovers its importance and develops a theory about the role poetry plays in interpersonal relationships. Highly formulaic poetry is used to express sentiments of attachment that are counter to the more dominant promotion of autonomy. For this reason, Abu-Lughod argues against the idea of a unified “culture” and talks instead about various ideologies (what other anthropologists have often termed “cultures”) within one culture. For more on Abu-Lughod see Epilogue.

identifications,” she urges a return to humanism as itself a radical response to the modern.²³

Approaching the problem slightly differently, feminist anthropologists Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon responded to Clifford’s rationalization for the general absence of women ethnographers in *Writing Culture* with the production of an important counter-anthology in 1995 called *Women Writing Culture*. The essays in the Behar and Gordon collection argue that many women ethnographers *did* produce unconventional forms of writing, such as fiction or poetry, in addition to their more conventional ethnographies. Within letters and other more private documents, these women also reflected extensively on what Clifford calls “ethnographic textuality.” This anthology has been crucial to the reclamation of the “experimental” history of women’s ethnographic writing. However, the relatively easy reclamation of almost all ethnography as experimental suggests that Clifford’s distinction between conventional and unconventional ethnography is false or at least unnecessarily stark.

Therefore, Kamala Visweswaran productively alters the terms of this argument. Synthesizing the various responses to the Clifford and Marcus anthology, she declares that she wants “to move away from the question of ‘experimentalism’” because it is clear that “a variety of textual forms (diary, memoir, review, life history, autobiography, travelogue) have existed throughout the history of anthropological production (Behar & Gordon 1995, Tedlock 1991).” Visweswaran focuses “less on ‘new writing’ than on renewed strategies for reading.” Her analysis is based on a historical and literary claim distinct from that of Clifford and Marcus or the earlier theoretical work of Clifford

²³ Abu-Lughod’s suggestion that recording particularities within a culture might produce more ethical ethnography parallels Martha Nussbaum’s argument for reading the novel as a form

Geertz. She concentrates more on intended effect and reader reception than on strictly formal experimentation. Visweswaran's extends "the poetics and politics of ethnography" beyond a somewhat shallow discussion of "experimentalism" through attention to the role of the reader. In fact, her struggle to situate women's ethnography parallels the work of earlier literary scholars such as Jane Tompkins and Nina Baym.

In order to recover popular novels written by American women in the nineteenth century from the dismissal and scorn of twentieth-century scholarship, these scholars had to establish a framework within which it made sense to take women writers seriously. Tompkins, for example, argues for understanding novelists who wrote of domesticity and women's development as political rather than simply sentimental. Notably, she believes that "the popular domestic novel of the nineteenth century represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view" (xvii). In form and content, these novels engaged the readers' perception. They present scenes of domestic life from the perspective of a young girl who must accommodate herself to this sphere.

Increasingly, histories of innovation in science and literature include the work of women amateurs and professionals. Following this critical trend, I initially focus in this dissertation on recovering a women's ethnographic tradition. I argue that ethnographic methods and ethnographic texts have both analyzed and appealed to women. Indeed, professional ethnography has been a form within which to describe the domestic and to depict alternative domestic structures. The close textual analysis of fictions and ethnographies undertaken in this dissertation also proceeds from an understanding of how the process of exposure and defamiliarization employed by ethnographers has resulted in disturbingly exoticized and often correspondingly eroticized portraits of other people and

of moral philosophy. See Epilogue.

other cultures, often other women. Dependent for their authority upon hierarchies of class, race, culture, gender, and sexuality still commonly accepted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ethnographic texts often—at times unwittingly—reinforced these hierarchies. Ultimately, however, I find that the simultaneous intimacy and distance cultivated by the ethnographic observer and modeled in the ethnographic text has been crucial for both fiction writers and anthropologists who want to produce effective critiques of dominant cultural practices.²⁴

Locating the emergence of professional ethnography within a broader textual tradition that includes women writers, I intend to recontextualize the work of ethnographers in the twentieth century in a way that avoids the overdetermined canon of “experimental” ethnographers as defined by James Clifford (in *Writing Culture*) and that also avoids oversimplified analysis of the writing of women and men as occurring in completely separate spheres or as comprising completely separate traditions. Therefore, I begin the following chapter with a brief consideration of one of the earliest ethnographies of America: Thomas Hariot’s illustrated *Briefe and true reporte of the new founde land of Virginia*. Having established this text as a precursor to both American literature and American anthropology, I then analyze a corresponding convergence of fiction and ethnography in the nineteenth century in the popular scientific writing of Jane Marcet and the frontier narrative of Caroline Kirkland. These women write for an audience of domestic women rather than the audience of investors and traders that Hariot imagined

²⁴ This argument is similar to that of Stephen Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions*. Greenblatt acknowledges that his “recovery of the critical and humanizing power of the marvelous does not magically make up for its use in the discourse of those who came to New World to possess and enslave—as if art could redeem the nightmares of history—but it does suggest that wonder remains available for decency as well as domination” (25). I rely upon Greenblatt’s ability to understand wonder as a dual and in some ways contradictory experience.

would consume his account of Virginia. In part in an effort to meet the expectations of this reading audience, these writers dramatize the practice of the modern ethnographer. The narrator of each fictional text is a methodical researcher who has spent a considerable amount of time in two different cultures and who crafts a textual form for sharing the empirical information and theoretical understanding she has gathered.

When Malinowski explained his practice of participant observation, a perspective combining intimacy and distance in the field, he famously “fathered” modern anthropology. While it has been argued subsequently that Franz Boas’s students, among others, preceded Malinowski in practicing if not in theorizing this perspective on culture, women fiction writers less often have been credited with dramatizing and developing it.²⁵ And while the participant observer is not exclusive or original to women’s proto-realist and scientific fiction of the early nineteenth century, it is clearly evident there. Women writers of this period assume this narrative identity in response to a perceived need and particular opportunity to create a simultaneously private and public identity.

Responding to a similar need to construct and/or exploit a dual identity, Zora Neale Hurston uses fictional conventions, such as chronological narrative and character development, to produce accurate ethnography. She includes a character named Zora in her first ethnography *Mules and Men*, for example, and, in revealing Zora’s role in the

²⁵ David Sassian performs a cogent and sensitive synthesis of scholarship on women regionalists and the influence of ethnography. There are obvious connections between this literary movement and the simultaneous beginnings of professional ethnography at the end of the nineteenth century. Many, although not all, of the regionalists were women. They observed local spaces and rendered local culture in highly detailed stories, employing dialect and other elements of “local color” that closely resemble elements of ethnography. I am dependent upon Sassian’s work and that of other scholars of regionalism and American women’s writing for many of the ideas here. However, I am interested in less immediately tangible connections between fiction and

collection of data and the creation of the ethnographic narrative, Hurston deliberately holds up a mirror to the anthropologist in the field. In Chapter Three, I read Hurston's fiction and ethnography as emerging out of her training under Franz Boas in anthropology and as in dialogue with classic early modernist texts of exploration by such writers as Malinowski and Conrad. Then, in Chapter Four, I analyze the early ethnographic writing of two other famous students of Franz Boas—Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead—in light of their detailed reading of Virginia Woolf and their conscious engagement with the concerns and contentions of an avant garde modernism. Although in many ways formally “conservative,” as James Clifford asserts, the writings of Benedict and Mead also extend the tradition of intimate observation in anthropology and incorporate elements specific to women's ethnographic fictions.

anthropology, and I argue for locating the beginnings of modern anthropology earlier in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO

The Emergence of the Ethnographic Eye in America

Ethnographic fieldwork has been characterized as a kind of New World encounter that inspires language akin to Darwin's rendering of life on the Galapagos or Robinson Crusoe's description of his island isolation. Proto-ethnographic experiences (like the actual Darwin's and the fictional Crusoe's) of new landscapes and people seem to demand that language somehow stretch to accommodate new forms. In one early example particularly useful for thinking about how the ethnographic operates at geographic and linguistic boundaries—Thomas Hariot's 1590 account of Roanoke, Virginia—the inhabitants of Virginia are represented in the text in a series of etchings done by the publisher, Theodor de Bry. As one of the "first recognizably scientific accounts of the New World," according to Mary Baine Campbell, Hariot's *Briefe and true reporte of the new founde land of Virginia* makes "an important contribution to the history of ethnography" (55, emphasis hers). This initial textual record of the American continent belongs to the history of both ethnography and American literature and reveals this shared history to be in many ways a history of illusions.

I. Emergence of the Ethnographic Eye

Creating and Cataloguing a New World

Thomas Hariot's ethnological cataloguing of natural resources and human inhabitants serves to advance a commercial, imperial enterprise on a newly discovered continent. Above all, he wishes to convince his readers in England to invest in Virginia. Thus, he first must convince his readers that the native population of Virginia will succumb to England's rule, and he does this through linking sanctioned erotic liaisons to commercial ones. Echoing the words of a traditional marriage vow, he offers information on Virginia natives as proof "that there is good hope [the inhabitants] may be brought through discreet dealing and government to the imbracing of trueth, and consequently to honour, obey, feare and love us" (quoted in Campbell, 55 [see original for page #]). Bolstering Hariot's promise, the publisher, de Bry, significantly alters the drawings of Native Americans performing common daily tasks—such as crouching to eat or gathering food with children—made by Hariot's traveling companion, John White. De Bry literally "whitens" the Algonquins and alters their gestures to make them look more European. Though they remain strange looking enough to excite curiosity and perhaps naked enough to arouse and maintain the interest of the readers, he renders them familiar enough to be understood more readily and consumed more easily by English eyes. Then, de Bry appends them to the text. He seems to have considered the illustrations neither inviolable nor integral to the text but as particularly useful for increasing its market value through creating an illusion of America.

In fact, the market for the illustrated text was much wider than that for the original text, published alone two years earlier. And although the text was aimed toward prospective English backers and colonists, the first edition of the illustrated *Briefe Report* came out in four languages; it appealed to all of “literate bourgeois Europe” (55). It remains in print today. Campbell goes on to argue specifically that the illustrations in Hariot’s account make the whole of the verbal text “ethnographic.” In Campbell’s brief argument that “the pictures were motivated, in part, by the absence of an ethnographic language” (51), she defines the proto-ethnographic as a visual rendering that can act in a way similar to later textual rendering of foreign peoples and cultures. Illustrations mark the ethnographic because the descriptive language and/or narrative forms, the “ethnographic language” that later would represent similar visual content, did not yet exist. Notably, these deliberately inaccurate illustrations are employed as a marketing strategy not a documentary one.

The familiarizing or Europeanization of the people of Virginia highlights the strangeness and thus the appeal of the commodities displayed—weapons, jewelry, and food, for example. These commodities are made to seem even more appealing and more available through a strategy of eroticization. Of one illustration, titled by White “Theire sitting at meate,” Campbell points out that the couple squatting for dinner has been changed to sitting “more like Europeans at a picnic” (59). Catering to the commercial interests of his intended audience, de Bry adds a background landscape and natural resources in the form of fish, corn, and nuts that the couple presumably prepares to consume. Additionally, de Bry promotes commercial interests through eroticizing the woman of the couple. In White’s watercolor, she smiles slightly and looks, somewhat



"Theire sitting at meate." Watercolor by John White (copyright the Trustees of the British Museum, British Museum Press); Theodor de Bry's engraving from White's watercolor, in *America, Part I* (Frankfurt, 1590). By permission of The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

vaguely, in the direction of her male companion who is looking directly at her. De Bry sharpens her features, making her lighter and more European (as Campbell emphasizes) and making her eyes significantly more distinct. Her mouth slightly and evocatively parted in de Bry's rendering, she looks away from her companion and toward both the edge of the engraving and the viewer. De Bry invites the viewer into the frame through the eyes of the woman.

The blatant commercialism and eroticism encountered in early ethnographic documents such as de Bry's provide some of the clearest evidence of the overlap of colonial and scientific interest. In other words, it is not surprising that the reader should encounter the erotic being used to promote the commercial in a text recognized as contributing to the origin of the genre of ethnography. As Campbell argues:

Commercial motives and eroticized representation seem to go hand in hand, and in the case of preinstitutional ethnology, commercial or at least economic interests always underwrote and enveloped fieldwork. Perhaps redundantly, I point out the sexualized structure of historical relations between Europe and the nations it dominated because I am concerned with that structure in the context of science, with its place in the originating documents of the social science that still brings most middle-class Americans their earliest access to dirty pictures, in the pages of the *National Geographic* (59).

Campbell does not emphasize the fact that the Harriot text might be read as American literature, as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* has been.²⁶ Nevertheless, she draws a particular

²⁶ See William C. Spengemann "The Earliest American Novel: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 384-414.

link between American literature and the ethnographic by identifying Harriot as a prime example of the operation and origin of ethnography and even more markedly when she draws a parallel between the effect of Harriot's text and the way in which *National Geographic* has shaped twentieth-century Americans' concepts of other cultures. Taken to the extreme, Campbell's almost casual reference to *National Geographic* as a compendium of dirty pictures makes it sound more like a pornographic magazine than a scientific one.

Exotica as Erotica

Though many Americans even today subscribe to *National Geographic* to learn about foreign landscapes and cultures, popular culture (and recently academic culture) more frequently refers to the startling pictures of bare-breasted women or of brightly painted warriors. These visual images form a kind of eroticized collective memory of experiences in other cultures and of encounters with cultural others. Before pornography became readily available, before, for example, the publication of *Playboy* in the 1950s, the *National Geographic* magazine fueled the public imagination. In fact, Tamar Y. Rothenberg argues more explicitly than Campbell that *National Geographic* was as much a commercial pornographic magazine as it was the scientific travel magazine it claimed to be. It "took its readers to exotic places and showed them the 'other'—the wild antithesis to 'civilization'. Printing pictures of bare-breasted native women was acceptable because they were a breed apart from American women." Breasts were fit to be educationally ogled as long as they were a discernable shade of brown." Thus, the largely white, middle-class readership of the magazine could be shown the world and

simultaneously reassured of their privilege to consume it. Theodor de Bry Europeanized White's engravings of indigenous Americans as a way of making the "natives" of sixteenth century Virginia seem more domesticable, while the photo editors of *National Geographic* brought naked women comfortably a "breed apart" from Americans into the American home. Ensuring the readers' comfort at the expense of accuracy, the magazine editors occasionally altered photographs of "natives," as Rothenberg points out, citing one photographer's memory of darkening a woman who appeared "suspiciously fair-skinned."²⁷ Whether in the sixteenth century or the twentieth, market savvy publishers (and at times publication needy academics) select or create images of an "Other" that simultaneously titillate and reassure readers who want to remain in the safety of their

²⁷ The *Geographic* editors occasionally resort to blatantly deceptive methods, as Rothenberg shows. She focuses on an incident recorded in the memoir of former *National Geographic* photographer Tom Buckley:

"On one occasion, a frolicking Polynesian girl appeared suspiciously fair-skinned," reported Tom Buckley in a later retrospective. "The problem was taken care of in the Geographic's laboratories. 'We darkened her down,' said Melville M. Payne, the president of the society, 'to make her look more native—more valid, you might say.'"

In response to this revelation, Rothenberg simply concludes: "Natives are brown, imperialists white; dark-skinned bosoms are quite all right" (172). Mimicking the rhyming sing-song of children's verse, Rothenberg suggests a willful innocence on the part of the American public about its pursuit of pornographic images through the thin veil of scientific documentary. Concerned as she is with the comments by Payne (as reported by Buckley) as data, obvious in its import, Rothenberg does not analyze their content further. She prefers to show the photographer and the president themselves undermining the "validity" of the *National Geographic* photograph by confessing that the magazine must create the native rather than capturing her. The openly erotic, admittedly altered images manifest the underlying racism of the magazine.

Yet in an analysis such as this one, concerned as it is with the ethnographic as a textual strategy, the comments of Buckley and Payne deserve more attention. Seemingly unreflectively, Buckley and Payne link the "frolicking girl," the dark, and the native to the validity of the photograph, a validity defined counterintuitively by its artificiality. To Payne, this link seems self-evident and unproblematic; if not apparent, validity can be adjusted for in the laboratory. Yet, he hedges momentarily after the word "valid." He chooses "valid" to describe the intended effect of the photograph because "*you* might say" it. In this way, he backs away from the action taken to alter the photographic image and gestures out to its audience. Indeed, as Payne's hesitation seems to indicate, the validity of the photograph does not depend upon the visual content of the image; it derives from the complex web of associations made by the intended viewers.

armchairs. In *All the World is Staged*, geographer Cindi Katz writes pointedly about potential consequences of academic research, arguing that “we participate in showing cultures as artifacts or sets of practices without geography or history. The knowledge we exchange about them or render in our teaching and writing as exotica is our currency. *National Geographic*, to take but one prominent example, long has presented the ‘exotica as erotica’ to use Tamar Rothenberg’s phrase” (499).

Rothenberg uncovers these associations between the exotic and the erotic in her examination of *National Geographic* in order to indicate broader trends in American culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In other words, understanding how editors of *National Geographic* constructed content to appeal to readers ultimately suggests something about the modern American consumer. Similarly, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, who write extensively in *Reading National Geographic* about the function of *National Geographic* photographs, argue that the magazine enforces or creates habits of seeing in the American public and extends these habits to a diverse readership. For “while the messages contained in *National Geographic* photos are highly specific in terms of the world view they encode—that of the white, educated, middle-class—they speak to, and draw into their vision a far larger group, extending from highly educated professionals and managers through white-collar clericals and technicians into the working class and lower ranks of the service sector” (6). Understood as shaping a quite general American imagination, the magazine forms part of a larger imperial project that “hails these diverse readers and invites them to look out at the rest of the world from the vantage point of the world’s most powerful nation” (7). Mary Louise Pratt calls this perspective the “monarch-of-all-I survey” and locates the emergence of such

“promontory descriptions” in nineteenth-century travel narratives. Pratt’s work on the use of verbal painting to create marketable travel narratives links clearly to that of Collins and Lutz on the aesthetic content and consequent cultural impact of early *National Geographic* photographs.²⁸

The bird’s eye perspective on the rest of the world traditionally belongs to a male observer, a narrator whom Pratt terms, metaphorically, a “verbal painter” who manufactures moments of discovery to emphasize his heroic position. Pratt questions the heroism of the explorer, taking into account more differences than early feminist theorists of visual culture. She points out that these heroes “proceeded to discover what [the local inhabitants] already knew” (202), because “lots of money and prestige rode on what you could convince others to give you credit for” (204). Here, Pratt suggests a set of viewers she assumes the nineteenth-century travel writer did not anticipate: the local inhabitants.

Similarly, Rothenberg attempts to create or acknowledge viewers not likely to have been imagined by the editors of *National Geographic*. Rothenberg is looking at naked women and creating a context within which to see them differently, creating a way to see through illusory images of them. Rothenberg writes from a position inside American culture, yet distinct from the Americans who created the published

²⁸ The contemporary photograph of the Galapagos that I describe in the introduction might be understood as closer to the parodic that Pratt identifies in postcolonial narratives; this would mean that the magazine in some way has reabsorbed the forms that emerged to counter its imperial perspective and content. Pratt refers to Richard Wright’s 1957 travel narrative, *Black Power*, as a notable parody of the nineteenth-century colonial perspective of “monarch-of-all-I-survey” travelers. From his hotel perch, Wright sees “evil and death,” (according to Pratt): “I stood on my balcony and saw clouds of black buzzards circling slowly in the hazy blue sky. In the distance, I caught a glimpse of the cloudy, grayish Atlantic.” Pratt compares Wright’s description to Mary Kingsley’s. Both are aware of alternative conventions of representation and seem to be “looking for ways to abdicate the a priori relation of dominance and distance between describer and described” (221-222).

photographs. Her attempt to undermine the voyeurism and racism she understands as originally invoked by the photographs is an ethnographic gesture. She gestures to a reality beyond the visual representations to show how the popular imagination of others has been based on fictionalized representation. Exposing the process that produced these images of people in other cultures, she tries to work counter to their original intent, in other words. She does not reproduce any photographs in her article. Perhaps purposefully she does not uncover any breasts.²⁹ She relies instead on an ethnographic authority. Textualizing these images, Rothenberg intervenes between them and their original viewers. She stands between the naked women and the eyes of her readers, refusing to allow the erotic to overtake her analysis.

Such revelations as Rothenberg's about the fictions created in popular and professional ethnography have attained academic currency for good reason. Yet, I am interested only provisionally in the ideas (so disturbing to some contemporary anthropologists) central to these descriptions and analyses of a mass, visual, ethnographic culture. It is obvious to me that ethnography begins with illusory and exploitative visual representations of primitive people and additionally that current popular understanding of ethnographic data is based partially on evidence rendered deliberately inaccurate and erotic. From the above examples of American ethnography as illusory, however, it is not

²⁹ This is similar to Virginia Woolf's use of photographs in *Three Guineas*. Woolf does not reproduce graphic pictures of dead Spanish children in her text (as a right-wing newspaper has done to garner support for the war). Instead, she refers to them. She attempts to undermine the picture's power to evoke an emotional response, and she refuses to gratify voyeuristic and overly sentimental readers. The anthropologist Margaret Mead, in contrast to Woolf, acknowledges her desire to shock her readers with details from other cultures; she knowingly panders to her audience. See Introduction to *Male and Female*.

necessary to conclude anything much about the current professional practice of ethnography or the genre of ethnography.

Recent attempts such as Rothenberg's to uncover and therefore diminish the persuasive power of illusions that *have* been created demonstrate a continuing and not unwarranted—in fact, a politically necessary—reliance on the power of accurate observation. They also demonstrate a continuing reliance on the authority of the ethnographer who presents to readers a better way to view the world. The role of the ethnographer in dispelling illusion corresponds closely to the ability to produce them, in other words. Of course, some of these deliberate visual fictions have been useful in creating a market for ethnographic data. These fictions are part of the reason for the popular appeal of some ethnographies and one—although, as I will demonstrate, not the only—reason for subjecting ethnography to analysis more commonly used for literature.

Placing Thomas Harriot and current exposes of popular ethnography as brackets around a long history of ethnography in America, I want finally to draw a somewhat simple conclusion about audience: audience affects content. The attention to audience has been central to the practice and production of ethnography from its naïve beginnings to its popular dispersal and, of course, its professional formulations. With this in mind, I present the following examples of admittedly fictional texts with factual bases. With these examples, I indicate how attention to the work of women writers should alter the history of science and fiction. Looking specifically at how women write for and about other women, I also demonstrate how some elements of fiction have been used in an effort to create accurate and influential ethnography.³⁰

³⁰ In *The Vulnerable Observer*, Ruth Behar addresses the problem so pressing to many feminist ethnographers in the 1990s, of “observing a ‘we’ that, until recently, was viewed as plural,

II. Methods of Domesticating Science

An Audience of Women

The most widely used elementary chemistry text in early nineteenth-century America was written by a woman. In *Conversations on Chemistry* (1805), Jane Marcet conveys the ideas of chemistry to her readers through discussions between the characters Mrs. B and her pupils Caroline and Emily. Although more widely read than many women scientists of the nineteenth century, Marcet is a paradigmatic example of their practice. Women scientists in both Britain and America often presented their work in fictional form, making emerging scientific ideas accessible to children and to the general public. This fictional presentation also made science available to women. As she writes in the Preface that narrates the book's inception, Marcet intended *Conversations* specifically for an audience of women. After attending "the excellent lectures delivered at the Royal Institution by the present Professor of Chemistry," Marcet sees the need for a book for women who she knows in general are unprepared for the study of chemistry and other sciences. It occurs to her that "familiar conversation [is], in studies of this kind, a most useful auxiliary source of information; and more especially to the female sex, whose education is seldom calculated to prepare their minds for abstract ideas, or scientific language" (iv). Thus, much as prestigious chemists would have presented demonstrations of scientific principles to a public or academic audience, Mrs. B presents

ahistorical, and nonindividuated" (26). Similarly, Judith Stacey wonders, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" See Stacey, Sonda Hale and Daphne Patai in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. See also Wolf, ed. *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*.

demonstrations within the text.³¹ Most importantly, Mrs. B's experiments can be tried at home.

In the few first pages, Mrs. B gestures to her female audience through the guise of assuring her skeptical pupil Caroline that chemistry will prove to be not only fascinating but also useful to understanding the domestic world. Mrs. B tells Caroline and, by extension, her readers that “without entering into the minute details of practical chemistry, a woman may obtain such a knowledge of the science as will not only throw an interest on the common occurrences of life, but will enlarge the sphere of her ideas, and render the contemplation of nature a source of delightful instruction” (14). After all, chemists have progressed far beyond the embarrassing beginnings in alchemy's quest for gold and have “by their innumerable inventions and discoveries...so greatly stimulated industry and facilitated labor, as prodigiously to increase the luxuries as well as the necessities of life” (15). As managers of households and as consumers, according to Mrs. B, women have at their disposal all of the tools necessary to enjoy and understand chemistry.

The domestic setting itself provides endless opportunities for clear explanation of chemical properties and principles. When one of her pupils does not understand how these experiments can be replicated, Mrs. B. replies, “This, as you shall see, is very easily done, particularly if the experiment be tried upon a small scale. I begin by lighting this piece of charcoal with the candle, and then increase the rapidity of its combustion by blowing upon it with a blowpipe. (Fig. 28, No. 1)” (152). In presenting scientific information, Mrs. B appears to pick up objects ready to hand, emphasizing the fact that science can be done easily at home if done on a slightly different scale from that of the

³¹ Humphry Davy lectured from 1801 to 1812, when Marcet would have attended.

Royal Institution. The specific piece of charcoal and the candle do not exist and perhaps never existed, but the act of gesturing to them within the text requires the reader to suspend disbelief and enter into the experiment, to pretend that it is occurring at the moment and could be replicated in reality by the reader.³²

With this level of specificity and this habit of gesturing to domestic objects, Marcet presents her position in relation to more public practices of sciences as a somewhat simple relationship of scale. In fictional form, Marcet can participate in the scientific culture emerging in the early nineteenth century.³³ While many popularizers of science, men among them, eventually used the dialogue form to present original scientific work, Marcet proves somewhat unique in her “use of conventionality to clear a space for science in the domestic world,” as Myers argues. “Thus she does not point to *this battery*, a large and expensive piece of apparatus available only to well-endowed laboratories like Davy’s; she holds out *this vial*... Through the fiction, Marcet defines a forum in which she can take on chemistry while still remaining on terrain granted to women of her class. In *Conversations* she used a fiction[al] form that enabled her to take on new areas of knowledge while protesting that she was not leaving home” (57). By reproducing scientific experiments on a smaller scale, Marcet can practice science while seeming to remain happily ensconced in the conventional woman’s realm, the domestic. Turning the domestic setting into an arena of intellectual experimentation, Marcet’s dialogues defamiliarize the familiar space of home by employing common objects for

³² For Greg Myers, the fictional elements of Marcet’s account can be located in these moments when Mrs. B gestures to specific objects. He argues that the “deictic *this* is the fictional element” in the dialogues.

³³ See Shinn and Whitley, ed. *Expository Science: Forms and Functions of Popularisations*.

uncommon tasks. They contribute to what I am calling an emerging ethnographic perception in nineteenth-century America. I apply the term “ethnographic” to Marcet’s writing to describe particularly the conscious negotiation of position or perspective required of women writers seeking authority in a field of inquiry dominated by men in the public sphere.

Mass Visual Culture and Modern Subjectivity

As the nineteenth century progressed, women continued to experiment with the form and content of scientific writing, both in response to an increase in scientific data and in response to being “edged out” of an increasingly professionalized scientific community. Technological advances that led to greater ease of travel also allowed women scientific observers to continue to generate and disseminate scientific knowledge. As Barbara Gates suggests of British women in *Kindred Natures: Victorian and Edwardian Women Explore the Living World*, “By the mid-1800s, women popularizers may have favored taking readers in search of wider worlds because they themselves felt the constrictions of British society and its scientific community. Going beyond British borders offered women horizons against which to shine as authorities, granting them a stature more equivalent to that of men” (47). The same can be said for American women who began to explore not only beyond the borders of their own country as missionary wives or journalists but also within the ever-expanding borders of the continent of the United States.³⁴

³⁴ See Nina Baym *Women of Letters*; Bruce *The Launching of Modern American Science*. Alexander von Humboldt also traveled in part as a way to escape the strictures of his own society.

Gates's use of the words "horizons" is not incidental. By the early nineteenth century, British and American science had quantified the unreliability of the human eye. Instead of investigating geometrical optics as scientists had in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nineteenth-century scientists studied physiological optics; they accumulated knowledge "about the constitutive role of the body in the apprehension of a visible world, and it rapidly became obvious that efficiency and rationalization in many areas of human activity depended on information about the capacities of the human eye."³⁵ To increase efficiency of human activity, in other words, scientists had to learn to exploit the defects of human vision. They soon discovered ways in which to extend the horizon of perception beyond the limits of the human eye. As Gates argues, the possibility of precise observation became central to the concept of scientific advancement. "To do creditable scientific work, one had to get the field in sharpest possible focus; consequently, new optical devices were brought in to aid in this refocusing. Enter not only the photographic camera but a host of other inventions, like the stereopticon" (72). These extensions of visual perception migrated relatively rapidly from the scientific field into the domestic.

Arguing for the significance of this migration from academic to domestic, Jonathan Crary uses the original stereoscope (what Gates calls the stereopticon), the Wheatstone stereoscope, to exemplify the shifting position of the observer in the nineteenth century and to suggest a reconsideration of what "realism" means in the nineteenth century. Toys such as the stereoscope, "a dominant form for the consumption of photographic imagery for over half a century," grew out of the new scientific

³⁵ Crary *Techniques*, 16.

discoveries about the unreliability of the human visual system and were common to American households by the 1840s. To view images with this device, an observer placed his/her eyes directly in front of two mirrors set ninety degrees to one another. Identical photographic images were placed in the two slots on either side, spatially separate from one another. Crary uses this stereoscope to demonstrate that, “the illusion of relief or depth was thus a subjective event and the observer coupled with the apparatus was the agent of synthesis or fusion” (129). The observer puts himself in the same plane of operation as the apparatus, occupying a different position from that occupied by the observer in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the enclosed room of the camera obscura served as the dominant model for human vision.³⁶

In playing with such toys as the stereoscope, members of the general public participated in the production of differently registered perceptual realities and began to assume unreflectively the dual position of participant and observer. Because observers had to hold the smaller, “parlor” version of the stereoscope, they could see their own hand while simultaneously seeing the three-dimensional image created by the device. Consequently, nineteenth-century observers recognized their role in creating what they observed. The body of the observer literally became part of the illusion-creating apparatus. Building on the work of art historian Jonathan Crary, the literary critic Susan Horton has suggested that the invention and popularization of such optical devices served to develop a new “modern” subjectivity by the mid-nineteenth century. A process of modernization begins with changes in mass visual culture that preceded photography and

³⁶ Scientists in these earlier centuries conceived of the eye as a monocular device something like a camera obscura and thought that the eye received an image that existed outside of and completely separate from the observer. See Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 14, 27.

film, the technological innovations more commonly credited with causing a modernist rupture. Within what Horton and Crary call the creation of a modern subjectivity, I am including the emergence of the “naïve ethnographer” and the related emergence of a textual tradition in the nineteenth century that extends into ethnographic fiction and anthropology of the early twentieth century.³⁷

III. Participant Observers on the American Frontier

Domestic Policies

As prime examples of this shift in the observing subject, American writers such as Caroline Kirkland and Margaret Fuller assumed the position of naïve ethnographers in narrative. They observed scenes of unfamiliar domesticity among settlers and Native Americans on the frontier and recorded them for readers back home in the East. Kirkland’s account of her initial encounter with the West (in this case, Michigan where she moved with her husband William in 1835) appeared in 1839, the same year in which Darwin published his journal of his *Voyage on The Beagle* in England, the same year Louis Daguerre made images on copper plates, Henry Fox Talbot produced the first photographs on paper, ethnological societies began in England and America, and many “removals” of Native Americans began.³⁸ Kirkland’s narrative emerges simultaneously

³⁷ For a related and complimentary concept refer to James Clifford’s definition of “ethnographic subjectivity” in “On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning,” p. 93. See also Chai on Margaret Fuller’s “apprehensive” critic and her reading of Schiller’s “Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung” (*Romantic Foundations*, pp. 386-391). Also Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism*, p. 267.

³⁸ Most famously the Trail of Tears. See Honigman 113.

with trans-Atlantic scientific discoveries often understood to demarcate a modern world, yet before photographic representations or theories of natural selection had seized the popular imagination.

Within American literary history, Kirkland should be read as inaugurating a narrative standpoint. Fuller, in fact, read Kirkland's *A New Home, Who 'll Follow?* before taking her own, now more famous tour of the Great Lakes. In contrast to Fuller, Kirkland claimed there were no precursors for the narrative she wished to write. Other writers generally described the American frontier as a place of romance and picturesque wilderness, according to Kirkland.³⁹ She intended to counter these "fanciful" narratives with a useful guide to survival and, in particular, with a more accurate portrayal of frontier domesticity, a detailed and honest description of the world of frontier women. For this reason, Annette Kolodny cites Kirkland as one of the first American realists. Extending Kolodny's appraisal, Sandra Zagarell terms the narrative "ethnographic fiction," because of the way in which Kirkland combines her observations of village life with acknowledgement of her own increasing participation in a distinct frontier culture.⁴⁰

Initially, Kirkland's narrator, Mary Clavers, confronted with the lack of familiar conveniences and familiar manners, sees and describes the strange frontier life through Eastern eyes. Above all, the narrative emphasizes how difficult frontier life can be for

³⁹ See Kolodny, Zagarell, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay. See also Linda Sumption.

⁴⁰ My reading of Kirkland is heavily indebted to Zagarell who reads the shifts in Clavers's narrative as ethnographic development, akin to the experience of the fieldworker. However, Zagarell stops short of comparison with other women scientists of the time and with later more traditional ethnographies. She considers Kirkland as prefiguring recent self-reflexive anthropology; I consider her more generally as an ethnographer whose work, although it precedes professional anthropology, clearly shares features of anthropological ethnography and demonstrates a negotiation of ethnographic authority.

women who must keep an orderly and comfortable household. In contrast to the men who might till the same or richer soil and gaze on the “same book of nature,” as they did in the East, “[w]oman’s little world is overclouded for lack of the old familiar means and appliances” (146). As the narrative progresses, however, Kirkland begins to see the frontier world less in terms of what it lacks and more as an emerging culture that changes her evaluation of her home in the East and her concept of what constitutes democracy. After all, Clavers asks rhetorically, “What can be more absurd than a feeling of proud distinction, where a stray spark of fire, a sudden illness...may throw you entirely upon the kindness of your humblest neighbour? If I treat Mrs. Timson with neglect to-day can I with any face borrow her broom tomorrow?” (65). Kirkland begins the following chapter with various instances of “involuntary loans.” She frames this in the way she does every chapter, with a quote from literature; in this case, the chapter becomes a twist on Shakespeare’s “Lend me your ears” from Julius Caesar: a young girl comes in to borrow a wash-dish because “we’ve got company,” and returns immediately saying, “Mother says you’ve forgot to send a towel.” While this clearly seems presumptuous to Kirkland, this scene also dramatizes her fluctuating responses to the requests of neighbors and her increasing ability to recognize that her distinct assumptions about propriety are based on a class identity that is also an urban one. With reference to common household objects, Kirkland dramatizes an ideal democracy of the wilderness that dissolves class distinctions, a democracy that develops out of necessity in this rural domestic sphere.

Accordingly, the narrator’s perspective shifts as the narrative proceeds, increasingly exposing Eastern class prejudices until Mrs. Claver’s announces that she has reached a turning point; she has “come to claim for [her]self the dignified character of a

cosmopolite, a philosophical observer of men and things” (66).⁴¹ As cosmopolitan, she places herself in a position between the metropolitan culture of the East—represented by the newly arrived, delicate, nervous and slightly scornful Mrs. Rivers—and the frank rural culture of the frontier. Mrs. Clavers and Mrs. Rivers have just encountered this frontier culture in the form of a country wedding “which occupied three minutes, fully twice as long as is required by...state laws” (66). In asides such as this, Mrs. Clavers’s ironic and slightly scornful detachment from the frontier culture comes through. And I would argue that Kirkland assumes a detached voice at this moment in the narrative in order to reassert her connections to her Eastern audience, revealing her to be negotiating a dual perspective upon which her authority to compare cultures depends.⁴² As the narrator shifts from curious outsider to sympathetic insider, her Eastern readers implicitly are asked to reconsider the naturalness of their own attitudes and beliefs.

⁴¹ For a critique of “cosmopolitan” identity see Timothy Brennan *At Home in the World*. Think of this in part as urban vs. rural identity.

⁴² In contrast to Kirkland, Margaret Fuller bases her authority to observe and record her impression of frontier domesticity and life in the “Indian wigwam” (in *Summer on the Lakes 1843*) principally on her perspective as an outsider from the East, able to see both sides. She argues more particularly that Ojibway Indian Jane Schoolcraft remained too close to Native American culture to be able to understand and describe it accurately. She suggests that “the observations of women upon the position of woman are always more valuable than those of men.” But upon comparison of the work of two women observers, “Mrs. Grant’s seems much nearer the truth than Mrs. Schoolcraft’s, because, though her opportunities for observation did not bring her so close, she looked more at both sides to find the truth” (176). The native “Mrs. Schoolcraft” actually had more ethnological experience than the cosmopolitan Mrs. Grant; Schoolcraft worked as an interpreter and translator for her husband, the ethnologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. She “assisted with the production of the *Literary Voyager* and contributed many of its interesting poems, accounts, and legends on the Indian” (Mason, ed., p. xxviii).

Schoolcraft’s second wife, Mary Howard, also wrote; although, rather than collaborating with her husband on linguistic or ethnological texts, she wrote a novel about the “plight” of African slaves on a plantation. See Mason for more on Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and the contributions of Jane Schoolcraft. See Leon Chai for analysis of Fuller’s relation to German and English Romanticism, particularly relevant for understanding her concept of observation and objectivity. For an analysis more focused on Fuller and science, see Haronian, *Language Experiment : Science, Gender, and Discourse in the Works of Margaret Fuller*.

Rather than exhibiting consistently greater solidarity with the subjects of her study of domestic frontier culture, however, Kirkland maintains a distinction between herself and her adopted community.⁴³ In other words, she retains an ethnographic perspective, and she shows how this perspective is dependent to some extent upon her ability to set herself apart and above the other members of the Montacute community. Kirkland refers to a case brought before the “Justas of the Piece” of Montacute in one of the final chapters, and from the beginning she distances herself from the proceedings. “I had not even heard a murmur of the coming storm,” she remarks with some surprise, “when I was served with a *subpoena*, and learned at the same time the astounding fact, that at least half the Montecute Female Beneficent Society were about to receive a shilling’s worth of law on the same occasion” (173). From Kirkland’s initial description of the court, held in Squire Jenkins’s house several days later, the domestic nature of this affair is made apparent. For,

the chairs were soon filled, and then the outer edges of the two beds.

Three young pickles occupied the summit of the bureau, to the imminent jeopardy of the mirrored clock which shone above it. Boards were laid to eke out the chairs, and when the room was packed so that not a chink remained, a sensation was created by the appearance of Mrs. Nippers and Miss Clinch. Much turning out and tumbling over was now to be done,

⁴³ Lori Merish argues that Kirkland establishes her narrator as superior to her rustic neighbors through her description of objects that are evidence of Clavers’s taste, such as the set of nesting tables. Clavers works to turn her neighbors into consumers who are able to appreciate the finer things of domestic life. Kirkland’s narrative cultivates a “sentimental materialism.” This idea is persuasive, situating Kirkland within the rise of capitalist culture in America. I read Kirkland as part of this culture of consumption but also as receptive to a counter culture of frontier domesticity.

although those active ladies appeared less than usually desirous of attracting attention (174).

The setting for administering justice is revealed to be humble, and the cause of the proceedings turns out to be equally common.

Why bring such a large and largely civic-minded group of women as the Female Beneficent Society to a court of law? Admittedly, “this Association is the prime dissipation of our village,” Kirkland has written earlier. But wasteful indulgence is hardly a crime against society. Indeed such dissipation generally does much more to uphold social structures. Thus Kirkland continues her description more archly, revealing the “Beneficent” Society to be anything but. It is “the magic circle within which lies all our cherished exclusiveness, the strong hold of *caste*, the test of gentility, the temple of emulation, the hive of industry, the mart of fashion, and...the fountain of village scandal, the hot-bed from which springs every root of bitterness among the petticoated denizens of Montacute” (132). And for this, the ladies have been brought to court. The case is one of slander, precipitated by the town gossip Mrs. Nippers, who denies having ever said a word.

Clavers herself does not speak in this scene, so while she has been summoned as a member of the society, she remains partially an outside observer.⁴⁴ She observes and comments particularly on the women’s place within the system. When asked to testify, “each wished to tell ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;’ and to ask one question, elicited never less than one dozen answers; the said answers covering a much larger ground than the suit itself, and bringing forward the private affairs and opinions of

⁴⁴ Comparable to the way in which Janie is set apart from judge, jury, and the jury of her peers in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as discussed in the following chapter.

half the village” (175). The women’s words are simply more gossip, straying from the point and revealing more than necessary. They have no effect on the outcome. For “while the wordy war was waxing stronger and stronger, Mr. Flyter and Mr. Shafton very wisely withdrew, and in less than five minutes returned, and informed the company that they had ‘settled it’” (175-176). This scene may help to explain why, while Kirkland exploits narrative perspectives successfully to generate sympathy in Eastern readers, she is less successful in creating a sympathetic audience on the frontier.

By the end of the narrative, Mary Clavers purports to have embraced the country ways she initially condemned. She calls herself a rustic damsel in relation to her reading audience, because she lingers, perhaps a rather rude guest, as she hesitates about how and when to take her narrative leave (189). She has talked on at length and with many digressions, like a common town gossip. However, complete participation in frontier culture turns out to be difficult for the writer determined to be a “philosophical observer of men and things.” She never really “goes native.” Although Kirkland often made fun of herself in her narrative, her neighbors were likely more disturbed by her satirization of them. For Kirkland reported to have strained relations with her neighbors after the publication of her not-very-veiled and not-always-very-flattering portraits in *A New Home*. Consequently, Kirkland never wrote another book like this one. She continued to write about life on the frontier for several years before she returned to New York, but she deliberately changed her narrative style and softened the substance of her later work. She writes about this as a decision she made, because the stranger can make comments that a neighbor cannot.⁴⁵ Her position within the community restricts what she can say about it.

⁴⁵ Letter quoted in Zagarell (xvii)

A New Home? is a personal narrative about an Eastern woman's reaction, initial rejection, and partial acceptance of many aspects of domestic life on the Western American frontier. It precedes Kirkland's embrace of the literary market in the East, but it evidences her considerable knowledge of her Eastern audience and of the literary conventions of her time. It is a satire of customs in a rural environment, and, as Kirkland declares, it is written in opposition to more romantic narratives, those of James Fenimore Cooper or other male adventure writers, for example. As other critics have noted, Kirkland occasionally incorporates conventions of romance into her realist narrative; she does this to show how women whose expectations have been shaped by reading too many romance novels encounter conditions on the frontier that are anything but picturesque. This mixing of genres is done to move the reader toward a kind of self-awareness and eventual reform. She uses satire with the intent of changing what Zagarell calls "the conventions of her era, nonliterary as well as literary" (xx). To this end, in *A New Home?*, Kirkland reveals the distasteful habits of her rural neighbors and likewise shows how ridiculous her more refined tastes may seem to them. The willingness to examine herself as closely as she examines others keeps Kirkland from writing a completely sentimental or condescending narrative. It prefigures her professionalism. And, it makes her into an ethnographer.

Much as the anthropologist Margaret Mead directed her first ethnography to an audience of parents and educators of girls in the United States in the early twentieth century Kirkland directed her first frontier narrative to an audience of Eastern women, those who would be most interested in domestic frontier life.⁴⁶ Kirkland intended the narrative of her experience to inform her readers about alternative domestic arrangements

and, as a consequence, to reform them, even if only slightly. One of the most salient points that Sandra Zagarell makes in her introduction to Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home? Who'll Follow?* is that Kirkland was a professional writer. Professionalism became a necessity for Kirkland when her husband, William, drowned in the fall of 1846. By this time, the Kirklands had settled in New York City; Caroline Kirkland already was writing for a range of magazines and had produced two more sketches of frontier life, *Forest Life* and *Western Clearing*. Like many of the nineteenth-century American novelists described by Nina Baym in *Women's Fiction*, Kirkland saw writing as a vocation not a calling. However, "as a writer of nonfiction who intended her work for readers of both sexes," Zagarell points out, "Kirkland differs from the novelists Baym discusses" (xx). In the above analysis of Kirkland's ethnographic writing, I focused more closely on form and content: on narrative perspective, on the unfamiliar economy of exchange of domestic objects, and on the role of gossip. I ignored Kirkland's professionalism as Zagarell describes it, instead considering the ways in which the methods she dramatizes of collecting and writing up data closely resemble the methods of professional anthropologists in the twentieth century and the ways in which her texts resemble those of other women writers and anthropologists. I was interested in finding "what might be considered a separate 'women's tradition' within ethnographic writing" (Abu-Lughod 152). In attempting to conclude more generally, however, I find useful Zagarell's characterization of Kirkland as a writer who develops out of the tradition of sentimental fiction rather than strictly within it.

In drawing these conclusions, I disagree with seemingly more explicitly political and historically grounded readings of Kirkland (and to some extent of Mead). Lori

⁴⁶ See Chapter Four for a discussion of Mead and her intended readers.

Merish understands Kirkland as a woman of her time who wrote from within the confines of her economic class, for example. After extensive analysis of the Scottish Enlightenment as it influenced nineteenth-century American culture, Merish concludes that “like the Scots’ equivalence of women and luxury goods, the narrator’s identification of feminine influence with the influence of domestic objects entails a suppression of female agency: Mary Clavers, who ‘sits all day’ and meticulously avoids ‘encroach[ing] upon the rights and enjoyments of others,’ is absorbed into her parlor’s domestic décor, and appears like one of its refined domestic objects” (104). Kirkland’s attention to aesthetic objects supports a system of consumption whose consequence is female passivity, according to Merish. Therefore, Kirkland belongs within a tradition of “sentimental materialism,” a compelling term that suggests many possible interpretations but that leads Merish to a rather reductive argument: “In its alignment of form and content, *A New Home* suggestively correlates the division of the literary landscape into the separate discursive spheres of ‘male’ romance and ‘female’ realism with a sexual division of characteristic economic practices” (115). Kirkland does describe the female economy of exchange in part in order to demonstrate its superiority to men’s devious schemes to defraud settlers. And she reinforces this division between men and women through her choice of genre. Kirkland’s text supports Merish’s argument to some degree. In fact, I am arguing for a delineating tradition of women writing as “intimate observers” that encompasses Kirkland’s domestic narrative. Yet, Kirkland does not observe these separate spheres nor does she correlate her generic choice to her gender in precisely the way Merish suggests.

Kirkland, like her narrator, struggles to position herself within a rural frontier community while retaining some of her urban Eastern perspective. She becomes alternately a participant and an observer of “men and things” unfamiliar to the majority of American readers in the early nineteenth century. And in describing the culture of the American frontier from the perspective of a participant in that culture, Kirkland creates a narrative that resembles later nineteenth-century American realist novels and ethnographies. Kirkland presents frontier domesticity as an existing culture within the United States rather than as an aberration of a more dominant, urban middle-class American culture; she places herself within an emerging ethnographic tradition. Additionally, Kirkland’s narrator, instead of describing this culture from a distance, negotiates a position within it and from this position leads her readers through a process of acculturation.

Kirkland’s narrative has obvious parallels to the work of women like Jane Marcet who negotiated for a place within the world of experimental science in the nineteenth century. Like Marcet, Kirkland chooses women as the audience for her (social) scientific information; she presents a series of dialogues in fictional form out of consideration for her readers and as a way of negotiating an acceptable position as a woman in a more public field of inquiry. And, as in Marcet’s fictionalization of scientific experiments, Kirkland’s narrator defamiliarizes objects and habits familiar to her urban audience. She demonstrates methods of observation in the domestic sphere and in so doing extends the boundaries of ethnographic inquiry to encompass women’s comprehension of domestic organization.

In some ways, Kirkland's effort to transmit the democratic practices of the frontier back to an Eastern audience anticipates the much later theories of historian Frederick Jackson Turner. According to Turner, the specific characteristics of Americans and American democracy developed first on the country's frontier instead of emerging from a European tradition.⁴⁷ Of course, Kirkland dramatizes frontier democracy; she doesn't theorize it. And, in contrast to Turner, she emphasizes the democracy of communal domestic practices not the more individualistic experience of explorers and pioneers.

Native Historians

Western historians such as Turner began to ponder empty spaces such as the American frontier "as their nations discovered that none was left," according to Stephen Kern in *The Culture of Time and Space*. "In America, the census of 1890 declared that the frontier was closed, and by the end of the century the dominant world powers had finished taking the vast 'open' spaces of Africa and Asia[...]. In an essay of 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner applied geopolitical theory to explain the development of American character and institutions" (164). In fact Turner applied more than geopolitical theory. He read widely and variously in travel literature and other personal narratives, as well as more theoretical and philosophical works while formulating his now famous 1893 thesis on the American frontier.⁴⁸ Late in his life, Turner located the impetus for his

⁴⁷ A timely decision as immigration from less desirably countries of Europe began to increase.

⁴⁸ Among those thinkers who influenced him most was the English sociologist Walter Bagehot, also an influence on Matthew Arnold. Arnold's landmark volume *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) provided one of the first definitions of term "culture." In contrast to much popular understanding

theoretical work on the American frontier more specifically in his personal experience on the frontier as a child. In the penciled-in postscript to a letter written December 16, 1925 to former student, Carl Becker (who had been commissioned to write a biographical sketch for *American Masters of Social Science* (1927)), Turner writes at some length about what he remembers seeing in mid nineteenth-century Wisconsin:

What I was conscious of, was that father had come of pioneer folk, that he loved the forest, into which he used to take me fishing. I have polled down the Wisconsin in a dug-out with Indian guides from “Grandfather Bull Falls,”

(and disavowal) of Arnold’s ideas, Stefan Collini argues in his introduction to *Culture and Anarchy* that Arnold “is not talking about some passive body of art and learning whose natural home is the museum and the library, nor simply a set of high-status social activities encased in an aura of snobbery and pretentiousness. He is talking, rather, about an ideal of human life, a standard of excellence and fulness for the development of our capacities, aesthetic, intellectual, and moral” (xxi). Bagehot’s anthropological attempt to explain the origins of “national character” interested both Arnold and Turner. Bagehot defines a unique American character—possessed of the spirit of individuality and self-reliance—in *Physics and Politics: An Application of the Principles of Natural Selection and Heredity to Political Society*, and locates the origins of this character in “colonial” conditions that produce “the mingling in the West of men from many lands.” From this idea of the frontier as a contact zone, Bagehot concludes that “the West fostered new traits through intercultural borrowings, just as it did by succumbing to environmental pressures” (quoted in Billington 126. [See original]). And so, like many less systematic travel writers before him, Bagehot saw on the American frontier the evidence of healthy, hybrid democracy.

Turner synthesized the ideas he found in Bagehot with the work of other political and philosophical theorists and the travel narratives of frontier settlers, attempting to explain (as Billington points out) not only *how* Westerners differed, as earlier theorists and observers had done, but *why*. His answer had everything to do with a concept of the American frontier as what Mary Louise Pratt calls a “contact zone” between several cultures. For more on Bagehot and the “culture concept” in the nineteenth century, see Christopher Herbert. In *Culture and Anomie*, Herbert portrays “the culture idea” emerging in the nineteenth century “as a negative response to metaphors of illimited desire and social control” (303). Thus he considers “the literature of political economy,” particularly Bagehot’s *Physics and Politics*, “as a sustained response to the theory of illimitable desires, and one that lays the groundwork for ethnographic interpretation of cultures by elaborately working out a model of society as a self-enclosed system of symbolic equivalences in which the grand principle of order is exchange rather than control” (301). This might as well be a description of an economy of the home governed as it is by exchange in Kirkland’s Montacute, an economy which Kirkland implicitly opposes to the dishonest “wild cat banks” and other exploitative economic ventures on the frontier. Kirkland, however, retains the ethical imperative that Bagehot deliberately evacuates from his analysis of political economy.

through virgin forest of balsam firs, seeing deer in the river,--antlered beauties who watched us come down with curious eyes and then broke for the tall timber,--hearing the squaws in their village on the high bank talk their low treble to the bass of our Indian polesman,-- feeling that I belonged to it all. I have seen a lynched man hanging to a tree as I came home from school in Portage, have played around old Fort Winnebago at its outskirts, have seen the red shirted Irish raftsmen take the town when they tied up and came ashore, have plodded up the "pinery road" that ran by our house to the pine woods of Northern Wisconsin, have seen Indians come in on their ponies to buy paint and ornaments, and sell their furs; have stumbled on their camp on the Baraboo, where dried pumpkins were hung up, and cooking muskrats were in the kettle, and an Indian family were bathing in the river—the frontier in that sense, you see, was real to me...

This sense of the "real" frontier comes through in Turner's ability to recall its particularity in vivid detail, an ability seemingly derived from his feeling that he "belonged to it all."⁴⁹ His attention to specific places and people, to the "lynched man hanging" and the "red-shirted Irishman," to objects such as pumpkins and cooking muskrats, reveals his attachment to the frontier of his childhood and underscores his conviction that "diffusion" of European ideas could not fully account for the unique "America" he had experienced.

⁴⁹ Kirkland has a different perspective on the frontier, moving from observer to participant; Turner moves from participant to observer, describing himself in his personal recollections as gliding through the scene, although he "felt he belonged." Although both keep themselves "classed off" from the rural settlers, Turner avoids the intimacy that Kirkland exposes in the domestic economy.

Following his recollections, Turner suggests that the boundary between personal experience and historical theory is necessarily porous. He writes to Becker: “when I studied history I did not keep my personal experiences in a watertight compartment away from my studies. Early I got hold of Droysen’s dictum⁵⁰ that history is the self-consciousness of humanity, and conceived of the past as the explanation of *much* of the present—not all of it, however, thank God. But possibly this capacity to see relations between past and present may explain much of me.”⁵¹ Indeed what Turner demonstrates in his informal autobiographical letter to Becker is his capacity to *see* relations on the frontier. He grew up seeing people and commodities, nature and culture mixing on the

⁵⁰ Johann Gustav Droysen, German historian (1808-1884). Turner may have read Droysen in the original German. Printed as manuscript in 1858, his *Outline* first appeared in English in 1893. According to his translator, E. Benjamin Andrews, Droysen was “a master in investigating details, as is shown by his minor but thoroughly classical treatises upon Pufendorf, Eberhard Windeck, the Marchioness of Bayeuth, the Strahlendorf Opinion, and others, he was at the same time an historical investigator on a larger scale, who never in viewing the particular lost from his eye its connection with the great whole” (xxxiii). Relevant to Turner’s invocation of him, Droysen writes in *Outline of the Principles of History* that “the human being is, in essential nature, a totality in himself, but realizes this character only in understanding others and being understood by them, in the more partnerships of family, people, state, religion, etc” (14). Thus, in his definition of “Historical Method,” Droysen first declares that “the essence of historical method is *understanding* by means of *investigation*,” and then admits that “the possibility of this understanding arises from the kinship of our nature with that of the utterances lying before us as historical material” (12). And through history, as Turner says, man comes to the self-consciousness of humanity. For “by this building and forming process in its individuals, developing as it works, humanity creates the cosmos of the moral world. Without the restless growth and development of its moral partnerships, that is, without History, its work would be like a mountain of infusoria shells” (34). In other words, “the work of History causes the mere creature man, by discovering in the sweat of his brow what he is designed to be, to realize this design and to discover it by realizing it” (35).

⁵¹ He concludes rather charmingly and in a way reminiscent of Darwin’s investigative nausea: This is too, too much *Turner*—I feel a bit sick to my stomach at the amount of it and I am, with respect
 Very humbly your servant
 Me
 Frederick Jackson Turner
 I am glad to talk with you this way, nevertheless, just as a man might wish to “look pleasant” when he sat to a famous portrait painter.

frontier, and he comes to understand this past as an explanation for the present. In his reading notes from 1892-1893, Turner records a similar idea about the frontier as it was expressed by a western writer in the 1889 issue of the *Unitarian Review*: “It is the singular advantage of a country like ours that we have not to go back in time, or many days journey in space, to come upon the rude beginnings of that social order which today we find so complicated. The beginning, middle, and end of that several thousand years’ growth are spread out before us like a map or else foreshortened to our view in the perspective of our chronology.” If Turner’s letter is a catalogue of objects on the frontier of his childhood, it might well be a catalogue to illustrate the “map” of time invoked by the writer in the *Unitarian Review*, for whom any spatial representation of the country is simply a foreshortened chronology.⁵²

The actual moment in which Western historians began to ponder the concept of ‘empty space’ and, in the case of Turner, its relation to American character coincides with the beginnings of an international literary response to a more general sense of space-time collapse like that described in the *Unitarian Review* above. In 1899, for example, Joseph Conrad began to publish installments of *Heart of Darkness*. Lauded as a bold experiment with narrative form, *Heart of Darkness* secured for Conrad his role as “progenitor” of the modernist novel. Conrad’s vagueness, his psychological exploration of character rather than strict adherence to chronological narrative, and his use of an unreliable narrator all became characteristic features of modernist literature in the early twentieth century. Perhaps naturally, Conrad has also been claimed as a kind of

⁵² Turner’s cataloguing impulse is much like Walt Whitman’s whose cataloguing of the country in *Leaves of Grass* becomes a method of self-creation, of creating and assuming an American identity.

progenitor of modern anthropology.⁵³ Given his predilection for creating doppelganger characters (like Marlow and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*), the Polish-born author Conrad might have appreciated being linked—as he is by James Clifford—with Polish-born anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. In the following chapter, I examine the writing of Malinowski and Conrad as representative early modernist texts in order to contrast them with the more controversial fiction and inventive anthropology of the later modernist writer Zora Neale Hurston.

⁵³ In “Ethnographic Self-Fashioning,” Clifford says that twentieth-century literature is characterized by ironic participant-observation. He claims participant-observation as a phenomenon of “modernity,” and while he acknowledges that “modernity” keeps happening to us, he doesn’t seem to think that the pairing of irony and participant-observation happened before the twentieth century. See Marc Manganaro whose introduction to *Modernist Anthropology* reviews the history of the field: “Edward Ardener maintains that what can be called modernism in anthropology begins in 1920 (roughly with the advent of Malinowski’s version of the monograph) and ends in 1975 (with the beginnings of postmodern anthropology).”

CHAPTER THREE

Explorers, Ethnographers, and Zora Neale Hurston's Glass Eye

“You got tuh go there tuh know there,” Zora Neale Hurston’s most famous fictional character, Janie Crawford, says to her friend Pheoby at the end of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Within a novel, dependent as it is upon the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief, Janie’s privileging of lived experience over written text seems surprising. Through Janie, Hurston questions the reliability of narrative. She suggests a limit to what the reader can learn from or should believe about the retelling of events that she hasn’t experienced herself. And in partially undermining the truth value of a once-removed narrative account, Janie asserts the authority of her own experience, an authority more commonly understood as ethnographic than literary. For, authority in modern professional ethnography derives in large part from the ethnographer’s ability to demonstrate that she has “been there” to observe another culture.⁵⁴ Janie’s matter-of-fact statement, made as she finishes telling her life story, suggests that Hurston’s fictional text is best analyzed as an artifact of American literary and anthropological history. In this chapter, I am proposing Hurston’s work in fiction and ethnography as a norm rather than an exception within twentieth-century modernism.

In the 1922 introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski quite boldly declared, “As always happens when scientific interest

⁵⁴ See James Clifford “On Ethnographic Authority” in *The Predicament of Culture*, 21-54; Clifford draws upon the distinction made by Paul Ricoeur between “discourse” and “text.” See also Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places,” in *Writing Culture*, on the fictional conventions used in traditional ethnography to establish authorial presence.

turns towards and begins to labour on a field so far only prospected by the curiosity of amateurs, Ethnology has introduced law and order into what seemed chaotic and freakish” (9). Here Malinowski articulates one of the central tenets of early anthropology: science will bring order to chaos. Writers and artists dedicated to an avant garde modernism were moving more concertedly toward the disruption and fragmentation of form at the same moment. To better define the relationship between these two powerful strains within early twentieth-century European and American culture, careful analysis of the work of Zora Neale Hurston is particularly apt. Hurston worked as an anthropologist in her native culture only a few years after Malinowski published his manifesto.⁵⁵ Her attempt to reveal a primitive culture as experienced first from within and then observed from without is contrary to Malinowski’s effort to differentiate his objective method from the prospecting of amateurs and natives—yet only somewhat.

Hurston’s novels and ethnographies record the effect of culture on *and* the understanding of culture by an individual human consciousness forming within it. She exposes the workings of a primitive consciousness. It is precisely this consciousness and narrative perspective that seems to entice and yet elude some of the most famous of the modernist writers: the deeply psychological novelist Joseph Conrad, for example, or the

⁵⁵ For a related, extended analysis of early Enlightenment curiosity and the “freakish,” see Barbara Benedict *Curiosity*; Benedict considers women first as the “natural” objects of curiosity then analyzes how curious women were perceived as dangerous. Also relevant is Mary Baine Campbell’s description of the simultaneous origins of ethnography, pornography, and popular collections of artifacts in curiosity cabinets. For a specific analysis of early modern women’s writing and ethnography see Campbell chapters 10 and 11.

early anthropologists, most famously Malinowski, who took to living for long periods of time among the natives.

I. Early Modernisms: Conrad and Malinowski Among the Natives

Self-Fashioning: Ethnography and Imagination

Through the development of fieldwork methodology around participant observation, Malinowski sought to establish ethnography in the early twentieth century as more objective and therefore more accurate than amateur travelers' accounts.⁵⁶ Thus he is most famous for reminding the ethnographer that despite aiming for scientific objectivity, ethnography must aim to "grasp the native's point of view."⁵⁷ Expressing a now-familiar concern about the encroachment of civilization into the primitive world, Malinowski offers the ethnographic observer as a necessary antidote in the Foreword to his ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*:

The hope of gaining a new vision of savage humanity through the labors of scientific specialists opens out like a mirage, vanishing almost as soon as perceived. For though at present, there is still a large number of native communities available for scientific study, within a generation or two,

⁵⁶ Malinowski has been heralded as the "father" of participant observation largely because he codified it. Susan Hegeman argues that he didn't create it, however; it already existed.

⁵⁷ Karen Jacobs skewers the participant observer more pointedly, reminding us: "...as a chorus of post-Geertzian anthropologists have made clear, the dirty little secret of the participant-observer method is its masking or denial of the complexity of the intersubjective encounter between fieldworker and native, as the power relations that result from this encounter" (Jacobs 332). I find her accepting this critique too wholeheartedly.

they or their culture will have practically disappeared. The need for energetic work is urgent and the time is short (xvi).

Malinowski presents anthropology as dedicated to the work of preservation and the ethnographic project as motivated by the hope of gaining a new vision of humanity through scientific labor and specifically through scientific observation within “savage” communities. He acknowledges the possibility that this new vision may be an optical illusion, a “mirage,” yet only because the work of observation and thus preservation cannot be done fast enough to catch these disappearing ways of life, not because the cultures cannot be caught or cannot be understood fully by an outside observer. He continues with a dramatic appeal to his readers: “Nor, alas, up to the present, has any adequate interest been taken by the public in these studies. The number of workers is small, the encouragement they receive scanty” (xvi). Thus his ethnography begins with a call for readers to provide the interest and encouragement due to such important work of cultural preservation.

In addition to appealing to the preservation-instinct of his audience in the introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski advocates his now well-known method of fieldwork. He is careful to point out first that the student of anthropology “must possess real scientific aims,” but his contribution to the formation of the discipline was as an advocate of a more subjective participant observation in culture. He proposed direct and prolonged experience as the best method for understanding a culture well enough to explain it to others: the ethnographer “ought to put himself in good conditions of work, that is, in the main, to live without other white men, right among the natives.” Malinowski’s own brief autobiographical account provides a means

of understanding this method of investigation, or as he says, “a brief outline of an Ethnographer’s tribulation, as lived through by myself, may throw more light on the question, than any long abstract discussion could do.” So he issues an invitation to the reader: “Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dingy which has brought you sails away out of sight” (4).⁵⁸

In *Argonauts*, Malinowski intentionally creates an image of the professional anthropologist at work in the field.⁵⁹ However, at the same time that Malinowski was recording data to produce a greater understanding of both an ethnographer and a culture, he also was recording his intimate reactions to fieldwork in his diary. He never destroyed this record in which he reveals his skepticism about the professional and personal decisions he has made. And to the great chagrin of many anthropologists in 1967 (when his diary was published posthumously) Malinowski represents himself in his private writing as a figure more like Conrad’s Kurtz who at times “tends toward exterminate the brutes” (XX) than like the romantic anthropological hero inviting his readers to “imagine” another world with him.

The ethnographic monograph presents a coherent observing narrator—the ethnographer—and a coherent observed people—the Trobrianders; it reveals no evidence

⁵⁸ By the time Mary Louise Pratt refers to this passage as an illustration of the markers of travel writing in ethnography, it is already, in her words, “the now famous line” that opens Malinowski’s personal narrative.

⁵⁹ He uses the word “imagine” frequently in the introduction and throughout the rest of the ethnography. Correspondingly, Frazer remarks in the preface that Malinowski has produced “round” characters as opposed to the “flat” character found in most ethnographic accounts of culture. Using E. M. Forster’s terms, Frazer likens Malinowski’s methods and textual rendering to those of the successful modern novelist. Certainly Malinowski shows a novelistic attention to the imaginative powers of his readers.

of the ambivalence, the latent racism, the emotional struggles of its author and admits little chaos into the ordered presentation of a culture. None of Malinowski's meditations on his motivation or lack of it, little personal or private history, no descriptions of his frequent sickness or indications of his disjointed thoughts about the culture he observes appear in his ethnography.

Then again, Malinowski does admit in the ethnography that he read novels to escape from the tedium of fieldwork. It is a vice he constantly tries to overcome. In the *Diary*, he says much more about his reading and its relation to his anthropology; he cites Conrad in particular as a kindred spirit, declaring in an often quoted letter to B. Seligman, "[W.H.R.] Rivers is the Rider Haggard of Anthropology: I shall be the Conrad!"⁶⁰ James Clifford argues in contrast to Malinowski's self-description that anthropology still awaits its Conrad. Because Clifford wants to establish a relationship between writing fiction and writing ethnography, he goes on to analyze the parallels between Conrad and Malinowski anyway; it is, after all a relationship that Malinowski acknowledges even as he tries to escape it. Clifford focuses on the process of "self-fashioning" he finds equally central to each text. Although he admits that "ethnographies are both like and unlike novels," he goes on to explain their essential similarity:

in an important general way the two experiences enact the process of fictional self-fashioning in relative systems of culture and language that I call ethnographic. One is tempted to propose that ethnographic comprehension (a coherent position of sympathy and hermeneutic

⁶⁰ Consider broader discussions of the participant-observer in literature. See, for example, Bewell on participant observation as a perspective William Wordsworth deliberately cultivated (although not under this term).

engagement) is better seen as a creation of ethnographic *writing* than a consistent quality of ethnographic *experience*. In any event what Malinowski achieved in writing was simultaneously (1) the fictional invention of the Trobrianders from a mass of field notes, documents, memories, and so forth, and (2) the construction of a new public figure, the anthropologist as fieldworker, a persona that would be further elaborated by Margaret Mead and others (110).

Clifford is careful about his delineation of Malinowski's ethnography as a fiction. Ethnographies are not novels, after all. They simply depend upon the same kind of "fictional self-fashioning" as the novel. Moreover, he considers that sympathetic comprehension of another culture may depend upon the coherence, and perhaps the closure, inherent to the act and product of writing as opposed to the more incoherent experience of the ethnographer in the field. Malinowski acknowledges something similar in his discussion of the ethnographer's need for tables.⁶¹

Despite Clifford's cautiousness, anthropologist Raymond Firth protests against reading ethnography as fiction, pointing out that Clifford incorrectly "treats the *Diary* and *Argonauts* as 'a single expanded text.'" For Firth, this elision of the distinction between genres with radically different intended audiences places Clifford's subsequent argument on a weak foundation. Treating the private *Diary* and the public *Argonauts*, "as two sides of Malinowski's complex personality," Clifford advances a theory about ethnographic fiction that Firth finds too broad to be useful. "Clifford has become fascinated by the notion of *fiction* and tends to treat any text with an element of personal subjectivity in it,

⁶¹ See Chapter One.

as fiction. It is not clear what he understands as ‘fiction.’ But for him the *Diary* is a fiction of self for Malinowski, and the *Argonauts* the fiction of a culture—though ‘realistic cultural fictions’ whatever that might mean.”⁶² Firth is clearly bothered by what he perceives to be Clifford’s attempt to undermine the truth-value of ethnography and the objectivity of the anthropologist upon which this value seems to depend.

To clarify slightly the connection Clifford makes between Conrad and Malinowski, I would point out that the most striking parallels Clifford draws are not between the author and the anthropologist but rather between Conrad’s fictional characters, such as Kurtz, and the character of Malinowski who emerges in the *Diary*.⁶³ Furthermore, Clifford’s attention to fictional constructions in ethnography need not undermine completely the important function ethnography serves within the field of anthropology. He simply ascribes to literary analysis part of the task of understanding

⁶² See Raymond Firth’s second Introduction to *A Diary In the Strict Sense of the Term* (1967/1988).

⁶³ Clifford seems rather more interested in how the concept of fiction applies to Malinowski than in how Conrad dramatizes participant observation. For Clifford, as discussed above, the diary and the ethnography are both fictions because they both are Malinowski’s attempt to create an identity for himself; they are about self-fashioning. Malinowski actually writes more concretely about the way fiction effects him bodily while he’s in the field. He lies nauseous at the bottom of the boat after reading. Yet he continues to turn to novels to turn away from the culture surrounding him; the natives sicken him also.

Several suggestive parallels exist between the Malinowski described in the diary and the characters and narrators of modernist fictions such as Conrad’s. Concerned to expose the primitivism of anthropology, for example, Torgovnick dwells on the moment when, in his diary, Malinowski describes the back of a native woman in a highly erotic/voyeuristic way and wishes he had his camera. She links Malinowski’s wish for a camera when looking at women to Marlow looking at Kurtz’s mistress from the boat in *Heart of Darkness*. However, Malinowski’s description echoes more directly Conrad’s descriptions of Nina and Nina’s mother in *Almayer’s Folly*—not surprisingly, since Malinowski read this novel in the field. Nancy Bentley in *Ethnography of Manners* compares Malinowski’s gaze in this same moment to that of the unnamed narrator of *The Sacred Fount* who looks frequently at people’s backs as he makes up stories about them. Bentley uses this textual parallel to support her idea that the writing of Henry James is ethnographic: his narrator catalogues people (voyeuristically, as does Malinowski), and the Jamesian narrator assumes the authority to comment on other people by assuming on the role

the impact of ethnography on its readers and the methods used in the “construction of a new public figure, the anthropologist as fieldworker.” The textual construction of a public figure necessarily involves some excising of information about the private figure and in Malinowski’s case necessarily involved the creation of two separate texts. It interests me more particularly that the intimate ruminations Malinowski concertedly omits from his professional writing resemble the autobiographical fragments Joseph Conrad deliberately works into his (in)famous fictional treatment of exploration and doubleness, *Heart of Darkness*.

Blank Spaces on the Map

Conrad begins his “Personal Record” of his travels with an invocation that links writing, isolation, and place. Unlike Malinowski, however, Conrad describes a place only momentarily still and an isolation always in danger of interruption. He begins by reminding his readers that “Books may be written in all sorts of places. Verbal inspiration may enter the berth of a mariner frozen fast in a river in the middle of a town.” After raising the possibility of a Muse boarding a ship, Conrad allows himself to remember himself “tracing on the grey paper of a pad which rested on the blanket” lines of dialogue that became part of his first book, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895). His tracing, a response to “an hallucinated vision of forests and rivers and seas,” is “cut short by the third officer, a cheerful and casual youth, coming in with a bang of the door and the exclamation, ‘You’ve made it jolly warm in here.’” (19) Conrad portrays writing as a

of professional observer. His professionalism and consequent authority are marked by many of the same features in the text that are used to establish the authority of the ethnographer.

precarious occupation that might begin and end in an instant and as a curiously visual, almost map-like, occupation of tracing lines on a grey paper while recalling landscapes visited in Southeast Asia.⁶⁴

The interruption by the third officer returns Conrad to his present surroundings so that instead of hallucinating landscapes, he turns to look through the porthole of his berth. “The round opening framed in its brass rim a fragment of the quay” which Conrad describes as “grimy...sombre...shabby...poorer quarters bordering the river” (21). From this opening of his autobiographical sketches, it becomes clear that Conrad naturally links the visual and the verbal. Given his moment in history, the apparent naturalness of this linking for Conrad may be thought of in part as a product of the popularization of photographic imagery. His habit of thinking through the visual demonstrates what Jonathan Crary would call his assumption of “modern subjectivity.”⁶⁵ In his memoirs and fictions, Conrad pays particular attention to markers of space and their social implications. Though he says in his preface to the autobiographical writing that “[t]he power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense,” he relies heavily on the power of sight or, perhaps more accurately, on his readers’ ability to imagine, quite literally on their ability to create images.

⁶⁴ See Gillian Beer in “Four Bodies on the Beagle” for her cogent discussion of Darwin’s journal account of lying seasick in the bottom of the boat (suffering as Malinowski does from material conditions to which he is physically unsuited but that are necessary for research); he immediately describes a dissection he witnessed on shore, and in this description, the distinction between himself and the object seems occasionally to dissolve. For a rich analysis of early cartography, see Conley *The Self-Made Map*, especially pp. 20-23 on the simultaneous origins of autobiography and cartography.

⁶⁵ See Crary *Techniques of the Observer and Suspensions of Perception*.

Conrad's sensitivity to perspective and to explicit frames, like the porthole he must look through to see a slice of the world, marks his awareness of occupying a position both inside and outside of culture and the language within which he has chosen to write. It also marks his modernism, encapsulated most famously in his preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*, the text heralded by Michael North as a "Preface to Modernism." Here, Conrad meditates on the relation between the task of the scientist and the task of the artist, beginning by asserting that the artist "like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal." In contrast, the scientist must "speak authoritatively to our common-sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to our fears, often to our egoism—but always to our credulity...It is otherwise with the artist." The artist, in Conrad's reckoning, must appeal to the reader's temperament. "Such an appeal, to be effective, must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way." This distinction between the purpose of science and art leads Conrad to his famous declaration that his task as a writer is "by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*."⁶⁶

In *Heart of Darkness*, the protagonist, Marlow, locates his urge to explore in his childhood, a time before the great expansion of colonial power into the interior of the African continent. He begins telling his story to his old friends, on a pleasure cruise with him on the Thames by explaining:

At that time, there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The

⁶⁶ Pp. 1498-1500 in Norton Anthology. [Get page numbers for preface with text.]

North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and...well we won't talk about that. But there was one yet-the biggest, the most blank, so to speak-that I had a hankering after" (71).

What Marlow calls "hankering after" blankness has become a classic formulation of the explorer's impulse.⁶⁷ Curiously, or perhaps predictably masculine in its thrust, the necessity to travel springs from a perceived need to go into a blank space, to fill the blank space with his own presence. Indeed the blankness of the map seems to extend into Marlow's narrative. Though he mentions other places he has been, he suddenly stops mid-sentence and refuses to elaborate. Language seems to fail him, and blankness appears typographically in the form of ellipses just before he refers to Africa, "the biggest" and "the most blank" space on the map. Then, as an adult, and an experienced sailor searching for a new voyage, Marlow happens to look in a shop-window in London and see a map that "had got filled since...boyhood with rivers and lakes and names." It still fascinates him "as a snake would a bird-a silly little bird" (71). In other words, though no longer a blank space, the Congo river region remains a place of unknown wonder to the adult Marlow, and he invokes that wonder to begin his tale.⁶⁸

The possibility of coming to a greater understanding of the self through coming to an understanding of another culture is dramatized in scenes such as this in the fiction and

⁶⁷ See Stephen Kern *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*, especially pp. 152-170.

⁶⁸ See Campbell who considers wonder and science interdependent in early modern Europe (*Wonder and Science*). See also Greenblatt *Marvelous Possessions*.

memoirs of Conrad. Because of this, Conrad—the quintessential modernist writer and explorer—has been labeled “a thoroughgoing racist” by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. Achebe criticizes the fact that in *Heart of Darkness* the map does not render the geographical features of the actual continent of Africa but serves instead as a vehicle through which to explore childhood memory. Similarly, Marlow’s journey on the Congo river, much as it may be read as an exposure and indictment of colonization, actually privileges the growth of the European male mind, the growth of Marlow’s self-consciousness.⁶⁹

Recent postcolonial, feminist, and anthropological theorists have made it clear that an outsider attempting to examine another culture risks seeing only what she has been prepared to see, risks seeing only elements that fit into preconceived notions about primitive culture.⁷⁰ And histories of the use of “primitivism” in twentieth-century art and literature have focused on such impulses to define an “other” in such a way that a clearer

⁶⁹ See Edward Said in “Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative” on vision in Conrad as evidence of his struggle with writing and authorship. “Conrad had the dubious privilege of witnessing within his own double life the change from storytelling as useful, communal art to novel writing as essentialized, solitary art” (101). For Said, it is because of Conrad’s direct experience of the difference between shipboard storytelling and the published novel that “Conrad is generally unhappy with the idea of writing, so much so that when he is not complaining about it he is always turning it into substitute speech” (109). This transformation is understood by Said through the Freudian concept of negation: negating writing somehow results in an affirmation of it (an affirmation of what is repressed). The function of oral storytelling as Said understands it in Conrad’s novels is relevant to the following argument about Hurston. More relevant at this point in the discussion, however, Said concludes that “if the mimetic function of language is solely inadequate to make us see, then by using substance instead of words the Conradian hero, like Conrad himself, aims to vindicate and articulate his imagination...In the end, like the dying Kurtz with his hoard of ivory, the hero becomes a talking insubstantiality...And for every Kurtz and Jim, there is a Marlow by whose memory a body can be recaptured in all its splendor and youth” (110).

⁷⁰ For more on feminism, experimental science, and anthropology, see the fundamental theoretical writing collected in Donna Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. See also Sandra Harding *The Science Question in Feminism*.

definition of the self can emerge. Thus theorists such as Marianna Torgovnick have argued that, "The real secret of the primitive in this century has often been the same secret as always: the primitive can be--has been, will be (?)--whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. It tells us what we want it to tell us" (9). In *Gone Primitive*, Torgovnick offers a detailed and explicitly feminist reading of Conrad in light of this "secret" of the primitive. She focuses on the way in which the African woman, commonly read as Kurtz's mistress, "is made to embody the landscape, rendered throughout in the language of pathetic fallacy." Generalizing from the geographic description of the African woman's body, Torgovnick locates what she understands to be a crucial substitution in Conrad, a substitution that occurs throughout the Western artistic movement known as modernism: "In some sense, to speak of women in *Heart of Darkness* and to speak of the primitive are, illogically, one and the same thing fantastic, collective ('women are all alike'), seductive, dangerous, deadly." To prove her point about this substitution and the lack of attention it has received, Torgovnick tracks both formal and political criticism of Conrad and suggests their limitations:

We have known for some time—how could we not know—that Conrad's works are about "identity," something achieved through a devious series of identifications and distinctions, through the dialectics of self and other. We have read for some time the structure of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* as a series of comparisons and contrasts between one male character and another: Marlow and the Belgians, Marlow and Kurtz; Jim and Marlow and Stein and the French Lieutenant, and the Malay Helmsman, and so on (Van Ghent, *English Novel*). We have tended to pose these

dynamics in traditional psychological terms (Freudian or Jungian) or philosophical terms (the “morally responsible” versus the derailed, the “realistic” versus the “romantic”). I am suggesting here that the texts’ treatment of primitive societies and their substitution of the female for the primitive are more explosive than these traditional terms allow (156-158).

Here Torgovnick chastises Conrad for both his primitivism and his sexism, demonstrating how women are figured as the blank spaces on the map. Taking up this gauntlet thrown down by Torgovnick in her “explosive” linking of two dangerous tendencies in early modernism, I devote the remainder of this chapter to a closer analysis of one notable successor to both Conrad and Malinowski, the African American woman writer, Zora Neale Hurston.

Hurston recognized that as an African American in the early twentieth century she would be seen most frequently as the object of anthropological study, the vehicle through which a writer like Joseph Conrad might move to understanding of himself or to an understanding of “man” as both particular and universal. Hurston responded to this recognition by training the “spy-glass of Anthropology” on her own home culture, fully aware that this culture would be regarded as primitive and strange by many Americans. In other words, although Hurston knew that as an African American, in the eyes of the prominent sociologist W.E.B. DuBois, she possessed a “double-consciousness,” she refused to be “tragically colored.” Choosing Franz Boas as her intellectual ancestor, she deliberately assumes the role of participant and observer, of native and anthropologist in African American culture. I intend to show that such readings as Achebe’s and

Torgovnick's contextualize much early twentieth literature but in turn are complicated by the work of a writer such as Hurston.

II. Toward an Anthropology of Women

Looking for Zora

Unlike Conrad or his fictional narrator, Marlow, Hurston does not point to an abstracted location on a map and say, "When I grow up I will go there." Instead, in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942), Hurston assumes the perspective of a proto-anthropologist surveying the observable world. "I used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world," she declares at the beginning of a chapter entitled "The Inside Search." From this perch, Hurston finds "the most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. Every way I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. I grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like. The daring of the thing held me back for a while, but the thing became so urgent that I showed it to my friend, Carrie Roberts, and asked her to go with me" (27). Thus, Hurston recounts her childhood impulse to walk to the horizon. In contrast to Conrad, she does not intend to set off on her quest alone but invites her friend to go along. Her call for a companion with whom to explore geographic places and self-understanding recalls the fictional Janie and Pheoby in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Hurston and her friend Carrie together climb to the observation post at the center of the world, and they draw upon the familiar domestic world closest to them to envision

what they cannot yet see. “We sat up in the trees and disputed about what the end of the world would be like when we got there—whether it was soft of tucked under like the hem of a dress, or just was a sharp drop off into nothingness” (27). Notably, Hurston does not describe the horizon first as a blank space that she can fill in with her own exploration but as an object, a specifically tactile and feminized object, the tucked under hem of a dress. Such domestic imagery proves central both to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and to her first ethnography, *Mules and Men* (1935) where dress functions as an observable marker of class and gender roles.

Within Hurston’s autobiography, the aborted journey functions first as a lesson about race in America. For Hurston never makes it to the horizon; her friend will not risk the whipping they almost certainly will receive if they cannot make it there and back by sundown. Initially undaunted, Hurston decides she can make the journey alone if her father buys her a riding horse for Christmas. Hearing this request, she remembers, her father exploded and reminded her, “[Y]ou ain’t white.” Hurston footnotes this statement for her readers, acknowledging that she writes to a non-black audience: “That is a Negro saying that means ‘Don’t be too ambitious. You are a Negro and they are not meant to have but so much.’” As a consequence of this incident, Hurston reports that she turned even more forcefully to her imagination: “Since Papa would not buy me a saddle horse, I made one up. No one around me knew how often I rode my prancing horse, nor the things I saw in far away places.” This scene creates a frame for understanding Hurston the adult who can make it her business to let people know the things she sees. Rather than riding to the far away places she imagined as a child, however, Hurston returns home to Eatonville to collect her first ethnographic data.

As Hurston's autobiography follows a rough chronological scheme, "The Inside Search" logically precedes the chapter "Research." The vague echo of one chapter title in the other suggests that for Hurston the childhood conviction that the world revolves around her and the urge to see the world that arises from this conviction form a context for later anthropological research and ethnographic writing. In fact, this seems to be a general motivation for the practice of anthropology. As Mary Louise Pratt points out in "Fieldwork in Common Places," "In terms of its own metaphors, the scientific position of speech is that of an observer fixed on the edge of a space, looking in and/or down upon what is other. Subjective experience, on the other hand, is spoken from a moving position already within or down in the middle of things, looking and being looked at, talking and being talked at. To convert fieldwork, via field notes, into formal ethnography requires a tremendously difficult shift from the latter discursive position (face to face with the other) to the former" (32-33 in Clifford and Marcus). What Pratt calls the difficult shift from subjective experience to objective observation and reporting, or from fragmented field notes to structured ethnography, seems similar to Hurston's shift from the self to the horizon and back. Hurston goes on to declare in the "Research" chapter, "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein" (127). By ending this lyrical definition of her chosen occupation on the word "therein," Hurston suggests not only that the researcher wants to know the world and its inhabitants, but also that the cosmic secrets of the world might dwell within the researcher herself.

Readers of *Mules and Men* follow the development of a woman, the anthropologist named Zora in the text, as she travels to three African American cultures

in Florida collecting folk tales and recording voodoo practices. Seemingly anticipating the later twentieth-century turn to a “self-reflexive” ethnographic text that includes the presence of the ethnographer in the field, Hurston writes a figure of herself into her ethnography in order to record more accurately her own culture.⁷¹ As both a scientist and an object of scientific curiosity in the early twentieth century, Hurston recognized her presence in the field to be part of an African American culture she was working to record, to preserve and celebrate, and also to transcend. The presence of the ethnographer in Hurston’s ethnography makes the ethnography read more like a realist novel that proceeds chronologically and promises the development of its central character through a series of encounters. And as a novelistic narrative, Hurston’s ethnography in many ways more closely resembles the “amateur productions” of travelers and missionaries from which at the time many other modern ethnographers were attempting to distance themselves.

Hurston specifies that she returns to her “native village” not so “that the home folks could make admiration over me because I had been up North to college and come back with a diploma and a Chevrolet. I knew they were not going to pay either one of these items much mind. I was just Lucy Hurston’s daughter, Zora” (3). In other words, to her once familiar domestic world, she is the same Zora. She can go home again. Home becomes the field of data collection, a location of simultaneous familiarity and distance for Zora. “I knew that even I was going to have some hindrance among strangers. But here in Eatonville I knew everybody was going to help me” (5). The

⁷¹ Vincent Crapanzano produces such “self-reflexive” ethnography in *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. In addition, Crapanzano theorizes this disciplinary turn in numerous essays. See his collection *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire*.

familiarity or “help” provided by people who know her will be critical to the collection of data. Like Janie the protagonist of *Their Eyes*, Zora, the protagonist of *Mules and Men*, has to go there to know there. Even more specifically, Zora goes somewhere she already knows and somewhere she is already known, and she calls this place the ideal site in which to be an anthropologist.

When Zora leaves Eatonville for a region slightly further south, she must acknowledge that in her time up North, she has forgotten how to be familiar. Her lack of familiarity with the culture she has come to study is revealed in a scene of contact in which she becomes suddenly attentive to visual objects, to the cultural artifacts around her. “I looked about and noted the number of bungalow aprons and even the rolled down paper bags on the heads of several women. I did look different and resolved to fix all that no later than the next morning” (69). This moment functions to establish her authority as an ethnographer “different” enough from the natives to observe them accurately. Yet, while establishing her position as trained outside observer, Zora also assumes the ethnographic authority of an insider. Her familiarity gives her the immediate ability to note important visual details and explain their significance to her readers. For Zora, fitting in to a culture is just a matter of what dress she chooses to wear. Hurston uses the character/narrator Zora to direct the reader to look and to instruct the reader about how to look at dress and gesture as cultural markers. Further elaborating on these cultural markers, she shows that she knows how to recognize and move immediately from the outsider position dictated by her “\$12.74 dress from Macy’s that [she] had on among all of the \$1.98 mail-order dresses.” To effect her shift in cultural location, she must tell a story about her clothes that will root her in the community. She must lie. She quickly

creates her character by explaining, “Mah man brought me dis dress de las’ time he went to Jacksonville. We wuz sellin’ plenty stuff den and makin’ good money. Wisht Ah had dat money now.” By posing as a bootlegger’s woman and by her “laughing acceptance of Pitts’ woofing,”⁷² Zora wins the acceptance by the community that will allow her to gather the best “lies.” Such “thick description,” the multiple contexts Hurston provides for more concrete ethnographic details, becomes possible only because of Zora’s unique position both inside and outside of the culture under study.

Hurston treats “looking” as a key action in culture and in cultural preservation, as important as “talking” or “signifying.” She collects the visual object and the oral object. She describes in visual terms her experience of the oral tales she has know since childhood and has to decided to add to science as an adult, writing in her introduction to *Mules and Men*: “When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of negroism. From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had know about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that” (3). Michael North argues somewhat speciously that the \$12.74 dress that Zora wears in Kissimmee is that “tight chemise” she describes in her Introduction. “I couldn’t see it for wearing it,” she says as a way to explain how anthropology gave her the power to observe. Yet, in the ethnographic narrative that follows, her disciplinary training in anthropology does not give her the ability to see her

⁷² Hurston footnotes this in the text as “Aimless talking.” She elaborates in the glossary at the end of the text: “A man half seriously threatens to fight or brags of his prowess in love, battle or

dress. Rather, one of her informants, Mr. Pitts, points out to her that the men are afraid to talk to her because she's rich. She realizes that he is informing her about how she is being read; her Macy's dress signifies difference. It "classes her off," (much as Janie initially is classed off from her community in *Their Eyes*). Zora, the careful anthropologist, accepts and records the interpretation given by her informant. It is this scene in the ethnography that begs the question of whether and to what extent Zora can be considered a participant or an observer. It reveals Hurston's subtlety, the quality perhaps most often underestimated in Hurston, in presenting the ethnographer as character. With no theoretical announcement of her intention, by showing the ethnographer to be the object of her informants' gaze, Hurston reveals the way in which Zora's presence alters the scene of study and yet, the dramatization of her negotiation of identity in the field demonstrates her ability to grasp the "native's perspective," signifies her ethnographic authority, in other words.

Hurston "was a true participant-observer, willing to subject herself to almost any danger to gather materials" (xv), Robert Hemenway has argued. This definition of the participant observer as willing to risk it all to capture an element of the culture under study refers to the incident that ends the narrative of data collection in Florida in *Mules and Men*. Zora's presence in Florida and the time she spends "woofing" with the men provokes one of the storyteller's girlfriends to jealousy. Lucy, the girlfriend, attempts to knife Zora, who must flee with the help of her protectress, Big Sweet.⁷³ This violent gesture on the part of one of the community members ends Hurston's record of her fieldwork collection. Teasing apart the roles tenuously linked in the term "participant

in financial matters. The term comes from the purposeless barking of dogs at night" (253).

observer,” Graciela Hernandez moves beyond Hemenway’s encapsulation of Hurston. She argues that because the informants (ie. Lucy) control how and when Hurston can exit the field, Hurston “casts doubt on the ethnographer’s ability to adequately represent” and “criticizes a discipline that offers people up for view through the lenses of the spyglass” (161). Representing within the ethnography the interaction between the ethnographer and her informants even more forcefully undermines the naive reader’s expectation that an ethnographer can be an instrument for simply recording a culture as it passes before her eyes. Rather, Hurston dramatizes the way in which the scene presented to the reader has been “colored” by the recording instrument itself.

An Audience of Women

The current reappraisal of Hurston’s ethnography has come largely on the heels of the reclamation of her fiction by such popular literary figures as Alice Walker who famously went “Looking for Zora” as part of her search for literary foremothers in the 1970s. Robert Hemenway’s 1977 literary biography of Hurston brought her writing back into academic circulation. However, Walker’s essay, first published in *Ms.* magazine and now widely anthologized, appealed to a broader popular audience. Feminists such as Walker celebrated Hurston’s writing particularly for its representations of women struggling for self-awareness and a consequent sense of autonomy. And much initial literary scholarship followed Walker’s example, analyzing Hurston’s novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in order to discuss the development of its central female character,

⁷³ See readings of the eroticism of the relationship between Zora and Big Sweet, another companion in adventure, this time a companion who takes an actively chivalrous role.

Janie, from her first moment of self-recognition to the death of her third husband. Less frequently noted as significant by critical readers, Janie also moves in the course of her self-development through three different African American cultures in the post-Civil-War South: she first marries Logan Killicks and cooks and cleans and works with him on his farm; she leaves Killicks for the sweet-talking Jody Starks and is installed behind the counter of his store, observing but rarely participating in the life of the newly incorporated all-black town of Eatonville, Florida over which Jody has been elected mayor; and finally, she follows her third husband, TeaCake, further South and works beside him and other transient laborers on “the Muck.”

Hurston represents the individual development of a girl as a sexual, textual, and cultural development. The intense awakening of Janie’s desire as a girl only finds fulfillment in her final marriage to TeaCake, and only after his death does she return home with another longing, “that oldest of human longing—self-revelation,” that finds fulfillment in her conversation with her female friend Pheoby. Thus Hurston’s novel celebrates the sexual development of Janie as dependent upon heterosexual and homosocial relationships. Additionally, Janie’s development occurs simultaneously with the recognition and related textual rendering of a distinct and disparate African American culture, a culture that Hurston roots firmly in the oral tradition of storytelling and the mystical, symbolic tradition of voodoo. Hurston’s knowledge of these cultural traditions comes from both personal and professional experience, from both childhood memories of home and data collection after returning home as an anthropologist.

Janie’s quest to find her own voice and the authority to tell her own story in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) has been read as both successful and unsuccessful. And

much has been made of the oral qualities and origins of this novel. What has been more often overlooked is that Hurston registers a specifically visual ethnographic sensibility in the text, a sensibility that she values and yet critiques. *Their Eyes* begins with Janie returning from her adventures with her third husband, Tea Cake. She returns under the watchful eyes of the whole town. For “the people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sound and lesser things. They passed notions through their mouths. They sat in judgment” (1). Released from their positions as objects of toil and work, the men and women of the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida gravitate to the porch in the evening to talk. And through talking together, they reconstitute a community; they reoccupy their own skins and allow themselves to speak and hear and see in a way they cannot during the day under the watchful eye of the sun and the bossman. Their own watchful eyes restored, the people sit in judgment on Janie, for “[s]eeing Janie return as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times” (2). Janie returns along the same road she had the audacity to leave down with the much younger Tea Cake.

Janie returns possessing the same audacity, and the scrutiny she receives from the community is unforgiving and lascivious. “It [is] mass cruelty” that seizes the porch sitters and sets them gossiping. They cluck about the inappropriateness of her clothing and seem certain that this signifies that Tea Cake deserted her for a younger woman,

something the men and women alike relish. They wonder to each other: “What she doin’ coming back here in dem overalls? Can’t she find no dress to put on?—Where’s dat blue satin dress she left here in?” (2). The important question comes at the end of a long string of worries and spite. After all, the people of the town really want to know “why she don’t stay in her class.” Why does Janie act like she’s better than the rest of the town? And as Janie passes them with only a cursory greeting and without stopping to tell them her “business,” “the porch couldn’t talk for looking.” They begin, in fact, to undress her more literally, more explicitly. “The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt.” The women note her faded clothes and lay them away “for remembrance” as “a weapon against her strength.”

Ultimately, the sense of herself that Janie has achieved through the course of her life and through the telling of her life story allows her to overlook this scrutiny, at least momentarily. Somewhat vociferously, Karen Jacobs argues “that Janie’s refusal to speak, taken together with the violent terms in which the porch’s willingness to speculatively (and falsely) interpret is rendered, suggests the novel’s indictment and gradual withdrawal from textualization altogether, just as Janie’s refusal to pause before the porch’s gaze and her sequestration inside her house indicates her retreat from embodiment as a method of resistance” (349). However, I am not convinced that in this novel Hurston stages a retreat from textualization as much as she stages both the limits and the necessity of textual narrative. Nor am I convinced that Janie’s refusal to stop indicates a parallel retreat from embodiment. In this scene Hurston presents Janie’s body

as an openly eroticized object and her physical beauty as one asset among many which Janie herself, through the course of her life, learns she possesses and can control. Rather than worrying over much about the lies and the leering, Janie simply asks her friend Pheoby, who has left the talk on the porch to visit Janie, “If they wants to see and know, why don’t they come kiss and be kissed? Ah could then sit down and tell ‘em things” (6). Not surprisingly, the porch sitters do not come to be kissed and told. Perhaps they do not yet know how to learn from life stories in this way, and perhaps they are not prepared to be the kind of intimate audience that Janie demands.

Though Janie returns home to Eatonville “full of that oldest of human longing—self-revelation,” she will not talk to anyone but her friend, Pheoby. Pheoby is willing to identify with Janie, or in other words, she is “eager to feel and do through Janie,” but she hates “to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity” (7). In Pheoby, Janie finds an audience who will listen sympathetically and then tell the story to the rest of the merely curious townsfolk.⁷⁴ The initial framing narrative with its explicit construction of an ideal audience for Janie and its staging of her movement from silence to speech has received critical attention for the way in which it foregrounds the process Janie goes through with Pheoby to assume a voice of authority. I am more interested in how Hurston demonstrates from the beginning of *Their Eyes* the role an audience plays in the construction and the content of a narrative.

⁷⁴ She positions Pheoby as a translator and by extension, perhaps, a kind of reverse ethnographer carrying the story of an individual back to the “primitive” African American community. See Vincent Crapanzano in the Conclusion to *Modernist Anthropology* on the way in which the anthropologist translates between cultures and in *Hermes Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire* on hermeneutics, “the messenger seeking a message.”

The audience may determine the accuracy and even the audacity of the story being told. Janie speaks of the relationship between herself and Pheoby—between the storyteller and the audience—as a kind of eroticized mirroring. As Janie says to Pheoby, “You can tell ‘em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat’s just the same as me ‘cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf.” She reminds Pheoby that since they’ve been “kissin’-friends for twenty years,” she’s depending on her “for a good thought.” And so, before Janie can speak, Pheoby and Janie must reestablish their familiarity; they sit “in the fresh young darkness close together” for some time without talking. Then, at the end of this scene, the implied narrator echoes Janie’s intimate characterization of her relationship to her audience, pointing out that “time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous thing while Janie talked” (7). The “fresh young darkness” has become the “kissing, young darkness,” and so, Janie and Pheoby are surrounded by Janie’s language.

The interwoven dialogue and description in the beginning of *Their Eyes* set up what Carla Kaplan has termed an “erotics of talk” between Janie and her audience.⁷⁵ Kaplan argues that “eroticizing Janie and Pheoby’s dialogue seems to affirm storytelling, narration, and communication in just the way we might expect from an anthropologist and writer who devoted so much of her life to documenting African American discursive, dialogic, and storytelling practices” (118). However, according to Kaplan, the kind of intimate audience that Pheoby provides for Janie would be difficult to imitate, particularly for white readers. In creating Pheoby, Kaplan believes that “Hurston provided an ideal listener meant...to discomfort most of us” (119). Of course, Kaplan’s

⁷⁵ For a “confession” and analysis of erotic tension in the field see Newton “My Best Informant’s Dress” in *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*.

argument depends upon the assumption that “most of us” reading Hurston are white and therefore cannot listen sympathetically and identify with Janie in the way Pheoby can. It is a salient point but unnecessarily limited in its construction of identity and difference. In figuring an ideal audience for Janie, Hurston does not preclude the development of this same skill in her readers, be they black or not. Indeed Hurston begins the novel with the unsympathetic scrutiny Janie undergoes in the African American community of Eatonville. And through the course of her narrative, Janie attempts to free herself from a series of restrictive roles in a variety of cultural contexts.

Naturally then, Janie’s story of her begins with her first realization of being seen as different by others, her realization of being constructed by the surrounding culture. The description of an accidental photograph creates an initial frame for a narrative of Janie’s developing identity and autonomy. The photograph—figured as a kind of mirror—neatly encapsulates Janie's first moment of self-recognition in childhood or, more specifically, of recognition of self as racialized other. As Janie says of her earliest memories, "Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six years old." Around six years, Janie is shown a photograph taken by a traveling photographer, and she cannot find herself in it. "So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor," Janie says. "Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me.'" (9). Janie literally has to be told by the mother of the white children where to look in order to see herself:

“Miss Nellie, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husban dead, she pointed to the dark one and said, ‘Dat’s you, Alphabet, don’t you know yo’ownself?’

“Dey all useter call my Alphabet ‘cause so many people had done named me different names. Ah looked at the picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said:

“‘Aw, aw! Ah’m colored!’”

Figured in the photograph, Janie’s moment of self recognition involves a conscious act of looking. She does not know that she is “colored” until she learns to see herself as the different child in the photograph. Engaged in the process of learning to “know herself,” Janie first sees her dress and her hair and only a moment later concludes that she must be in the space that fills these objects. Thus identity formation as Hurston figures it through the photograph is revealed to be a process of looking and then of seeing and ultimately of filling a space between the cultural artifacts of clothing and hair.

Janie’s scrutiny of the photograph momentarily stops the forward temporal movement of her life story. In this moment, the reader must stop and look at the main character looking at herself and being looked at by the white world that surrounds her and describes her. Many critics have dwelt upon this photograph, intrigued by Janie’s initial inability to recognize herself.⁷⁶ Oddly, critical readers have been more than willing to believe this fiction of identity formation as described by Hurston, more than willing to believe that until six years old, Janie did not see her color. Though it seems a stretch to read Janie’s experience literally, Hurston’s description dramatizes the accuracy of a more

⁷⁶ See work by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Barbara Johnson, and Karen Jacobs, among others.

general idea. She shows the rupture of coming to self-consciousness when self-consciousness involves the recognition of a self that is separate from others but also the attendant painful realization of being a self that is looked at as other.⁷⁷ Janie assumes both an individual and a cultural identity as she sees herself represented in the photograph. And, as Karen Jacobs argues, "Among other things, this moment underscores the enormity of what the objective camera eye (or any objective apparatus) cannot see, just as the name 'Alphabet' standing in for the many names Janie is sometimes called conveys the scope of what language cannot say in its abstracted attempts to name the self" (343). As Jacobs suggests, Hurston uses this photograph to show identity formation to be a complicated process that ultimately escapes the apparatus attempting to record it. Through the camera lens, Janie becomes simply a "dark child." The photograph underscores the impossibility of completely and accurately representing or perhaps even creating a self.⁷⁸

Thus Janie's narrative begins by referring to a visual experience of identity formation that recalls initial visual descriptions of primitive scenes framing ethnographic monographs. It recalls also the technological roots of ethnographic fieldwork. Similar to the "frozen in time" scenes of written ethnography and the photographs constructed by

⁷⁷ This scene also recalls the moment in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* when the protagonist first realizes that other people see him as black. He returns home from school and runs to look in the looking-glass, notices the "ivory whiteness" of his skin and struggles to read it as black, a visual reversal of Janie's photographic realization but with the same struggle for self-recognition. In *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, Nancy Armstrong suggests that if we were "to substitute the photograph for the mirror in Lacan's account of how the individual acquires an identity, we would suddenly improve the chances of understanding our unique ability as modern individuals to locate and maintain ourselves in an increasingly fluid and heterogenous social order" (23).

⁷⁸ Karen Jacobs also suggests this but does not make explicit.

early ethnographers, the photograph in *Their Eyes* serves as a framing device that renders the racialized individual as an object momentarily fixed, an object that can be captured and observed outside of time.⁷⁹ With this photograph rendered in text, Hurston creates a trope for conventional ethnography and ethnographic data collection; leading her readers to look at Janie looking, she reveals observation to be a process of construction, and she involves the reader in the cultural construction of Janie. And in an apparent reversal of classic ethnographic renderings of the “primitive,” Janie looks at an other and sees that she herself is the other.

III. Objects and Others

Objectification

Hurston’s representation of Janie reveals her awareness of how an object of ethnographic study becomes objectified and in turn how Janie can move from her position as object to become the subject of her own story. Such a complex understanding of objects and objectification was not initially obvious to her academic mentor, Franz Boas, who burst onto the American anthropological scene with an argument about museum display.⁸⁰ On his way back to New York from his first fieldwork on the

⁷⁹ The work of Franz Boas and the Jesup expedition (1897-1902) provides one prominent example of early methods of data collection and the use of photography in anthropology. Miller and Mathe in *Drawing Shadows to Stone* argue that “the transformation worked by the camera on a person’s image is a metaphoric model of the ethnographic enterprise at the heart of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition: to record and preserve cultures in the form of representations. Drawing shadows to stone, photography recorded a person’s momentary shape in a static medium, flattening dimensions and freezing images of the living into inert objects” (20).

⁸⁰ See also Sebeok *American Signatures* on Boas and his work in relation to developments in semiotics.

Northwest Coast of the United States, Boas stopped at the United States National Museum to see the Eskimo and Northwest Coast exhibits curated by Otis T. Mason. Boas, still a relative newcomer to anthropology and to the United States, criticized Mason (an important member of the Washington anthropological establishment led by John Wesley Powell) for arranging objects from different cultures together based on physical resemblances. He used his observations of Mason's exhibits as a basis for an attack on established American anthropology in an 1887 letter in *Science* magazine, arguing that "the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes. I believe that this object can be accomplished only by the tribal arrangement of collections."⁸¹ In other words, Boas thought that in order for an artifact's meaning to be best understood, it should be displayed in the setting of its generating culture and those of its neighbors.

With his letter to Mason, Boas "shifted the goal of ethnography from the study of discrete objects, in a universal perspective, to a focus on their cultural contexts, in a local setting," according to Ira Jacknis. However, Boas drew back from this confrontation with Mason, leaving his students to take up more forcefully the question of representation. The influence of Boas's early conviction about how best to understand ethnographic objects is evident in Hurston's later fiction and ethnography.

Throughout her fiction, ethnography, and autobiography, Hurston pays particular attention to the individual embedded in cultures. As discussed above, Janie's first

⁸¹ Stocking, ed. *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911*, 66. See also *Shadows to Stone*, the catalogue for the recent exhibit on the Jesup expedition at the American Museum of Natural History.

moment of self- recognition occurs within a specific context, within the yard of the white family for whom her grandmother works, and it occurs through a specific vehicle of visual representation, the photograph. While the narrative announces itself as about an individual who is an outsider in her surroundings, the visual object further translates for both the central character and the reader the experience of the individual marked by culture. Hurston makes race visible. Not only is Janie framed in the narrative by a white world but also by a means of visual representation. In fact, the photograph itself would likely have had a white border.⁸² Within this border, the individual appears as an object, defined by multiple observers.

As Boas's career progressed, his interest turned away from worrying about the kind of artifacts generally sought for museum display and toward creating objects out of more ephemeral sights, sounds and words. He began treating texts as objects of a sort. He came to believe that transcribed or, even more preferably, recorded stories and explanations given by native informants would endure through time and provide a better basis for future research than would artifacts removed from their original setting. (His belief has been born out in an almost ironic way. For though Boas thought this collection of texts was crucial to salvage disappearing cultures, now natives of these still-existing cultures study the history of their own cultures using these texts.) Boas believed transcriptions and recordings to be not only ethnographic objects in their own right, but also objective, because he presumed them to exclude the point of view of the European observer. As Jacknis argues, "Boas believed that the only reliable ethnographic objects were those which had been repeatedly elicited from as many informants as possible. Many texts and songs could be checked in this way; photographs could not. The

⁸² Photography was not designed to capture darkness but to capture light. See Sekula or Shapiro.

photograph was also suspect as an object produced by the observer rather than the native” (204). Considering her attention to the photograph in *Their Eyes*, it would seem that Zora Neale Hurston agreed. Given the clear distinction Boas seems to make between observer and native in his treatment of ethnographic objects, however, Hurston’s position as both observer and native places her in an anomalous relation to the objects and texts she collects and produces.⁸³

Participant and Observer

Given her representation of the ethnographer as a character in both of her book-length anthropological works, *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* (1938), Zora Neale Hurston seems purposefully to lead her readers to look at the anthropologist looking, often actually looking at herself. Thus, in the introduction to *Mules and Men*, Hurston writes, “It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that” (3). With this image of herself looking at her own garment through the “spy-glass of Anthropology,” Hurston makes explicit to her readers her conscious occupation of a position as participant and

⁸³ See Faye V. Harrison in *African American Pioneers in Anthropology* on DuBois’s influence on Boas; evidence of this influence is in archival material that has not been examined fully. In 1905, DuBois initiated a friendship with Boas that would last nearly three decades. Of Boas, he later writes, “I did not myself begin actively to study Africa until 1908 or 1910. Franz Boas really influenced me to begin studying this subject and I began really to get into it only after 1915” (quoted in Williams *Rethinking Race* 74). See Williams pp. 46-53 for more on Hurston’s place within this intellectual milieu; also see Gwendolyn Mikell who suggests that “although Hurston’s techniques were in harmony with the salvage approach used by others of the Columbia school she saw the origins of her approach as being more varied and growing out of her dialogue with other black writers, such as Langston Hughes” (in Harrison 59).

observer within her native culture. Her choice of profession tidily echoes, reinforces, and perhaps depends upon such a position as cultural insider and outsider. In fact, Graciela Hernandez has explored "the ambiguity produced as Hurston participates in the institutionalization of anthropology while she simultaneously undermines a project that deems ethnography a final repository of knowledge" (151). Hernandez considers Hurston's recourse to fiction and to fictional form in her ethnographies as one strategy for undermining the sanctity of ethnographic knowledge. Hernandez simplifies the relation between fiction and ethnography in order to position Hurston as a radical member of the anthropological tribe. Certainly Hurston opposed many of the codified traditions of anthropology. She opposed emerging ideas about the role of the African American writer in culture as well. Criticized by several of her contemporaries for her portrayal of "low" African American culture in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*⁸⁴ and largely uncelebrated for her prescient positioning of herself within the narrative of her first ethnography, *Mules and Men*, Hurston remained on the margins but resolutely a member of the various communities in which she lived and worked.

Their Eyes Were Watching God eventually illustrates the way in which looking, for Hurston, never constitutes a one-way action proceeding from the observer to the observed. Janie moves from recognizing her position as object of observation to become the subject of narrative through the telling of her story, as Gates and Johnson have noted (and celebrated). More specifically, Janie learns to value her body as not as an object for regard by others but as a register of her own experience. Karen Jacobs argues

⁸⁴ See Richard Wright, etc. Of course, this is a simplification of Hurston's reception. Alain Locke praised Hurston's lyrical prose. She was invited to write short anthropological pieces for Nancy Cunard's huge *Negro Anthology*. She worked extensively with Langston Hughes and, as Hughes did, (somewhat briefly) accepted the patronage of Mrs. Osgood Mason.

“embodiment and its power served as a recurrent and important resource for Hurston. Although embodiment risks the perils of objectification, those perils may be obviated by the body’s potential to reassert itself as experiential subject. Yet another way to track Janie’s development in the novel, then, is by observing the ways in which she attempts such a reassertion against the objectifying impulses of other characters, who typically deprive Janie of her coherence as a subject through a fragmenting and synecdochical gaze” (349). Put more simply--Janie gets looked at and picked apart throughout this novel until she learns to look back at herself.

When Janie and Joe first arrive in Eatonville, after Jody has carried Janie away from her first husband with flowery promises, Janie attracts the attention of the men of the town, in particular a man identified only as Hicks. Although the other men follow Joe to see him buy land to build a proper town, Hicks stays behind to talk to ‘Miz Starks.’ Janie rebuffs Hicks’s advances, and so he tells the friends who later ask about her that “‘Dat’oman ain’t so awfully pretty no how when yuh take de second look at her. Ah had to sorta pass by de house on de way back and seen her good. Tain’t nothin’ to her ‘ceptin’ dat long hair” (36). Hicks’s friend Coker turns this account of the “second look” into a lesson about class, telling Hicks that this is not a question of seeing good, “You just talkin’ to console yo’self by word of mouth.” Coker reminds Hicks, “Dat women don’t want you. You got to learn dat all de women in the world ain’t been brought up on no teppentine still, and no saw-mill camp. There’s some women dat jus’ ain’t for you tuh broach” (37). Thus Coker points out to Hicks that Janie signifies something about Jody. Janie serves as a marker of her husband’s status, as ornament, and as object of consumption. When the town invites Janie to speak “uh few words of encouragement”

after Joe has been elected Mayor, Joe takes the floor himself and responds, “Thank yuh fuh yo’compliments but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ‘bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat” (41). In stepping forward to speak for Janie, Jody confirms what the conversation of the other men suggests. As signified by Jody’s extension of himself in front of Janie, to him—and therefore to the community who values him as their new leader—Janie’s value lies not in her speech, not in her demonstration of subjectivity, but in her role as object to be admired alongside her husband.

Janie first appears to the reader as an object as well, pointed out in the photograph as the “dark one.” Through the remainder of the narrative, however, Janie’s color is described more variously and signifies various class positions as well. Her “coffee with cream” color gives her a higher status, for example, with Mrs. Turner, her neighbor in the “muck” of Southern Florida where Tea Cake travels to work. But Tea Cake refuses to keep Janie “classed off” from the other workers. This separates him from Janie’s second husband, Joe Starks. Tea Cake invites Janie to work alongside him. Yet, even this apparently equal marriage cannot be sustained as Janie’s narrative progresses. Tea Cake gets bitten while defending Janie from the attack of a rabid dog during an epic-style flood. He goes mad and eventually threatens Janie with a gun. She responds with a rifle, shooting and killing him only when he refuses to lower his weapon.

Out of great love for Tea Cake, the African American community in the muck turns against Janie at this point. They pack the courtroom during her trial. Although Janie first sees the room full of white people, the description of her subsequent observation of her peers is vivid and pointedly spatial. For “she saw all of the colored

people standing up in the back of the courtroom. Packed tight like a case of celery, only much darker than that...She felt them pelting her with dirty thoughts. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks" (176). This initial description of the courtroom scene as seen through Janie's eyes echoes the opening scene on the porch in Eatonville but further belies the power of witnessing. Those who might serve as character witnesses will not be allowed to testify in court. Instead "Twelve strange men who didn't know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her were going to sit on the thing" (176). Indeed the courtroom must turn around to look at the "Negroes in the back" who, under the law, are the observed not the observers and reporters. Without knowledge of "people like Tea Cake and her," the jury is unqualified to judge the veracity of Janie's story, but it will anyway.

Though central to the action, Janie herself does not have a voice in the courtroom. Her story is told in the standard English of the narrator. Given the importance of Janie's voice emerging through the course of Hurston's novel, the muting of Janie's voice and the narrative in dialect in this scene suggests that in this context Janie's story has already been determined before she speaks. Just as the opening photograph presents Janie as a racialized subject, the "dark child," her identity fixed by others at the outset of the narrative, the legal system operating at the end reveals Janie's story as foreclosed in the witness stand.

This foreclosure is acknowledged in the narrative by those forced to observe the enactment of "justice." After her trial, Janie takes a room in a boarding house for the night and hears "the men talking around the front.

‘Aw you know dem white mens wuzn’t gointuh to do nothin’ tuh no woman dat look lak her’” (179).

Here the men grumble that the jury had already decided the verdict before hearing Janie’s story. The jury decided based on her appearance: they would never convict a woman who looks like Janie. The narrator leaves this statement unexplained and therefore fairly ambiguous. The men in front of the boarding house, the actual jury of her peers, seem convinced that a white jury would never convict a woman as light-skinned or as pretty as Janie—unless she killed a white man. Equally important to the novel as a whole, however, this scene once again embeds Janie in the process of looking. She has witnessed and been witnessed. She has seen herself as others see her and has learned to see herself.

Hurston’s portrait of Janie’s development told in poetic and erotic prose seems to be written in response to the social realism more common among male writers of the Harlem Renaissance and in dialogue with many of the formal and methodological developments of anthropologists writing at the same time. In other words, Hurston is a modernist. Her writing first “passe[d]...into the realm of Anglo-American modernism” when *The Eatonville Anthology* of African American folk tales was chosen for inclusion in Nancy Cunard’s unwieldy *Negro Anthology*, published in 1934.⁸⁵ Lost in the translation from the original magazine version to its place in this modernist behemoth is the narrative frame Hurston constructed around the tales, however. This frame is written in the third person in the voice of a standard English speaking narrator. Contending that this narrator establishes the authority of the textual information, Michael North argues

⁸⁵ See in particular the recent work of Jane Marcus and Tory Young for more on Cunard’s project.

that Hurston's original text includes an example of a self-reflexive ethnographer. Then he points out that the last word or, more precisely, the last tale in the original anthology belongs not to this nonparticipating narrator/ethnographer but instead to a dialect speaker, thereby demonstrating Hurston's "conviction that it is the dialect that encloses the standard" (188). Therefore, when Cunard removes this third person narrative frame, she removes the self-conscious ethnographer from the text. Hurston's work passes into the culture of modernism in a diluted form, a form less threatening to the constitution of knowledge about others.

In enclosing the standard within the dialect, Hurston encloses the observer within the participant. And despite his careful attention to Hurston's use of language, North fails to note the importance of this. In fact, he uses the term "participant observation" casually, treating this position as more stable than Hurston herself does. Hurston moves self-consciously from cultural participant to cultural observer as she strives to occupy the ethnographic perspective. She retains her perspective as object of study while assuming the subject position of researcher. Employing multiple narrative frames throughout various textual forms, Hurston seems intent to resist the complete fusion of the participant and the observer into one immobile term. She exploits the possibilities of her dual position, producing fictions and anthropological ethnographies best understood as being in conscious dialogue with each other and as intentionally crafted to press against their distinct generic boundaries. She adopts an uncomfortable perspective on her chosen profession. And her fiction offers no more romantic resolution to the dilemma faced by a woman who witnesses her own culture.

At the end of *Their Eyes*, in the time and place where she began telling her story, Janie is left alone with her memories. Her journey and her narrative complete, she “pulled in her horizon like a great fish net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder” (184). Thus, Janie dresses herself in the horizon. The immense abstract world now belongs to Janie; it has been turned into a concrete, feminized object that can be stolen and worn. *The* horizon has become *her* horizon. This movement from abstract to concrete parallels the path of Janie’s eyes on the family photograph. In this originating scene, Janie sees objects first and then sees herself inside them. By the end of her story, she has an expanded understanding of herself and her place in culture; alone, she chooses to drape herself in an object world of her own making.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ethnographic Heroines

In 1926, Margaret Mead was at sea, sailing away from her first experience with ethnographic fieldwork on Samoa and toward Europe to join her husband, the Episcopalian missionary Luther Cressman. Just a year later, Virginia Woolf embarked—somewhat more vaguely—upon a new novel that she tentatively titled *The Moths*. Woolf begins to sketch in her diary entry for June 18, 1927 the outlines of a novel organizing fleeting, moth-like impressions into a simple story: “A man and a woman are to be sitting at table talking. Or shall they remain silent? It is to be a love story; she is finally to let the last great moth in...But it needs ripening. I do a little work on it in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas. (The windows fidget at the fastenings as if we were at sea.)” Musing on possibilities for her new novel, Woolf locates herself in her immediate physical environment only to move quickly to the suggested environment, to the imaginary surroundings vividly invoked by her sensory experience. As she writes, the gramophone plays Beethoven and the windows rattle *as if* she were at sea. Here, Woolf figures writing fiction as the kind of voyage that the anthropologist Mead made more literally throughout her life in order to find things to write about. The excerpt from Woolf’s diary documents a moment of imagination that links Woolf’s plotting of a fictional text—notably, a love story—to the motion of an exploratory voyage out like Mead’s. It also forecasts the transformation of *The Moths* into *The Waves*. Two years later, Woolf “suddenly remember[s]” that moths “don’t fly by day. And there can’t

be a lighted candle. Altogether, the shape of the book wants considering” (September 10, 1929). Eventually, Woolf settles upon the waves over the moths as the appropriate figure around which to structure a novel largely comprised of streams of thought and images. “*The Moths?* That was to be an abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem,” she had written in her diary on November 7, 1928. By this, she means that she intends to include as much as possible of real life without the intervention of a narrator or a narrating consciousness. “It must include nonsense, fact, sordidity: but made transparent,” she continues on November 28th. “It comes to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don’t belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional.” Here Woolf’s private notes toward fiction read like a manifesto for modernism.

Of greater note, Woolf’s concern to move away from the unreality of narrative and instead to assemble in her novel the elements that make up a moment is analogous to the work of the modern anthropologist. Woolf’s saturated atoms, her attempt “to give the moment whole” sounds much like Malinowski’s manifesto for modern ethnographic study in which he argues that “each phenomenon ought to be studied through the broadest range possible of its concrete manifestations” and tabulated into a synoptic chart. Of course, the fledgling anthropologist Margaret Mead did not do months of fieldwork in preparation to write the kind of experimental text that Woolf plans in her diary. However, in the tradition of Malinowski, Mead *had* prepared to write an eyeless book, or

rather more accurately, to write an I-less one, one in which the anthropologist functions as a recording instrument internal to yet magically separate from the action of the culture being described. In 1928, three years before Woolf finished her novel, Mead published an account of Samoa in the form of a monograph titled *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*. As proscribed by Malinowski, the monograph traditionally organizes the apprehended details of a culture into a comprehensible whole. Rather than a broad picture of Samoa including “matters of political organization which neither interest or influence the young girl,” however, Mead says she has “tried to present to the reader the Samoan girl in her social setting, to describe the course of her life from birth until death, the problems she will have to solve, the values which will guide her in her solutions, the pains and pleasures of the human lot cast on a South Sea island” (7). Mead’s ethnography describes the culture of Samoa from the perspective of its young female members, in other words. Somewhat more like a novelist than like her recent predecessors (such as Malinowski) in the field of anthropology, Mead writes only about the development of “the” Samoan girl. And in fact, although she describes the activities and experiences of individual Samoan girls, in some cases referring to them by proper names, Mead tells her readers that these individuals are actually composites of many girls. She has created these composites to preclude the possibility (and the resulting “embarrassment”) of identifying any one girl, but each composite has as its basis a living member of Samoan culture.

Mead’s composite portrait of the typical Samoan girl is intended to work as a model for education in the United States in much the same way as the domestic novels by women that became popular in nineteenth century America. To the great chagrin of

Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, Maria Susanna Cummins's *The Lamplighter* sold 100,000 copies before it had been out for a year, while the *Scarlet Letter* sold less than 10,000 in Hawthorne's lifetime. "What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter*?" Hawthorne wonders in a letter to his publisher. Responding from a twentieth century feminist perspective to this nineteenth century male author's anxiety, Nina Baym points out that *readers* of sentimental fiction were mainly women who identified with the heroine:

The contemporary reader of *The Lamplighter* did not interpret the novel; she experienced it. If it worked for her, she put it down inspired, as our contemporary saying has it, to be all that she could be. But this is not all. She became, in the reading of *The Lamplighter*, a lover of reading. Or, if she already loved to read, she was confirmed in that love. Gertrude's first, and most important, service to her blind friend is to read to her...Throughout *The Lamplighter*, the two young women are constantly reading...The proponents and practitioners of our serious elite literature have never succeeded as *The Lamplighter* and its sister books did in creating a huge audience that deeply loved to read (xxx).

This creation and maintenance of a sizeable reading public contributed to the creation and maintenance of a new profession for women in the mid-nineteenth century. "Authorship became one of the two earliest professions that American women entered in large numbers," Baym points out. "The second profession was teaching, and many women thought of authorship as an extension of the teaching role" (xii). Additionally, while both men and women writing in New England at that time had to justify their work in social

and moral terms, women had to write for a specifically female audience. “It was not deemed appropriate for women to address men in a public manner. Women authors, therefore, had to limit their explicit aims to the improvement of their own sex and children. Men could and did read women’s books, but the implied audience of *The Lamplighter* is exclusively female (xv). With similar “domestic” content about the lives of women and children and a similar impulse toward “improvement,” Mead writes her ethnography for an audience of American educators and American parents dedicated to child-rearing—many of whom were women.

For an explicitly-defined audience of Western readers, readers who can learn to see their own cultural practices as if through the eyes of others, Mead’s ethnography provides a glimpse of a way of life distant in space and custom but not in time. Mead assumed that such readers would find the intimate details of the sexual life of Samoan girls interesting and unsettling. Bearing out the wisdom and accuracy of these assumptions about audience interest, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (like the novels that so irritated Hawthorne in the nineteenth century) became a bestseller. Historian George Stocking argues that “although there was from the beginning an undercurrent of professional criticism of its ethnographic adequacy, it has been, like *Patterns of Culture*, one of the most influential anthropological works of the twentieth century.” Mead herself explains the intended effect of her work in a 1972 preface in which she maintains the relevance of her conclusions, even for an unanticipated audience:

I wrote this book as a contribution to our knowledge of how much human character and human capacities and human well-being of young people depend on what they learn and on the social arrangements of the society

within in which they are born and reared...The usefulness of this account of how life could be, on one small group of faraway island, is still, and perhaps more urgently, relevant...But there are two things about the original book which need comment. One is my expectation that Samoan life would change even more than it has...The other is my failure to include Samoan young people themselves as possible readers and so address the book to them also, as well as, to the readers of the Western world (xi).

Mead's preface demonstrates her ongoing attention to the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of a text. She realizes that "inevitably, young Samoans who read this book will feel somehow not included, because this account of young people two generations ago was written about them, but not for them, as I would write such a book today" (xiii).

Coming of Age is one of the first ethnographies written for "the lay reader," according to Mead. Notably, however, the process of identification that Baym and other novel theorists locate in the reader, Mead's mentor Franz Boas locates first in the work of the anthropologist/ethnographer. Readers of the ethnography must understand the necessity of the anthropologist's consciousness governing the text; we should feel, Boas urges in his Preface,

grateful to Miss Mead for having undertaken to identify herself so completely with Samoan youth that she gives us a lucid and clear picture of the joys and difficulties encountered by the young individual in a culture so entirely different from our own. The results of her painstaking

investigation confirm the suspicion long held by anthropologists, that much of what we ascribe to human nature is no more than a reaction to the restraints put upon us by civilization (iv).

The anthropologist identifies with “the” Samoan girl. The Western reader is assumed to identify more readily with the anthropologist; only later and only through the governing consciousness of the anthropologist will the reader come to identify with the Samoan girl and so to understand that what commonly is considered human nature may be a product of culture.

Mead’s voyage out is an adventure like that of the classic romance hero, but the resulting text exhibits more features common to sentimental fiction. As she becomes an ethnographer—as she becomes both traveler and author, that is—Mead gains the ability to combine two seemingly disparate textual traditions (fictions of adventure and fictions of the domestic) and, further, to compare them both with the romance plot she records on Samoa. Somewhat like Woolf, therefore, Mead writes a love story in a new form and in reaction to the plots of earlier realist novels. Ultimately, in this chapter, I am arguing that Mead and Woolf are not merely contemporaries by virtue of their shared moment in time. I analyze the trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific exchange of texts among Woolf, Mead, and Ruth Benedict, Mead’s mentor, colleague, and lover. And through close readings of the public and private writing of these three women—all critics of their inherited cultural traditions, all self-consciously anti-patriarchal, yet all socially, intellectually, and economically privileged—I establish analogous traditions of writing against romance in literary modernism and anthropology.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Writing privately, these women write often to other women; writing publicly, all write explicitly to a larger audience of women and yet all respond to the need to be taken seriously by a

I. Modernism and Anthropology

In January 1932, Ruth Benedict writes eagerly from New York to Mead on fieldwork in New Guinea, “Did you like *The Waves*? And did you keep thinking how you’d set down everybody you knew in a similar fashion? I did. I suppose I’m disappointed that she didn’t include any violent temperaments, and I want my group of persons to be more varied.” Focusing on character drawing as practiced by Virginia Woolf in her experimental novel *The Waves*, Benedict sees the fictional form as a model for ethnography. Yet Benedict avoids the literary term “character” in her discussion of Woolf’s novel. It is a particularly odd omission from a literary perspective since only a decade earlier Woolf had entered into a debate about methods of character drawing in modern fiction, a debate that has come to exemplify key aspects of the modernist movement in literature.⁸⁷

Human Character Changed

Benedict finds Woolf’s novel useful primarily for defining more clearly the struggle to set down what she calls “her” group of persons in an ethnography. Employing the novel as a limited methodological tool, however, Benedict overlooks the violence,

scholarly or literary publishing industry still largely governed by men. Woolf points out in *Three Guineas* that “although it is true that we [the daughters of educated men] can write articles or send letters to the Press, the control of the Press—the decision what to print, what not to print—is entirely in the hands of your sex” (12).

⁸⁷ See also Mary McCarthy on character. See Ann Peters on women writers of the mid twentieth century and the shift away from characters. She contends that women writers wanted to move outside, into space, and this movement occurs in their fiction. This idea of space versus character

both sexual and political, represented in *The Waves* and ignores the more radical implications of Woolf's experiment with the novel form. She continues her letter to Mead with an explanation of how reading the novel in relation to the aims of ethnography made her "realize how Mrs. Woolf's types are circumscribed; she never does anything that isn't essentially mild."

This reduction of Woolf to "mild" lady novelist allows Benedict to distinguish between fiction and ethnography and to assert the value of the ethnography as a more complete picture of culture than the novel. Immediately following complaints to Mead about Woolf's limited content, however, Benedict becomes more cordial, complimenting Woolf's method and urging the general dissemination of it. "This way of setting down people seemed very exciting to me," she writes, "and I wish a whole crop of authors would try it; then there'd be lots of different sorts of people included." Overall, Benedict posits a close if contentious relationship between the attempt of the academic ethnographer and the attempt of the modernist novelist to "set down people."

The concept of "type" as used by Benedict derives from her reading of Jung as well as from work done in the early years of the twentieth century by such social scientists as Max Weber. Emphasizing similarity over difference, Weber's concept of 'ideal type' seems to work by substitution, the way a metaphor works (according to Aristotle). It makes a comparative method possible.⁸⁸ For Weber, "The quantitative

in fiction has informed my own thinking about women anthropologist traveling outside the country (not inside the mind).

⁸⁸ When Max Weber coined the term 'ideal type,' however, "he did not mean to introduce a new conceptual tool." He merely gave a name to "what social scientists and historians had been doing when they used words like 'the economic man,' 'feudalism,' Gothic versus Romanesque architecture,' or 'kingship'" (Gerth and Mills 59-60). See Nina Baym (*Women of Letters*) on the potential imperialism and chauvenism underlying scientific naming. Baym relies on theories developed by Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* to understand the work of women botanists and other women

approach to unique cultural constellations and the conception of ideal types are intimately linked with the comparative method. This method implies that two constellations are comparable in terms of some feature common to them both.”⁸⁹ In *Patterns of Culture*, the ethnography on which she was working while reading *The Waves*, Benedict critiques some earlier anthropologists, most notably and pointedly Bronislaw Malinowski, for their failure to pay attention to comparable types: Malinowski simply generalizes a particular cultural trait “as valid for the primitive world instead of recognizing the Trobriand configuration as one of many observed types” (50), she writes. Thus such studies as Malinowski’s promote an understanding of a universal primitive culture rather than recognizing a plurality of primitive cultures. Benedict, in contrast to Malinowski, wants to work out some of the implications of the recent change from the singular “culture” to the plural “cultures.” She is trying to create a place for her work in a discipline whose methodology is still being developed. And indeed *Patterns of Culture* has been credited with popularizing the term “culture.” It also “served for many later anthropologists as an introduction to the discipline.”⁹⁰

While working out this influential study of “culture and personality,” Benedict seems to have been drawn to the novelistic form in part because of the way in which it can present “the variety of life” as a momentarily unified configuration. She is equally frustrated by its failure to provide a comprehensive account of individuals and cultures,

in nineteenth century American science. For more on metaphor see Paul Ricoeur’s comprehensive history of the term in *The Rule of Metaphor*. See Smith and Katz on the use of metaphors in theory.

⁸⁹ Gerth and Mills 59.

⁹⁰ See Mead introduction to *Patterns of Culture* and Stocking “The Ethnographic Sensibility of the 1920s,” 228.

but she concludes that this failure demonstrates the need for ethnography. Perhaps not surprisingly, within her published ethnography Benedict does not refer to the unified world of the novel as a methodological influence but instead cites the philosophy that underlies her theoretical approach. She acknowledges Wilhelm Dilthey, for example, who stressed “the importance of integration and configuration” (52). As Mead tells the story in her posthumous anthology of Benedict’s writing, Benedict included German philosophy out of scholarly necessity and at the urging of Boas.⁹¹ Mead de-emphasizes Benedict’s own account of her precursors and presents Benedict’s “real insight” into temperament as originating in a more personal epiphanic moment in Pima in 1927 “when she saw the basic contrast between the Pueblos and the other Indian cultures of North America ‘as the contrast that is named and described by Nietzsche in his studies of Greek tragedy’” (211).⁹² This epiphany supports Mead’s contention that Nietzsche “had been old favorite” Benedict’s and further suggests that Benedict had not left her background in literary studies completely behind her when she entered anthropology.⁹³ Given the

⁹¹ At the time of the publication of *Patterns of Culture* in 1934, and for many years after (as the obituary written by her student Victor Barnauw affirms) most anthropologists thought Benedict had included such “‘deep’ intuitive plunges of German scholarship and philosophy” in spite of the fact that Franz Boas had “long ago rejected” them.

⁹² Mead says she is telling the “actual facts” about the origins of Benedict’s ethnography: the theoretical part of the work—the usefulness of viewing the integration of a culture within an area in light of the way individuals with specific temperaments integrated items from within their cultural heritage—was worked out with reference neither to Spengler nor to Dilthey. Nietzsche had been an old favorite of hers...As for Dilthey, far from battling for her individuality against Boas’ disapproval of Dilthey, it was Boas who insisted that she must discuss him, not out of sympathy for Dilthey’s ideas but out of the special standards of scholarship which required mention of those who had used comparable irrespective of whether or not one’s own ideas derived from them” (210-211).

⁹³ Benedict received her undergraduate degree in English from Vassar. See McCaffrey, Modell, and Mead biographies. Richard Handler discusses her reading of Walter Pater as evidence of “how early and how profoundly Benedict was committed to—or ensnared by—the modernist

explicit acknowledgement of philosophical influences and related theories of culture in both Benedict's finished ethnography and Mead's recounting of "the origins of the idea," an acknowledgement of the work done on culture and temperament by Virginia Woolf is notably absent.⁹⁴

In her landmark essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf draws some careful distinctions between the novelist's obsessive attention to character and every day observation of others' behavior before suggesting a correlation between the aims of the novelist and the aims of the practical observer. "Novelists differ from the rest of the world because they do not cease to be interested in character when they have learnt enough about it for practical purposes," Woolf begins. Originally an invited talk given to The Heretics Club of Cambridge, England, on May 18, 1924, this essay also contains Woolf's famous statement that "On or about December 1910, human character changed." Making no mention of Woolf's declaration, Henri LeFebvre writes in *The Production of Space* about the visual artists who "heralded the space of modernity." According to LeFebvre,

Around 1910 academic painters were still painting 'beautiful' figures in an 'expressive' way: faces that were moving because they expressed

sensibility." Benedict embarked on a modernist question for personality and "a source of stability or order beyond the self" (166).

⁹⁴ Barbara Babcock has declared that Woolf's "method of evoking essential spirit rather than realistically describing character appealed to [Benedict] and clearly influenced her own book," *Patterns of Culture* (119). Babcock's somewhat crude understanding of "realistically" describing character as in opposition to Woolf's method is not surprising given Benedict's failure to explicate Woolf's novel in her letter to Mead. In contrast to Babcock, however, Benedict seems to have grasped realism as coexistent with stream-of-consciousness. Benedict's acknowledgment in her letter to Mead that Woolf's "way of setting down people" corresponds to ethnographic work on temperament and type demonstrates her understanding of the almost hyper-realism of modernist novels.

emotions—the emotions of the painter—and desirable nudes giving voice to the desires of spectator and painter alike. The pictorial avant garde, meanwhile, were busily detaching the meaningful from the expressive. They were not too clearly aware of this, however, for they were no great manipulators of concepts. Yet through their experimental activity these painters were acute witnesses to the beginnings of the ‘crisis of the subject’ in the modern world. . . . If we are to believe the most authoritative commentators, the turning-point was 1907. It was at this time that Picasso discovered a new way of painting: the entire surface of the canvas was used, but there was no horizon, no background, and the surface was simply divided between the space of the painted figures and the space that surrounded (300).

Woolf, writing almost sixty years before LeFebvre, recognized a similar attempt being made in modern fiction to set in motion what LeFebvre finally calls “that paradoxical process whereby the third dimension (depth) was at once reduced to the painted surface and restored by virtue of the simultaneity of the multiple aspects of the thing depicted” (301). For Woolf, superceding form in this way had an additional urgency also unacknowledged by LeFebvre: Woolf worried about the place of women in society and celebrated the dismantling of many spaces, both architectural and fictional, some because women felt forced to occupy them, others because women were barred from entering.

Although Woolf herself says she “arbitrarily” marks this change in human character, the date she chooses to inaugurate a literary and cultural modernism coincides with the famous exhibition of “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” organized by her

friend Roger Fry. The exhibit—which included the work of Gauguin, Picasso, and Matisse—marked “the English debut of the primitive in high culture,” and it shocked the English public. Fry published the equally shocking essay “The Art of the Bushman” in *Athenaeum* the same year. His celebration of African art is part of “an emerging modernist aesthetics” that includes Woolf. “Like others in the art world, [Fry] thought primitive and modern art twin phenomena—and scripted both as attempts to rescue art from the morass of photographic representation and narrative.”⁹⁵ Woolf’s declaration of her intent to rescue modern readers from the morass of realistic conventions and the fallacy of narrative chronology resonates with the salvage project Fry performs in the visual register. A change in human character, what might more clearly be called a change in human consciousness, Woolf argues, necessitates a corresponding change in the way in which novelists must write.

Thus in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf is providing justification for the self-consciously modernist writer. She is responding to the declaration of critic Arnold Bennett that recent young novelists are not of first-rate importance because they cannot create convincing characters. Initially Woolf agrees with Bennett that the “foundation of all good fiction is character-creating.” In fact, she says that for the novelist the “study of character becomes an absorbing pursuit; to impart character an obsession.” But she quickly admits that she finds it “very difficult to explain: what novelists mean when they talk about character, what the impulse is that urges them so powerfully every now and then to embody their view in writing” (97). Rather than attempting to explain what character is, therefore, Woolf shows how she discovers a character sitting next to her in a train. This story of Mrs. Brown becomes the exemplification of how a character

⁹⁵ Torgovnick *Gone Primitive*, 85-86.

“imposes itself upon another person,” the novelist. The modernist novelist’s rendering of Mrs. Brown—Woolf soon makes us realize—is a “study,” not the creation of character that Bennett calls for. And Woolf’s story of Mrs. Brown in the railway carriage is “a simple story which, however pointless, has the merit of being true.” Woolf tells it to illustrate her eventual argument “that novels are in the first place about people.” For this reason, modernist novelists (or “Georgian writers” such as James Joyce, E. M. Forster and by implication Woolf herself) can’t use the conventions of earlier writers (such as Arnold Bennett) because these “Edwardians were never interested in character in itself...They were interested in something outside. Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them, actively and practically, for himself” (105). The reader has been led to look with the Edwardian novelist “at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at [Mrs. Brown], never at life, never at human nature,” Woolf concludes. The meaning of each Edwardian novel was foreclosed, because the author knew what he wanted readers to do in the real world once they had finished reading.

In contrast to these novelists that have preceded her, Woolf argues that there may be multiple “true” ways to convey character, multiple truths about human nature. “You see one thing in character, and I another,” she reminds her readers. “You say it means this, and I that. And when it comes to writing each makes a further selection on principles of his own. Thus Mrs. Brown can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer” (102). Mrs. Brown can be true in “an infinite variety of ways,” in other words, and she is just as much a revelation of the author’s temperament as she is an accurate rendering of another person. Finally,

despite her initial contention that novelists differ from other people, Woolf depends upon audience to measure the truth of characters. “Might I end by venturing to remind you,” she archly inquires of her readers, “of the duties and responsibilities that are yours as partners in this business of writing books, as companions in the railway carriage, as fellow travelers with Mrs. Brown? For she is just as visible to you who remain silent as to us who tell stories about her” (118). So Woolf imagines readers who themselves observe and evaluate characters in daily life.⁹⁶ Does she therefore imagine ethnographic readers such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead? Certainly Benedict seems more than willing to understand Woolf’s characters in *The Waves* as representing so many Mrs. Browns, as “types” that might emerge from accurate fieldwork, and as models for the ethnographer writing up data on human behavior.

“I’m feeling quite bored with my book just now, for it seems fairly elementary,” Benedict admits to Mead on October 16, 1932. “However it gives reasoned descriptions of SW and NWC and the pictures hang together rather well. Then it gives me a chance to introduce a little sophistication into the discussion of the deviant in a culture. The carbons of the first four chapters go to you on this boat.” This letter accompanies Benedict’s manuscript of *Patterns of Culture* on its voyage to Mead in the field. And after talking about her own work and expressing her own concerns, Benedict addresses those of Mead who has written about her struggle to understand and convey character:

You write about the number of configuration classifications you might get by going through the cultures of the world, and how helpless we are without stable classifications the psychologist ought to have provided us

⁹⁶ A more developed class critique might be made here; the New York Times reviewer, “Simon Pure,” to some degree rightfully objects to Woolf’s comments on servants. Similar critiques have

with. It would make it neater if they had, but I don't know that it would be any guarantee of good anthropological work in cultures. I feel about it just as I do about a novelist's getting down his character with the correct motivations, etc.; it might help him to have Freud investigate it for him first, but usually all it's done is to take his eyes off the real person he's describing, and it's usually vitiated more character-drawing than it's helped. I know that I feel that way about it because what I'm fundamentally interested in is the character of the culture and the relation of that institutionalized character to the individual of that culture.

Mead's concerns reflect the salvage anthropology in which she consciously engaged. With stable classifications, Mead might be able to collect more information going "through the cultures of the world." But Benedict disagrees with Mead and in the process (probably unwittingly) echoes Virginia Woolf. The anthropologist, like the novelist, should keep her eyes on the real person she's describing.

Reading Cultures

At the same time that writers such as Woolf are expressing frustration with the formal conventions of the "realist" novels of the nineteenth century and are trying to craft fictions to reveal the inner workings of consciousness, the ethnographic monograph emerges as a hybrid yet seemingly more stable form to be used to describe "other"

been made of Benedict and Mead. See Leacock on Mead as 'missionary' in the South Seas.

cultures and to critique “home.”⁹⁷ As Mead points out in her introduction to *Coming of Age in Samoa*, “The traveller who has been once from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own” (7). The ethnography that effectively delivers such knowledge of another culture should transform readers, in other words. Readers receptive to its unfamiliar content will become better “readers” of their own culture.⁹⁸ If ethnography aims to produce critics of culture, then Woolf—intensely critical of English imperialism and patriarchy in works such as *A Room*

⁹⁷ See McKeon *Origins of the English Novel* for a discussion of the novel as a generic category and a historical process. In contrast to Ian Watt’s definition of the novel by conventions of “formal realism,” McKeon defines the novel as dialectical and historically constituted. Thus the novel negates (or supercedes) the romance but retains some of its conventions and concerns. The “break” between realism and romance is not complete. His discussion of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia applies most directly to ethnography (almost too obviously, in fact). Other critics have read the work of Zora Neale Hurston as exemplifying Bakhtin’s dialogic. See Henderson. For the classic discussion of realism and romance in the American novel see Richard Chase. The work of Duncan Faherty on Henry James and his biography of Hawthorne deals directly with the implications of Chase’s scholarship on romance and realism. Faherty’s argument that these delineations also have served to exclude women writers from a canon of serious writers informs my understanding of women writers, fiction, and the cultural critique in ethnography.

⁹⁸ Correspondingly of modernist novels, Paul Ricoeur argues that “it may be the function of the most corrosive literature to contribute to making a new kind of reader appear, a reader who is himself suspicious, because reading ceases to be a trusting voyage made in the company of a reliable narrator, becoming instead a struggle with the implied author, a struggle leading the reader back to himself” (*Time and Narrative* Vol 3, 164). In Volume 2, in a section entitled “Metamorphosis of the Plot,” he makes a related point about the effect of fiction in the real world of the reader: “To the extent that every work does something, it adds something to the world which was not there previously. But the pure excess we may attribute to the work as an act, its power of interrupting repetition, as Roland Barthes puts it, in his ‘Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,’ does not contradict the need for closure. ‘Crucial’ endings are perhaps the ones that best combine these two effects. So it is not a paradox to say that a well-closed fiction opens an abyss in our world, that is, in our symbolic apprehension of the world” (20-21). Similarly, a well-closed ethnography seems intended to interrupt repetition and open an abyss in our world.

of *One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938)—seems the ideal reader. Indeed, several years after Benedict read *The Waves*, Woolf returned the favor.⁹⁹

Woolf approaches Benedict with the sensibility and critical acumen of a novelist, noting in her diary on July 26, 1940 that she has been “reading Ruth Benedict with pressure of suggestions—about Culture patterns—which suggests rather too much.” Woolf follows this statement in her diary with the contrasting comment that “[six] vols of Aug. Hare also suggest—little articles.” Thus, August Hare’s multi-volume *Story of My Life* suggests something particular, something concrete. Perhaps it suggests producing something specific such as “little articles,” or perhaps it suggests to Woolf that it is something specific, something like a collection of “little articles.” Benedict’s *Patterns* is simply suggestive; it *suggests* too much and thus remains abstract, almost poetic in its method and content. Anthropologist Barbara Babcock argues that “Benedict took a ‘poetic’ approach to inscribing the essential patterns of Pueblo experience” (119). She points out that *Patterns* does not move toward one meaning determined by the

⁹⁹ Consider Woolf’s preoccupations just before reading Benedict’s ethnography. She writes *Three Guineas* (1938) as a letter to “answer the question of how to prevent war.” In a review in *The London Review of Books* of a new edition of this anti-Fascist, anti-war book, Alison Light wonders rhetorically why reading and writing matter when changing the cultural/political climate requires action. “Perhaps it is easier to legitimise an aggressive reaction to fear than the feelings of helplessness and self-hatred Woolf so often endured,” Light acknowledges. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf explores feelings while the world totters on the edge of another war. “But without accepting their paralysing force, it’s hard to appreciate the scale of what she achieved,” Light argues. “And hard also to understand why she was a writer, that most passive of activities” (21 March 2002, p. 31). Consider also *Between the Acts* which Woolf was writing while reading Benedict and which was published posthumously in 1941. The novel describes the presentation of a national pageant at a country estate, a presentation made to English landowners by their servants, all of them shown to be poised uncomfortably between the two world wars. Michelle Pridmore-Brown argues similarly to Light that in *Between the Acts* Woolf presents passivity (pacifism) as a viable alternative to action (war and imperialism). The concept of a critical “Outsider’s Society” that “the daughters of educated men found” is central to *Three Guineas* and finds another form in the lesbian character, Miss LaTrobe, director of the pageant in *Between the Acts* and outspoken critic of English national culture.

ethnographer but rather toward multiple meanings: “Pueblo culture as conceived by the old men in particular,” as Clyde Kluckhohn once commented.¹⁰⁰ In fact, Woolf may have been expressing opposition to the multiplication of meanings in Benedict’s ethnography. Or she may have meant to say that Benedict “suggests *too much*,” that she draws too many concrete conclusions from simply suggestive information about cultures.¹⁰¹ Anthropologists contemporary with Benedict criticized her idealization of the Pueblo culture as essentially harmonious, contending that her “poetic” approach involved selecting “those Pueblo culture traits that supported her conception.” Woolf’s reaction sounds closer to that of these anthropologists whom Babcock calls “realists” than to the more celebratory analysis of recent feminist anthropologists such as Babcock herself.

Commenting only briefly on the overly suggestive quality of the ethnography rather than on its content, Woolf ultimately registers her refusal to read the ethnography as Benedict intends it to be read: as an accurate description of a range of psychological types. She also seems unable to read it as one of the “infinite variety of ways” to render true characters. What is at stake in the responses of Benedict and Woolf? Each writer critiques the other’s work using the vocabulary of her own profession, seemingly erasing and dismissing the elements that exceed this vocabulary. Ultimately, however, these women writers take each other very seriously. Each looks to the text of the other for potentially more accurate or more evocative methods of writing culture and each records

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Babcock, p. 120

¹⁰¹ Geographer and ethnographer Cindi Katz pointed this possibility out to me, showing a greater willingness than I had to understand Woolf as reading Benedict’s work as an anthropologist might. In Katz’s reading, Woolf takes Benedict’s arguments about culture seriously and challenges Benedict’s writing not with an eye to aesthetics alone but with an accurate application of standards for ethnographic data.

her understanding of the limitations of the other's work. Notably, for both literary scholarship and anthropology, each writer also acknowledges the work of the other within a text more generally devoted to self-representation: the intimate text of the love letter and the private space of the diary.¹⁰²

At the beginning of this chapter, I tried to establish suggestive parallels between Virginia Woolf and Margaret Mead. I then referred to Ruth Benedict's explication of *The Waves* and Woolf's vague response to *Patterns of Culture* as direct evidence of connections between early professional anthropology and modernism. These writers study and represent human characters, both general types and individual deviants. Yet what about Margaret Mead and this preoccupation with character? I argued above that Mead records data on individuals in order to create a composite character she calls the Samoan girl. In order to mediate between the Western reader and the world of Samoa, the anthropologist identifies with the Samoan girl; she presents her portrait as an alternative model of adolescent development. Like Benedict and Woolf, therefore, Mead focuses her research on human character. More explicitly than Benedict, however, Mead writes in conscious opposition to romantic constructions of character in literature and in culture more generally.

An analysis of ethnography as romance—as love story as well as adventure story—recognizes the cultural scripts that Mead, Woolf, and Benedict are writing against. Rather than showing “the anthropologist as Romantic hero,” I am suggesting an

¹⁰² Each commentary eventually reaches the public, however, published by its original audience: Benedict's letters edited and published first by Margaret Mead and Woolf's diary edited and published first by Leonard Woolf. It might be argued that, as public figures, Benedict and Woolf already thought of much of their private writing as potentially public. I am not convinced of this; I think the letters and diary remain distinct from the novels and ethnographies in terms of form and in terms of intended audience.

analogous tradition of the anthropologist as heroine. I read ethnography as part of a modernist tradition in contradictory dialogue with the romance.¹⁰³ To make this point more clear, I will turn briefly to Mead's autobiography. While analogous to Benedict's letter and Woolf's diary in that it functions as self-representation, Mead's autobiography is not private but quite deliberately public. And in this public document, Mead writes quite deliberately against conventional romance.

II. The Modernism of Anthropology: Mocking Romance

It is to be a love story

The story with which I began this chapter —the story of Mead's voyage home— turned quite quickly into a romance. By her own account, Mead spent a great part of her time on board ship sitting at table talking to Reo Fortune, the New Zealand anthropologist who became her second husband. “No doubt everyone on shipboard thought we were having an affair,” Mead writes in her autobiography, then continues matter-of-factly, “We were not, but we were falling in love, with all the possibility of a

¹⁰³ See George Stocking and others in *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility* for a historical account of the “romantic motif in anthropology” (6). Stocking's concept of romantic sensibility “is not particular to any given historical moment, but is rather a recurrent and we may expect permanent tendency within the anthropological tradition.” Therefore Stocking points out that, along with the other contributors to this volume, he is using ethnography “to exemplify rather than to define” romanticism. He does this to avoid “a problem that has vexed students of literature and of the history of ideas for over half a century” (5-6). Yet, Stocking identifies the 1920s as one of the historical moments in which the romantic sensibility of anthropology is most strongly expressed. I consider more specifically the literary genre of romance as an extension of the “romantic motif.” My reading of ethnography as a genre counter to the domestic has benefited from Linda Camarasana's work on plots by women writers in the early twentieth century.

relationship that I felt was profoundly unsuitable. Reo was so young, so inexperienced, so fiercely ambitious, and so possessively jealous of any fleeting glance I gave another person” (185).¹⁰⁴ Fortune knew the despair of love. He communicated the banal details of this despair to Mead on their first meeting. “He told me also about Eileen,” Mead writes, “the girl with whom he was in love and for whom he had written a long series of poems. She had refused him, and he was suffering from unrequited love as well as from passionate ambition.” Rather than elaborating on Fortune’s previous emotional entanglements in her autobiographical text, Mead emphasizes Fortune’s extreme ambition and quickly moves to a discussion of her own. She recalls that Fortune sought a model for his ambition, and he had settled most recently on the revolutionary Romantic poet, William Blake. Thus “he had thought of going somewhere and reading Blake, nothing but Blake, until he had induced in himself the state of mind in which Blake had created a new mythology.” Mead, on the other hand, already had determined the most appropriate model for her new mythology: Franz Boas’s instruction in the field of anthropology.¹⁰⁵

Immediately following Fortune’s complaints, Mead writes that she “talked about anthropology and the kinds of problems anthropology was preparing to investigate.”

Without commenting on Fortune’s somewhat disturbingly solipsistic and Romantic impulse, his dramatically unscientific invocation of Blake’s mythical poetic world, Mead

¹⁰⁴ Mead’s catalogue of unsuitable qualities demonstrates the ways in which Fortune initially showed himself to be steeped in what Roland Barthes has called the lover’s discourse. See in particular the sections or “figures” under “jealousy” and “scene” in Roland Barthes *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

¹⁰⁵ Stocking points out that Boas gave Mead “only one half-hour of methodological instruction before she sailed for Samoa, emphasizing that she should stick to her problem and not waste time

moves on to the problems of anthropology as she understands them. She concludes with a juxtaposition of their mutually passionate professional ambitions. “I said,” Mead continues, “that with the grounding I had received from Boas I hoped that in ten years I might add something original to anthropological theory. Reo answered that he meant to add something original immediately” (186). Roland Barthes begins *A Lover’s Discourse* with the etymology of “Dis-cursus—originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measure taken, ‘plots and plans’: the lover, in fact, cannot keep his mind from racing taking new measures and plotting against himself” (4). This definition of discourse as both travel and plotting reinforces the link Woolf makes between the writer and the voyager as well as the link between Mead’s first ethnography and the love story she tells in her autobiography. Each emerges out of and in some ways in reaction to the lover’s discourse that Barthes seeks to register, always provisionally. In contrasting the impatience of Fortune’s passions, both personal and professional, with her own more measured approach, Mead seems to be celebrating her method over his and by extension subordinating the “lover’s discourse” Fortune accepts and employs.

Certainly Mead devotes her subsequent anthropological career in part to popularizing alternative discourses of love and alternative models of sexual development.¹⁰⁶ *Coming of Age in Samoa* was only the first, although it remains the most famous. “It was an odd winter,” Mead reports in her autobiography, as she recreates the context within which—after her strictly discursive extramarital romance with Reo—she completed her ethnography. “Luther was teaching anthropology, which meant that I

“studying the culture as a whole” (240). The last phrase (attributed to Boas) is a quotation from Mead’s autobiography.

¹⁰⁶ In fact, she devotes her autobiography to an analysis of her professional life rather than her personal one.

became a resource at breakfast. But we had married with the expectation of having a common vocation working with people within the framework of the church. Now this was gone, and with it much of the sense of a shared purpose. My new job gave me time to write, and I finished *Coming of Age in Samoa*, all but the last two chapters in which I related my findings to American life” (188). Here again, as in the scenes with Fortune, Mead juxtaposes her professional and her personal life, only to conclude that the two must be intertwined. Soon after the publication of *Coming of Age*, she and Luther part, and Mead leaves almost immediately for fieldwork in New Guinea with Fortune. She has succumbed to the romance of anthropology, and she wants to draw in her American readers as well.

The term “romance” was used first to describe the body of popular literature written or translated into the vernacular languages of Europe as these languages—later termed “romance” languages—came into more general use.¹⁰⁷ In part due to these early cultural linguistic origins of the literary designation “romance,” Kristen Ramsdell defines the later genre romance novel in relation to its readers rather than strictly in terms of its content. “The genre romance novel appeals both generally and specifically,” she maintains. “Its general appeal is that of all genre fiction—an escape fantasy that is predictable, enjoyable, and safe. Romance’s specific appeal is more complex. It attracts readers for diverse reasons that include emotional involvement, female empowerment, the promotion of moral values, the celebration of life, the ultimate triumph of love, and a sense of unflagging optimism” (18). Ramsdell’s formulation follows closely Janice

¹⁰⁷ Petrarch, for example, immortalized his beloved Laura in sonnets in Italian instead of Latin in the 15th century, and thus he began a vernacular literary tradition, established conventions of romantic poetry, and assured the acceptance of the Tuscan dialect as standard written Italian.

Radway's loosely ethnographic work on contemporary romance novels (the trashy sort probably read by lonely housewives, spinsters, or single girls on the make). Radway combines theories about the formal conventions of such novels with information gathered in interviews with contemporary readers of romances. Through this combination, she formulates a somewhat credible opposition to "most mass-culture critics" who seek simply to "show how the consciousness created by popular literature reconciles readers to a social order dominated by others" (6). Such a conclusion about how popular literature operates in culture raises the critical reader above the general reader, Radway contends, and, moreover, such a foreclosed reading of romance does not account accurately for the way in which a novel and the meaning of a novel can be created as much by audience as by authorial intent, formal convention, or even industry standards.

Radway's attention to the act of reading an imaginative genre such as romance is most importantly a way of taking women readers seriously. Out of this optimistic, anti-elite, and initially sound impulse, Radway declares that romance novels "may enable women to resist their social role" and supplement "its meager benefits." The large numbers of readers seeking (and finding) escape in romance novels suggests a potential for more "substantial social change." Gillian Beer makes a similar argument about the broader genre of romance. Rather than resistant to cultural convention, however, in Beer's formulation romance is "revolutionary." Specifically, the courtly code of love represented in early romances "subverted the values of feudal society by its emphasis on love without bargains, its fantasy of female dominance, its individualism and its paradoxical legalism which piquantly appropriated the language of authority while undermining authoritarian assumptions," Beer argues. Thus, the medieval romance

offers a mix of “political actuality” and “imaginative creation” (23). And “because romance shows us the ideal it is implicitly instructive as well as escapist...By simplifying character the romance removes the idiosyncrasies which set other people apart from us; this allows us to act out through stylized figures the radical impulses of human experience” (9).

Simplified characters (what Benedict might consider “types”) provide models for more radical, subversive human behavior less often or less apparently modeled in real life. “The romance has always flourished in periods of rapid change: twelfth-century France, Elizabethan England, the end of the eighteenth century. We might expect to find it flourishing in our own time,” Beer suggests. In fact, I am arguing that we do, that in addition to the elements of romance evident in what Beer calls “the insipidity of women’s magazine fiction” and “the ‘ideal worlds’ of works such as Mervyn Peake’s *Gormenghast* trilogy and Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*,” the romance persists in ethnography. Science fiction writers such as Peake and Tolkien “offer totally imagined idiosyncratic worlds which we can inhabit completely while we read; and both worlds are preoccupied with complex moral issues, acted out by characters living according to a conscious code of conduct. They instruct us in our own world even while they allow us to escape from it. They express the conserving and crystallizing function of romance” (78). Mead’s ethnography expresses the conserving and crystallizing function of romance as well. She instructs readers about the codes of their own world while allowing them to escape briefly to a remote island in the South Seas.¹⁰⁸ She promotes the emotional participation

¹⁰⁸ For related reading, see Greenblatt *Marvellous Possessions* on Renaissance exploration of the New World. See Amy Kaplan’s introduction to *Cultures of United State Imperialism* for a comment on Greenblatt. See also Greenblatt’s typically New Historicist introduction to *The*

of her readers in the sexual development of the Samoan girl, opening a window onto recognizably intimate entanglements in an unfamiliar and distant world.

Many now classic ethnographies begin with an opening frame intended to appeal to a Western audience. In examining this impulse, Mary Louise Pratt locates personal narrative as a “conventional component of ethnographies. It turns up almost invariably in introductions or first chapters, where opening narratives commonly recount the writer’s arrival” (31). Unlike the ethnographies Pratt analyzes, however, Mead’s does not begin with a personal narrative of her initial encounter with Samoa. It begins from the perspective of what Pratt later terms the scientific position “of an observer fixed on the edge of space, looking in and/or down upon what is other.” Mead immediately places the reader in the position of the ethnographer observing from a distance rather than in the position of the fieldworker living among the natives. In other words, Mead does not undermine the authoritative position of the ethnographer in the field. Nor does she narrate her discoveries as a lone adventurer. Instead she seems to depend upon an omniscient narrative perspective from the beginning in order to better convince her readers of the fragility and partiality of their perspective.

Mead frames her study of character in Samoan culture with an inviting lyrical description of a natural scene.¹⁰⁹ The ethnography begins with the sun, because “the Life

Tempest and Campbell’s analysis of Hariot’s erotic, commercial rendering of Virginia (discussed briefly in Chapter One). Somewhat similarly, XX writes about ‘America as a woman.’

¹⁰⁹ This “opening” is actually the second chapter of the published ethnography. The first chapter is about education in the U.S. The publisher William Morrow asked her to add the first and last chapters to her manuscript ‘The Adolescent Girl in Samoa.’ In this original manuscript, “cross-cultural comparisons were relegated to a brief set of ‘conclusions’ in which Mead suggested that ‘only by criticizing our own civilization in terms of the behavior of other human beings in civilizations having different patterns of behavior can we arrive at any knowledge of how great a part of our attitudes and behaviors is due, not to the accident of humanity or even of sex, still less

of the day begins at dawn, or if the moon has shown until daylight, the shouts of the young men may be heard before dawn from the hillside.” Then the light and the sea become briefly intertwined: “as the dawn begins to fall among the soft brown roofs and the slender palm trees stand out against a colourless, gleaming sea, lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm tree or in the shadow of beached canoes, that the light may find each sleeper in his appointed place.” Finally, the natural scene comes to life, we hear the birds, and the human activity begins to take over. “Cocks crow, negligently, and a shrill-voiced bird cries from the breadfruit tree ... Women carry piles of washing to the sea or to the spring at the far end of the village, or set off inland after weaving materials. The older girls go fishing on the reef, or perhaps set themselves to weaving a new set of Venetian blinds.” Certainly Mead made these observations over time as she gradually perceived a general pattern of daily life, and yet she relays her observations to her readers in what Pratt refers to as the “famous ‘ethnographic present’” tense. The use of the present tense condenses the diachronic experience of a culture into a synchronic picture. In arrested time, Mead describes an ideal and idyllic Samoa where lovers are ever slipping home from trysts amid the sound of cocks crowing.¹¹⁰ This one day captured by

of race, but rather to the accident of having been born in America, or in Samoa, in the America of 1927 instead of the America of 1729.” (manuscript quoted in Stocking, 243-244). Mead wrote the “Day” opening for her professional account of Samoa, “Social Organization of Manu’a,” but she decided it was too literary for such a scholarly text. (See *An Anthropologist at Work*.) *Coming of Age* was written as a popular book, supporting my reading of it as a ‘vernacular’ text or ‘romance.’ This vernacular reading also corresponds with Abu-Lughod’s description of a women’s tradition of ethnographic writing. See Chapter One.

¹¹⁰ Deborah Gordon points out that this description suggests that Mead “can see everyone and everything at once... Up in the morning before anyone else, able to read the minds of anonymous young men and to witness the sexual lives of the ‘natives,’ Mead’s voice claims total vision and knowledge of the ‘other’” (152). True enough. Yet, stylistically, this section sounds most like Woolf’s writing. It is the narrative convention that frames Mead’s ethnographic data. I am not certain that the data is completely bound by this vision, but I do think that Mead, like Benedict, misses the more radical implications of Woolf’s formal experimentation, particular the

the ethnographer functions as a kind of textual diorama: like the dioramas of people that still can be seen in natural history museums, the story of the human characters becomes part of natural history.¹¹¹

Mead further elides the distinction between nature and people through the order and the choice of words in her description. She moves from the image of the “slender palm trees” standing out against the sea to the lovers reappearing to “slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees” in the same sentence. Nature is personified and humans naturalized as the emerging light becomes capable of acting to “find each sleeper.” The cocks express a negligence in their crowing that reflects the same casual attitude of the human lovers. The casual attitude of the Samoan lovers suggests that there may be several “lover’s discourses” from which to choose. Indeed, Mead pauses later in the text to point out what her readers should have concluded from the evidence of sexual liaisons so far presented. “Romantic love as it occurs in our civilization, inextricably bound up with ideas of monogamy, exclusiveness, jealousy and undeviating fidelity does not occur in Samoa,” she concludes. To support her conception of “our civilization,” Mead traces several contributing traditions. For, “our attitude is a compound, the final result of many converging lines of development in Western civilization, of the institution of monogamy, of the ideas of the age of chivalry, of the ethic of Christianity” (58). Much like Woolf in *The Waves*, Mead deliberately positions herself as the inheritor of a discursive and

implications for and challenges to conventional study and rendering of human character. See also Lutkehaus.

¹¹¹ See James Clifford *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, especially Chapter 10; also Tim Armstrong *Modernism, Technology and the Body*.

narrative tradition only to situate her own text as a love story in opposition to a Western romantic tradition.

Pattern of Cultures

Although Ruth Benedict applauds Virginia Woolf's choice of subject matter and method of capturing personalities in *The Waves*, she never explains any specific way in which she understands Woolf to have defined and developed characters. Instead, she continues her January 1932 letter to Mead by complaining that "the talk about *The Waves* has been mostly about what it means, and it's bored me to death. Well, what's its theme? People have suggested the strangest assortments. To me of course it's just about life's being a wrapping and wrapping oneself in one's own cocoon. What you can spin is all you have to work with, and the result is altogether dependent on that." Here, Benedict seems to be saying that Woolf's novel has no theme. To Benedict, this is simply a novel *about* characters accumulating distinct personalities as they move through their lives. She discusses the novel as she has apprehended it, as a text parallel to her own broadly comparative ethnographic work on culture and personality.

Benedict argues in *Patterns of Culture* for understanding "a culture, like an individual" as "a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action"(46). She elucidates this link between culture and personality by focusing on three different cultures and characterizing each in terms of its dominant tendency to be "Apollonian" or "Dionysian," categories she borrows from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and employs only loosely. For example, she considers the Zuni Pueblo in the Southwest United States to be made up of ideal Apollonians who "keep the middle road...do not meddle with

disruptive psychological states” such as trance. However, the Dobu of Tewara in Polynesia and the Kwaikuitl of Vancouver Island exhibit the “violent temperaments” Benedict finds lacking in Woolf’s fictional work. Unlike the moderate members of the Pueblo culture, individuals in the Dobu and Kwaikuitl seek to transcend “ordinary bounds and limits of existence” and break through into another order of experience. In analyzing how individual types combine into a pattern of culture and how individuals who deviate from cultural norms can be absorbed into a culture or expelled from it, Benedict echoes many of the concerns Woolf expresses in both her novels and essays. This conceptual framework remains in place as she reads Woolf and subsequently reports to Mead, and this framework seems to provide such an adequate way to navigate *The Waves* that she makes no mention of the complex structure or the stream-of-thought narrative that rendered the novel obscure to many readers.

The Waves quite literally begins in obscurity, in an undifferentiated darkness that more-than-closely resembles the dawn in Mead’s Samoa. It begins with the declaration that “The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it.” Then, as the rising sun brings increasing clarity to the scene and divides the sky from sea, the focus shifts quickly from the action of the light to the waves. As the details accumulate, the waves become increasingly personified, “pursuing each other, perpetually” until “as they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously.” With the waves in retreat, the focus shifts back again to the action of the light as it illuminates individual details:

The light struck upon the trees in the garden, making one leaf transparent and then another. One bird chirped high up; there was a pause; another chirped lower down. The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue fingerprint of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window. The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial. The birds sang their blank melody outside. (7)

Thus Woolf plunges her readers first into nature, gradually illuminates the markers of civilization (the house, the blind, the window), and ends on an elegiac but empty note with the blank melody of the birds. The details of such a seaside scene will change, of course, as the sun moves across the sky. And Woolf intermittently records these changes as they occur throughout a single day. Eventually, these descriptive sections enclose a narrative of character development; the novel ends with the waves breaking on the shore again.

The similarities between the opening of *The Waves* and Mead's initial synchronic description of "A Day in Samoa" are striking: the sea, the birds, the blinds. However, whereas Mead embeds the Samoans in their natural surroundings, Woolf segregates the characters from the natural description. She completely severs the two. And, whereas Mead pauses to interject conclusions to be drawn from the scenes of life presented, no reliable, omniscient narrator's voice directs the reader through the texts interspersed in Woolf's novel. How do we make sense of the dramatic aesthetic similarities and the equally dramatic structural differences between Woolf's text and Mead's?

In *The Waves*, Woolf presents natural and cultural scenes in parallel texts, rendering nature seemingly distinct from historical time, or rather, to speak more accurately in terms of the logic of the novel, as distinct from the narrative time it takes to develop characters.¹¹² Descriptions of the natural scene interrupt a longer narrative that centers on six main characters as they grow into adults. These characters assume distinct personality not through the governing fiction of an implied or embedded narrator who observes them but only as they comment on each other in extended interior monologues. Occasionally, they talk to each other. More often, each character recounts his or her observations of the events that make up the plot. Each event seems to occur many times, each time troped or turned like a plant toward the light for repeated scrutiny by the reader, each narration differing slightly in emphasis from the others. Thus Woolf's novel works not through linear development as much as by accretion.

Unlike many of the male modernist writers who were her contemporaries, Woolf does not rue the loss of a great English textual tradition or struggle with the "anxiety" of its influence. Rather, she exploits such techniques as stream-of-consciousness to mock a classical romantic hero and to fragment and disrupt the traditionally celebratory plot of his self-development.¹¹³ In other words, Woolf delineates her characters with direct and

¹¹² As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the frame is classical, the action occurs in one day. See also Bakhtin in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," particularly on "adventure time" and Greek romance.

¹¹³ "It is not irrelevant that in *The Waves* Woolf can be said to have summarized her exploration of the past by depicting a writer's voyeuristic gaze at another writer. From early in her career she herself continually looked with mingled admiration and aversion at the lives of her precursors. Indeed, long before she was a novelist, Woolf was a literary critic working in a new genre pioneered by women writers of her generation, and her reconstruction of her aesthetic heritage, like the reconstruction attempted by many of her contemporaries, frequently involved a visualizing of the primal scene of writing, a kind of spying on the past. In particular, Woolf exemplifies how women of letters indulged in such erotic peering when approaching the forbidden precincts of the female tradition" (*No Man's Land*, 196-197).

purposeful reference to English literary tradition; Benedict also fails to register this intertextual gesture in her analysis.¹¹⁴

To indicate clearly the textual tradition she writes consciously within, Woolf names her central character Percival. First found in European poetry in the incomplete *Perceval, ou Le Conte du Graal* of Chretien de Troyes (c.1182), the legendary heroic figure Perceval is also the subject of the German *Parzival* (c.1205) which was the inspiration for Wagner's opera.¹¹⁵ He appears in the Middle English metrical romance *Sir Perceval of Galles* that tells of his childhood and being knighted by King Arthur. Finally, Sir Thomas Malory makes him the son of King Pellinore, "The King of the Waste Lands," and describes his success in the Quest for the Holy Grail.¹¹⁶ Invoking multiple and various texts all centered on the legendary Perceval, Woolf invokes a textual and cultural tradition of the heroic quest and the courtly lover.

Percival remains a compendium of various texts in *The Waves*. He is given no direct speech or thought. He is the silent, empty center. The other six speaking characters observe and report on his apparent heroism as he moves from success and arrogant brutality on the cricket field to become a colonial official in British India where

¹¹⁴ Condensing each of the six characters into one essential quality, for instance, Maria DiBattista reads them as traces of the multiple literary precursors—mainly forms of romance—with which Woolf seems to be in dialogue in *The Waves*: "Rhoda's visionary romances, Jinny's stylized erotica, Susan's dark pastorals, Louis's historical romances, Neville's lyrical meditations on limits of human love, Bernard's novelistic parables on the nature of time and story—*The Waves* reads like an anatomy of the 'body' of literature in the Western tradition."

¹¹⁵ Three of the most influential literary works of the twentieth century, *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*, all quote directly from Wagner's operas.

¹¹⁶ See *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, p.762; for further reading see Sir Thomas Malory *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1470, printed 1485). For more on the genre of romance see Gillian Beer *Romance* and above discussion.

he dies, a mock hero, in a fall from a mule. In thus defining the collective task for the six characters to be the creation of an image of Percival, Woolf dramatizes the complicity of both white middle-class English women and the English writer. Through homage to heroes as undeserving of idealization as Percival, both women and writers uphold the sham ideals and further the brutal practices of the British Empire. In one of the central scenes in Woolf's novel, the six characters, first shown together as young children around the school table, come together again as adults around a table in a restaurant to wait for Percival to arrive. They want to say goodbye before he goes to India. They are drawn together into an almost religious relation to each other through their shared expectation, their shared belief, or, as the writer Bernard says, "We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion" (126). They "come together...to make one thing, not enduring—for what endures?—but seen by many eyes simultaneously" (127). Thus Bernard describes the function of these six characters struggling "to make one thing" out of disparate observations, and in the process, he accurately describes the precarious structure of the novel itself, a novel comprised of people and events "seen by many eyes simultaneously."

Presenting multiple perspectives rather than a distinct authorial vision, Woolf undermines the coherence of the novel's plot. She works in opposition to the nationalistic romance at the level of structure. Disrupting conventions of realism and conventions of heroism, she uses the descriptive interludes to fragment the story of typical schoolchildren coming of age in England and to fragment the heroic story of Percival. The accumulated thoughts of the individual characters reveal typical quest heroes to be men who deal with their own feelings of inferiority by creating inferiors and

brutalizing them. Men build empires out of the impulse to feel superior; England of the early twentieth century is built upon Empire. Therefore, English culture has rot at its center. At the center of *The Waves*, Percival stands as an emblem of English culture and English empire.

Thus, in both form and content, Woolf suggests the fall of the British Empire. For, as Jane Marcus points out, “while popular sentiment might declare that the sun never sets on the British Empire, *The Waves* emphatically dramatizes the very historical moment in which the sun does set” (155). In the opening scene, Woolf plunges her readers first into nature, and in the closing scene, she plunges them into history. Additionally, with this frame, she embeds her characters in the classical confines of one day and surrounds them with the “sound of the waves...throughout.” The “sea’s voice is an objective, unchanging standard against which to measure the passage of time and human lives,” Michael J. Hoffman argues. More specifically, through the initial plunge into a dark, unknown but gradually illuminated natural scene, Woolf invokes a timeless primitivism that she ultimately critiques in the novel. Considering Woolf to be writing *The Waves* in opposition to the patriarchal elements of the literary romance and to a related imperial tradition, I find it odd that the novel migrated into American ethnography with only a cursory mention of its form and content. In textual terms, it migrated as a metaphor.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ DiBattista immediately questions her own figuration of Woolf’s reference to other literary forms and traditions as a scientific “anatomy,” arguing that “Woolf’s primary intention, however, is not to dissect, but to enumerate the various styles of figuration through which the literate body expresses itself. Capitalizing on the pun buried in her repetitive use of the word ‘figure,’ figure as both a rhetorical pattern and as a human outline, Woolf reconnects the broken lines of communication between mind and body, aesthetic and natural form. Thus the climax of her novel appropriately announces itself as a set of figurative relations” (*Virginia Woolf’s Major Novels*, p. 183). See also Smith and Katz “Grounding Metaphors.”

After complaining to Mead about the lack of violent temperaments in Woolf's novel, Benedict seemingly unwittingly repeats a central metaphor that in the novel is used to reveal the violence of individual temperaments and English society. In many ways, the central, classical romance in *The Waves* is the unfulfilled love between Susan and Percival, the Earth-mother and the Warrior. Yet Susan's adult love for her child seems to exceed this earlier infatuation. Susan first uses the image of a cocoon to explain her experience "all spun to a fine thread around the cradle, wrapping in a cocoon made of my own blood the delicate limbs of my baby" (171). And she continues talking to the baby and to herself, "Sleep, I say, and feel within me uprush some wilder, darker violence, so that I would fell down with one blow any intruder, any snatcher, who should break into this room and wake the sleeper" (171-172). Ignoring or forgetting the violence first attached to the metaphor of the cocoon, Benedict turns Woolf's evocation of the fierce physical connection established between mother and child into a figure suggesting solitary self-creation: What you can spin is all you have to work with.

Somewhat similarly, Woolf later transfers this metaphor to another character, the Australian Louis, and transforms the cocoon Susan has spun around her child into an image for the creation of an external identity, a fragile and fraught process of presenting oneself as whole to others:

"It breaks," said Louis, "the thread I try to spin; your laughter breaks it, your indifference, also your beauty. Jinny broke the thread when she kissed me in the garden years ago. The boasting boys mocked me at school for my Australian accent and broke it. 'This is the meaning,' I say; and then start with a pang—

vanity. 'Listen,' I say, to the nightingale, who sings among the trampling; the conquests and migrations. 'Believe—' " (218).

Here Louis speaks back to the nightingale that for Keats "was heard/ In ancient days by emperor and clown." While Keats's ode ends with the famous question "Do I wake or sleep?" that recalls Susan's musings to her child, Louis's laments ends with the equally ambiguous exhortation to "believe." Benedict invokes the image of the cocoon in her letter to Mead in much the same way Louis does. She agrees with Louis that everyone must spin an outer covering (must do something in order to continue to believe, perhaps). And her aversion to making meaning out of the novel also recalls Louis's inability to claim the authority, which he calls "vanity," to assign meaning. Louis's hesitancy arises out of an acute awareness of how his "outsiderness" has provoked the mockery and the indifference of others; the English schoolboys laughing at his colonial accent have made him self-conscious.

Similarly self-conscious, Benedict, like Woolf, developed a professional interest in the social deviant.¹¹⁸ Notably, she does not recognize Louis as this "type." Also notably, given Benedict's training in a discipline dedicated to the study of savagery and civilization, she does not recognize Louis's (and Woolf's) reference to the trampling of one civilization over another, to what he hears early in the novel as "a great beast's foot," chained and stamping. "As a former colonial subject, Louis is most afraid of the dissolution of Empire," Marcus argues. "He hears the great beast of revolution stamping

¹¹⁸ "Hampered by deafness and diffidence, Benedict did not find fieldwork congenial, and the small amount that she did (no more than eight months altogether) fell into a rather conventional early Boasian mold" (Stocking 223). Many other historians of anthropology and biographers have noted Benedict's unconventional life, her divorce, her physical intimacy with women as motivating her interest in individual deviants in other cultures.

on the shore. He commutes between a garret room, where he can observe sordid sights of poverty and degradation, and a mahogany desk in a posh office, where he plans for swimming pools on luxury liners...Louis's insecurity is so insecure that he needs continual reinforcement of his class position from walking the slums" (157). In Marcus's reading, Louis hardly sounds like a person "who has a shrug of the shoulders," as Benedict says. Benedict does not see how Louis reacts to the brutality of colonial power that he feels as a personal slight by becoming a wealthy snob and developing a brutality of his own. But Margaret Mead does.

III. Intimacy

"Darling," Mead writes to Benedict on April 10, 1932, "THE WAVES and a bundle of New Yorkers came to save our lives, and a letter to Reo from you saying you'd got the Ainomis article and had heard nothing about the Manus manuscript. Neither have we, and if its [sic] lost I suppose it will be oo [sic] late to trace it. The carbon would need a lot of reworking, so it will just have to stop until we get back, if it was lost." Of course, letters travel between people to link them when they are in disparate places, but Mead also links disparate texts and what she perceives to be disparate times in her letter to Benedict. Mead writes to Benedict about *The New Yorker*, *The Waves*, the copies of the lost manuscript that "will just have to stop" until she gets back home. She writes about the field as a place of textual exchange and temporal distortion. New York and New Guinea exist in parallel time frames. So do she and Ruth Benedict.

Mead actually experiences the primitive world of Tewara and her more familiar modern world as out of order. In the same letter in which she acknowledges receipt of

The Waves, Mead describes the “scrappy” way in which letters from Benedict have reached her, presenting to her the social world of New York in a different sequence. Mead’s perception of time in the field becomes more apparent in a letter written two weeks later, on April 28, in which she imagines the events of New York City in relation both to the events observed in New Guinea and to her sense of arrested self-development:

If I had been in New York, Tom’s marriage, Nat, Leonie’s response to Louise’s confidence to Eda Lou, Papa Franz’s illness ---all would have stirred me to far far more definite responses than the world’s old time element let’s them do here. [?] But here I plod along, so far removed from immediate participation in any more complicated scene. And I feel that aside from more ideas about anthropology—I’ll be exactly the same as I was when I went away. Things will have been happening to you—I’ll have been as isolated from events as if I had T.B. and had spent these two years in a sanitorium.

Mead never reveals in her private writing the kind of violent reaction and neurosis of Malinowski, but she speaks petulantly about her time in the field.¹¹⁹ She seems to feel that she is missing some party still going on in New York. While she plods along doing good work in anthropology, she sacrifices the individual development she would have been “stirred” to at home.

Like Caroline Kirkland before her and Zora Neale Hurston after, constant self-scrutiny proves integral to Mead’s fieldwork experience. For Mead, the spatial and

¹¹⁹ Malinowski writes in his diary that out of frustration with the natives, he, like Conrad’s Mr. Kurtz, “tends toward exterminate the brutes.”

temporal disruption of anthropological work seems to threaten her individual development, dependent as it is on the modern world. Yet, Mead is aware of her biases and, therefore, she suggests that there may be limits to individual observation in the field.

On April 25th, she writes:

It is beginning to be anything but funny the way I always have primitive people who specialise in breaking down their form, in abrogating [sic] in [them?] as much as possible. This is just another case, of adoptions, working and then living with affinal relatives, making all sorts of choices in kinship terms instead of sticking to any solid basis. It's a mercy that Reo did Dobu first and that I'll have him along to bear witness that it isn't just some prejudice [sic] of mine which makes me see all the violations instead of the form.

The Dobuans will not conform to the patterns Mead so enjoyed among the Samoan girls. Indeed they seem to Mead to refuse to adhere to any consistent culture at all. From a literary perspective, Mead's rendering of the primitive as "old time" and primitives as "breaking down their form," her irritability about time lost in the field and her worry about observations of "violations instead of the form" is charmingly—or at least markedly—modernist.

The disruption of temporal sequence results from the modern confrontation with and immersion in the primitive world, a confrontation that Virginia Woolf apprehends in the colonial encounter and represents in her novels; Woolf replicates such an experience of time as relative in the parallel but distinct texts of *The Waves*, for example, and she presents events from the multiple perspectives of her characters as well. In spite of the

analogous experience and representation of ethnographic time and in spite of Benedict's unquestioning acceptance of Woolf's technique, Mead complains about *The Waves*. For Benedict, Woolf's characters reflect an actual world outside the text.¹²⁰ After all, Benedict believes that primitive cultures and peoples remain particularly susceptible to being captured in text. As she says in her long introduction to *Patterns of Culture*, "in primitive society, the cultural tradition is simple enough to be contained within the knowledge of individual adults, and the manners and the morals of the group are moulded to one well-defined general pattern" (18). It is not surprising that Benedict understands the world Woolf creates through the cumulative, often repetitive thoughts of the characters in *The Waves*. Mead responds to Benedict's enthusiasm for Woolf's mimetic abilities with skepticism about the truth value of the character sketches. Indeed, "I very much doubt if she really understands men at all," Mead begins her critique. Although admittedly "the three women were quite good, done by moods and preferences more than ideas, and with their emotional life made a reality," unfortunately, "Reo thinks she drew over generously on Nietzsche [sic], even down to very phrases, sometimes, and then she puts his sayings in two different men's mouths, which is theoretically alright [sic] but very bad theatre for this kind of book, where you have to tell people apart only by their thoughts." At least, that is what Reo thinks, according to Mead, who (we must presume) really does understand men.

Mead writes again to Benedict after a sickness during which she rereads *The Waves*, and she specifies her objection in terms of the fictional form. "I think she needs

¹²⁰ See Paul Ricoeur "The World of Text and the World of the Reader" in *Time and Narrative*. See also Eric Auerbach *Mimesis* and Bakhtin's similarly sweeping literary history in *Marxism and Literature*. Todorov points out that both Auerbach and Bakhtin exhibit a primary concern with the way in which literature refers to the real world.

one more fiction to carry it over,” Mead suggests. And so, Mead has amended her method of reading accordingly. To fully enjoy the novel, Mead says she “must add” the kind of fiction provided by Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*: the fiction of a unifying consciousness. She must tell herself as she reads, “i.e. that this is one person thinking what he and his five associates would think, if they all used the same figures of speech the same cadences, the same type of imagery.” Here Mead might as well be describing the unifying function of the anthropologist in *Coming of Age in Samoa*.

In fact, although multiple perspectives are presented throughout *The Waves*, the writer Bernard’s version of the story does take over by the end.¹²¹ And while Mead appears to be more critical of Woolf than Benedict, they come to the same general conclusion, according to Mead. “Your comment that her people are circumscribed, all taking life with a shrug, is another comment on the same point,” Mead explains before pointing out that Benedict has misread Woolf. “For they don’t; Louis surely, nor Susan, do not take life with a shrug, but care terribly. But Bernard, the teller of the story, does take it with a shrug, and it is his phrase making which gets in and spoils the illusion...all are muted with the common denominator of Bernard’s style.” In a way, Bernard admits this.

Bernard ends the novel by considering his struggle as a writer and arrives at the conviction that it is in fact impossible for the writer to convey characters, “impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole” (256). In this account, the effort of the writer of fiction sounds remarkably similar to that of the ethnographer who wishes to convey to Western readers the complex whole of a culture

¹²¹ See DiBattista on how his story subsumes that of the others, similar to Mead’s comment on “Bernard’s unifying style” (below).

that has been apprehended through the actions and the stories of the particular individuals who comprise it. Yet, the modernist fiction writer understands that this thing Bernard calls “life” may elude representation. Woolf admits the limits of her fiction, whereas neither Mead nor Benedict will jeopardize the necessary function of ethnography by foregrounding its partiality or inability to represent a real world to its readers.

EPILOGUE

Margaret Mead in the Bedroom: Traces of Ethnography

After Margaret Mead's death, her daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, recreated her in a memoir, filling in the gaps Mead had left in her own autobiography. "What she carefully concealed, I have now decided to write and publish," Bateson declares. "It has seemed to me finally that if we are to winnow out what is valuable and freeing in her work, it is necessary to know who she was with whatever honesty we can achieve. Children, do not, I believe, belong in their parents' bedrooms, nor does the public belong in the bedrooms of those it has turned into public figures for their wit or their beauty or their wisdom. But Margaret Mead had walked in a thousand bedrooms" (143). Invoking her mother's authority as a professional observer of others' intimacies, Bateson authorizes her exposure of Mead's bisexuality. It is a revelation tinged with anger and regret. "However I try now to rationalize and empathize with her choices, I have to deal with the fact that she did not trust me to do so, and however I try to appreciate the level of honesty implied in her words, it was not complete," Bateson explains. But her indignation dissolves in the next instant when she turns to a description of the domestic space she shared with Mead. "Sometimes, however, I want simply to laugh aloud at Margaret's refusal of all forced choices. She kept Ruth [Benedict]'s photograph on the mantel and Gregory [Bateson]'s on her bureau." (153).

Thus, although Mead displayed evidence of her relationships with women, and although she represented in her anthropological work many ways in which to understand

sexuality, she never revealed this aspect of her private life, even to her own daughter. Would this information have destroyed the representative female character Mead carefully created? Perhaps. Certainly it indicates how consciously Mead used ethnography as a form of self-representation.¹²² She reveals more intimate details of others' lives in her ethnographies than she does of her own in her autobiography. Yet these details about others correspond to elements of her experience. In other words, in order to represent her own experience, Mead seems to depend upon the distanced perspective of the ethnographer and the public function of the ethnography.

Professional anthropological ethnography begins in the same moment in history as a literary and artistic modernist movement characterized by formal experimentation. These self-proclaimed modernist artists reacted against the homogenizing effects of modern mass culture and purposefully dismantled some of the dominant forms of cultural representation in order to create what they considered more accurate records of modern human experience. The novel in the hands of Virginia Woolf succeeds, although only partially, in uniting the fragmented modern object world and bringing together isolated individual consciousnesses. And professional ethnography, from its very beginnings, is a genre in some ways analogous to novels like Woolf's. Ethnography unites fragments. In a way similar to Woolf's purposeful disruption of what she considered a masculine literary tradition, ethnographers purposefully transmit details about a minor culture to a

¹²²When Nancy Lutkehaus wants to reclaim Mead as an experimental anthropologist, in reaction to the absence of any discussion of women's ethnographies in *Writing Culture*, she maintains a hierarchy between autobiography and ethnography to make her point. "In contrast to most male writers, Mead grounded her writing in the immediacy of her own sensate experience. This is more than merely a form of autobiography or egocentrism. It is the result of a phenomenological approach to ethnographic research" (201).

major one, often by incorporating traditional literary structures into the less familiar form of the monograph.¹²³

“What is the significance of having two culturally constituted and sanctioned discourses available to individuals to express[...] interpersonal experiences?” anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod wonders in the conclusion to *Veiled Sentiments*, her ethnography of “honor and poetry in Bedouin society.” The question arises out of her growing understanding of the stark contrast between the dominant cultural ideology of honor and autonomy in Bedouin society and the intimacy and passion of their oral poetry. “The existence of dissident or subversive discourses is probably not unusual,” she concludes. “What may be peculiar to Awlad ‘Ali is that their discourse of rebellion is both culturally elaborated and sanctioned. Although poetry refers to personal life, it is not individual, spontaneous, idiosyncratic, or unofficial, but public, conventional, and formulaic—a highly developed art” (251). In this dissertation, I make a related claim for ethnography as it can function and as it has sometimes been intended to function within Western culture. Ethnography refers to other people’s personal lives in a public form, and in referring to unfamiliar personal and cultural practices, ethnographers extend the possibilities of what can be represented, even perhaps experienced, at home.

In “Perceptive Equilibrium,” philosopher Martha Nussbaum points out the way in which the novel often is written to answer the ethical question “How should one live?” The novel aids ethical inquiry precisely because it does not generalize nor invite generalized response. Using Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*, Nussbaum makes the

¹²³ I borrow these terms from Cindi Katz who in “Towards minor theory” is “following the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on Kafka’s ‘minor literature’ as a way of reconfiguring the production of knowledge in geography” (See especially pages 487 and 490).

claim that “stories cultivate our ability to see and care for particulars, not as representatives of a law, but as what they themselves are: to respond vigorously with senses and emotions before the new; to care deeply about chance happenings in the world, rather than to fortify ourselves against them; to wait for the outcome, and to be bewildered—to wait and float and be actively passive” (184). This active passivity that Nussbaum argues is cultivated by the novel (and *in* novel readers) sounds quite like the perspective cultivated by the ethnographer. Ethnographers must acknowledge the limit to what Nussbaum terms “perception as morality,” and yet the need for ethnography persists. Abu-Lughod advocates writing ethnographies of the particular as opposed to more generalized descriptions of culture despite her uncomfortable realization that such a book “might seem only a public display of family secrets” (*Writing Against Culture* 159).

Here Nussbaum’s argument is helpful. The perceptive observer, standing apart from the action, performs an ethical function. According to Nussbaum, the novel not only cultivates an emotional attention to particulars, it also “gestures toward the limits of ethical consciousness, making us aware of the deep elements in our ethical life that in their violence or intensity lead us outside of the ethical attitude altogether, outside of the quest for balanced vision and perfect rightness” (190). Indeed, it is intimacy—the element of other cultures that ethnographers seem most often eager to grasp—that exceeds perception in many of the novels of Henry James, for “intimacy is a part of the world that demands *not* to be in the eyes of the perceiving, recording novelist—at least not in all of its particularity” (189). In form and content, the novel can contain contradictions, or rather, it points to the ways in which the perceptive observer violates the privacy of the observed, and in this way, it defines intimacy as outside of a carefully

considered ethical position. Intimacy is unbalanced and unbalancing. It may be more difficult to account for this in an ethnography, because ethnography accumulates detail in order to understand a culture. Even if the ethnographer begins research with a willful suspension of understanding, ethnography rightfully does not end there, as the modern novel often does.

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