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THE IDEA OF A COLONY
PRIMITIVISM AND EXOTICISM IN MODERN POETRY

by

EDWARD MARX

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

1995

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*On what strange froth does the gross Indian dote,
 What Eden sapling gum, what honeyed gore,
 What pulpy dram distilled of innocence,
 That streaking gold should speak in him
 Or bask within his images and words?*

Wallace Stevens, "The Comedian as the Letter C": Part IV, "The Idea of a Colony"

The enterprise of empire depends upon the idea of having an empire, . . . and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture; then in turn imperialism acquires a kind of coherence, a set of experiences, and a presence of ruler and ruled alike within the culture.

Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism

Introduction

"A poem including history" is how Ezra Pound once described his *Cantos*. And while it would be unfair to say that the critical literature on modern poetry is devoid of historical analysis, one may well be struck by the absence of any significant discussion of the possible relation between modern poetry and the cultural history of imperialism. A hundred years ago, Europe and the United States were at the height of imperial expansion; and at the same time, English language poetry was in a period of major transition. Granted, a coincidence of dates does not prove a relationship, and it might indeed turn out that the involvement of poetry and imperialism begins and ends, as is often assumed, with Kipling. But the question needs to be asked. The present study takes up this question, asking how the history of modern poetry might be reconfigured when viewed through the lens of the history of imperialism and its associated discourses. I will argue that there were indeed considerable linkages between empire and poetry during the transitional period and in early modernism. It could hardly have been otherwise, for ideas of empire were very much a part of American and British literary and intellectual culture.

This study does not attempt to account for all of the effects of imperialism in early twentieth

century poetry; in particular, it will not attempt to account for poetry addressed to specific political questions relating to imperial policy, nor will it attempt to address the vast quantities of war poetry that particular imperial conflicts produced.¹ Instead, I will focus on the ways non-Western cultures and peoples were portrayed in English-language poetry.

Though much of this study will be devoted to exploring the cross-cultural interests of canonical modernist poets such as Eliot and Stevens, a good deal of my analysis will be devoted to poets who are not considered to be canonical, or in some cases, even “modern” according to prevailing accounts. The necessity of this shift from the canonical may be justified, in the present study, by observing that the exclusion of non-canonical poetry would eliminate at the outset a wide range of material essential to the understanding of the variety of ways non-Western cultures were portrayed. A more general justification for this shift would call attention to highly exclusive processes of selection through which the modern poetry canon has been constructed. As Cary Nelson points out, “we no longer know the history of the poetry of the first half of the century; most of us, moreover, do not know that the knowledge is gone” (4).

My argument, stated briefly, is that these representations primarily involved two sets of discursive strategies, which I call “primitivism” and “exoticism.” Together, these strategies offered an accepted mode of consumption for non-Western elements in poetry, whether the poetry in question was the work of a non-Western writer writing in English, an English translation (or supposed translation) of a non-Western work, or a purely imaginative work. But primitivism and exoticism are not reducible to concepts or themes which can simply be located in the appropriate poems: in each case in which a poet deploys primitivist or exoticist strategies, it is necessary to identify both the discursive backgrounds and the strategic functions at work.

¹ Van Wyk Smith's *Drummer Hodge*, which explores poetry of the Boer War in considerable depth, and Ann Parry's recent book on Kipling's poetry both consider the question of imperial politics in the transitional period.

I Primitivism and Exoticism: Definitions

It will be helpful at first to strip these terms of their “isms” and ask what is meant by the adjectives “primitive” and “exotic” and their derivative noun forms. Both terms have what we might call a “base meaning”: something is primitive if it is in some way originary; something is exotic if it is in some way “outside”: foreign, strange, or unfamiliar. Both terms also have an affective meaning that is curiously double-sided: to describe someone or something as “primitive” may be a gesture of approval or of derision; something exotic may be highly desirable or merely ridiculous. Both terms conjure up all sorts of images: each of us has his or her own collection. Both terms also carry with them an opposing term to which they are inevitably paired in an unstable, value-laden binary opposition: the primitive with the civilized, or the modern; the exotic with the familiar, the local.

This instability gives way to a further difficulty when we try to explain the way these terms develop and function historically, particularly in their application to people of other cultural backgrounds. Here we can no longer say precisely what is meant by these terms without taking in a good deal of the cultural context of the speaker. When we say that “Montaigne admired primitive customs” we cannot simply offer the dictionary definition of primitive, but must in effect tell a story about Montaigne's own cultural customs, the customs of those whom he thought “primitive,” and about the beliefs which Montaigne must have had in order to conclude that the difference between these sets of customs was due to a relationship between them which could be described by saying that one was “primitive” in relation to the other. We need to tell a story of this sort because our cultures, our customs, and our beliefs about their historical development, are in a process of historical change. Thus when we have told a satisfactory story about Montaigne, we must begin all over again with Rousseau. With exoticism there are similar stories to construct.

From the perspective of the historian of ideas or the literary scholar, it would be desirable

for these variant versions of primitivism and exoticism to be reducible to some historical progression or development, or at least to a determinable range of possible forms which might be linked to historical circumstances. There have, indeed, been studies which have attempted to classify primitivisms formalistically (Lovejoy and Boas) and chronologically (Street). From the perspective of the present study, however, these studies fail to provide a satisfactory account of the relationship between primitivism and empire; primitivisms are merely understood as fitting into a varied but ultimately limited vocabulary of styles (Lovejoy and Boas), or are linked to changes in scientific accounts of race, with the progress of science providing the last term in the analysis.

In retrospect, the limitations of perspective inherent in these approaches are hardly surprising. The development of a critique of the West's modes of representation of non-Western cultures and peoples has been a consequence of the struggles of colonized and formerly-colonized peoples for decolonization and independence, to which end a dismantling of colonial ideology has been a prerequisite. The reconceptualization of ideas about the ways colonialism functions through these modes of representation was brought about largely through a series of object-lessons in the political sphere as well as by post-colonial intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, and Edward Said. If contemporary post-colonial theory is almost inconceivable without the powerful work on colonial psychology of Fanon, and such strategic attacks as Achebe's essay on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Edward Said's important book *Orientalism* is nevertheless the first attempt to systematically come to terms with the historical emergence of colonialist structures of thought. Said attempts to explain Orientalism by a three-fold analysis, examining it as a set of academic institutions and discourses, as a body of imaginative literature of various sorts, and as a set of governing institutions associated with Western hegemony in the Near East. The combined effect of these three sets of institutions has been, Said argues, to produce the discourse which he calls Orientalism.

II. Discourses of Otherness: Preliminaries

The term “discourse,” fundamental to Said’s analysis, is borrowed from Foucault, whose formulation of the concept as part of his methodology of discourse analysis, described in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, presents a powerful tool for the historian seeking to describe large systems of thought and their relation to institutions and cultural practices. In an important methodological statement Said writes, “My contention is that without understanding Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.” By roping together seemingly disjunct writings, statements, and events – Macaulay’s views on Indian education, Flaubert’s *Salammbô*, U.S. policy in the Middle East during the oil crisis of the seventies – a pattern begins to emerge.

Said’s attempt to define Orientalism as a discourse was a groundbreaking move which brought to light larger patterns of complicity between institutions, disciplines, and popular discourses in constructing and constituting the Orient as an object of analysis. Nevertheless, as the critical inquiry into structures of Orientalist discourse has developed, the need to establish Orientalism as a single discursive structure has necessarily given way to a more nuanced analysis in which the complexity and multiplicity of the field of analysis, rather than its unity, has become a pressing concern. For the places from which Orientalism “speaks” are too diverse, too disunified, too lacking in institutional contiguity or coordination to represent anything like the discourses of Foucault’s analyses. Nevertheless, the reluctance of many critics to question the efficacy of Said’s formulation, or to propose alternative models, has resulted in what is often a very loose understanding of the notion of discourse, and as a result, the actual work of constituting Orientalism as a discursive structure in all of its complexity – a daunting task at best – has remained largely undone, though

a great deal of local analysis of Orientalist discourse has been produced.

The approach I have adopted involves a slight reconfiguration of the discursive terrain by relocating structures like Orientalism to a different level within Foucault's model of discourse. I am arguing that what Said calls "Orientalist discourse" would more be appropriately described in terms of what Foucault calls "discursive strategies."² Orientalism, as Said sees it, "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident,'" thus becomes a strategy found in a wide variety of fairly specific and localisable discourses that involve knowledge about the East: for example, anthropological discourse, theories of race, or Marxist political thought.

It is this model, then, that I have adopted for the present study of primitivism and exoticism. Accordingly, primitivism and exoticism are not to be considered as continuous discourses in themselves, but rather as repeatable strategies which appear again and again in a wide variety of discourses. This model, I acknowledge, is not without its problems. The notion of family resemblance that links one instance of primitivism with another is necessarily called into question. No instance of Orientalism, or of primitivism or exoticism, in a literary work can simply be labelled as such without an analysis of its discursive derivation and strategic function both in the discourse and in its specific deployment.³ This difficulty may be partially alleviated by calling attention to

² Foucault frames the question of strategies from the perspective of the historian of ideas: "The problem is to discover how they are distributed in history. Is it necessity that links them together, makes them [inevitable], calls them to their right places one after another, and makes of them successive solutions to one and the same problem? Or chance encounters between ideas of different origin, influences, discoveries, speculative climates, theoretical models that the patience or genius of individuals arranges into more or less well-constituted wholes? [Should it not be at least possible to] find a regularity between them and define the common system of their formation?" (64, my emendations to Smith's translation in brackets).

³ A critical question which has plagued practitioners of colonial discourse analysis, beginning with Said, concerns whether or not a shaping role in the development of discourse is to be attributed to individual writers, or whether the writer is merely the vehicle for the workings of power. Particularly in literary history, where authorial creativity remains a central concern of critical analysis, it is difficult to evade the assumption of authorial agency entirely, nor is it by any means certain that

what may be called the iterativity of “the exotic,” “the primitive,” and “the Oriental” as discursive objects, which is to say, the way in which any particular enunciation of these signs calls upon a history of similar utterances in much the same way as the utterance of a name calls upon a history of similar uses of that name without necessarily linking it to any particular previous utterance of that name.

This reorientation of Said's critical paradigm does not blunt the polemical thrust of Said's argument – which attempts to oppose the violence of representation perpetrated by Orientalist thought – other than to make the observation that an opposition to this sort of representational violence may not be eliminated merely by undermining its one central dominating idea, but rather can be combatted only by recognizing and contending with all of the disparate, isolated, and covert forms of a group of reiterable and migratory discursive strategies involving what might be generally termed “othering.” The continuing processes of economic and cultural globalization (with their deeply problematic ties to uncompleted imperial projects) demand a critical ability to recognize and evaluate these strategies of othering, both as they arise in contemporary discourse, and as they have impacted (and continue to influence) our historical understanding and pedagogical practices.

such agency is incompatible with discourse analysis in a broad sense. In my analysis, I confess to a certain ambivalence about the notion of agency, an ambivalence evident in a certain occasional slippage in my use of the notions of “discursive strategy” and what David Spurr calls “rhetorical strategies.” Within the strict limits of discursive analysis, which mainly seeks to individuate discourses through the identification of their “patterns of dispersion” of statements and objects, the question is an unresolvable one; the actual critical practice of Foucault and most discourse analysts, however, rarely observes these strict limits.

Discourses of Otherness: Some Backgrounds

I Poetry & Discourse

The limitation of the scope of this study to the subject of modern poetry is a somewhat arbitrary one, and one that needs to be resisted in certain ways, for poetry is not an insular discourse, and to understand its history one must go beyond poetry to the culture in which it is produced. Poetry indeed exhibits certain features that would seem to mark it out as an individuated discourse, among which one may cite poetry's distinctive modes of address, its status as an institution which authorizes certain individuals to speak as poets, its "traditional" tendency, which encourages internal referentiality. Nevertheless, it must be stated that the sense in which poetry comprises a discourse fails to account for many of its most interesting features, for poetry draws heavily on a wide range of cultural discourses outside of itself.

Primitivist and exoticist strategies in poetry were no exception. They were substantially derived from discourses outside of poetry itself. It would therefore seem proper to begin with a brief account of these other discourses. I have chosen to refer to these by the somewhat vague term of "discourses of otherness," though the term is unsatisfactory, as the role of the "other" will be seen to be in some cases a dominant feature and in others a merely incidental one. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a brief survey of several prominent discursive formations as they develop in the period leading up to the main period of our analysis. These include the discourses of travel and exploration, of philology, anthropology, and spiritualism, which, understood in relation to the non-discursive institutions and practices that will be touched on at the end of this chapter, may be understood as components of what may be called the "imperial archive." The term "archive," following Foucault, refers not to "the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as

documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity” nor “the institutions, which, in a given society, make it possible to record and preserve those discourses that one wishes to remember and keep in circulation” but rather “the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events,” “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (128-30). Although, as Foucault points out, “the archive cannot be described in its totality” and only “emerges in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness the greater the time that separates us from it” we may hope to glimpse here in some detail the way the imperial archive functions to produce a set of practices which cause “a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated” (130). The following pages will offer a sense of this range of discursive practices from which poets derived their images of the primitive and exotic other.

II. Otherness in the Age of Discovery

In the so-called “age of discovery,” which encompasses the period from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth, the primary discourses of otherness developed within the discourses of geography and navigation. They were generally produced within a specific nexus of power relations: as reports produced by explorers and merchants explaining and documenting their actions to their sponsors, who were quite often located at the highest levels of the state.⁴ As such texts proliferated, however, they became available for uses by others than the state and the explorer. In the English tradition, the publication of Hakluyt's compendium of voyage and discovery narratives at the end of the sixteenth century marks an important moment in the dislocation of the text from this specific power

⁴ Thus Sir Walter Raleigh's report on the “discovery” of Guiana is clearly directed towards his sponsor, Queen Elizabeth, as a strategic effort both to defend the actions of himself and his men and to gain support for future exploratory projects.

nexus, a dislocation that had been, to be sure, in progress for some decades as texts began to circulate. Although Hakluyt's collection made available as a resource for further exploratory and colonialist projects a virtual encyclopedia – albeit a highly disorganized one – of expansionist experiences, it also resulted in a more general availability of these discovery texts, and thus helped to relocate the emerging discourses of contact into a more general cultural domain. Moments of contact were thus made as available and as “present” – to the extent that these texts created the effect of being present at the site of contact – to the general reader as they were to the sponsor of the voyage. And it is precisely this displacement into the public domain that enables the emerging uses of discovery texts in the formation of new discourses and disciplines.

By the early sixteenth century a field of cultural discourse about otherness has begun to emerge within the domains of poetry and drama (Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for example, has been extensively written about in this context), and emerging forms like the essay (Montaigne's “Of Cannibals” being the classic example) and the prose narrative or proto-novel (for example, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* or Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*).

Whereas these discursive productions of otherness in the Renaissance were usually fragmentary and tentative, in the eighteenth century one begins to note the emergence of systematic discourses of various types concerning “the other.” Great Britain's colonial projects in North America, and in India with the permanent settlement of Bengal, had been established, each with a specific set of goals and methods. Secondly, following the voyages of Captain Cook in the 1770s the geographical project of locating and mapping the borders of the world's land masses had been brought to completion, leaving a fairly limited field of geographical “unknowns”: the supposed northwest passage, the north and south poles, etc. And thirdly, a group of questions about the nature of man in his various forms had begun to be articulated. With the expansion of European knowledge about other cultures and the regularizing of modes of contact, new questions about other cultures emerge in the domains of philosophy and science. These questions, and the discourses which

develop from them, concern both the “essences” of man and his differences, that is, both the unities and the distinctions among individuals and social groups.

In this elaboration of the unities and differences of man, we may note a variety of what may be called *areas of inquiry* into the nature of the other. These areas of inquiry emerge as accounts of the “manners and customs” of foreign peoples, eventually developing a relative autonomy, out of various types of accounts of inter-cultural contact such as the voyage and discovery narratives discussed above. We may recall in *The Odyssey* and in Herodotus' *Histories* (both which remained influential in modern Europe) how inseparable such modes of writing were for the ancient Greeks from the larger project of the constitution of community through myth and history. Presumably, such texts also preserved information useful in Greek inter-cultural practices: trade, war, alliances, etc. Similarly, in the texts of the European age of exploration, the areas of inquiry develop from specifically material interests (trade, the establishment of colonies) and the inherent problems of contact which render these interests problematic. The explorers cannot speak the language of the peoples they encounter, and they do not understand their social practices, organizations, institutions, and value systems. The two main responses to these problems are the development of strategies to work around these problems,⁵ and the development of knowledges.

The development of these various areas of inquiry is a complex and fascinating problem, one that can only be touched on here in the broadest outlines. In working towards a discursive history of these areas of inquiry there are several points which must be noted. First, it would be a mistake to assume that these areas of inquiry completely developed within, or were entirely constrained by the concerns and information needs of the explorer or colonialist and the sponsoring state. In the earlier colonialist projects, there is a manifest confusion about what kinds of knowledge would be

⁵ For example, in the case of the language barrier: the use of interpreters, the strategy of leaving behind a crew member to learn the language and customs, the development of a set of “universal” visual signs.

useful; explorers generally tried to record a complete picture of the peoples they encountered, but their “ways of seeing” were often severely constrained by their limited understanding. The difficulty of translating observable behavior into intentions and meanings often presented as much difficulty as the incomprehensible languages.⁶ Although the audiences of these texts often shared the restrictive beliefs of the explorers, and were further limited in their ability to ‘call into question the explorers’ interpretations by the fact of their not having been present on the scene, the *awareness of interpretation as a problem* (an awareness no doubt motivated to a certain extent by the often fatal results of *mis*interpretation) had resulted, at least by the eighteenth century, in a split between *purely objective* knowledge and *theoretical* knowledge about other cultures. Theories about others proliferated, each with its own peculiar ways of making sense out of the “objective” data, and its own sense of what kind of knowledge was needed for its particular vision of progress.

In addition, these fields of interest underwent numerous divisions and migrations as they were absorbed by other discourses or formed autonomous discourses of their own. For instance, the learning of Sanskrit by an isolated group of legal scholars for the purpose of analyzing traditional legal systems in India became the centerpiece of a new discipline of philology and was subsequently picked up by other discourses and disciplines such as mythography, literary history, and theology. When we find T.S. Eliot studying Sanskrit at Harvard in the early years of the twentieth century, it is within a disciplinary framework that has all the appearance of intellectual autonomy; surely Harvard was not seriously concerned with preparing men for the civil service, as its overseas counterparts were. And many of these new disciplines and discourses gravitated away from a dependence on external sources of information and developed specific new types of contact through

⁶ Thus the absurd formalities of appropriation that Stephen Greenblatt has discussed in *Marvelous Possessions*.

which to produce the required “raw” information.⁷

III. Otherness in the Age of Empire

As I have argued above, the discourses of otherness arose from the situation of contact. While these discourses underwent drastic shifts and transformations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they remained to a large extent tied to the circumstances of contact, which themselves underwent continual transformation as a result of changing conceptions and structures of empire. In the century following the permanent settlement in Bengal, to take one significant example, Britain's involvement in India changed from that of a relatively isolated base of operations, from which the ostensibly independent British East India Company could conduct trade, to virtual control of the vast majority of the Indian subcontinent, under the rule of Queen Victoria herself.

As the British Raj expanded its operations and territories during this period, the need for knowledge about newly subjected peoples – and the production of such knowledge – underwent a vast increase. Literally thousands of books on aspects of India were published during this period, not to mention the scores of Anglo-Indian newspapers that served more immediate needs. Genres proliferated. There were still the occasional exploration narratives, but these were gradually replaced by the less ambitious travel books, which nevertheless often sought to preserve the excitement and danger of the former. Those seeking pure adventure began to look to the adventure novel. Accounts of manners and customs, increasingly systematized, continued to appear. Translations of non-Western literary texts began to appear, with interest sparked by the late eighteenth-century English translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1785) and Kalidasa's classical drama *Shakuntala* (1789); products

⁷ The most conspicuous example is the new type of contact known as “fieldwork” developed by Anthropologists in the nineteenth century as a way of eliminating dependence on exploration, travel, and missionary texts.

of the new breed of East India Company recruits with an interest in Oriental languages. Journals devoted to scholarly and political questions were founded. Histories of India were written. A large, specialized corpus of information was developed for the purposes of efficient government, including censuses, surveys, handbooks, gazetteers, protocol books, as well as books directed towards the new recruits constantly arriving – advice books on what to bring and how to survive, travel guides. Memoirs were produced in abundance, largely by military officers, who also occasionally contributed a book of well-meaning military and political advice. There were polemics on various questions: the wisdom of further expansion, what to do about the Russian threat, what went wrong with such-and-such a battle or political maneuver, what our policy should be on such-and-such a question, how best to convert the heathens or why the heathens should not be converted, the advantages or the disadvantages of Indian customs, religions, institutions. The mutiny of 1857 spawned whole shelves full of books, as Patrick Brantlinger has pointed out (199). Many of these genres were the exclusive preserve of the men of the Raj, but a fair number of memoirs and travel accounts were produced by its women, and one finds as well an occasional book by an Indian author: a collection of poems, a novel, an account of Indian life written “from the inside.”

While some of these texts were intended only for colonial use, the dissemination in Britain (and to a somewhat lesser extent, America) of texts concerning India (and, of course, other imperial domains and interests) was not insignificant. Many major British and American periodicals regularly published articles on Indian questions and reviews of books about India; and these were often, significantly, general-interest literary periodicals such the *Athenaeum*, *Blackwood's*, the *Bookman*, the *Dial*, the *Literary Review*, the *Nation* – the same periodicals in which our familiar canonical authors regularly published their serialized fiction, short stories, poetry, and criticism. Primitivism and exoticism were particularly characteristic of this export literature, whereas in much of the literature produced for local consumption by the colonial community, exoticism is conspicuously absent: for many of these civil servants and military men and their families, the exotic and primitive were

generally conceived as things to be avoided as far as possible, not embraced.

IV. Early Philology and Empire

“Since a variety of causes which need not be mentioned here give the English nation a most extensive power in that kingdom,” Sir William Jones predicted in 1771, “the languages of Asia will now perhaps be studied with uncommon ardour; the valuable manuscripts that enrich the publick libraries will be in a few years elegantly printed; the manners and sentiments of the eastern nations will be perfectly known; and the limits of our knowledge no less extended than the bounds of our empire” (*Persian Grammar* xi-xii). Jones's prediction about the spread of Oriental philology and its importance to imperial administration was to prove correct, but even he could not then have predicted the radically disruptive effects the study of Asian culture would have on Western historiography. For a decade or so later, Jones shocked philologists with the observation that Sanskrit was related to Greek and Latin, and, moreover, was the most perfect of the three in form, structure, and vocabulary:

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source.

Sanskrit was later established to be of greater antiquity than Greek as well.

Thus the West's production of knowledge about the other – in this case, for the explicit purpose of aiding in the imperial rule of South Asia – was once again to fold back on the West itself: knowledge of the other turns out to be knowledge of the self, permitting the reclamation of a lost Indo-European past. The well-charted familiarity of the Greco-Roman-centered view of ancient history would be compelled to give way to a strange and complex Indo-European history in which

European historians would have to struggle to find their place.

V. The Emergence of Anthropology

The emergence of cultural anthropology in the nineteenth century deserves particular scrutiny here. Cultural anthropology more or less successfully sought to establish itself as *the* authoritative discourse within the hierarchy of Anglo-American discourses claiming to speak of and for the other. In order to attain this position of authority, anthropologists collected and reassembled materials from a wide range of travel writings, colonial and missionary sources, and classical sources. Thus, while modern poets like Yeats and Eliot shared some of these same source materials, they were often particularly indebted to anthropological texts. As Eliot wrote in 1919,

Within the time of a brief generation it has become evident that some smattering of anthropology is as essential to culture as Rollin's *Universal History*. Just as it is necessary to know something about Freud and something about Fabre, so it is necessary to know something about the medicine-man and his works. Not necessary, perhaps not even desirable, to know all the theories about him, to peruse all the works of Miss Harrison, Cooke, Rendel Harris, Lévy-Bruhl or Durkheim. But one ought, surely, to have read at least one book such as those of Spencer and Gillen on the Australians, or Codrington on the Melanesians.

Anthropology represented a domain in which questions about otherness could be addressed with scientific objectivity, a domain in which competing truth claims of merchants, missionaries, colonial politicians could be adjudicated under the aegis of scientific authority.

As George Stocking has argued in his authoritative study, *Victorian Anthropology*, the emergence of anthropology as a discipline was a somewhat more tenuous affair than one might imagine given the apparent correlations between anthropological and colonialist interests. The early history of anthropology is a dense region of intersecting and emerging discourses and institutions, a hotbed of strategic maneuvers and competing interests. Within anthropology in these early years,

discourses of the other were formalized and systematized, points of opposition were established around which competing interests proposed alternative systems of relations between a more or less shared group of objects (“savages”), and new institutional attachments and modes of articulation were constructed.

Stocking readily concedes that “there can be no doubt that sociocultural thinking offered strong ideological support for the whole colonial enterprise in the later nineteenth century” (237), but nevertheless points to the difficulty of identifying “any significant social demand for anthropological research . . . there was little success in translating programmatic or rhetorical assertions of utility into real social demand sustained by significant resources . . . There was virtually no governmental consciousness of any serious need for anthropology either at home or abroad” (266). If a correlation is to be established between the doctrines of anthropology and the imperial project, it cannot be simply based on the assumption that anthropology was a state-supported institution. This absence of a direct economic link should not, however, be read as an indication of anthropology's scientific disinterestedness; in fact, anthropologists were often quite outspoken about the possible benefits of the discipline to the empire.

The institutional formations associated with cultural anthropology that developed in England, the United States, France, and Germany, were markedly different. My focus here will be on the British version, in which a field to be known as anthropology developed in the 1860s from a preexisting field known as Ethnology which had emerged in the 1830s. The London Ethnological Society, created in 1842, emerged as a 'disgruntled' scientific faction of the Aborigines Protection Society, a humanitarian group which had been influential in the abolition of slavery in the 1830s (Stocking 244). Its political leanings were thus liberal, and its methodology was to draw upon “a wide body of ethnographic data to solve the historical problem of relating all human groups to a single original root” (Stocking 269).

In the early 1860s, a schism developed within the Ethnological Society, and the result was

a new, competing organization under former Ethnological Society Secretary James Hunt: the Anthropological Society of London. Its principle organ, the *Anthropological Review*, began publication in 1863. The Anthropological Society was distinguished from the Ethnological Society by its greater emphasis on physical anthropology, its relative political conservatism, and its strong current of racialism. The Anthropological Society claimed to be a broad discipline which would subsume Ethnology as one among many general aspects of the nature of man. Nevertheless the interests of Hunt, the organization's dynamic leader, were more specific. As Stocking writes,

The political differences between the two groups were quite strikingly manifest. Here, the tone of the Anthropological Society was set by Hunt in his first presidential address, which appeared in the first of the Society's *Memoirs*. Entitled, in obvious paraphrase of Thomas Huxley, "On the Negro's Place in Nature," Hunt's paper was a compendium of anatomical, physiological, and psychological evidence and opinion that might well stand as archetypal of the traditional racist view of blacks. Asserting that Negroes were a different species, closer to the ape than to the European, Hunt argued that they were incapable of civilization, either on their own or through the influence of others; indeed, they were better off as slaves in the Confederate States of America than as Freemen in Sierra Leone. Nor was Hunt's paper an isolated manifestation. When Governor Eyre's ruthless suppression of a rising of black farmers on Jamaica roused a furor among liberals and humanitarians in 1866, the response of the Anthropological Society was a public meeting at which Captain Bedford Pim gave a paper on "The Negro and Jamaica." Pim's racist diatribe was greeted "with loud cheers" and a unanimous vote of thanks, after which one member of the audience after another got up to offer comments on "the true art of governing alien races." (251)

Many of the more influential thinkers of the period, including Lubbock and Huxley, remained with the Ethnological Society, and Tylor returned after only a brief hiatus, but nevertheless the Anthropologicals continued to grow, and the tension between the two organizations resulted in heated arguments about status and position within the British Association for the Advancement of Science (Stocking 254). According to Stocking, "it was not until after the Liverpool meeting of the British Association in 1870, where for the first time the two groups met in harmony within the same subsection ('Ethnology and Anthropology'), that the basis for rapprochement was laid" (256). In

the battle of the names, it was “Anthropology” that emerged as the victor, in the mid 1870s. It was not until the 1880s, however, that the discipline managed to gain a foothold in the universities.

By this time, the founding works of the new discipline had already emerged. The 1860s had brought an onslaught of new theories into public consciousness. First and foremost was the arrival of Darwin, whose *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 raised questions about human evolution which dominated anthropological discourse in the 1860s, although they were questions that Darwin himself conspicuously avoided addressing directly until *The Descent of Man* in 1871. The evolutionary model provided a new and rigorous theory and set of terms for conceptualizing “primitive man.” At the same time, a number of works critical to the development of primitivist strategies, and to anthropology in general, appeared: Sir Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* in 1861, Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* (1862), J. F. McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865), a response to Bachofen's 1861 *Das Mutterrecht* (“Mother-Right”), E. B. Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865), the precursor to his 1871 *Primitive Culture*, and Sir John Lubbock's 1870 study, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man: Mental and Social Conditions of Savages*. It was these works of the 1860s and early 1870s that set the anthropological agenda for the next century.

On the Origin of Species invited a variety of questions about the origin, age, and development of man. In the anthropological texts of the sixties, these questions were approached both theoretically and empirically, with evidence drawn from archaeology, natural history, and most importantly, existing “primitive” and “savage” cultures. Although Maine and McLennan had advanced similar arguments, it was Tylor who canonized the “comparative method” that would dominate anthropology until the next century:

By comparing the various stages of civilization among races known to history, with the aid of archaeological inference from the remains of prehistoric tribes, it seems possible to judge in a rough way of an early general condition of man, which from our point of view is to be regarded as a primitive condition, whatever yet

earlier state may in reality have lain behind it. This hypothetical primitive condition corresponds in a considerable degree to that of modern savage tribes, who, in spite of their difference and distance, have in common certain elements of civilization, which seem remains of an early state of the human race at large. (21)

The comparativist, according to Tylor's doctrinal statement, studies other cultures not to advance the colonial project, or even for the sake of cross-cultural knowledge, but because they tell us something of *our* history, or rather, our prehistory. The specific kinds of questions that were asked about "our" primitive past were various, but fall into some distinct categories. First, there were definitional and taxonomical questions about races: their nature, relative accomplishments, physical differences, relative positions on the developmental scale. Secondly, there were questions about cultural organization: social hierarchies, forms of control, gender relations, religious practices, rituals. Thirdly, there were psychological questions: religious beliefs, methods of reasoning, attitudes. And fourthly, there was an increasing interest in often arcane interpretive problems, reflecting the new professionalization of the discipline: elaborate theories of kinship, totems, and various rituals. Though many of these interpretive questions produced nothing other than endless opportunity for theoretical discourse, some of the expositions of native concepts became sufficiently influential as to eventually enter the cultural mainstream: fetishes, totems, taboos, mana, the potlatch, the kula, and so forth.

One constellation of questions of particular interest in the 1860s which would continue to be highly influential emerged around the issues of sexuality, gender, marriage, and patriarchal vs. matriarchal social organizations. Here, as in many other areas, it is impossible to extricate the anthropological discourse from its surrounding discourses. Maine's *Ancient Law* focused on the evolution of the idea of "marriage by capture" from its "primitive" form through a transitional Roman form to a relatively innocuous vestigial modern form. In *Primitive Marriage*, McLennan revised Maine's analysis to present a history of kinship relations in which patriarchal kinship was derived from an earlier matriarchalism centered around the institution of marriage by capture.

Contemporaneously, in Germany, Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* presented an alternate version of a matriarchal past. All three were taken up by Engels in *The Origin of the Family* (1883) which attempted to relate kinship, the state, and the origins of capitalism. As Western notions of gender and sexuality came under scrutiny, the "primitive" was repeatedly called upon for scientific support or explanation. Freud's "primal horde" developed from these earlier contexts. Malinowski, in the twenties, first questioned the cultural universality of the Oedipus complex in *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, then plunged into a comprehensive study of *The Sexual Life of Savages*. But if "primitive" sexuality was involved in the birth of anthropology, it was by no means an interest exclusively of that discipline, as we shall see in our examination of contemporaneous poetry.

Malinowski inaugurated the concept of fieldwork, permanently altering the methodology of the discipline; the early years of anthropology, in contrast, were the years of the "armchair anthropologist," the professional theoretician who abjured fieldwork and constructed comprehensive theories from vast libraries of source materials. And it is in these early comparativist texts, from Tylor to Frazer, that we find primitivist and exoticist strategies emerging as a textual style a style which situates the writer spatially, at the panoptical center of global culture, and temporally, in the vanguard of progress. Text became panorama; the library was transformed into a magical lens offering a rarified and powerful perspective from which reader and anthropologist looked out not only on the vast array of primitive cultures, past and present, but also on the primitive vestiges and survivals of Western culture.

As Edmund Gosse recalled in an essay entitled "A Poet among the Cannibals," there existed in London in the 1860s a small society called the Cannibal Club, which claimed among its members Sir Richard Burton and the poet Algernon Swinburne. "The spirit which animated many of the members of the Society was that of revolt against conventionality, and this became, in fact, the bond of union, and almost the condition of membership of the club, in testimony of which it was christened the Cannibal Club" (64). Presumably, cannibalism was used as the ultimate signifier of

a rejection of Victorian conventionality. They met, Gosse tells us, in the meeting-room of the Anthropological Society in St. Martin's place, and dined at Bartolini's Hotel "in front of a mace, which represented the ebony head of a negro gnawing the ivory thigh-bone of a man." To complete this ritualistic identification of the members with this black cannibal, Swinburne christened him "Ecce Homo"; and Gosse notes that "it was always placed on the dinner-table opposite the president," none other than Dr. James Hunt, president of the Anthropological Society.

The great encyclopedic work of anthropology's comparativist phase, Frazer's *Golden Bough*, first published in 1890 in two volumes and continually revised over the next three decades until it comprised more than a dozen densely-argued volumes, was the book destined to have the greatest direct impact on poets of the early twentieth century.⁸ But the effect of anthropological discourse *per se* on poetry should not be underestimated, as Frazer neither originated the language nor most of the questions which would come to fascinate himself and his readers.

While the influence of Frazer is often indisputable, I have suggested above that the influence model is not entirely adequate to explain the correspondence of anthropological and poetic interests in otherness, which must be regarded as parallel developments within a wider field of discourses of otherness. As parallel developments, they undergo similar transformations in the twentieth century. It is of at least passing interest that, as Marc Manganaro points out, 1922 was a watershed year for both modernist literature (*The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, the founding of Eliot's journal, the *Criterion*) and modern anthropology, which inaugurated in Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* a new methodology (functionalism) and a new form (the monograph) (31). More germane, I think, is the argument that the decline of primitivism in poetry in the twenties roughly corresponded to the displacement of theories of racial evolutionism by theories of cultural relativism, proposed by Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and others. Anthropologist Arnold Krupat writes, "I read Boas, as I do literary

⁸ On the variety of Frazerian literary influences, see Brian Vickery, ed., *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough*, and Robert Fraser, ed., *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination*.

modernists, against the backdrop provided by what has been called the epistemological crisis of the later nineteenth century, the shift away from apparently absolute certainties – in religion, linguistics, mathematics, physics, and so on—in the direction of relativity” (134). As poet and anthropologist view the other through shifting strategies of primitivism and exoticism in the early twentieth century, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”; the modern poet shores fragments against his ruins, while the modern anthropologist leaves the panorama of the library for the pursuit of “local knowledge.”

VI Müller, Victorian Philology, and the New Interest in Indian Religions

The new popular interest in the religions of India arguably begins in the 1870s with the first publications of Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*, a vast compendium including scholarly translations of Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Islamic, and Taoist texts eventually stretching to fifty volumes. Müller directed the project, providing many of the translations himself, and argued in his *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India* (1878) and *India: What Can it Teach Us?* (1883) for a greater appreciation of the importance of Indian religions. Though Müller's quirky “science of language,” which reduced all languages to a primal language of natural phenomena, was to be largely discredited by the end of the century, in the 1880s he remained a central fixture in the production of knowledge about the Orient, and an active proponent of the philological, as opposed to anthropological, approach to primitive culture.

It was in this position of authority that Müller was invited by the Board of Historical Studies at Cambridge to deliver a course of lectures to the students interested in the Indian Civil Service as a career. These lectures were subsequently published in book form as *India: What Can it Teach Us?* in 1883. While Müller's efforts to excite in his students an enthusiasm for the project of gathering knowledge about the Orient were partly inspired by the national need to produce increasingly large quantities of educated young British men to supply the enormous bureaucratic machine of the

Empire, his efforts to sell India as an intellectual challenge and a means to the fulfillment of a scholarly need were evidently sincere. The Cambridge lectures were an extended effort toward getting his audience to overcome deeply entrenched prejudices against all things Indian. “Those who have spent many years of active life in Calcutta, or Bombay, or Madras, will be horror-struck at the idea that the humanity they meet with there, whether in the bazaars or in the courts of justice, or in so-called native society, should be able to teach *us* any lessons,” he acknowledges (24). The Hindus, he argued, are regarded “as an inferior race, totally different from ourselves in their moral character, and more particularly in what forms the very foundation of the English character, respect for truth.” “So often has that charge of untruthfulness been repeated, and so generally is it now accepted, that it seems almost Quixotic to fight against it” (52). But it was not necessary to do so, for, Müller argued, the modern Indian was utterly irrelevant: “we are speaking of two very different Indias. I am thinking chiefly of India such as it was a thousand, two thousand, it may be three thousand years ago” (24-5).

With the modern Indian subject conveniently out of the way, Müller goes on to point out the intellectual interest of the India of antiquity, where we may “find strange coincidences between the legends of India and the legends of the West, without as yet being able to say how they travelled, whether from East to West, or from West to East” (28). Here, away from the bazaars, in the courts of justice and in “so-called native society,” we may be safely introduced to “our nearest intellectual relatives, the Aryans of India” (33). Though “the ancient inhabitants of India are not our intellectual ancestors in the same direct way as Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Saxons are,” he is quick to point out, “they represent, nevertheless, a collateral branch of that family to which we belong by language” and “we can learn from them lessons which we can learn nowhere else, and supply missing links in our intellectual ancestry far more important than that missing link (which we can well afford to miss), the link between Ape and Man” (89).

The discovery of Sanskrit as the oldest surviving member of the Indo-European language

family, the sister language whose reintroduction to the family brought “light and warmth and mutual recognition” is the most important of these lessons. “They all ceased to be strangers, and each fell of its own accord into its right place. Sanskrit was the eldest sister of them all, and could tell of many things which the other members of the family had quite forgotten” (40). “To speak the same language,” Müller assures his audience, “constitutes a closer union than to have drunk the same milk; and Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, is substantially the same language as Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon” (45).

“It is quite amusing, though instructive also,” he says, “to read what was written by scholars and philosophers when this new light first dawned on the world. They would not have it, they would not believe that there could be any community of origin between the people of Athens and Rome, and the so-called Niggers of India . . . No one ever was for a time so completely laughed down as Professor Bopp, when he first published his *Comparative Grammar of Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, and Gothic*” (46). Müller remembered the shock, both horrible and thrilling, of being present at the moment when this conceptual bombshell was dropped on himself and his unsuspecting fellow students:

I remember, I say, one of our masters (Dr. Klee) telling us one afternoon, when it was too hot to do any serious work, that there was a language spoken in India, which was much the same as Greek and Latin, nay, as German and Russian. At first we thought it was a joke, but when one saw the parallel columns of numerals, pronouns, and verbs in Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin written on the blackboard, one felt in the presence of facts, before which one had to bow. All one's ideas of Adam and Eve, and the Paradise, and the tower of Babel, and Shem, Ham, and Japhet, with Homer and *Æneas* and Virgil too, seemed to be whirling round and round, till at last one picked up the fragments and tried to build up a new world and to live with a new historical consciousness. (46)

Learning to love the new sister language was perhaps easier than at first suspected because she brought along with her an elaborate body of literature on which to exercise the Victorian desire for order and categorization. Though not acknowledged by Müller, there was an implicit need to

understand this ancestral literature better than any Indian scholar and thereby demonstrate the superiority of western philological and historical methodologies. For the scholar this meant opportunity: "The Indian Government has of late years," he notes, "ordered a kind of bibliographical survey of India to be made, and has sent some learned Sanskrit scholars, both European and native, to places where collections of Sanskrit MSS. are known to exist, in order to examine and catalogue them" (102). As Müller estimated the number of these manuscripts at "about 10,000," this meant endless opportunity for enterprising Orientalists.

Müller seems to have recognized that support for such a vast endeavor depended on distancing the ancient Aryans as far as possible from the "so-called Niggers of India." Complete identification between audience and subject had to depend on a plausible historical argument demonstrating that the ancient Aryans were white, and for this he turns to "the invasion of the Sakas, or the Scythians, or the Indo-Scythians, or Turushkas, the Turanian invasion." Citing Chinese chronicles he argues, in typical Müllerian style, that these invaders "are described as of pink and white complexion and as shooting from horseback; and as there was some similarity between their Chinese name *Yueh-chi* and the *Gothi* or *Goths*, they were identified by Remusat with those German tribes, and by others with the *Getae*, the neighbors of the Goths" (104). The keys to history are always, for Müller, to be found in words.

Now what remains for Müller is to validate this early ancestral literature and somehow dispose of later writing which might have too strong an Indian flavor, and this he does by simply declaring that Indic literature falls into two periods and that "we may call the literature of the former period *ancient* and *natural*, that of the latter *modern* and *artificial*" (106). Müller is now able to turn to the "ancient and natural literature of India" with the enthusiasm of one who has discovered long-lost family records. In the ancient Sanskrit literature we find "the Aryan man, whom we know in his various characters, as Greek, Roman, German, Celt, and Slave, in an entirely new character."

Whereas in his migrations northward his active and political

energies are called out and brought to their highest perfection, we find the other side of the human character, the passive and meditative, carried to its fullest growth in India. In some of the hymns of the Rig-Veda we can still watch an earlier phase. We see the Aryan tribes taking possession of the land, and under the guidance of such warlike gods as Indra and the Maruts, defending their new homes against the assaults of the black-skinned aborigines as well as against the inroads of later Aryan colonists. (117)

This possessive and warlike Aryan is, in Müller's argument, essentially the same heroic ancestor we have come to know through Graeco-Roman and European literature and mythology, but the Indo-Aryan developed differently, because following the early violent phase there occurred a paradisaal phase where the Aryan settlers find "fruit on the trees in every forest, which everyone who likes may pluck without trouble." So here, the natural pacifism of the Aryan race, stifled for so long by the harsh competitive conditions of the north, was able to emerge, resulting in the development of a non-violent, introspective philosophy. This view of life, Müller argues, "though we cannot adopt it in this Northern climate, may yet act as a lesson and a warning to us, not, for the sake of life, to sacrifice the highest objects of life" (123).

Modern man's search for the origins of his institutions and ways of thinking is of the utmost concern. "It has been a favorite idea of those who call themselves 'students of man,' or anthropologists, that in order to know the earliest or so-called prehistoric phases in the growth of man, we should study the life of savage nations, as we may watch it still in some parts of Asia, Africa, Polynesia, and America" (130). This is a mistake, Müller thinks, since "in the Veda we have a nearer approach to a beginning, and an intelligible beginning, than in the wild invocations of Hottentots or Bushmen" (132). "There must always be an aristocracy of those who know" Müller argues (137), and it is from these early aristocrats, the Aryans, that the British are descended. Comparative anthropology, which constructs the generic primitive as ancestral, is thus misleading since its primitive subjects are not of the same aristocratic lineage. In fact, Müller finds that the Aryans are not really all that primitive after all; the *Rig Veda* turns out to have "ideas that seem

novel and nineteenth-century-like to us" (133).

Instead of thrilling with delight at this almost miraculous discovery, some critics stand aloof and can do nothing but find fault, because these songs do not represent to us primitive men exactly as they think they ought to have been; not like Papu'as or Bushmen, with arboraceous habits and half-animal clicks, not as worshipping stocks or stones, or believing in fetiches, as according to Comte's inner consciousness they ought to have done, but rather, I must confess, as beings whom we can understand, with whom to a certain extent we can sympathize, and to whom, in the historical progress of the human intellect, we may assign a place not very far behind the ancient Jews and Greeks. (144)

In contrast to the comparative anthropological model, with its model of surveillance over the field of objective description of primitive manners and customs, Müller's philological model claimed to offer a direct route of access into the subjectivity of the primitive mind; equally important, since Müller leaned in the direction of polygenism, it was the *appropriate* (i.e. Aryan) primitive mind.

VII. Edwin Arnold and *The Light of Asia*

In *India: What Can it Teach Us?* Buddhism is only mentioned in passing, as it was evidently not part of the Aryan heritage on which his main argument is based:

As to the lessons which the early literature of Buddhism may teach us, I need not dwell on them at present. If I may judge from the numerous questions that are addressed to me with regard to that religion and its striking coincidences with Christianity, Buddhism has already become a subject of general interest, and will and ought to become so more and more. (108)

In fact, poetry had done much to make Buddhism a subject of general interest. Several years earlier, in 1879, an epic poem entitled *The Light of Asia*, by Edwin Arnold, a minor poet better known in his role as editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, appeared to almost instant acclaim. Scholarly translations of Buddhist texts had previously appeared, but *The Light of Asia*, an easy-to-read versified life of the Buddha, loosely based on earlier translations, was the first to reach a wide audience.

The Light of Asia was an appealing vehicle in part because its jaunty narrative moved along in highly readable verse, playing up exotic and erotic elements in the story of the Buddha. In a typical scene, Prince Siddartha (before his enlightenment) and his wife Yosodhara are seen luxuriating in the royal antechamber, where

The purdah hung,
Crimson and blue, with broidered threads of gold,
Across a portal carved in sandal-wood,
Whence by three steps the way was to the bower
Of inmost splendor, and the marriage-couch
Set on a dais doft with silver cloths,
Where the foot fell as though it trod on piles
Of neem-blooms. (62)

Another dozen lines are needed to complete the description of the exotic setting, and then the narrative moves onward to Yasodhara's description of a dream to her husband, which begins thus:

Half risen from her soft nest at his side,
The chuddah fallen to her waist, her brow
Laid in both palms, the lovely Princess leaned
With heaving bosom and fast falling tears.
Thrice with her lips she touched Siddartha's hand,
And at the third kiss moaned, "Awake my Lord!
Give me the comfort of thy speech!" Then he—
"What is it with thee, O my life?" (63)

Arnold had honed his technique on the *Gita Govinda*, the Sanskrit erotic poem which he translated (and suitably expurgated for British consumption) as *The Indian Song of Songs* (1875), and in *The Light of Asia*, he rarely loses an opportunity for gratuitous eroticism. But exotic eroticism was ostensibly just the sugar-coating to make palatable Arnold's message of religious liberalism: the poem, his biographer notes, "was composed during the busy months when England was in an uproar over the Eastern Question and when the *Daily Telegraph* was hotly fulminating against the Russians abroad and Gladstone at home" (Wright 71). Arnold deliberately played up the parallels between the life of the Buddha and that of Christ, adopting a modified King James style throughout and throwing in an occasional reference to the the Buddha as "our Lord" or "greater than the King of kings." These parallels were the subject of contemporary debate: Müller's brief mention of Buddhism prompts

his editor to note that note “in June, 1882, a Conference on Buddhism was held at Sion College, to discuss the real or apparent coincidences between the religions of Buddha and Christ” (108). And some religious conservatives took offence: notably one William Cleaver Wilkinson, who felt obligated to take on the question in the form of a book-length attack on Arnold's *Light of Asia*.

The publication of Mr. Arnold's work happened to coincide with a singular development, both in America and in Europe, of popular curiosity and interest concerning ethnic religions, especially concerning Buddhism. The “Light of Asia” was well adapted to hit this transient whim of occidental taste. So I account, in part, for the instantaneous American popularity of the poem. At any rate, Mr. Arnold has, no doubt, whether by merit or by fortune, been, beyond any other writer, the means of widening the the American audience prepared to entertain with favor the pretensions of Buddha and his teachings.

The effect is very observable. There has entered the general mind an unconfessed, a half unconscious, but a most shrewdly penetrative, misgiving that perhaps, after all, Christianity has not of right quite the exclusive claim that it was previously thought to possess, upon the attention and reverence of mankind. (v)

Wilkinson claims that his consideration will be entirely impartial; he will simply present the evidence and Buddhism will be given the opportunity “to stand or to fall . . . by its own inherent merits or demerits” (vi). The first point to be considered, after pointing out how bad Arnold's verse is as poetry, is Arnold's misrepresentation or exaggeration of certain aspects of the Buddha's life.

For example . . . Mr. Arnold applies every resource of his rhetoric in describing the tenderness of the relationship represented by him to subsist between Gautama and his wife. He even, in such description, permits himself a license of sensuousness that is saved by you from the grossness of sensuality, only as you make a huge allowance to the writer on the score of his dealing with an Oriental theme. Again and again, while you read, you are forced to use your very strongest timely recollection of extraordinary privilege belonging to the poet, in order to choke down an almost irrepressibly rising nausea and qualm of instinctive disgust, both at the ideas expressed, and at the language employed to express the ideas. (83)

However repulsive and unscholarly Arnold's misrepresentation and eroticizing of the life of Gautama may be, Wilkinson is after bigger fish. “We have played long enough about the outside and Border

of Buddhism,” he announces in the fourth chapter. “Let us see if we can find our way into the heart of the system” (128). The heart of the system, as he has already argued, is the doctrine of Nirvana, which has been similarly perverted by Arnold. Properly understood, “Nirvana’ is nothing more nor less than a euphemism for annihilation . . . Blank annihilation, boldly self-confessed in frank terms, would not be an attractive prospect wherewith to commend Buddha to people hereabout” (93).

The damage had, however, been done: Buddhism began to attract a growing interest in the West, and hundreds of thousands of copies of *The Light of Asia* were bought up (Wright 75).

In a family library there may be a book which somebody bought at the time it was published, because it was highly spoken of, and which nobody read. It was in this way that I came across, as a boy, a poem for which I have preserved a warm affection: *The Light of Asia*, by Sir Edwin Arnold. It is a long epic poem on the life of Gautama Buddha: I must have had a latent sympathy for the subject-matter, for I read it through with gusto, and more than once. I have never had the curiosity to find out anything about the author but to this day it seems to me a good poem, and when I meet anyone else who has read and liked it, I feel drawn to that person. (38)

Not everyone who bought the book read it, nor did all who read it find its message appealing. But for readers like T. S. Eliot, who wrote this passage in his essay “On Minor Poetry,” *The Light of Asia* was something strange and new that could not be easily forgotten.

Oriental philology and the translation of sacred texts were crucial components of the production of knowledge of other cultures, offering a means of access to cultures of the East for specialists and non-specialists alike. Although their methods were radically different, both Müller and Arnold sought to package India in an attractive way for their respective audiences. Though both were essentially pro-imperialist, they used historical and spiritual arguments, rather than a direct appeal to imperial sentiments to promote the reading of exotic texts.

VIII. Spiritualism

Spiritualism and the occult were closely linked to early Modernism, both in its literary and anthropological incarnations, a connection that needs to be reestablished against the accounts of many literary and anthropological historians. Similarly, an account of the development of multicultural thought ought at least to acknowledge the syncretism and universalism of nineteenth-century occultism.

Two of the most widely-known and influential of the schools of esoteric thought in England and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the Society for Psychical Research and the Theosophical Society. Claiming descendents at least back to the ancient Egyptians, the Theosophical Society, under the leadership of the controversial Madame Helena Blavatsky, saw as their object “to reconcile all religions, sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities” (3).

In *The Key to Theosophy* (1889), written in the form of a dialogue between a sceptical Enquirer and a Theosophist, Blavatsky is at some pains to demonstrate that Theosophy is no new-fangled religion, but rather a historically cogent entity committed to the scholarly study of all religions, and open to all serious enquirers. “The fellows may be Christians or Mussulmen, Jews or Parsees, Buddhists or Brahmins, Spiritualists or Materialists, it does not matter; but every member must be either a philanthropist or a scholar, a searcher into Aryan and other old literature, or a psychic student” (19).

Of course, the attempt to reconcile all religions could only be attained through selection and (often liberal) interpretation. “We hold to no religion,” the Theosophist tells the Enquirer, “as to no philosophy in particular: we cull the good we find in each” (19). Yet despite the stress on a diversity of influences, the goal of the Society was to demonstrate the essential *unity* of religions. “The 'Wisdom-religion' was one in antiquity; and the sameness of primitive religious philosophy is

proven to us by the identical doctrines taught to the Initiates during the MYSTERIES, an institution once universally diffused" (4). The divisions between races and nations result from perversions of this primal religion, such as the "literal acceptance of the Jewish Bible" which, through the present system of religious education, has strengthened "the natural selfishness of human nature" (40).

While ostensibly open to all religions, the Theosophical Society nevertheless had certain preferences and leanings. As the preceding reference to the Mosaic Law of the Bible indicates, the Jewish Old Testament, with its emphasis on dogma rather than spirituality, was not highly regarded; however, the Jewish mysticism of the Kabbalah, particularly the Zohar, was highly favored. Buddhism's emphasis on ethics rather than ritual and dogma earned it a high place in the Theosophical canon (14). Islam, on the other hand, despite the reference to the admissibility of "Mussulmen," is nowhere referred to in *The Key to Theosophy*. Nor does Blavatsky seem to have much interest in the religions of Africans, Polynesians, or Native Americans.

Blavatsky's esoteric vocabulary is largely drawn from the Indic religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, and from Ancient Greece. Her extensive Greek references (including the term "Theosophy" itself) are most often derived from the Neo-Platonists, especially Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus, while her Indic borrowings suggest familiarity with contemporary translations of major texts by orientalists such as Max Müller. Other derivations include Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, and the writings of Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme. The translations published by the more respectable Orientalists coincided to a great extent with the Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and another highly influential work, A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883).

Blavatsky obviously made extensive use of contemporary writings on Indian religions, although she also claimed to have direct spiritual guidance from her "masters" in Tibet. Many of her followers also leaned towards India among the various spiritual influences; some became serious devotees of Hinduism or Buddhism, while others borrowed more eclectically. The influence of Blavatsky's Indian thought on W.B. Yeats is evidenced by the three poems on Indian themes in his

first book, *Crossways*, “Anashuya and Vijaya,” “The Indian upon God,” and “The Indian to His Love,” all written between 1886 and 1887, after Yeats had heard Blavatsky but before he joined the Society. In 1890, however, Yeats's continuing demands for investigations into psychic phenomena led to a falling out with Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophists, and his attention turned to Rosicrucianism, in keeping with his new occult affiliation with the Order of the Golden Dawn. But Yeats maintained a lifelong interest in Indian religions, and spoke highly of his Indian teachers Mohini Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, and Shri Purohit Swami.⁹

IX. A Child's Garden of Empire

Since the poets of the early twentieth century were the children of the late nineteenth century, an account of primitivism and exoticism in modern poetry ought to take into account literature written for, or read by, children towards the end in the late Victorian period.¹⁰ The Victorians recognized that the production of good imperial citizens must begin early; we find, therefore, in regions of Victorian discourse designed particularly for children already-well-formed discursive strategies facilitating the formation of imperial identities. One may, of course, point to the ever-popular adventure novels, but as our particular study here is poetry, we will find few better examples than Robert Louis Stevenson's immensely popular *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885).

⁹ For a discussion of Yeats's relationships with Chatterjee and the Swami, see Sankaran Ravindras, *W. B. Yeats and Indian Tradition*.

¹⁰ For other treatments of the relation between children's literature and imperialism see Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*. (Manchester: Manchester UP; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Daniel Bivona, “Alice the Child-Imperialist and the Games of Wonderland,” *Nineteenth Century Literature* 41:2 (1986):143-71; and Claudia Nelson's chapter on “Adventures, Empires and Strange Gods” (117-146) in *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857-1917* (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers UP, 1991).

Stevenson's world for children is an empire in miniature, an ideal world where everyone should be properly fed and Christian:

It is very nice to think
The world is full of meat and drink,
With little children saying grace
In every Christian kind of place.

Of course, the world is not full of meat and drink, not even in Great Britain, and not every place is a Christian kind of place. What makes it “nice” to think that it might be is a kind of naively benevolent ethnocentricity made much more explicit in the poem entitled “Foreign Children,” which asks,

Little Indian, Sioux, or Crow,
Little frosty Eskimo,
Little Turk or Japanee,
Oh! don't you wish that you were me?

The question is not purely a rhetorical one, though it seems to urge the reader in the direction of affirmation. And yet a certain ambivalence remains as the comparison is fleshed out:

You have seen the scarlet trees
And the lions over seas;
You have eaten ostrich eggs,
And turned the turtle off their legs.

Such a life is very fine,
But it's not so nice as mine:
You must often as you trod,
Have wearied NOT to be abroad.

You have curious things to eat,
I am fed on proper meat;
You must dwell upon the foam,
But I am safe and live at home.

Exotic scenery – ostrich eggs, lions, scarlet trees, and turtles – and exotic lifestyles – “curious things to eat,” “dwelling upon the foam” – are indeed desirable but not so satisfying as proper meat, safety, and “home,” the mystical source of British values. Even so, the tendency of this poem and others is not hostile toward an approval of the exotic: even a negative answer – that home life is not

superior to the life of the exotic other – served the ends of empire, which depended on the production of hybrid identities of both types: the community-denying exoticist as well as community-building ethnocentrist.

The building of empires is often on the mind of the children in the Garden of Verses. When left to his own devices, the Garden boy dreams of travel to exotic places. In “Foreign Lands” the cherry tree in the garden offers a view of the next-door garden, the river, and the road: pathways to a metonymic fantasy of the foreign lands which a sufficiently high tree would enable one to see. At the end of the path is fairy land,

Where all the children dine at five,
And all the playthings come alive.

The poem “Travel” offers an even more explicit fantasy of travel, again with the promise of exotic toys at the end of the journey. “I should like to rise and go,” the child-poet begins,

Where the golden apples grow;—
Where below another sky
Parrot islands anchored lie,
And, watched by cockatoos and goats,
Lonely Crusoes building boats;—
Where in sunshine reaching out
Eastern cities, miles about,
Are with mosque and minaret
Among sandy gardens set,
And the rich goods from near and far
Hang for sale in the bazaar;—
Where the Great Wall round China goes,
And on one side the desert blows . . .

The list goes on – the seemingly endless promise of the empire of the exotic: African “forests hot as fire. . . Full of apes and cocoa-nuts / And the negro hunters' huts”; jungles “near and far” where “man-devouring tigers are.” After this whirlwind exoticist tour, the speaker arrives at the safety of the final destination,

Where among the desert sands
Some deserted city stands,

“All its children,” we are told, are gone – not exactly dead, but “Grown to manhood ages since.”

“There I’ll come when I’m a man,” the boy-speaker declares,

With a camel caravan;
Light a fire in the gloom
Of some dusty dining-room;
See the pictures on the walls,
Heroes fights and festivals;
And in a corner find the toys
Of the old Egyptian boys.

The final image of the boy, grown to manhood, who survives these adventures only to end up in a deserted Egyptian city where he is finally permitted to act upon his true desire – to appropriate the toys of exotic children – would be merely amusing were it not for its uncanny resemblance to British imperialist strategies involving the appropriation of valued native properties as a demonstration of British control. But getting to play with other people's toys is only half the game; one also has to protect one's own toys, as is explained in “Looking Forward”:

When I am grown to man's estate
I shall be very proud and great,
And tell the other girls and boys
Not to meddle with my toys.

When alone, children in the Garden of Verses fantasize. In “Armies in the Fire,” the changing shapes of the fire turn into the blazing cities of destructive warfare. In contrast, the imaginative child of “The Little Land” produces a more congenial fantasy when he shuts his eyes and travels

To the pleasant Land of Play;
To the fairy land afar
Where the Little People are;

A safe haven where he can examine flora and fauna, and sail in a tiny boat in a rain-pool sea, observing the “Little thoughtful creatures” who “sit / On the grassy coasts of it; / Little things with lovely eyes” who “See me sailing with surprise.” The child is presented with a seductive image of an infantilized colonial encounter with the Little People, whose comparative powerlessness (“*little thoughtful creatures*”), ambivalent humanity (“*thoughtful*,” but “*little things*”), seductiveness (“with

lovely eyes”), and unpreparedness for colonial invasion (See me sailing *with surprise*) pre-construct an adult colonial encounter with similar qualities but on a larger scale.

Just as the child alone fantasizes empire fantasies, the child at play, particularly in groups, plays empire games. The three children in “Pirate Story” begin their play in the sea-meadow by choosing from a range of exotic destinations drawn from the past and present locales of exploration and colonial conquest:

Where shall we adventure, to-day that we're afloat,
Wary of the weather and steering by a star?
Shall it be to Africa, a-steering of the boat,
To Providence, or Babylon or off to Malabar?

Before completing this projective fantasy, however, their pirate voyage is brought to a close by an unexpected attack by a squadron of angry cattle which sends them scurrying back to the garden. The identification of the children with pirates highlights the potential for cross-identification in quasi-imperial play. Identification with the other is often deemed more interesting than identification with the appropriate representative of one's community: in playing “Cowboys and Indians” – the American equivalent to this piracy play – there is arguably greater pleasure in playing the transgressive Indian than in playing the cowboy. Cross-identification in play is productive of hybrid identities through the splitting of identities; one should, of course, avoid the facile assumption that cross-identification in play necessarily leads to cross-identification in non-play situations: more likely, play is used to discriminate qualities of otherness to be later dissociated in the organization of identity.¹¹ The same arguably holds for the production of gender identities, as evidenced in “Marching Song,” where three boys and a girl play at being grenadiers, with the girl, Mary Jane, acting as aggressive commander. Mary Jane evidently enjoys her enactment of (culturally-defined) masculine aggressivity so much that she must finally be called off:

¹¹ One may also draw a parallel between such instances of children's play and other types of theatrical or performative representations.

Here's enough of fame and pillage,
 Great commander Jane!
 Now that we've been round the village,
 Let's go home again.

Other strategies of identity formation will presumably be brought to bear on Mary Jane to dissociate or divert her temporary sense of identification for what was culturally constructed as a masculine role.

“Block City” raises the perennial question, “What are you able to build with your blocks?” and here the answer must of course be a miniature colony, an independent fortress-city with “Castles and palaces, temples and docks.” The sophisticated empire-child understands the four crucial elements of the colonial outpost, “The kirk and the palace, the ships and the men,” and appears to understand, even if he cannot precisely articulate, the exact functions of each of these crucial technologies of colonial rule. As Homi Bhabha observes in a similar context, “Such visibility of the institutions and apparatuses of power is possible because the exercise of colonial power makes their *relationship* obscure, produces them as fetishes, spectacles of a 'natural'/racial pre-eminence. Only the seat of government is always elsewhere – alien and separate by that distance upon which surveillance depends for its strategies of objectification, normalization and discipline” (83).

A few somber notes about the painful realities of empire are included: the toy soldier buried in the garden in “The Dumb Soldier” by the child who, though not fully able to connect the burial with death, is able to connect it with both sadness and glory:

Not a word will he disclose,
 Not a word of all he knows.

And the pain of parting and separation characteristic of the world of empire is acknowledged in “To Minnie,” a sad poem-letter to a child-friend who has gone off to a far away exotic place:

Our phantom voices haunt the air
 As we were still at play,
 And I can hear them call and say:
 “How far is it to Babylon?”

Ah, far enough, my dear,
 Far, far enough from here—
 Smiling and kind, you grace a shelf
 Too high for me to reach myself.
 Reach down a hand, my dear, and take
 These rhymes for old acquaintance' sake!
 Yet you have farther gone!

But it is a rare moment of sadness in an otherwise glorious world of Empire.

In a famous passage in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow recalls the love of maps he had as a child:

I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. 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.
 (11)

Marlow's experience of wonder and desire was undoubtedly shared by many of those who would grow up to become the writers of Conrad's generation. By the middle of the nineteenth century a growing body of children's literature was helping to promote the imperialist ideal. Novels like *The Boy Hunters* by Mayne Reid were eagerly devoured by the likes of T. S. Eliot (Crawford 15). Captain Marryat's sea-going adventure tales were immensely popular (Brantlinger 47-70), as were a huge number of popular works whose names and authors have been largely forgotten.

The grown-up poet would no doubt have a somewhat broadened view of the world. The adult Marlow gazing at the map in the Company office sees a somewhat different map, "marked with all the colours of a rainbow," colours which indicate where the "real work" is being done, as well as "where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer" (13). And of course, there are no more blank spaces left, in Africa or anywhere else for that matter, by the late nineteenth century. The vast majority of the world had been divided up amongst the European nations, and European trading interests had been established — often with a good deal of force — even in areas which were

not a part of one or another European empire, such as China and Japan. American imperialism in the Pacific and Caribbean was at its peak, and the scramble for Africa among the European powers was in full swing.

In Great Britain, the need to bring up children to staff the machinery of the Empire was widely accepted, and attempts to fulfill this need are manifest in educational literature of the period (the popular series of *Empire Stories for Boys* and *Empire Stories for Girls* is one example) and in such organized activities as the new scouting movement begun by Baden-Powell around the turn of the century. In America, where imperialism remained part of a national debate throughout the progressive era, the need for young Empire-builders was less apparent, but the expansionism of the American frontier made use of similar values and concepts of otherness, and children's literature – aided by the still-substantial American dependence on English literature – easily made the overseas passage, as did movements like scouting.

X. Beyond Discourse: Othering Institutions and Cultural Practices

I began this chapter with the intention of saying something about the formation of an “imperial archive” that functions, in contexts of “otherness,” to produce a regularity of statements and coherence of discursive objects. The specific discourses which I have touched on above – travel writing, philology, anthropology, and spiritualism – contributed in distinctive but interconnected ways to this archive: each offers its source of information – the journey, the literary text, the native village, the spiritual leader. Each has its own reasons and methods for “textualizing the other,” each justifies its enterprise in distinctive ways, but there are similarities: each produces “other” objects as objects of desire; each, in its literary form, seeks to control and package these objects for Western consumption – a packaging which involves, in each case, both textual pleasure (narrative, scholarly, etc.) and – whether intended or not – knowledge which lent itself to political uses along the lines

of what Edward Said has called “Orientalism as a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3).

Even an exhaustive survey of these discourses of otherness would be inadequate, however, if it failed to take into account the cultural practices and institutions through which the other is also, in part, constructed. These practices and institutions generally mark and form discourse, and are not detachable from it. This interplay is critical to discourse analysis, which must, furthermore, be wary of the danger of restricting its purview to discourse and discourse-producing practices and institutions, neglecting those coexisting institutions and practices which leave their traces on discourse only minimally or indirectly. We will do well, before proceeding, to briefly examine some important institutions and practices of this type – namely, tourism, museums, exhibitions, and exotic theater – in order to foreground their role in structuring conceptions of otherness.

XL The Arrival of Tourism

British imperialism in the last decades of the nineteenth century is often referred to as “the new imperialism,” characterized by “the emergence of new political and economic pressures and priorities, culminating in the gradual and wide acceptance of an imperial ideology” (Sturgis 104). In the United States, the 1890s saw a decisive turn towards imperialism, culminating in the annexation of Hawaii and Samoa and the Caribbean interventions of the Spanish American War. At the same time, improved technologies such as the telegraph, the telephone and the steamship, and the spread of railroads in India and Africa, produced the effect of “the diminution of lived distances” (Kern 223).¹²

The increase of European and American presence overseas, the public acceptance of colonies, and the improved ease of travel produced a boom in travel beginning in the last decades of the

¹² In the modernist period these would be supplemented by the the automobile, the aeroplane, and the Panama Canal (completed 1915).

nineteenth century and increasing steadily thereafter. A new “literary” form emerges in the travel guide, a development of the travelogue which displaces the adventurer-author with the tourist-reader, the potential consumer of an already-discursively-processed experience of otherness. As Ali Behdad points out in his reading of nineteenth-century travel guides to the Orient, the travel guide is “a dispersed, heterogeneous text, belonging at once to several different epistemological domains” (39). The replacement of the authorial voice of the travelogue with the dispersed, corporate voice of the travel guide signifies, Behdad argues, “the emergence – and the recognition – of the reader-user as an orientalist” (41). Another important difference between the two forms stems from the fact that,

unlike the orientalist traveler, the tourist is less concerned with *capturing* the exotic signified than with “sliding” over the signifiers of otherness. In other words, what brings the tourist to the Orient is not the “lordly” attempts of earlier orientalists to understand and “make sense” of the internal dynamics of Orientalist culture and to gain “new” knowledge about them, but the desire to identify the already defined signs of exoticism as exotic. (48)

It may be argued, however, that the sign of the exotic *only appears* to be the final referent of desire in the commodification of tourism; in fact, the sign of the exotic functions as a promise of a range of pleasures which tourism may or may not deliver, pleasures whose potential availability is evoked by means of images called forth from the archive of exotic representations. With the aid of the tourist guide, the discursive production of otherness enters a new stage; the space of the other has been mapped, textualized and prepared for consumption by the individual, who is thereby enabled to share in the benefits of the communal enterprise of imperialism.

XII. Museums, Exhibitions, and Exotic Theater

For those unable to actually travel to non-Western countries, there were the new museums of ethnography and the popular colonial and international expositions, as well as travelling and local

shows like Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows.¹³ These too formed an important part of the archive of knowledge about non-Western cultures. Museums like the Smithsonian organized their ethnographic exhibits with attention to their didactic aspects. Kipling, who visited the Smithsonian in 1896 with Theodore Roosevelt, then Civil Service Commissioner, found the collection “specially on the ethnological side,” a pleasant place to browse in, but rather transparent in its motives. “Every nation,” he wrote,

like every individual, walks in a vain show – else it could not live with itself – but I never got over the wonder of a people who, having extirpated the aboriginals of their continent more completely than any modern race had ever done, honestly believed that they were a godly little New England community, setting examples to brutal mankind. This wonder I used to explain to Theodore Roosevelt, who made the glass cases of Indian relics shake with his rebuttals. (*Something of Myself* 73)

That Kipling, earlier in this same autobiographical work, views the idea that “the British in India spent violent lives 'oppressing' the Native” as the height of absurdity (55), provides additional proof of the “vain show” by which nationalism evades its own self-criticism.

Timothy Mitchell argues that these exhibits did not simply reflect the non-Western world, but rather, sought to organize that world by means of a carefully arranged “exhibitionary order” which “enabled them to evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress” (295). In Mitchell's analysis, one observes discourses of otherness at work, strategically arranging cultures and objects with the help of a variety of discursive technologies: “the visitor would encounter, set apart from the objects on display, an abundance of catalogs, plans, sign posts, programs, guidebooks,

¹³ For an analysis of the interplay between the Wild West shows and American imperialism, see Richard Slotkin, “Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire” (Kaplan and Pease, 164-81). Slotkin traces the facility with which Cody's shows were adapted to a changing field of American imperialist activity – from “Custer's Last Stand” to the Rough Riders' victory at San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War, and even to “The Battle of Tien-Tsin,” in 1901 “reenacting the capture of that city by the Allied army that suppressed China's Boxer Rebellion and rescued the 'captives' in the Peking Legation quarter. In this performance, the Indians assumed the role of the Boxers, and the Wild West's soldiers and cowboys represented all of white civilization” (178).

instructions, educational talks, and compilations of statistics" (297-8). "The practical distinction that was maintained between the exhibit and the plan, between the objects and their catalog, reinforced the effect of two distinct orders of being—the order of things and the order of their meaning, of representation and reality" (298). By these visual and discursive organizational tactics, non-Western cultures were brought under the regime of the Western gaze, the exhibit thus creating a mediating point of entry for the Western subject.

The most popular exhibition at the 1904 St. Louis Purchase Exhibition, Robert Rydell points out, was the Philippines Reservation, which consisted of 1,200 Filipinos living in the middle of the fairgrounds. "The Philippines Reservation, organized by the U.S. government and located immediately adjacent to the American Indian Reservation, signaled the arrival of the United States as a world imperial power and indicated a willingness by the federal government to compete with the colonial displays that European powers had been building into European fairs since the 1851 London Crystal Palace Exhibition" (*World of Fairs* 19-20). The extensive anthropological section, which sought to display "a Congress of Races . . . exhibiting particularly the barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples of the world, as nearly as possible in their ordinary and native environments," was organized by anthropologist W. J. McGee, who organized the exhibits to exemplify his theories of racial evolution (*All the World's a Fair* 160). The exhibits, reinforced by the scientific authority of the exhibition's psychometric laboratories, were to provide "a great object lesson" about human progress from savagery to civilization. There was a political lesson as well, and, since it was an election year, the pro-imperialist Roosevelt administration was particularly concerned that the Philippines be presented in a positive light, that the exhibit should not "make prominent the savageness and barbarism of the wild tribes either for show purposes or to depreciate the popular estimate of the general civilization of the islands" (172). When the administration's desire that the Igorots be more properly dressed was resisted by the show's organizers, Vice President Taft's secretary telegraphed the show's organizers that "President still thinks that where the Igorot has a mere G string that it might

be well to add a short trunk to cover the buttocks and front" (172). Under resistance from the scientific community and derision from the press, the request was eventually dropped. Visitors to the exhibition, like St. Louis's own Tom Eliot, then sixteen, were free to observe the Igorots in their native attire amidst the panorama of their fellow savages.

Exhibitions and theater were often seamlessly integrated, as in the case with the Empire of India Exhibition of 1896, the creation of professional showman, Imre Kiralfy, who directed the construction of the exhibition grounds, including the six-thousand-seat Empress Theatre, and also wrote and produced the play *India* which appeared there during the course of the exhibition, and both have been discussed in detail by historian Breandon Gregory. Gregory reads the exhibition's entrance, the Ducal hall "devoted to an exhibition of goods manufactured in Britain for export to India," as an invitation to the visitor to "identif[y] with these products of the home country *en route* for the Empire" (162). From here, "the visitor emerged from the Ducal Hall into 'British India' itself, a place of exoticism and elegance, where the Indians appeared only as servants" (163). Passing through "the Queen's Court," the visitor might dine at either the (exotic) Curry House or the (domestic) Grill Room, and visit the East India Company's vast exhibition before entering into the "Indian City" through a reproduction of Bombay's Maidan Gate. Here, a large decorative enclosed building housed the "Jungle," inhabited by "thousands of lifesize models of insects, snakes, crocodiles, tigers, elephants, and people" (the last modelled in wax by John Tussaud), was surrounded by streets intended to characterize various well-known Indian cities. This area, Gregory notes, was "occupied by eighty-five Indian craftsmen, including silk and carpet weavers, and also over one hundred jugglers, dancers, animal keepers etc.," all of whom "were on a fixed contract, and lived throughout the season within the Exhibition" (163-64).

The show *India* presented at the specially built Empress Theatre, decorated inside to resemble a Mughal temple, chronicled, with a cast of a thousand performers, eight and a half decades of Indian history leading inexorably to "The Glorification of Victoria, The Empress Queen." "Finally the

English have appeared upon the scene and delivered the people of India from the oppression of anarchy, and established the reign of order and law" (167). It was, Gregory observes, "a tendentious justification for the British Raj," presenting "the historical matrix within which the exhibition should be read" (152, 153). The "curtain raiser," written by Sir Edwin Arnold (of *Light of Asia* fame), was "an 'Imperial Ode' written expressly for the first performance of the play . . . but, it would appear, delivered at each performance," and spoken in the "voice" of the Indian to the Empress (166):

Eastern Empress! Western Queen!
Thou whose stainless flag is seen
Fluttering under every sky!
Thou, whose sceptered Majesty
Sways the seas and rules the lands!
Here, today, thy India stands
Mindful, grateful, on this stage,
Calling back each bygone age ...

"Thou, for us, art proved the Best," the "Ode" declares, in the Indian's voice:

India, nestling at thy knee,
Hath thy peace, and praiseth thee;
In their Heaven our Gods recline,
Well content that we are thine.
Jai! Jai! Victoria! Be this seen:
Eastern Empress! Western Queen! (166)

"It is possible to estimate," writes Gregory, "that during the two summers, at least one and a half million people watched *India* and twelve million people visited the exhibition" (153).

The *India* show was merely one example from a long history of imperialist spectacle on the British stage. The most common site for this imperialist theatre was the music hall, known in the nineteenth century as "the fount of patriotism" (Summerfield 17). "Years before Rudyard Kipling's verses became household words, the choruses and catch phrases of innumerable songs had familiarized the public with the myths of Anglo-Saxon superiority and the onward course of Empire" (Senelick 168). In the 1870s, it was largely the music hall that promoted the militaristic imperial patriotism associated with "jingoism"; a music hall song was, in fact, credited with adding the word to the language. "We Don't Want to Fight," better known as "By Jingo," was written by G. W. Hunt

in 1877 and performed by “the Great Macdermott” (George Farrell) during the crisis of 1877-8, when the Russians threatened to take Constantinople (Senelick 168; Summerfield 25).

We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do
 We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too.
 We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true,
 The Russians shall not have Constantinople. (Senelick 169)

When fears of a Russian threat to India provoked war in Afghanistan in 1878, the symbolism of jingoistic “readiness for battle” proved easily adaptable to the new position of belligerence in Hunt's contribution to “Indianationality,” a spectacle presented at the Oxford Theatre in January of 1879, which ended:

The Afghan Wolf may friendship make
 With cunning Russian Bear,
 But the Indian Tiger's wide awake
 And bids them both beware!
 The prowling foe on plunder bent
 By this should surely know
 The British Lion's not *asleep*
 As in the years ago.

The dusky sons of Hindostan
 Will by our banner stand.
 Australia, aye, and Canada,
 Both love the dear old land!
 No foe we fear—we fight for right!
 No day we e'er shall rue,
 If England, dear old England,
 To herself be only true. (Summerfield 27-28)

The “dusky sons of Hindostan,” and other non-Western subjects, were less likely to be portrayed as England's allies than as evil enemies, particularly after the Indian uprising of 1857. This was especially true in the popular genre of melodrama, with its “polarisation of good and evil, a dichotomy into which 'British' and 'foreign' could easily be slotted” (Summerfield 31). Simple divisions of this sort had the advantage of cutting across class and regional boundaries, linking Britons together in the shared project of Empire. “A very common transaction in the Victorian theatre,” J. S. Bratton argues, “was the interpellation of every Briton, however humble, not as a

member of his class but as an empire-builder, and a natural superior of the other races and nations of the world" (5). It may be that, as Laurence Senelick argues, the working classes were largely the unwitting victims of the "seductive and appealing" presentation of expansion and colonization which "were publicized as fields of opportunity for the unemployed, new markets for British goods, and increased prestige for the average Briton" (168). Senelick points out that "much of the energy the working man might have directed to ameliorating his own situation was rechannelled by the music hall to the advancement of Empire" (168): "that the songs of the music hall consistently contrasted the soundness of Conservative measures with the muddle-headed innovations of the Liberals is a strong indication of the breach between music-hall politics and the actual alignment of the working class" (164).

These institutions and practices – tourism, museums, exhibitions, and exotic theatre – remind us that non-Western peoples and cultures were not experienced only through discourses and texts: they were made available through a variety of representational practices. The ubiquitousness of primitivism and exoticism as representational strategies in these situations is, if anything, more pronounced than in the textual and discursive fields. Within this overdetermined field of representationality, there were few alternatives. We now direct our attention to these strategies in greater detail.

Exoticism

I. The phenomenology of the exotic

Columbus's voyage "initiated a century of intense wonder," Stephen Greenblatt suggests, and thus, "the early discourse of the New World, is among other things, a record of the colonizing of the marvelous" (14, 24-25). But the marvelous and wonderful are not entirely pleasurable sensations, nor are they conducive to a sense of security; the effect of these incursions of the marvelous was disorienting, disruptive of the certainties of Western structures of knowledge: "compared to the luminous universal histories of the early Middle Ages," Greenblatt writes, "the chronicles of exploration seem uncertain of their bearings, disorganized, fragmentary. Their strength lies not in a vision of the Holy Spirit's gradual expansion through the world but in the shock of the unfamiliar, the provocation of an intense curiosity, the local excitement of discontinuous wonders" (2). As the marvelous passes into the ordinary, it exists for a time in a space which we may call the exotic. At this stage, the experience may be said to be complete, and yet it (or its representation) remains charged with the energy of novelty and strangeness, while producing, at the same time, the satisfaction associated with the bringing under control of the disruptive and dangerous forces.

II. Segalen: Exoticism as a way of life

Of the many Europeans who sought the exotic and returned to write about it – Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Richard Burton, Pierre Loti, Paul Gauguin, Joseph Conrad, T. E. Lawrence, to name a few – perhaps none came to embrace the exotic as deeply as the French writer Victor Segalen. Segalen's novels *Les Immémoriaux* (1907) and *René Leys* (written 1913-16) pursued the exotic in the traditional

terrains of Tahiti and China, respectively, but it is his *Essai sur l'exotisme* (1914) which stands out among the remarkable doctrinal statements of the exotic quest.

In the *Essai* Segalen was interested in dissociating exoticism from merely conventional exotic objects and rediscovering “universal exoticism,” “the power of *conceiving other*” (19). He proposed to examine spatial (geographical), and temporal exoticism (temporal exoticism being the “bewildered flight from the Stingy Present” [“Fuite éperdue du Présent Mesquin”]); to study each sense in its connection with exoticism, as well as the sensation of exoticism itself; to explore the sexuality of exoticism: the exoticism “Of the other sex. Of animals. (but not of madmen, in whom we find ourselves so well!)” For Segalen, this was both a literary enterprise and a program for living; the fragments that make up the *Essai sur L'Exotisme* were jotted down during his travels, as he both lived and wrote the exotic.

Philosophically, it was “an Aesthetic of the Diverse” (22). Segalen saw, in modernity, the degradation of the diverse: “Degradation and Re-integration of the diverse in man. Exoticism of God to man, of heroes to man, of the king to the people. All of these in complete degradation” (79). Even the exoticism of war, experienced during the writing of the book, was “in full degradation.” The loss of these traditional forms of exoticism demanded a search for the exotic in the Diverse. Diversity could be sought in both the diversity of individuals and of races and languages (27). At this point, he argued that such diversity is impenetrable, but later proposed that “the growing fusion, the falling of barriers, the great spatial foreshortenings, must themselves be made up for somewhere by new separations, unanticipated gaps” (67). As the exotic is consumed, new exoticisms must be produced. Segalen's exoticism may be understood, in this later form, as a kind of avant-gardism.

The “hero” of the *Essai* is the *exote*, the individual who lives entirely for the sensation of the exotic. “The sensation of Exoticism augments the personality, far indeed from suffocating, it enriches” (49). “For,” as he wrote in one of the last fragments, “in seeking, instinctively, Exoticism, I have sought Intensity, Power, Life [Car, cherchant d'instinct l'Exotisme, j'avais cherché l'Intensité,

donc la Puissance, donc la Vie]" (76). The exote seeks for a kind of balance; he cannot be the mere tourist, nor a collector of impressions, like writers such as Pierre Loti, who confuse the object they write about with themselves (22). Nor should he seek to transform exotic societies to be like his own, as do the missionaries and other bringers of civilization. Segalen's worst fear was global homogeneity: the triumph of the homogenous, "the kingdom of the lukewarm, the time of vicious mush with no inequalities. . . the degradation of ethnographic diversity" (67).

III. Exoticism's unappeasable need

If Segalen, as would-be-exote, was primarily interested in the augmentation, enrichment, and balance that may be attained through the exotic, more recent critiques of exoticism have placed their emphasis decidedly on the absence that drives the subject to seek an illusory fullness through the experience of the exotic. The notion of absence has been formulated in numerous ways. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian writes, "The need to go *there* (to exotic places, be they far away or around the corner) is really our desire to be *here* (to find or defend our position in the world)" (756). "If we consider the English novel," writes Robert J. C. Young, "we find that what is portrayed as characterizing English experience is rather often the opposite, a sense of fluidity and a painful sense of, or need for, otherness" (2). "The many colonial novels in English betray themselves as driven by desire for the cultural other, for forsaking their own culture" (3), a desire which Young reads as a desire for dialogism and hybridity. Paroma Roy, in her illuminating reading of Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Meccah*, notes how "the process of endless impersonation and exchange is problematized and made inseparable from a profound sense of ontological incompleteness" (201).

Chris Bongie, who identifies exoticist strategies as essentially primitivist, writes,

As a project, exoticism necessarily presumes that, at some point in

the future, what has been lost will be attained 'elsewhere,' in a realm of ad-venture that bypasses the sort of contemporary present that a symbolic form such as the bildungsroman, by contrast, prepares us for. But if exoticism partakes of modernity and its promise, what the future promises – and here, of course, is the central irony of this particular project – is a recovery of the past and of all that a triumphant modernity has effaced. Indeed, the very emergence of this project is unthinkable without such a triumph. Because of this vicious circle that draws the future and the past together, the exoticist project is, from its very beginnings, short-circuited: it can never keep its promise. And therein, I will eventually suggest, lies the promise that it holds out to us. (15)

In his reading of Segalen, Bongie is less interested in what Segalen holds to be the promise of exoticism than he is in Segalen's need to renounce earlier versions of exoticism in the name of a *pure* exoticism which is constantly receding beyond the horizon. Bongie reads this as a sign that “for Segalen and Conrad, exoticism has been exhausted as an *ideology*, that is, as a discursive practice that still produces itself in the register of belief” (23). Although both Segalen and Conrad “*rhetorically* conserve the exotic, engaging in a renewed, and strategic, dreaming of what they know to be no more (but no less) than a dream” (23), what is conspicuous, Bongie argues, is his sense of belatedness: “he will always be at a critical remove from the 'valeur première' that he hopes to recover” (114). “In the age of the New Imperialism, the exotic necessarily becomes, for those who persist in search of it, the sign of an aporia – of a constitutional absence at the heart of what had been projected as a possible alternative to modernity” (22).

The notion of the belatedness of modern exoticism is further developed in Ali Behdad's *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (1994). As Behdad writes,

The orientalist of this period undertook an exoticist project marked by an anxiety of coming after what had come before. Traveling in the Orient at a time when the European colonial power structure and the rise of tourism had transformed the exotic referent into the familiar sign of Western hegemony, these orientalist could not help but experience a sense of displacement in time and space, an experience that produced either a sense of disorientation and loss or an obsessive urge to discover an 'authentic' Other. (13)

The effects of this belatedness are most often visible, according to Behdad, in what he labels, following Homi K. Bhabha, discursive and ideological splits. “The discursive practices of these belated orientalist are therefore split, for they are inscribed within both the economies of colonial power and the exoticist desire for a disappearing Other” (14); again, they are “discursively diffracted and ideologically split” in their vacillation between “an insatiable search for a counterexperience in the Orient and the melancholic discovery of its impossibility” (15).

Behdad's “split subject” is derived from Homi Bhabha's highly influential formulation of the hybrid colonial subject. Hybridity, for Bhabha, is precisely that characteristic of colonial discourse which renders it incomplete: the seam through which the pull of the other threatens the wholeness of the colonial subject. Hybridity “is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority)” (112). Hybridity is not merely a name for a disorientation or “imperial delirium” of the colonizer's discourse, for it infects all discourses produced by colonialistic interaction, but its effects in the discourse of the Western colonialism are particularly marked by “the disturbance of its authoritative representations by the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences” (113). As Bhabha argues, it is not sufficient to merely mark out the discriminatory processes of hybridity as a disruption in Western discourses of culture; rather, hybridity must be seen as that which produces both recognition and disavowal, which in turn constitute all cultural discourses: “to see the cultural not as the *source* of conflict – *different* cultures – but as the *effect* of discriminatory practices – the production of cultural *differentiation* as signs of authority – changes its value and its rules of recognition” (114). The significance of this shift for the practice of colonial discourse analysis is clear: it “reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that the other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition . . . the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or

evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply *there* to be seen or appropriated” (114).

Implicit here is the assumption that the colonial subject is constituted by discourse, and this discourse, Bhabha shows, is necessarily hybrid in that the discursive system of identifications and dis-identifications with variously constituted groups, which constitute the identity formations of subjectivity, must always be constructed by means of a split, which functions much like the deconstructible binary opposition in Derrida's work. Exoticist identifications and disavowals, with their ostensible reversal of the ethnocentric colonialist paradigm, do not succeed in escaping the problematic of hybridity, for they are also productions of the “shifting forces and fixities” of colonial power. Exoticist identity constructs are hybrid just as ethnocentric constructs are.

One may ask, if the construction of cultural identity is necessarily hybrid, what is the function of its critique, by Bhabha or other practitioners of colonial discourse analysis? If one cannot opt out of hybridity, then in what way does calling attention to its specific forms affect our understanding of its procedures? What, in other words, would an ethics or politics of hybridity look like? Clearly, it could not take the form of a renunciation of hybridity itself. Bhabha's argument that a recognition of hybridity restores a balance, relocates the figure of the other in a discourse which the other has shaped without this shaping role being acknowledged, provides one such argument from the perspective of historical analysis. Nevertheless, such analysis does not address the issue of an ethics or politics of hybridity which would make possible – given the inability to opt out of hybridity – a means of evaluating among competing logics of hybridity – in other words, to say something about whether exoticism or primitivism as logics of hybridity should be considered necessarily unethical, or about under what circumstances they might be so considered.¹⁴

¹⁴ Paul Gilroy's rehistoricizing of the construction of transnational subjectivity in *The Black Atlantic* seems to me an important step in this direction, as does Bhabha's more recent development of the notion of “cosmopolitanism.”

IV. Exotic sex

Perhaps the most conspicuous association of the exotic in post-enlightenment European discourse is with sexual eroticism. The association of the exotic with entry into forbidden spaces: the harem, the zenana; with voyeurism of sexual practices; with romanticized interventions Gayatri Spivak has characterized as “White men saving brown women from brown men”; with contemplations or actual appropriations of a wide array of forbidden sexual practices including homosexuality, transvestitism, sado-masochism, exaggerated or inverted patriarchalism and sexual role-playing; with “going native” or “going jungli”; with the intensification of the quality or quantity of sexual experience.

Moreover, the figuration of colonial acquisition as sexual possession was extremely common. David Spurr refers to this as the “eroticization of the colonized,” by which phrase he means “a set of rhetorical instances – metaphors, seduction fantasies, expressions of sexual anxiety – in which the traditions of colonialist and phallogocentric discourses coincide” (170). Thus colonies, like women, were not only possessed (their possession represented variously as seduction or rape) and commodified, they were also attributed corresponding feminine qualities: hysteria, sexual uncontrollability, irrationality, all of which demanded male/colonialist intervention (Spurr 172).

Joseph Boone points out that while “metaphors for the West's appropriation of the East are at least implicitly heterosexual,” “that which appears alluringly feminine is not always, or necessarily, female” (92). Boone is one of a number of critics who have begun to draw attention to the often-neglected homosexual interests of colonialist exoticism. Among the more visible examples are T. E. Lawrence, for whom, Boone argues, “putting on 'Arab drag'¹⁵ provides the desert androgyne with a disguise that allows for the play of sexual and gender ambiguity,” resulting in a homoerotics that pulls in two directions, “towards an impossibly idealized Bedouin homosexuality and towards its

¹⁵ For more on Orientalist cross-dressing see also Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests* (304-52).

nightmarish opposite, utter degradation" (96,97); and Andre Gide, whose "projection of gay awakening onto the Near East" may be read as an act of "unconscious colonialism" (101). Sara Suleri has explored the homoerotic strategy of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, arguing that while it "cannot be explained away with reference to Forster's own curiously class-conscious and cross-cultural homosexual experience, it would be a theoretical error to ignore their relevance to the text's embodiment of the situation of alternative desire in the construction of colonial encounters" (136). In Forster's novel, "the most urgent cross-cultural invitations," Suleri argues, "occur between male and male, with racial difference serving as a substitute for gender" (133).

The association of colonies with sexuality was by no means merely metaphorical. historian Ronald Hyam amply documents "the range of sexual possibilities which could be pursued uninhibitedly and with impunity within the formal empire well into the twentieth century, at least within the army," a range which included a wide variety of homosexual as well as heterosexual possibilities (133).

Anthropology too did its part to link non-Western cultures with sexual exoticism. The sexual practices of Non-Western cultures were vigorously investigated, and often portrayed as primitive, extreme, or perverse. J. F. McLennan's influential *Primitive Marriage* (1865) sought to trace marriage practices to marriage by capture, which was present to varying degrees in many non-Western cultures though present only in "survivals" in Western culture. Though McLennan's civilized distance requires him to view as "somewhat suspicious" the suggestion by an early recorder of aboriginal marriage by capture "that this mode of courtship is rather relished by the ladies as a species of rough gallantry," the author's fascination with the practice is evident throughout, and is presumed to be shared with the reader: "The reader may imagine the extent to which, among these myriad hordes of savages, the women are being knocked about, and the men accustomed to associate the acquisition of a wife with acts of violence and rapine" (33). Author and reader share the vicarious pleasure of contemplating the marriage ceremony's underpinnings of masculine violence, but are at the same time

permitted to congratulate themselves on the progressive distance which separates modern man from this primitive state. Marianna Torgovnick finds voyeurism and “the language of compulsion” key elements in Malinowski's account of *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929); the reader, she points out, is led inexorably to the book's “main interest,” “the copulating couple.” “Am I wrong,” Torgovnick asks, “to see this narrative structure as a form of striptease, its goal (coming closer, closer) the seduction of the reader, the reader's consent to an act of voyeurism?” (7).

V. The commodification of the Exotic

Nupur Chaudhuri has shown the particular value British consumers placed on exotic imports from India, and the particular status that adhered to objects such as cashmere shawls in Britain. Although native productions were denigrated in the colonies, they were often highly valued at home. The memsahibs, or Anglo-Indian women, “served as a conduit for the flow of culture from India to Britain beginning around the mid-nineteenth century” (232). The “imperial ethos,” Chaudhuri argues, made such items as Indian fabrics, Kashmir shawls, jewelry and other decorative objects popular among the middle classes. Indian foods also came into vogue in the 1860s, and were sold on a mass scale and at specialty stores like Stenbridge's Oriental Depot at Leicester Square (240). Recipes and goods were ironically brought home by the same memsahibs who were expected to scorn them in the colonies in the name of imperial prestige: “once they returned home, the special context for which they had to be overtly ethnocentric by displaying a certain indifference to the surrounding culture would no longer bind them” (242).

As William Leach argues in his history of American merchandising, “perhaps the most popular of all merchandising themes in the years before World War I was the oriental theme, fashion from the bottom up, as it were, not, as with much of Paris couture, from the top down” (104).

even as European and American orientalism distorted and

demeaned non-Western cultures, it also exposed an underlying sense in Westerners themselves that they lacked something vital that 'Orientals' had. Orientalism was symptomatic of changes taking place within Western society – and especially in cities – that had little to do with imperialism or with the desire to appropriate somebody else's property, but that symbolized a feeling of something missing from Western culture itself, a longing for a 'sensual' life more 'satisfying' than traditional Christianity could endorse. (105)

“Whatever the complexity of the widespread interest in things oriental, then, American business furnished the principal means for their transmission and for the creation of a new national dream life for men and women” (107).

VI The fictionalization of the exotic

That there is an indissoluble link between imperialism and exoticism is abundantly clear. Exoticist literature reflected the interest in, and anxiety about, foreign lands which might fall under Western influence. Exotica provided the general culture with “information” about relatively unknown places, and as such, paralleled the more official production of information which formed a crucial part of the technology of imperialism. While not everyone might recognize a personal stake in overseas expansion, one might, through the consumption of exotica, participate in the vast cultural project toward which the nation was directing so much energy. This was particularly the case for the British, with their substantial cultural investment in the project of Empire, but it was true as well for turn-of-the-century Americans, who had begun to experience the rewards and anxieties of expansion in such areas as Samoa, Hawaii, and the Caribbean; and who were experiencing strong temptations to follow suit with other nations in their quest for overseas territories. Indeed, the divisive political element in the American imperialist tendency may have made the interest in the exotic even more powerful than if the nation had been uniformly pro-imperialist.

Nevertheless, the discursive strategies of exoticism are not fully exhausted by identifying their

connections to imperialist ideology. Imperialism to a great extent makes exoticism possible by opening possibilities for exoticist exploration, and exoticism in turn often promotes imperialist expansion; but this interchange is not an absolute necessity, and is in actual practice, quite often absent.

Since imperialism is commonly associated with nationalism, Tzvetan Todorov's claim that exoticism is, in fact, directly opposed to nationalism suggests that the relationship between exoticism and imperialism is, at the very least, a troubled one: "If I am a nationalist, I proclaim that the values of my own country, whatever they may be, are superior to all others. No, the exoticist replies, the country with superior values is a country whose only relevant characteristic is that it is not my own" (264). Todorov's exoticism is perhaps too rigidly defined; it is far more common to find writers intrigued by the exotic but retaining a sense of national identity, or, at the very least, exhibiting a troubled ambivalence in their espousal of nationalist and exoticist identity formations. Todorov's definition of exoticism as "otherness . . . *systematically* preferred to likeness" (264, my italics) is, in fact, rarely approximated. The possibility of anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist exoticism is clear, but so is the possibility of the appropriation or incorporation of the exotic in the national or imperial interest.

There is often, in other words, a dialectical relationship between imperialist nationalism and exoticism. But it is necessary to point out that even this is not always the case, for when the exotic is incorporated into the realm of cultural discourse, it can, in some cases, become, to a greater or lesser degree, severed from its imperial context. By way of illustration, it is useful to compare the vogue for outer-space movies in the fifties and sixties with these earlier exoticist forms. The popularity of such films had some relationship to the excitement of the early years of space exploration, and yet many of the films are not really in any significant way *about* space exploration; rather, they use the premise of space exploration or invasions from outer space to explore cultural issues of many sorts. The same situation holds true for exoticism. While exotic novels, poetry, and

in the next decade, films, would, in certain ways, fulfill an informative function with regard to other cultures, this informative motive cannot be said to be central in most cases.

What, then, was the function of this cultural space of exoticism? The answer to this question is extremely complex in its particulars, but in its general sense may be understood as follows: exoticism provided an “outside” space in which certain questions too difficult to treat within the primary cultural space could be considered in relative safety. J. S. Bratton makes a similar observation in her discussion of the late nineteenth century imperialist theatre, where in her discussion of theatrical forms of cultural negotiation, she writes of the “less overt hegemonic practices involved, especially in the construction of ‘them’ not simply as the Other, all that is opposed or hostile to us, but as a projection of those things in ourselves that we do not wish to countenance or acknowledge” (5).

On to the transgressive and hostile imperial subject on stage the audience could project all sorts of anti-social characteristics, and these could well be the same evils which were condemned as characterising the working class, and which also present problems of control in the individual psyche. The stage, therefore, offered a framed and bracketed space in which licence, violence, irresponsibility, physicality and other enjoyable but anti-social acts or sensations could be savoured and then rejected and denied. (5)

Bratton's conclusions are mainly drawn from the limited conventions of genres like the stage melodrama, with their generally rigid, conventionalized portrayals of demonised others. Within the wider generic potentialities of literary forms, the possibilities for identification with “the other” (though here too, demonisation was common) were far more open. Bratton's observations concerning “the nature of the audience enjoyment of the spectacle of the demonised aspects of the self” – which, she argues, “must vary according to the class position of the individual, and all the other factors which make up psychological identity on conscious and subconscious levels” – lead her to conclude that “the possible complexity of these negotiations . . . is almost exhaustible” (5-6).

The world of the exotic, I would argue, was a kind of allegorical space which might or might

not be understood to have referential connections to the primary cultural space. The authenticity claims of its representative texts ranged from the unquestioned truth of archival documentation to the most whimsical fictions. Since “factual” exoticism was accepted as informative and valuable, writers of *exotica* who could make any claim to factuality were, generally speaking, released from holding a moral responsibility for ideas expressed or events depicted in their works, for if the author's intentions were called into question, this informative function could be called upon in the author's defense (and generally some sort of factual source could be pointed to if necessary). The exotic was thus, to an extent, a space where anything went; the manners and customs of others might be considered, approved of or even appropriated where attractive, rejected when unappealing. In this way, ideas extrinsic to the prevailing discourses of the culture might, by means of the exotic, be given consideration. There was thus a potentially subversive element to exoticism. At the same time, however, the exotic space could be used to reinforce a negative response towards “things other,” and thus might perform a conservative function within the culture. In short, the exotic provided both an explorative literary space and a safety net of substantial value in a literary culture where moral condemnation could often be a factor in the literary marketplace. It was well known that many writers and publishers took advantage of a gullible public eager for pseudo-knowledge about exotic places. F. W. Bain, to cite one example, made a name for himself around the turn of the century with his genuine-sounding translations of Hindu short stories, which were in fact not translations at all, despite all their technical footnotes concerning Hindu puns and the meaning of names in the “original text.” To a certain extent audiences were willing participants in this fictionalization of the exotic: aesthetic criteria were generally substituted for factuality. And while critics appear to have been unwilling to shatter the fictional pretenses of works of *exotica*, even when they were capable of doing so, they were not above taking a knowing attitude, in order to demonstrate that they were not

entirely taken in by the claims made as to the authenticity of various works.¹⁶

We can see, then, that exoticist strategies offered a wide range of possibilities for imaginative writers. Public fascination with the exotic was fueled by interest in empire, and exoticist literature presented itself in terms of its informative content and, sometimes covertly, as an exploration of cultural hybridity.

VII. Poetry and the marketing of the exotic

Despite the phenomenal success of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) English poetry did not embrace the exotic until quite late in the nineteenth century. Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyam*, though published in 1859, did not come into vogue until the 1890s. In the work of the major Victorian poets there are only a few glimpses of non-Western cultures – in Mathew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustom* (1853, adapted from Firdausi's Persian epic), a few poems by Browning,¹⁷ and Tennyson's posthumously published “Akbar's Dream” (1892). Most of the popular poets who wrote

¹⁶ In her study of theatrical melodrama, Heidi Holder offers a different view of this process of fictionalizing the exotic, arguing that, at least in this genre, there was a “gradual weakening of the emphasis upon accuracy and edification” in the latter decades of the nineteenth century (142). “Ironically,” she writes, “it was just as the British Empire was reaching its height in the last decades of the century, and the drama of that Empire was so clearly dependent upon 'authoritative' images and sources, that the representation of Empire became estranged from its roots in pedagogy and historical 'facts.' The settings of imperialist dramas remained indebted to 'experts' and to popular imagery, but historical specificity diminished.” In their theatrical representation in the 1880s and 1890s, “the countries of the Empire become places – rather like Oz – where characters go to prove themselves and straighten out domestic difficulties” (141); now, “the real battles are between Europeans, fought *within* a conflict with indigenous people” (142). Holder reads this “denial of a vital connection between British and non-British, as the latter is carefully removed from his powerful position as Other” as an act of cultural imperialism: “rather than presenting melodramas which *depict* the imposition of British culture and law upon colonial societies, these later plays in effect *enact* an imperialist expansion of British culture by imposing traditional domestic melodramatic plots and characters upon the colonial locale” (143).

¹⁷ Among them, “Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr” (1842) and “An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician” (1855).

on exotic or imperial themes are now largely forgotten. In the 'nineties, however, exoticism flourished. Yeats wrote several poems on Indian themes before turning his attention to an exotic Irish past; Wilde revelled in the luxuriant exoticism of *Salomé*, and found in Orientalism a basis for his aesthetic theories, arguing in "The Decay of Lying" (1891), for example, that "the whole history of [the decorative] arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit" (303). Kipling arrived on the scene with his *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892) and *The Seven Seas* (1896).

By the early twentieth century, exoticism was an indisputable component of English-language poetry. The following chapters will look at some of the exoticist strategies evident in the first two decades of the twentieth century. I begin with a look at one of the most intriguing neglected writers of exotic poetry, Violet Nicolson, who, as "Laurence Hope," established a considerable popular following with her racy pseudo-translations of "Indian Love Lyrics" that were said to "breathe the spirit of the East." The next three chapters examine non-Western writers who found, through the British and American interest in the exotic, a market for their own English poetry. "What We Wished To Receive': Sarojini Naidu as Nightingale and Nationalist" examines the poetic development of Naidu in light of the expectations of Western audiences, who sought from non-Western poets "authentic" portrayal of exotic subjects, and looks at the way Naidu was able to use her reputation as a means of gaining political authority back home in India. Questions of audience expectations are again raised in "Could'st Thou But Be a Bright Black Boy Again': Reading the Tagore Craze," which looks at the intense interest Tagore produced in England and America after the publication of his English poems in 1912. The Far East is the subject of the final two chapters. The first, "What About My Songs': Yone Noguchi in the West," looks at another non-Western poet, in this case from Japan, who successfully penetrated the British and American literary market, while the second, "Orient from all Quarters': Modernism and the Far East" reassesses one of the most well-known sites

of exchange between modernism and “Orientalism” – the Chinese and Japanese translations of Ezra Pound and other early modernists – in light of the issues of exoticism explored in this section.

The Exotic Transgressions of Violet Nicolson (Laurence Hope)

When we think of the poetry of British Imperialism, we tend to think of the male poets who sang its praises or criticized its methods – poets like Kipling, Henley, Newbolt, Lyall and Blunt – or the male poets who were enthralled by the exotic, like Thomas Moore and Edwin Arnold. But the colonies also produced women poets, although their names are generally forgotten – women like Mrs. W. S. Carshore of Rajapore, whose *Songs of the East* was published in 1855, and Mary Leslie, whose *Sorrows, Aspirations, and Legends, from India* appeared in 1858. These women poets were not often taken seriously, nor, it would seem, were they often encouraged to take their own work seriously: “the Authoress,” Mrs. Carshore acknowledged in her preface, “must naturally feel a diffidence and hesitation in thus venturing to appear before the world, and cannot be without many doubts and fears as to her success.” It is difficult to gauge the success of these “unpretending little volume[s]” in India, with their picturesque accounts of quaint native customs and patriotic sentiments, but there can be little doubt that they failed to find much of an audience outside of the Anglo-Indian community. One woman poet, though, Violet Nicolson, did break the success barrier with her three volumes of “Indian Love Lyrics,” published between 1901 and 1905; she did so, however, by posing as a man, by breaking the conventions of Victorian propriety, and particularly, by catering to the home audience's interest in the exotic. Through the poems, the reader at home could vicariously experience the fantasy of the Oriental despot's power, particularly his sexual omnipotence, with all of its inherent possibilities of violence, cruelty, exoticism, and erotic passion:

You are my God, and I would fain adore You
 With sweet and secret rites of other days.
 Burn scented oil in silver lamps before You,
 Pour perfume on Your feet with prayer and praise.

Or experience the transgressive thrill of visiting an exotic Indian temple, where

Strange, weird things that no man may say,
 Things Humanity hides away;-

Secretly done,—
 Catch the light of the living day,
 Smile in the sun.
 Cruel things that man may not name,
 Naked here, without fear or shame,
 Laughed in the carven stone.

Above all these were poems of passionate intensity, allied in certain respects with the poetry of Decadence, perhaps owing a debt to the Paterian figure of the artist, burning with his gem-like flame:

Ah, that one night! I think Love's very essence
 Distilled itself from out my joy and pain,
 Like tropical trees, whose fervid inflorescence
 Glows, gleams, and dies, never to bloom again.

At the same time, however, the style was more accessible than the rarified cadences of much Decadent poetry. Like Kipling, Violet Nicolson found subject with intense popular appeal, and an appealing form for it, drawing on the rhythms of the music hall to create a poetry which largely bypassed institutions of literary approval and reached a wide audience, forcing critics to take notice.¹⁸

¹⁸ The following reviews, listed in chronological order, will be referred to in this chapter: "Volumes of Verse," *Literary World* 65 (7 Feb. 1902): 115-16; "Recent Verse," *Athenaeum* (15 Mar. 1902): 331; A. R., Rev. of *The Garden of Kāma* by Laurence Hope, *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly* 13 (Jan-Apr. 1902): 415-6; Edith M. Thomas, "India's Love Lyrics," *Critic* 40 (1902): 549; "Recent British Poetry," *Nation* (New York) 74 (26 June 1902): 513; Review of *India's Love Lyrics*, *Dial* 34 (1 Jan. 1903): 24; "Western Interpreters of Eastern Verse," *Calcutta Review* 236 (April 1904): 479-89; "Books of Verse," *Literary World* 69 (22 Jan 1904): 74; [Jeannette Gilder], "The Lounger," *Critic* 44 (June 1904): 493; "Some Recent Verse," *TLS* (25 Aug 1905): 267; "Verse, Old and New," *Athenaeum* (2 Sept. 1905): 299-300; "Poems and Plays," *Literary World* 71 (15 Sept. 1905): 358-59; R[ichard] Garnett, "Indian Love," *Bookman* (28 Sept. 1905): 206; "Songs from Far Lands," *Spectator* 95 (1905): 391; H. Pearl Humphry, "The Work of Laurence Hope," *Acorn* (London, 1905): 137-47; Edith M. Thomas, "Two Books of Song," *Critic* 48 (Feb. 1906): 184; H[enry] Bruce, "A True Indian Poet," *East & West* 52-3 (Bombay, Feb-March 1906) 158-166, 240-250; James Elroy Flecker, "Laurence Hope," *Monthly Review* (June 1907): 164-68; "Verse," *Saturday Review* 107 (29 May 1909): 693; Brian Hooker, "Some Springtime Verse," *Bookman* 29 (New York, June 1909): 371; "Recent Verse," *Spectator* 102 (30 June 1909): 153; Otto Rothfeld, "Laurence Hope," *Indian Dust* (Oxford: Alden & Co., 1909): 203-216; Austin Johnson, "The Poetry of Laurence Hope," *Poetry Review* 3 (July-Dec. 1913): 151-154.

I Eroticizing India

The daughter of Colonel Arthur Cory of the Bengal Army, she was born Adela Florence Cory in 1865 while her father was on leave in England, raised by relatives and schooled in England and abroad. At sixteen, she joined her family in Lahore, where her father, now retired, was co-editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette*. When Colonel Cory fell the family was forced to return to England (Cory was replaced by the young Rudyard Kipling), but after his recovery the Corys returned to India, and the Colonel took up the editorship of the *Sind Gazette* in Karachi. Adela and her sisters, Vivian (who later became the popular novelist “Victoria Cross”) and Isabell, assisted their father with the newspaper. In 1889, at 23, she married Colonel Malcolm Hassels Nicolson, 46, of the Bombay Army, commander of a native regiment, veteran of the Second Afghan War and an expert linguist. After several years of regimental duty in various regions of northwest India, Colonel Nicolson became Commanding Officer of a small cantonment in Central India, and two years later he was promoted to General and transferred to Mhow, the head-quarters of the Western Command, where he again served as Commanding Officer. In Mhow, where they remained from 1895-1900, Violet — as she preferred to be called — is reputed to have written the bulk of her verse.

The Garden of Kama, Nicolson's first collection, was published in 1901 during the couple's return to England at the end of the Colonel's five-year term. The book's early success was aided by the popularity of Amy Woodforde-Finden's musical arrangements of “Four Indian Love Lyrics” the following year, the most popular of which was “Kashmiri Song”:

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
 Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?
 Whom do you lead on Rapture's roadway, far,
 Before you agonise them in farewell?

Oh, pale dispensers of my Joys and Pains,
 Holding the doors of Heaven and of Hell,
 How the hot blood rushed wildly through the veins
 Beneath your touch, until you waved farewell.

Pale hands, pink tipped, like Lotus buds that float
 On those cool waters where we used to dwell,
 I would have rather felt you round my throat,
 Crushing out life, than waving me farewell!

The poems, with their eroticism and violence, were not only different from earlier Anglo-Indian poetry, they were unlike anything previously seen in England, or in America, where they were also acclaimed.

When I have slowly drawn my knife across you,
 Taking my pleasure as I see you swoon,
 I shall sleep sound, worn out by love's last fervour,
 And then, God grant your kinsmen kill me soon!

She was, as Richard Garnett wrote in 1905, "a writer with a field all her own, and likely to remain so." Perhaps her closest affinities are with the Decadent poets; Harold Herbert Williams, writing on the eve of the First World War, thought her "directly descended from the writers of the *Yellow Book* and *Savoy*." "Her background is different," he wrote, "but in psychological subtlety and frankness she was nearer to Mr. Arthur Symons than any other modern poet" (142). Occasionally her treatment of Indian themes was compared to the rediscovery of Irish mythology by the Celtic revivalists.

More frequently, however, she was associated with poets like Edwin Arnold, Rudyard Kipling, and Edward Fitzgerald, even Thomas Moore and Shelley: poets who had also treated non-Western subjects through exoticist strategies. Whether her work was also to be considered with other works of Indian poetry in "literary" translation – i.e. Sir William Jones's *Sacontala*, various works by Edwin Arnold, etc. – remained, for reasons which will be explored below, a vexed question.

A second book, *Stars of the Desert*, appeared in 1903 while the Nicolsns were in London following a sojourn in North Africa. During that year she had some intercourse with literary society (notably meeting Thomas Hardy at the home of Blanche Crackanthorpe) but the identity of "Laurence Hope" was not widely known. In 1904 the Nicolsns returned to India, but in August, Malcolm died during a routine prostate operation. Two months later, Violet committed suicide,

swallowing a corrosive poison. A friend wrote to Hardy, who wrote an anonymous obituary for the *Athenaeum*. This was later expanded at the request of her publisher, William Heinemann, into a preface for her third book. Heinemann, however, declined to use the preface in the volume, which appeared in 1905 as *Indian Love*.

There was little question of her popularity. The “tropical luxuriance and Sapphic fervour” of her first volume “attracted the attention of so many readers that a second and third edition of the book were demanded,” wrote Thomas Hardy in his 1904 obituary. By 1907, the question of her popularity had reached sufficiently alarming proportions – these were, after all the years of the “Slump in Poetry”¹⁹ – for James Elroy Flecker to make it the main subject of an article on the poet in the *Monthly Review*, which he began by observing that:

Laurence Hope has succeeded where most modern poets have failed, older and greater than this woman who died so young. She has created for herself a world of admirers, a multitude of initiants—a Public. Therefore she is bound to fascinate those who diligently inquire into the modern mind, and who love to grasp the elusive psychology of the present. . . . Other Muses of to-day are widely loved, Imperial Muses, worthy of respect; but there is as little mystery about their attractions as doubt of their divinity. It is harder to account for nine impressions of “The Garden of Kama” (164)

That Laurence Hope’s “world of admirers” and “multitude of initiants” was extensive enough to buy out nine impressions of her first book (not to mention her second and third books) does indeed raise important questions.

II. The Real Thing, or a Clever Simulation?

The first question reviewers tended to ask was whether the translations were authentic or not. The

¹⁹ See Neil Covey, “The Decline of Poetry and Hardy’s Empty Hall” (*Victorian Poetry* 31, Spring 1993): 67.

confusion was aptly expressed by the early reviewer in the March 15, 1902 *Athenaeum*, who wrote, "It is not clear to us precisely what Mr. Laurence Hope means by 'arrangement,' or whether Valgovind, Mahomed Akram, Zahir-u-Din, Taj Mahomed, and others, to whom many of these verses are ascribed, are more than projections of his own poetic personality." At least several passages, the review goes on to suggest, "betray an Anglo-Indian rather than a native inspiration." In general, however, the reviewer finds the poems both appealing and convincing:

Mr. Hope has caught admirably the dominant notes of this Indian love poetry, its delirious absorption in the instant, its out-of-door air, its melancholy. Slender brown limbs stir silently in the garden where the flying foxes cross the moon, in the hot jasmine-scented jungle, among the pink almond blossoms of Kandahar. And always there is the poignant sense of the fleetness of love, a moment's salvage from the flux of years. . .

While "Mr. Hope leaves on one side a great deal, in particular the squalor and tawdriness of India as the average man sees it," he "brings us into a region of native feeling and imagination never yet fully explored." The review is a model of equivocation: the poems may be projections of the poet's personality, or they may not; some poems "betray an Anglo-Indian rather than a native inspiration" and yet somehow "the dominant notes of this Indian love poetry" have been caught, and the reader is brought into "a region of native feeling and imagination." The "dominant notes" that signify the poems' Indian-ness are evidently authentic, or at least admirable, because exotic.

This pattern of hedging one's bets, followed by a rationalizing observation that it did not matter, was to become the reviewers' paradigm in discussions of the authenticity question. The difficult part was explaining why it did not matter, which appears to have been less difficult than one might expect. For as the poet Edith Thomas was to suggest a few months later in a 1902 review in the *Critic*, the situation was not so different from that of Fitzgerald's *Rubdiydt of Omar Khayyam*. "The genius of the translator, or the adapter, is so flexibly great, in both the cases cited, that we are made, *first*, to feel the equivalence and kinship of human emotion and desire wherever on this earth they have their action and being; and, *afterwards*, to discern the special marks of race differentiation

and the outlines of the strange landscape in which they have their setting.” Thomas thought Mr. Hope's poems transmitted remarkably well this “racial” temperament – “the wondrous lethal fascination and the 'Inherent Cruelty of Things' in the ancient land of Vishnu.” The *Indian Love Lyrics*, she suggested, could be thought of as a worthy addition to “the aggregation of such temperamental songs of a race as 'The Roumanian Folk-Lore Songs,' or the recent Celtic revival by Mr. Yeats and others.”

The critic William Morton Payne, in the January, 1903 *Dial*, wrote reprovingly,

It is a pretense easy of penetration that would have us think of Mr. Laurence Hope's collection of “India's Love Lyrics” as translations, or even paraphrases, of Eastern originals. The title-page admits that Mr. Hope has “collected and arranged” these poems; it might as well have said outright that he is their author.

And yet, “they are Indian in theme, no doubt, and Indian in their warmth and color, as well as in their sentiment and imagery,” he concedes, in what must be read either as a sudden change of heart, or, more likely, an attempt to hedge on the authenticity question. “Possibly a few of them,” he even hazards, “have as their actual basis some folksong or lyrical legend of the Orient.”

The only review that seriously grappled with the authenticity question appeared in the *Calcutta Review* of April 1904. The *Calcutta Review*, established as far back as the 1840s, was the most important of the Indian literary reviews. Though the anonymous review had the general title “Western Interpreters of Eastern Verse,” it was actually a sustained attack on the authenticity of *The Garden of Kama*. India has been the land of opportunity for many – soldiers, civilians, and writers, the reviewer suggests. “But, there is one class of writer, who has made 'opportunity' of India, in a way we cannot but resent. I refer to those who indulge a taste for the forbidden, and—indecent, by sheltering behind a misrepresentation of a country their knowledge of which may be summed up in the bare fact that it is the home of elemental passion.”

Laurence Hope is not at this point named, though it is clear that she is the sole representative of a type, of which, indeed, no other example is offered. Rather than take a direct

attack, the reviewer begins with a general question about the interpretation of other cultures as a form of quest:

We read into the things we see, that which we bring to them. Whence else should the taint come?

“What went ye out for to seek?” That is the crucial question in life. The answer belongs to the seeker, helping or condemning his soul's progress: and it belongs to him alone, except when he poses as *interpreter*.

Then, is it the duty of the interpreted, to deny his imputations: to prove that he speaks in the language of what land he will – in the language of his own heart, perchance – but not in the language of the East.

For, whence come his interpretations, if not from his personality? It is an interesting question.

Certainly the literature of the East, rightly read, does not justify him. (480)

The seeker finds what he brings with him; this is to be expected. But for the seeker to locate his own quest in an *actual* other, and, in doing so, to misrepresent that other, is, the reviewer recognizes, a dangerous move. It is thus necessary for the “interpreted” to question the accuracy of the interpretation: in effect, to refuse the interpretation and to relocate the object of the quest instead as a projection of the seeker.

But how to demonstrate that this is a misrepresentation? First, it must be shown that the “essence” of the East depicted here is different from that of the “true” essence of the East, with which the reviewer claims intimate familiarity:

All the world throbs to one pulse in the East. Men and women take the mystery of God's great Life-gift, as simply as does the flower or animal life around them. The West, with its taint of the “civilized,” its cleavage between human and animal and vegetable, its suggestions of the improper – born, of necessity of its highly developed civilization – looks on, and reads into the wondrous work of creation, thoughts of ugliness and ill. Not all the West, of a truth; but this “West” to which I now refer. (478)

Second, this general attitude to “the mystery of God's great Life” must be demonstrated to be not only coincident with the reviewer's own experience, but also identical with that found in an empirical survey of the various poetic traditions of India, a more difficult requirement. The reviewer cites

representative passages from the early Vedic hymns, with their nature worship; from the erotic Radha-Krishna poetry of the twelfth century (a prime example – the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva – had been translated by Edwin Arnold as “The Indian Song of Songs” several decades before), which, though passionate and erotic, may be interpreted allegorically as devotional poetry; from seventeenth-century Maratha poetry; and from Persian poetry, which, he acknowledges, is often erotic. But this eroticism is of a different sort from that of Laurence Hope. “The instinct of the Eastern, is to draw a veil over the things which really move him” (486). The language of love is always metaphorical, never direct.

“After this *résumé* of Indian verse,” the reviewer writes, “we, of the East, may be forgiven, if we object to the title.”

Her verses are not Eastern, in the sense of being translations: not Eastern are they either, in their monotonous passion, and unbeautiful suggestion.

Laurence Hope has arrested just one aspect of human love, and that not the highest. Her lyre has one note, and she twangs it, like the insistent maddening call of the brain-fever bird. No half-tones are there, no light and shade in her love-pictures: nothing is there elusive, nothing mysterious, rarely anything really poetical. Plainly are things material written and labelled; gross are the details, ugly the images.

In no sense are lyrics such as these Eastern: in no sense – Sanskritic, Persian, or contemporary.

The reviewer has evidently read the earlier reviews, which influence the critical language: the one-stringed lyre of the early *Athenaeum* review, though here not an instrument on which the poet “has caught admirably the dominant notes of this Indian love poetry,” or one “capable of sounding heights and depths of passion that few poets of this day and generation have reached,” as Edith Thomas would later write, but one which “she twangs . . . like the insistent maddening call of the brain-fever bird.”

A few of the poems, the reviewer concedes, are “pretty,” “but, on the other hand, one turns in disgust from *the Song by Gulbaz*, or the horror of *the Story of Udaipur*, told by Lalji [sic] – and

many more not quotable.” “The glorious Eastern night, with its weird mysteries, its converse with the illimitable, suggests nothing to her, as a rule, but the licentious.” Having sufficiently expressed his distaste for this subject matter, the reviewer returns to the main argument. If the comparative resumé is not sufficient to demonstrate the poems' inauthenticity (and it may be pointed out that it would take a very long resumé indeed to exhaust all of the possible sources in the Indian subcontinent) more proof is to be found in the details: “Her lovers go for shade to a *babul* tree. They might as well sit under a lamp-post, or a cactus!”; “Her skies overhead are 'violet' and 'lilac' – a colour rarely seen in India, except along the horizon, and before a storm” (488-89). “Eastern men do not discuss their women-folk in public,” as Mahomed Akram suggests in his “Reminiscence”:

Often across the Banqueting board at nights
Men linger about your name in careless praise –
The name that cuts deep into my soul like a knife. . .

“The 'Kama' verses show none of that tender reverence and solicitude” which is accorded to women in India. “Again, the faithfulness of Indian wives is proverbial. The only apparent wife-song in the volume is *The Regret of the Ranee*; and she, with her husband and brethren lying dead at his hand, – thinks forbidden thoughts of the stranger whom they have brought to her for condemnation.”

“In truth are these things difficult to be known by strangers: but why then write love-lyrics which you call *Indian*? Label them otherwise.” The point is well taken. The “Indian Love Lyrics” are certainly a misrepresentation of Indian life, if they are indeed taken as being “representative.” And, as we have seen, they *were* taken as being representative, even, paradoxically, when their authenticity was questioned. The potential damage of such misrepresentations was utterly lost on most critics, whose obliviousness reaffirmed the unspoken belief that it was the West's prerogative to represent the East in whatever fashion pleased it most. The Calcutta reviewer understands this danger well enough: why should the people of India be presented in this manner? “One may be forgiven the wish,” he concludes, retaining a touch of humor, “that when she writes again, it might be neither of Love, nor of India – or, at least not of Indian Love” (489).

It is evident that none of the other reviewers cited in this essay read the *Calcutta Review's* critique. The closest thing to an informed opinion came when a reviewer in the *Spectator* cited another book under review whose author had consulted a native about Laurence Hope. The author was C. F. Usborne, and the other book was *Panjabi Lyrics and Proverbs*, published in the same year as Laurence Hope's *Last Poems*. As the reviewer notes, the "native" in question had informed Usborne that although it was beautiful poetry, the sentiment seemed to him entirely Western.²⁰ "This is enough to make the rashest critic pause," wrote the *Spectator's* reviewer "for the conventional comment on 'Laurence Hope's' books is that they breathe the authentic spirit of the East."

Yet we think we can understand the point of view. It is the sentiment of the East; but the form of its expression, the self-consciousness, the clear analysis, the wider horizon, are entirely Western. The philosophy of life might be that of an Oriental woman, with its humility before man, as the master of the household, and its preoccupation with love and children; but it is impossible to imagine any Oriental attaining so articulate and passionate an expression.

Thus racism enters the picture again: the inarticulate East, the comprehending West. The reviewer's flash of insight utterly disregards the wisdom of Usborne's native informant, however, whose opinion on the poems was based on the observation that the examples of the thoughts and behavior of Oriental womanhood presented in the poems could hardly be said to depict the philosophy of life of an Oriental woman since "respectable women neither did these thing[s] nor said them, and that for a woman to make any display of affection towards a man was most indelicate" (v).

In the years following the poet's death the general tendency among reviewers was to acknowledge the unresolved authenticity problem but to dismiss its importance. "It is uncertain how

²⁰ The fuller account in Usborne reads: "He replied that respectable women neither did these thing[s] nor said them, and that for a woman to make any display of affection towards a man was most indelicate. I suggested that a woman might kiss her husband. 'No,' said my friend, 'it would be considered most immodest. She may be kissed, but she must not kiss.' I do not know whether my friend was an authority on these subjects, but *prima facie* one would think that if such rules are conscientiously observed love making in the East must be a little dull" (v).

many of her poems are translations, how many original, and it is not profitable to spend time in inquiring," wrote the *Academy's* reviewer in 1905. "The stamp of her individuality is on all her work, so indelibly that whether it be translated or direct becomes a matter of small importance." Brian Hooker,²¹ writing in the *Bookman* in 1909, agreed: "it is not, of course, of the smallest importance whether her Oriental atmosphere and detail are in fact accurate and correct, any more than it matters whether the Celtic Revival school reproduce correctly the spirit of old Celtic literature." In his chapter on Hope in *Indian Dust* (1909) Otto Rothfeld thought it "impertinent to enquire" (211), though he felt certain the poems had at least "drawn their inspiration mainly from the world of Islam and the Persian poets." And literary historian Harold Herbert Williams, who believed that "many of her poems are translations, adaptations or imitations," thought it did "not matter to the general reader or the lover of literature which are which" for "he will be content if he find real poetry which gives him an intimate knowledge of actual life" (152).

Nowhere was this attitude more ironically apparent than in the *New Republic's* disparaging review of the talented Indian poet Sarojini Naidu's second book of poetry in 1916. There was "nothing specially Hindoo in the book now published" the reviewer complained.

Laurence Hope was as European in origin as Sarojini Naidu is Hindoo, yet it is Laurence Hope who seems closest to India and her verse less pastiche. Laurence Hope, throbbing out her burning passionate soul, needed just India for a setting – needed the cruel heat of the Indian day and the hallucination of the Indian night. But Sarojini Naidu's poems might have suggested themselves in Connaught or Cornwall or even in New Jersey. She seems Indian by obligation: take away the Indian decoration, which is extraneous and not, in sum, very much, and what have you but some very musical western poetry – English poetry?²²

Naidu, who had been for many years deeply involved in India's nationalist movement (she had read

²¹ Hooker was a minor poet better known as a writer of libretti, notably his later adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

²² "Another Hindoo Poet," *New Republic* 9 (30 Dec. 1916): 247.

one of her more strongly nationalist poems at the previous year's meeting of the Indian National Congress), could hardly compete with Laurence Hope's burning, passionate India.

The critical attitude that poetry is valuable as poetry without reference to its content is still widely held; but, of course, it matters a great deal whether the poems of Laurence Hope are indeed translations, or whether they are instead imaginative projections of one sort or another. The critical ambivalence about this question may be attributed to at least two causes. First, critics probably were somewhat embarrassed by their inability to declare definitively whether or not the poems were in fact translations, and found the argument that the distinction was unimportant appealing for that reason. Secondly, it must be conceded that many of these critics had an extremely vague notion of India and "The East," and were prepared to accept its "truth" on the basis of its relative conformity with previously received notions.

III. The Lure of the Exotic

But ambivalence about the authenticity question may be attributed to a third cause as well: it was preferable to think of the poems, with their violent eroticism, as somehow deriving from an Eastern source, certainly far preferable to thinking of them as originating in the imagination of a British woman. The pseudonymous "Periscope" in a 1923 *Blackwood's* article on "Anglo-Indian Poetry" bluntly observed, "The poems purport to be for the most part adaptations of Eastern originals, and one hopes that this is the case. It will save her from the charge which with good reason is levelled against many present-day women novelists, and she can always plead that the ideas are those of the originals." Nicolson's American publisher, John Lane, stressed the distinction in his advertising circular for *Stars of the Desert*: "Let the reader who desires to enjoy the real beauties of this collection, never forget as he reads, that these are the love songs of young Eastern blood, whose laws of conduct were framed to fit their temperament, not ours" (Gilder). Thus the author was protected

from the charge of immorality, and the poems became part of the literature of exoticism for an audience which appears to have demanded not authenticity precisely, but merely the appearance of authenticity, which served to mark the text as part of an authorized project of knowledge-collection concerning regions of actual or potential imperial interest.

With a vast quantity of exotica being produced, as was the case at the turn of the century, critics were of necessity somewhat suspicious about its value. Otto Rothfeld, in 1909, wrote:

“The glorious East” and “the mysterious Orient” have long become the commonplaces both of literature and journalism, both “of that which is unreadable and of that which is never read.” The poet finds melody in the music of an Indian name or seeks images from the storied vale and water-borne gardens of Kashmir. The journalist flies for three months from Bombay to Calcutta, and bespangles his vivid columns with local colour of “gaudy hues” and “silken curtains” and “opalescent skies” for the delight of his anaemic readers in the London suburbs – readers who seek in the silly anaesthesia of sentimental romance and tasteless epithet relief from the dreary round of servile work and trivial monotony. (205)

The cheap exoticism of commonplace melodic imagery and obligatory local colour provides a literary opiate for the urban masses Rothfeld sees as its consumers. The banality of exoticism is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in the *Saturday Review's* notice of the illustrated *Songs from the Garden of Kama* (1909) which dryly observed: “Love songs in the Oriental vein are a severe test for any poet. In this book they maintain a perfect level of unexciting fluency.” Rothfeld, writing about Hope in the same year, took an opposite position, writing effusively: “to her the observation of alien emotions, unknown desires, has brought a thought so transformed that from her lips fall the fiery words, true because unreal, universal because not individual, in which she expresses a mood, a passion, or a temperament, not yet felt or known of any, yet motive in a whole nation's varied life” (208-9).

A new exotic discovery grows old quite quickly, and the public appetite for the exotic is always for the new. The *Athenaeum's* reviewer of 1905 was somewhat disappointed that in the last book,

there is little novelty in the presentment of her favourite theme--the East. It may well be that readers whose hearts are there can never feel satiated with rice-fields and jungles, the champa tree and the datura, tom-toms and "the odour of sun-warmed fur"; but to the Western mind such things, though pleasant enough for a while, being exotic, are apt to become a burden if there be not some variety of treatment or thought to save them from dullness.

But then it is remarkable, given the short life of exotica, that Laurence Hope's fascination continued so long, in spite of the occasional critic's observation that her novelty was used up.

It is somewhat curious in retrospect that respectable critics with some knowledge about imperial regions would find in the poems of Laurence Hope confirmation of their image of India. What was this image? For Edith Thomas it was "the wondrous lethal fascination and the 'Inherent Cruelty of Things' in the ancient land of Vishnu," and "The refined cruelty of the Asiatic indifference to life." For Harold Herbert Williams she "communicates the spell and mysterious fascination of the blue skies and bronze shadows of the Orient, its vast inchoate life, its silences, the age-old habits of its life and thought, its perfumes, its passions, hates, loves and the transient swiftness of its youth" (143).

The reality of India as "the exotic" was in its effect on the reader, and for many readers, this effect was all that could be desired. "She holds the gorgeous East in fee," wrote Brian Hooker,

and through her we hear our own dreams of it -- of fierce joys and pains, a swarming vividness of life, a fate cruelly smiling, death-cries trodden under the feet of interminable generations and sultry fevers of desire. It is a new dream, intensely modern and a little unhealthy; but it has a tone and colour of its own, and it will find a place in our literature and live there.

Hooker's language captures perfectly the paradox of the exotic: the poems are at the same time both dream and reality, a projected fantasy that becomes, through the poet's creative intensity, a curious reality, destined, in Hooker's view, to live a life of its own.

IV. But was it Literature?

If the critics were ambivalent about the authenticity of the translations, they were also divided about the quality of the verse. The divisions in part reflect the critical split between the two dominant modes of poetry of the day: the decadent or aestheticist mode, which valued subtlety and suggestion, valued art for art's sake, indentified with the figure of the dandy, and professed disdain for middle-class taste; and the opposing school, which preferred direct statement, stressed the social and political function of poetry, figured the poet as vigorous and virile, and embraced the middle class audience. The aesthetes and decadents – including such poets as Symons, Wilde, Yeats, – traced a lineage through Pater, Swinburne, and the French Symbolists, while the virile school – including Kipling, Henley, Newbolt, and poet Laureate Alfred Austin – generally tried in vain to fill the shoes of Tennyson. While many poets – Hardy, Meredith, to name a few – did not fit easily into either camp, the values represented by these two directions in poetry did a great deal to form critical responses to new poetry.

While Laurence Hope clearly tended in the direction of the decadent poets, there were certain affinities with the virile school. Her style was direct, perhaps owing something to the music hall lyric, her diction accessible. She did not court the middle-class audience, but neither did she disdain it. Critics often commented on the “force” of her poems, which was a way of potentially aligning them with the virility school; generally, however, they were not quite forceful or vigorous enough to suit these critics.

Approval or disapproval was often directed at the poet's skill at prosody, although such judgements more often than not reflected the critics overall attitude toward the work in question rather than any strict analysis of poetic technique. Thus critics who liked Laurence Hope's poems were likely to assess her technical skills favorably. The quality of the poems was often observed to be uneven.

V. Gender and the Woman Poet

There is some evidence however, that the criticism of the defects of the poetry of Laurence Hope was not unrelated to the revelation of the poet's female identity. The early reviews, though not unequivocally positive, are generally either positive or negative; in the later reviews the positive aspects are invariably balanced by negative ones. This was to be expected in a literary world where women poets were assumed to be naturally inferior to their male counterparts. James Elroy Flecker could state as late as 1907 that "we have never before had an English poet who was a woman," noting that "Mrs. Browning hardly ever wrote a line that was structurally good; the veiled majesty and demure sorrow of Christina Rossetti proclaim her a recluse and a devotee" (164).

Thomas Hardy believed that the assumption of a male pseudonym by Mrs. Nicolson was a mistake. In his unpublished preface to the last volume he wrote:

one may feel a passing regret that by not using on her title page the name she actually bore — far from an unattractive one — or a distinctly feminine pseudonym if some disguise were her fancy, she should have refrained in her authorship from an avowal of sex which would have thrown light at the beginning on the sentiment of her canticles. In the long run women almost invariably lose more than they gain by masquerading on the literary stage in male attire.

But was this a fair assessment of the literary scene at the time? Although women were assumed to make up the bulk of readers, and played a significant role in the world of literary journals, poetry was at the time considered primarily a male occupation. It could not have hurt the reception of her first book that it was received as if written by a male author; and the positive reception her work attained at this time was difficult to retract later on, after her books had proven successful. Had her first book been published under a woman's name, it would have been subject to more careful moral scrutiny, and would have been more likely to be thought improper by the critics. And as we have

seen, critics had no need to criticize a book on moral grounds; the moral aspects of a work were often criticized through the ostensibly formal qualities. Technical errors of grammar, style, rhythm, etc., could always be found, and provided ready material for any critic who wished to express disapproval of a book.

That the male pseudonym was no haphazard decision is illustrated by the curious gender-neutrality of many of the poems. "It seemed equally difficult to attribute them as a whole to a woman or to a man," recalled Richard Garnett in 1905. The poet obviously went to some pains to ensure that the book could be read as if it had been written by a man; in many cases, for example, the love object of a poem is described in a vague or evasive manner to allow it to be understood as a person of either sex. One has only to read the essays of Flecker or Rothfeld to perceive that gender deeply affected the readings given to the poems by their critics. Particularly in these heated years of the women's movement, it was all too easy for male preconceptions about "the nature of women" to deeply color the reading of a woman's poetry.

As in the cases of the other critical questions discussed thus far, the question of the gender of Laurence Hope's readers provoked disagreement. The *Academy* reviewer wrote:

Laurence Hope is a man's poet, although femininity is apparent in almost every line; even her delineations of a man's point of view show it. She is a man's poet, because she was not ashamed to confine herself to subjects of which women are as a rule taught to be afraid. Nothing but her intense feeling for beauty and her glowing Eastern images, could make her work palatable to the average Western woman, who could neither feel nor understand the fire of such a nature.

For Flecker, on the other hand, the answer to the riddle of her popularity could only be her female audience: "the true cause must be sought in the nature of the feminine – in the appreciation of Laurence Hope by her sex" (164). Not that most women are like "the wild untrammelled creatures of impulse, the primitive and savage beings that Laurence Hope would have them to be," any more than most men are like Don Juan, Flecker hastens to add. "Yet perhaps more of her sex sympathise

with this elemental Muse of the whirlwind than would ever care to own or be able to realise the slightest affinity" (165). Laurence Hope knows women better than most women know themselves, and so they are irresistibly drawn to her work.

Otto Rothfeld was even more desirous of making Laurence Hope's women into icons of femininity. "If Laurence Hope has done nothing else," he wrote, "she has at least done this, that she has laid bare the longing of the woman for the man" (215-16). The devoted slave woman thus becomes the general type of womanhood. Even more amazingly, Rothfeld, struggling to come to grips with the overpowering images of female sexual desire in the poems, concludes that these represent "the distinctive cry for maternity":

It is curious to reflect that the lyrical writings of the world should so far have failed to give expression to that overpowering and biologically natural will for maternity which alone, one must suppose, can have made matrimony tolerable to any beautiful women, which alone could make her submit to the stringent regulations of the oldest Guild in the world. And yet it is not unnatural, since men have been mainly the poets of the world, and no man can know more than dimly conjecture that wild craving. (214)

But Rothfeld has not quite reached the apogee of absurdity which he attains in the following lyrical passage which ends his book:

In the melody of her lines is shaped the image of one, fair and straight, poised on a pinnacle, in the rays of the golden sun, her wheaten skin flushed with desire, modest but not afraid, smiling and earnest, as at a sacrament, with her arms indeed outstretched to man, but her eyes stedfastly [sic] ever gaze on that dazzling firmament where she alone reads the future strivings of her race – eternal symbol of woman at her highest – at once Wife and Mistress and Mother. (216)

It is difficult to imagine a greater misreading of the poems. And yet, it is merely the question of the poet's gender and its relation to the poems which inspires these flights of fancy; at other points, such as in his perceptive observations about the psychological appeal of exoticism, Rothfeld's comments are quite perceptive.

Other critics saw Laurence Hope less as “representative woman” and more as a curious, feminine anomaly. “No woman has written lines so full of a strange primeval savagery,” observed the *Spectator's* critic in 1905, referring to the poem “Atavism”:

Deep in the jungle vast and dim,
 That knew not a white man's feet,
 I smelt the odour of sun-warmed fur,
 Musky, savage, and sweet.

Far it was from the huts of men
 And the grass where Sambur feed;
 I threw a stone at a Kadapu tree
 That bled as a man might bleed.

Scent of fur and colour of blood: —
 And the long dead instincts rose,
 I followed the lure of my season's mate, —
 And flew, bare-fanged, at my foes.
 * * *

Pale days: and a league of laws
 Made by the whims of men.
 Would I were back with my furry cubs
 In the dusk of a jungle den.

That primitivism could appeal to the female poet as well as the male clearly came as a surprise to some readers, who were already accustomed to its masculine versions.

VI. The Scandal of Confession

Despite the poet's elaborate devices of concealment – the pseudonym, the pretense of translation, the fictionalized characters – it is apparent, and was apparent even to some of her contemporaries, that the poems were deeply personal, even confessional. The “Dedication to Malcolm Nicolson” (which prefaces the last volume) with its specific references to her husband and to her (projected) suicide, invited such speculations, while providing at the same time an ambiguous disclaimer:

I, who of lighter love wrote many a verse,
 Made public never words inspired by thee,

Lest strangers' lips should carelessly rehearse
 Things that were sacred and too dear to me.

Thy soul was noble; through these fifteen years
 Mine eyes familiar, found no fleck nor flaw,
 Stern to thyself, thy comrades' faults and fears
 Proved generosity thine only law.

Small joy was I to thee; before we met
 Sorrow had left thee all too sad to save.
 Useless my love—as vain as this regret
 That pours my hopeless life across thy grave.

In our day we are accustomed to such poetry; the influence of the “confessional poets” – Lowell, Berryman, Plath, Sexton – in the American poetry scene of the 1950s and 1960s has made poetry which reveals aspects of the poet's personal life which are private and often deeply fraught with emotion acceptable, even ordinary. In Laurence Hope's day, however, it was not at all clear that poetry ought to penetrate into such private places.

It was particularly the last volume that inspired some outrage on the part of critics in relation to what was perceived by a few reviewers as their confessional nature. Henry Bruce thought that “The last of Mrs. Nicolson's volumes, though the least in poetical value, is personally the most revealing. There are pieces in it which, despite her warning, it is impossible not to connect with her life” (160). The reviewer in the *Academy* thought it necessary to “criticism . . . the painful revelation in the latest poems.” “The dedication and some of the other verses,” the reviewer observed, “force an active imagination to read between the lines matters which the mind instinctively feels it is intrusive in formulating. Some women of emotional temperament have this lack of final reticence under the pressure of sorrow, and seem to take a fierce pleasure in inviting the whole world to gaze upon their holy of holies.”

H. Pearl Humphry was even more explicit about exactly what it was that she found offensive in the poems. While “the three Grand Masters of lawlessness” to whom Humphry compares Laurence Hope “take the whole earth for subject, and, on occasion, range both above it and below

it; Laurence Hope takes only love, and physical love at that.”

This fact of the limits of her theme is, perhaps, responsible for some of the verses in “Indian Love,” where she touches on her own relations with her husband, and enters on revelation of a purely personal kind. This is an error in taste, if not in art. There are certain intimate things which one feels should never be told; and there is a dual reason for wishing that the poems had been kept impersonal. First, one is repelled by the lack of essential reticence; second, the sense of tragedy and personal pain is so strong that wandering, or rather, being compelled, into a Hospital “theatre” during an operation would scarcely be a more unwelcome experience. Everyone admits that physical pain is to be depicted, whether in art, in literature, or on the stage, with certain limitations; and when these are over-stepped, not even the cry of Realism can save the depicor from a storm of criticism. The same rule ought to obtain with mental anguish also, especially when it is of the violent kind which is almost physical in itself. Shakespeare once or twice touched the limits of what can be borne. The last scene of “King Lear,” for instance, contains as much as most people could support of mental grief and anguish. Laurence Hope certainly offends in this respect. It may have given her relief to write her sufferings down; but there was no need that these verses should have been published. They give a stronger impression of indelicacy than her most outspoken lines elsewhere. (144-45)

The transgression cited here is of two sorts: first, an invasion of the domestic sphere, into the sanctity of marital relations; and second, the revelation of excessive mental grief and anguish. Violet Nicolson had broken the taboo of exoticism: she had left too obvious a key to the link between the exotic world of her poetry and her life, and what this link revealed was too much for at least one critic to bear.

VII. Passionate Sincerity

But not unrelated to the horror of the confessional was a quality appreciated by many critics: her sincerity. “She is so hotly in earnest that it seems beside the mark to criticise her for technical carelessness, or an occasional lapse into the obvious,” wrote the *Academy's* reviewer. Flecker, too, remarked on this quality, referring to “this curiously sincere poetess” (164) and citing lines such as

the following:

They say that Love is a light thing,
A foolish thing and a slight thing,
 A ripe fruit, rotten at core;
They speak in this futile fashion
To me, who am wracked with passion,
Tormented beyond compassion,
 For ever and ever more.

“In the throes of despair or passion,” Flecker theorized, “the almost involuntary whispers of an imaginative mind are stray echoes of phrases we have loved, grotesquely blended with the stage-worn rhetoric of the occasion.” Yet this blending of the mind’s involuntary whispers with “stage-worn rhetoric of the occasion” does not necessarily result in an utterance valuable as literature. It does so only, according to Flecker, “when the faculties of a writer are so concentrated, so technically supreme, that the sensations cannot become vilified by borrowed or inadequate or inharmonious language.” And when this fortuitous combination of sincerity and technical mastery occurs, the result is “worthy poems of experience written not less sincere and far more splendid.” And while Laurence Hope, a “sincere but imperfect artist” generally lacks this mastery, “very often the glow of passion transfuses lead into gold.” Harold Herbert Williams, too, was entranced by “the power and spell of deep and sincere emotion” in her poetry (144).

It was not the sincerity alone but the sincerity in combination with passion that appealed to many readers. For there was little disagreement about the passionate nature of her poetry. As Williams remarks, “the passion and fire of Laurence Hope’s lyric inspiration is astonishing” (142). The very significance of *The Garden of Kama*, observed the 1902 *Athenaeum* reviewer, was “the tremulous, irrecoverable deliciousness of young passion.” The second and third volumes, *Stars of the Desert* (1903) and *Last Poems* (1905) reinforced the association of Laurence Hope with passion. The *Academy’s* reviewer hoped “that in these three volumes of tropical verse, which are like the white-hot lava from a crater, a vexed and passionate spirit has dissipated its inquietude,” while the *Athenaeum’s* 1905 reviewer thought that “In this last book the passion is beginning to seem forced,

the colour is fading. It would seem that the vein which the author worked successfully was nearing exhaustion.”

A number of reviewers, not surprisingly, objected to the passionate eroticism of the poetry. The erotic element of Laurence Hope's poetry was one that could hardly be avoided by reviewers. But how should it be treated? The responses vary widely. Her admirers generally thought her treatment of the theme to be well-handled, and their approval of her eroticism often figures in their approval of her work, although some of her admirers felt she transgressed somewhat. Her less approving critics tended to find her eroticism excessive or in bad taste, and their disapproval of this aspect often though not always figured prominently among reasons for dismissal in those critics who rejected her work. “If the total effect of his book is somewhat monotonous and cloying, that is due chiefly to the theme, which harps perpetually on a single string of love,” wrote the 1902 *Athenaeum* reviewer. The 1905 *TLS* reviewer finds that the poems “touch on one side the love of women--the women of the Western's East; on the other the jungle-lusts of the tiger,” and returned gratefully to “that other Laurence, Mr. Binyon, thankful that there are more ways than one of making and singing love.”

Henry Bruce is typical of the type of critic who approved of Laurence Hope's “honest eroticism”:

Few women, when writing of love, have been so poignant and penetrating, within lyric forms, as Mrs. Nicolson. For the sake of propriety, one must insist that the passion of these poems is a legitimate as that of the “Portuguese Sonnets.” In a line of Mrs Nicolson's own : “Licit thy pleasure and honoured thy pain.” Yet in fancy she doubtless wandered further: “But till my limb are dust, I have my Fancies.” Honest eroticism has its place in life and in literature, as she doubly showed. A whole philosophy of love might be built up from her writings. (241)

Harold Williams was generally appreciative of her eroticism – “with all her insistence on a single aspect of life, she rarely sinks, like many erotic poets, into meaningless ecstasy” (145) – but at the same time thought “the pervasion of her lyrics with the neurosis of sex” to be “a mode of the Paris

boulevard and the ballet stage of London,” rather than a reflection of “the thought of the East, which accepts woman without vexation of spirit as an ordinary incident of life” (142).

VIII. A Singular Lack of Restraint

Many critics commented on her lack of restraint. As a review in the *Literary World* (1904) put it:

In *Stars of the Desert* the emphasis laid on the erotic is far too heavy. There never was an easier task than that of attracting attention by means of verses laden with such excesses of passionate utterance as those expressed by Laurence Hope in these pages. A frankness is used that reminds us of some from among the most daring of the modern French poets. To be quite candid, we think Laurence Hope has overstepped the proper limits

The reviewer went on to offer moral guidance to the poet, with the reassurance that “nothing could be more certain than that this author has no need to commit extravagances, for in this book there are numerous proofs of an ability remarkable enough to succeed without the help of dangerous instruments.” “A true artist,” it was pointed out, “can make the right effect without an indiscreet use of the more violent colours.”

Some reviewers blamed this on the subject matter. “The songs deal, for the most part, with the loves of women – dancing girls, temple girls, and the like – often expressing with a singular lack of restraint which may be, indeed, oriental,” wrote the *Athenaeum's* reviewer in 1905. H. Pearl Humphry wrote extensively about Laurence Hope's “lawlessness.” Flecker remarks on her “half-scandalous appetite for free speech.” The *Spectator* in 1909 thought the new illustrated edition “a deserved tribute to a remarkable, if undisciplined book” (153).

In some cases this lawlessness was characterized as a kind of primitive savagery, a reading, it should be noted, encouraged in certain poems by the poet herself. “These fierce utterances, which are now and then almost the ravings of passion, are the work of a woman now dead,” the *TLS* reviewer rather callously observed. “They touch on one side the love of women – the women of the

Western's East; on the other the jungle-lusts of the tiger. To liken these raw and savage verses to 'Poems and Ballads' is to insult the art of a great poet. Their subject, so treated by a woman of western origin, makes them remarkable."

Some critics became quite passionate themselves in their reviews. The *Academy* reviewer, for instance, wrote:

It is certain that her temperament was passionate, intensely artistic, very much over-strung, and almost inevitably bound to make a tragedy of life. She lived for long periods in Indian camps, where the sights and sounds of the tropics, in jungle and plain, by river and sea, were constantly about her, driving her in the one direction till the idea of Love, its colour and beauty, its fierceness and tragedy, seized upon her with the force of a monomania. She flung herself heart and soul, with all her power of imagery and boundless feeling for beauty, into the task of singing Love, and only Love. Now and then, nevertheless, from out a gorgeous jungle of material images comes a breath of longing for spirituality beyond and above all gratifications and delights of the body; or she turns aside with almost a jerk of impatience, from the heavy, gardenia-like scent of her chosen theme, to sing of the clean glory of health and sanity and a free life, as in "The End," and "My Desire," and "I Arise and Go Down to the River," where there is cool, salt strength to be found.

Here, the poet is over-strung, with a passionate and tragic temperament made worse by exposure to the tropics and the Indian camps, which seize upon her and drive her to fling herself heart and soul into her task of poetry, a task from which she only occasionally turns aside "with almost a jerk of impatience" for a moment of health and sanity.²³

The poet's suicide in 1904 confirmed for many critics the authenticity of her passion. The lovers who died for love in her poems were thus proved to be not merely drawn from the romantic tradition of poetry but representative of the deeply-felt convictions of the poet herself. Indeed, her explicit figuration of her suicide as "suttee" in the suicide-note dedication to her last volume was

²³ Her poetry was nevertheless anthologized in many wholesome anthologies such as *The Family Book of Best Loved Poems* (New York: Random House, 1952) and *The Home Book of Verse* (New York: Holt, 1949).

clearly intended to link her own fate to that of the tragic heroines of her poems. Again, some critics were deeply moved by this last confession, others found it excessive. Thomas Hardy in his *Athenaeum* obituary notice viewed it as a sort of operatic gesture: "the tragic circumstances of her death seem but the impassioned closing notes of her impassioned effusions." A later *Athenaeum* reviewer of her last volume thought her suicide confirmed her "singular force and passion"; Harold Williams thought it suggested her "capacity for intense passion and regret" (142). The *Academy's* reviewer was one of those deeply moved: "Neither man nor woman can withhold sympathy from the spectacle of a life which might have been noble utterly overthrown; of a spirit which might have been genius wrecked and drifting rudderless." Similarly, Richard Garnett thought that the last volume's status as the poet's "last utterance" gave it "a claim to sympathy which would redeem the shortcomings even of far inferior poetry."

Some critics merely included a formulaic statement such as "we regret to inform our readers . . .," while others side-stepped the issue of the suicide entirely. Austin Johnson's statement that "at one time her poetry had a special vogue, because of an incident to which, however, we shall make no further reference, because in truth it neither concerns the critic nor the lover of poetry" (151), a statement almost certainly referring to the fascination of some readers with her final act of passion, indicates both the fascination and the discomfort reviewers felt in addressing the matter. Indeed, earlier (1905) reviewers in the *Spectator*, *TLS*, and the *Bookman*, had studiously avoided mentioning the matter. That this avoidance was intentional was suggested by Henry Bruce, who wrote that "our robust feeling against suicide, combined with the subject of her poems, has somewhat clouded the poor lady's name" (163).

IX. Conclusion

The two films, *Less than the Dust* (1916) and *The Indian Love Lyrics* (1923), that claimed to be inspired by her poetry attest to the fact that Laurence Hope's selling power remained intact at least through the twenties, a decade which saw two new editions of Laurence Hope as well as continued reprints. The films – the first, American, starring Mary Pickford, the second, British – with their convoluted plots and racial caricatures, were part of a new era in the production and marketing of the exotic. Thereafter, if her books continued to sell – and there is evidence that they did – and her poems to appear in an occasional anthology, there was little interest among literary historians. Indeed – and despite Lesley Blanch's groundbreaking study in 1963 – the library acquisitions journal *Choice* described the arrival of a new volume of *Selected Love Lyrics* in 1968 merely as a “reissue of sentimental poetry without scholarly or historical interest.”

The reception history of “Laurence Hope” offers a valuable picture of the workings of what Edward Said has described as “imaginative” Orientalism, by which a “basic distinction between East and West” becomes “the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on” (2-3). This “basic distinction” is a prominent feature of the criticism cited here, with its frequent allusions to a “spirit of the East,” and generalizations about “Orientals.” What particularly stands out in this reception history is the general acknowledgement of a process of “fictionalization” as well as an utter disregard for its potentially dangerous consequences. The half-hearted attempts to distinguish the authentic from the fictional, and the questionable claim that the distinction was unimportant, betray a casual disregard for factuality linked to a sense that culture producers and consumers bore little responsibility for the accuracy of what was presented in the cultural sphere concerning non-Western cultures.

At the same time, however, even as one recognizes the violence of these fictionalized

representations with their very real consequences in terms of public opinion about “Orientals,” it is necessary to acknowledge the way the exotic came to function as an alternative literary space in which controversial ideas and values could be expressed with relative impunity. Exoticism was seen as an innocent game where verisimilitude was of little consequence, and its consumers tended to care little about the source or accuracy of representation and much about its aesthetic impact. The functions of this exotic space ranged from sensual titillation to serious cultural critique: exoticism was play, but it could be serious play. Though this exoticism was largely fueled by the imaginations of Westerners, it could not have been produced in a vacuum; it needed the stimulus of “authentic knowledge” of other customs and ways of life. The success of Laurence Hope's poetry clearly owed much to its successful deployment of this exotic space.

**“Couldn’t Though But Be a Bright Black Boy Again”:
Reading the “Tagore Craze”**

In the early summer of 1913 a new object appeared within the purview of English literature: a new author was created. In the history of English literary discourse Rabindranath Tagore, though 51 at the time of his appearance on the literary scene, did not previously exist, for, as Foucault tells us, “the object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations” (45). How this complex group of relations – which I shall take here to include, among other things, English literary society, colonial discourse, spiritualism, and international relations – came together to produce this discursive object, “Tagore,” and the ensuing discursive event known as the “Tagore craze” – before eventually conspiring in the decline and refusal of canonical status of the author, will be the subject of this chapter. I shall not go so far as to claim that the name “Tagore” never referred to an actual person, nor that this “person” did not take part in the production of the discursive object and event associated with his name.

No non-Western writer in English ever finessed the difficult terrain of “Otherness” more successfully than Tagore. He was, indeed, so successful, that many of his followers would have chafed at the suggestion that he was “exotic”: in the early years, at least, he was their own, somehow a part of them, although speaking from a knowledge of other worlds. “There is little doubt that what some people are largely calling the ‘Indian Renaissance,’ but which may be better described as the rise of Mr. Tagore upon the West, is, as yet, the most striking event in the poetry of the century,” claimed the *Manchester Guardian* several weeks after Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in November of 1913. But how was this conquest of English literature accomplished in a mere seventeen months?

Rabindranath Tagore arrived in England with a small entourage, including his 24-year-old

son, Rathindranath and Rathindranath's wife, Pratima, on June 16, 1912. He had been in England twice before (once during his studies in the late 1870s, again in 1890) and was hoping on this trip to recover his health after a long period of stress. He had by then amassed a considerable body of work in Bengali: poetry, songs, plays, novels, short stories, and essays, and was considered the preeminent writer of Bengal, though his work was less well-known in other parts of India, and almost unknown abroad: only a few scattered fragments had been translated into English. On the way to England Tagore amused himself by translating some of his poetry into English.²⁴ Shortly after his arrival, he visited Will Rothenstein, whom he had briefly met in India in 1910, and who had previously expressed an interest in translations. "As he entered the room," Rothenstein recalled in his autobiography, "he handed me a note-book in which, since I wished to know more of his poetry, he had made some translations during his passage from India. He begged that I would accept them" (262). What Rothenstein found, when he read through the poems, was "poetry of a new order" which seemed to him "on a level with that of the great mystics" (262). He communicated his discovery to his friend W. B. Yeats (who, he no doubt felt, had greater poetic discernment and more influence). Yeats read the poems over, suggested a few emendations, and agreed with Rothenstein's assessment.

The precise date on which Tagore became an object of public interest may be fixed as Wednesday, July 10, when a dinner was held in his honor at the Trocadero restaurant. The large gathering, over which Yeats presided, was written up twice in the *Times*: on Saturday in a brief descriptive notice (Kundu 4), again on Tuesday in a longer article entitled "The Triumph of Art over Circumstances." This second article celebrated the event as a moment of unity; Tagore is recorded

²⁴ This is the account given by Tagore himself to various individuals. However, Sisir Kumar Das argues, in his excellent introduction to the poetry volume of the new edition of Tagore's English writings, that the English translations may have been premeditated. Tagore was aware at this time, Das argues, of a demand for translations of his writings; he was himself aware of the necessity for translations; and he was displeased with the quality of earlier translations (10-14).

as assuring the guests that he was deeply moved, and had learned “that, though our tongues are different and our habits dissimilar, at the bottom our hearts are one.” The article stresses the authenticity of the feelings expressed and of the communication which took place:

We may be sure that this was not merely a formal compliment, that the speaker meant what he said. For the dinner itself was not a formal compliment. It was given by English poets and other writers to an Indian poet, whose poems, translated by himself into English, had confirmed by their moving power the truth of that saying of his, that, in spite of all difference of language and habits, at the bottom the hearts of men are one. This is a fact constantly insisted upon by those who have the greatest knowledge of alien races. It is a fact which they learn slowly and by long experience; but it is one which art can teach in a flash to those who know its secrets and lay their minds open to its influence. They are aware that art is a means of communication, the only means which can overcome all obstacles of circumstance, all differences of time and place; because it deals with those feelings which are common to all men and has the power of carrying them from one mind to another. (Kundu 5)

Rothenstein set to work arranging an edition of the poems, to be put out initially in a limited edition by the India Society, then by a commercial press. “I personally feel certain that the book is going to take its place among the books of the world,” Rothenstein assured Yeats, who was delegated to write “a short & emphatic introduction” (*Letters to W.B. Yeats* 249, 251). When Yeats did not respond to Rothenstein's two letters of August 18th and 24th, Tagore may have become concerned, for he dispatched a letter to Yeats on September 2nd:

When, in spite of all obstacles, something seemed to impel me to come to this country I never dreamt that it was for this that I was taking my voyage. What my soul offered to her master in the solitude of an obscure corner of the world must be brought before the altar of man where hearts come together and tongues mingle like the right and the left palms of hands joined in the act of adoration. My heart fills with gratitude and I write to you this letter to say that appreciation from a man like you comes to me not only as a reward for my lifelong devotion to literature but as a token that my songs have been acceptable to Him, and He has led me over the sea to this country to speak to me His approval of my works through your precious friendship. (*Letters to W.B. Yeats*, 251)

Tagore was already hard at work on other translations: Rothenstein had written Yeats, "there is a rich mine, & if Murray has the courage, there might easily be three or four volumes" (251). Murray published Cranmer-Byng's *Wisdom of the East* series, and had expressed interest in the translations. Tagore hoped Rothenstein and Yeats would handle literary and financial matters, but "he would very much care to have them bring in as much as possible, as he dedicates all the profits of his writings to his school" (251).

Yeats completed his glowing introduction in September, and the India Society edition of *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* was ready in November. As expected, enthusiastic reviews called for a commercial edition, which was brought out by Yeats's own publisher, Macmillan, at the beginning of 1913. To call the early reviews of the India Society edition enthusiastic would be something of an understatement: the *Times Literary Supplement* thought it might reverse the decadence of modern poetry, blamed on poetry's failure to "express the emotions stirred by ideas," for "that is the problem which troubles our poetry at present and seems to endanger its very existence; and it is no wonder that Mr. Yeats should hail with delight the work of an Indian poet who seems to solve it as easily as it was solved in Chinese painting of a thousand years ago" (Kundu 7). The *Nation* thought it "mystical poetry of the highest class": "for those interested in the spiritual history of man . . . the appearance of these poems is an event of great importance" (9). Poet Lascelles Abercrombie, writing in the *Manchester Guardian*, concurred, though he thought the poems too great to be the work of one man alone: "the poems of Rabindra Nath could not credibly come except on the crest of some large and vital impulse moving thorough a nation." "We Occidentals," he wrote, "can scarcely fail to perceive in these exquisite and noble poems that peculiar artistic greatness which seems necessarily to imply a general great condition of life surrounding and inspiring the artist" (12).²⁵ Only the Academic Committee balked when Yeats proposed the election of Tagore in late November, despite

²⁵ Tagore no doubt also provided fodder for Yeats's theories of the artist's "natural" dependence on the aristocracy.

Yeats's suggestion (to fellow Committee member Edmund Gosse) that it would be "a piece of wise Imperialism, for he is worshipped [in India] as no poet of Europe is" and "if we pay him honour, it will be understood that we honour India also for he is its most famous man to-day" (*Letters* 572-73).

I. *Gitanjali*

What were these poems about, and why were they greeted so enthusiastically by audiences who had never before responded in this way to the work of a living Indian writer? *Gitanjali* was a collection of poems selected to present Tagore's more spiritual side. Tagore's specific religious orientation was a critical factor in his Western reception. The Brahmo Samaj was a movement, in part, a response to Western monotheism, which proposed a revisionary Hindu canon heavily emphasizing the Upanishads, and focused on the central Hindu deity Brahma. Revisions of religious ritual and social practices were also advocated. *Gitanjali* was a collection of spiritual poems drawn from several decades of Tagore's poetry. The spiritual themes treated in the poems were interconnected, and though they represented only a narrow range of the poet's work, they presented a manageable introduction to a body of poetry which was part of a tradition of Indian spiritual poetry (the Bhakti tradition) almost entirely unknown in the West, and did so in a way that was comprehensible without demanding an introduction to that tradition (which was fortunate, since the introduction was written by Yeats, who knew nothing about it).

In this tradition the poet directly addresses the deity. While *saguna bhakti* poetry addresses a god such as Vishnu or Shiva, a god "with qualities" (hence the name), *nirguna bhakti* poetry addresses a god or godhead "without qualities." Many of the religious poems in *Gitanjali* may be considered in this latter category, although, as Mary Lago points out, they owe much to the poetic

traditions associated with Vaishnavism, which would generally fall into the former.²⁶ The poems are addressed to “Thou,” “Lord,” “my God,” or sometimes, allegorically personified as “friend” or “king.” The religious tone is set by the first poem in the volume, which begins, “Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.” This first poem, like a number of others early in the volume, is concerned with the relationship between poetry and the divine, the nature of inspiration. In one of the best of these, Tagore writes,

7

My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.

Yeats's poem “A Coat,” written in 1912, must have been inspired by this poem: “I made my song a coat / Covered with embroideries / Out of old mythologies,” writes Yeats. “But the fools caught it, / Wore it in the world's eyes / As though they'd wrought it.” Yeats's song relinquishes its adornments less willingly than Tagore's, but similarly embraces the necessity of nakedness: “Song, let them take it / For there's more enterprise / In walking naked.” One notes, however, that Yeats's poem places the unadorned in secular and artistic terms – a naked song is a song with “more enterprise” – than that of Tagore, for whom the stripping to essentials is in the service of a religious austerity.

In many poems Tagore speaks as the mystic, the spiritual poet devoted to communion with God:

38

That I want thee, only thee – let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night, are false and empty to the

²⁶ On Vaishnava poetry see Edward C. Dimock, *In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali*, tr. Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and Denise Levertov (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1967).

core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry – 'I want thee, only thee'.

As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is – 'I want thee, only thee'.

But he was perfectly capable of adopting a seemingly opposite position, rejecting the reclusive, world-rejecting pose of the devotee:

11

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

No doubt, his negotiation of these opposite, but both compelling, positions concerning the ideal relationship to the spiritual, appealed to many Western readers. Tagore's deity is in a sort of flux; the poems seek out possible relationships. Sometimes these possible relationships derive from the earlier bhakti traditions, as in the Vaishnava lyrics, where the desire for union with god is allegorized by Radha's unfulfilled desire for Krishna:

45

Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, 'He comes, comes, ever comes.'

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my

heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.

In other cases, the poems convey religious ideas through allegories or parables:

50

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path, when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream and I wondered who was this King of all kings!

My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust.

The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou didst hold out thy right hand and say 'What hast thou to give to me?'

Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee.

But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little gram of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all.

On the literal level this is parable concerned with generosity and its return in this world; while, read allegorically, it speaks of the "repayment" of spiritual devotion. Similar themes are treated in the several poems about death toward the end of the volume, for example:

90

On the day when death will knock at thy door what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life – I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door.

Other parable-poems guide the reader in questions concerning self and being, for example:

29

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon. I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into the sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

I take pride in this great wall, and I plaster it with dust and

sand lest a least hole should be left in this name; and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.

Here, the poet suggests that the construction of a worldly identity involves inevitable loss, though this loss may be concealed by pride. (Similarly, in Poem 31, a “prisoner,” asked why he has bound himself in chains, explains, “I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive leaving me in a freedom undisturbed”). If the barriers that constrain this inner being to worldly identity can be broken down, one may attain the sense of the unity of being expressed in:

69

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

For a West beginning to emerge out of the Victorian era, this was a strange new world. Many of these poems presented lessons that may now seem simplistic. In many cases, an idea that lent itself to a pleasant song in Bengali translated into banal prose in English. But Tagore's skillful metaphors and allegories often translated well, and his best poems were deceptively simple, and often haunting:

60

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle.

The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea
beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest
roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water,
death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless
worlds is the great meeting of children.

It is easy to see why Yeats, two decades later, chose this poem as one of several to represent the Bengali poet in his *Oxford Anthology of Modern Verse* (1935). The imagery pulls toward allegory while resisting any simple interpretation; the images are both powerful and ambivalent: a sea that is both soothing and threatening, the innocent children, contrasted to – but also resembling – the pearl fishers and merchants, their activities drawn into a frame in which the boundaries of work and play become blurred, and the questions of cultural boundaries and the formation of desires are effortlessly drawn into contemplation.

II. Tagore hook and all

Ezra Pound, who was becoming increasingly intimate with Yeats, nevertheless missed the first wave of excitement over Tagore, whom he did not meet until October 2, 1912. “I dined with Tagore on Wed. – discussed metres etc. Spent most of yesterday P.M. (2-6) with him. Discussing prosody, watching Rothenstein paint his portrait, listening to him read & sing. Have arranged to print 6 poems in 'Poetry' unless somebody raises a fuss.” Here, writing to his his future wife, Dorothy Shakespear, Pound appears relatively unimpressed. “You have seen the eagle [Yeats] in a state of exultation over this matter and you may readily judge the condition of my lighter and more volatile spirits. I send this off before I go into another fit of meditation” (162-63). To Harriet Monroe, however, he was more enthusiastic: “I’ll try to get some of the poems of the very great Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore. They are going to be *the* sensation of the winter” (10). And Pound was also full of a sense of the importance of the appearance of Tagore's poems in his first published essay on

the subject – an essay which appeared the following March in the *Fortnightly Review*, but which was written months earlier, “a little over a month since I went to Mr. Yeats' rooms and found him much excited over the advent of a great poet, someone 'greater than any of us'” (571).

As it turned out, the sensation of the winter was soon visiting Harriet Monroe himself, for in November, shortly after the publication of *Gitanjali*, Tagore accompanied his son to Urbana, Illinois, where Rathindranath was studying,²⁷ and subsequently visited Chicago and other American cities. Again, a planned vacation turned “unexpectedly” into a lecture tour: fortunately, Tagore had turned his attention to a series of lectures on self-realization, published the following November as *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life*. Meanwhile, Pound was left in London, frantically trying to catch up on Indian lore. His introduction to the six Tagore poems published which appeared in the December *Poetry* presented him as one of the cognoscenti. In January he began working with Kalimohan Ghose on translations of the poems of Kabir, a 15th-century Hindi poet whose mystical verse was favored by Tagore. “The estimable Ghose may be coming in to tea with me” Pound wrote Dorothy on January 2. Pound's versions, entitled “Certain Poems of Kabir,” appeared in the *Modern Review* (Calcutta) on June 13. On January 4, Pound ordered lecture announcements for a series of three lectures in “Mrs Fowler's new chinese drawing room”; the second, to be given on the 23rd of January, would be on “Rabindranath Tagore.” Four days later he reported, “I have just bought a huge history of Hindoostan for 4d.” On the 21st, he had heard from both Monroe and Tagore in Chicago and wrote Dorothy, “Tagore is being boomed by the Chicago newspapers. He's sent me 25 new poems – some of which I shall read [at the lecture] on Thursday – a nice one about ducks” (177-180, 183).

²⁷ Tagore arrived in Urbana on October 30, 1912, remaining there until his son completed his degree the following spring. While there, he gave lectures at the Unitarian Church, but was not invited to speak at the University. A “Tagore Circle,” formed during his visit, was still active when the poet returned with much fanfare in 1916. See Harold M. Hurwitz, “Tagore in Urbana, Illinois,” *Indian Literature* 4 (1961): 27-36.

In a March, 1913 letter to Harriet Monroe, Pound was quite clear about what he perceived to be his stake in the control of the Tagore industry:

The *Current Gossip* (God what a sheet!!!!) seems to have taken Tagore hook and all. *Current Opinion* (March number). However, it serves as illustration of what I said a while back. These fools don't KNOW anything and at the bottom of their wormy souls they know they don't and their name is legion and if once they learn that we do know and that we are "in" first, they'll come to us to get all their thinking done for them and in the end the greasy vulgus will be directed by us. And we will be able to do a deal more for poetry indirectly than we could with just our \$5,000 per annum. (16)

Tagore was becoming big business, and Pound wanted his share – not only of the profits, but of the influence of being among those who knew.

In mid-April, Tagore was back in London. On May 9 he gave a reading of his newly-translated of his play, *Chitra*, winning over more converts, and receiving a glowing report in the *Westminster Gazette*:

Before a large and deeply interested gathering that included many Anglo-Indians and many well-known men of letters, Mr. Tagore leant over his reading-desk – a tall, slim, figure dressed in tight-fitting garments of black; a face with finely chiselled features and with the deep-set eyes and a flowing beard in which grey is taking the place of black; and a strangely thin, but musical, voice. In the dusk of late afternoon the shaded light that was directed upon his manuscript was reflected in a copper glow upon his face; but he read with hardly a gesture, without a break, and in the accents of a refined Englishman from the beginning of his short prose-poem to the end. (16)

One reviewer, who took this for Tagore's first appearance in England, had no idea what to expect, but was pleasantly surprised:

One remembers the utter lack of any pose or conscious impressiveness on the part of Mr Tagore himself. He seemed just to be perfectly happy reading his own work, and to care nothing at all whether anyone were listening or no. It began like the chirping of a cricket in a corner. Gradually one realised, "on the margin of consciousness," that he was reading something really good. The little parable of the princess who was jealous of her own loveliness began to steal its way into one's imagination. After a while one

forgot the shrill voice, the dull speeches, the sleepy summer afternoon – one forgot everything except that beauty was born.
(77)

A week later, Tagore's play *The Post Office* appeared at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

Beginning on May 19, Tagore delivered a series of weekly lectures at the Caxton Hall based on the *Sadhana* material. Although the mystical element in *Gitanjali* was considerable, Tagore had until now appeared in England as a literary figure rather than a spiritual leader. With the *Sadhana* talks, the focus changed. By his literary acquaintances this was generally regarded as a disastrous move. “As a religious teacher he is superfluous” wrote Pound to Harriet Monroe. “We've got Lao Tse.” For Pound at this point, still six months away from discovering Fenollosa, one Asian religion or philosophy was as good as another. Nor did Pound think Tagore's philosophy had “much in it for a man who has 'felt the pangs' or been pestered with Western civilization”:

So long as he sticks to poetry he can be defended on stylistic grounds against those who disagree with his content. And there's no use his repeating the Vedas and other stuff that has been translated. In his original Bengali he has the novelty of rime and rhythm and of expression, but in a prose translation it is just “more theosophy.” Of course if he wants to set a lower level than that which I am trying to set in my translations from Kabir, I can't help it. It's his own affair. (*Letters* 19)

But for many others, Tagore's homogenized version of the *Upanishads* was just what the doctor ordered. The *Sadhana* lectures claimed to be “culled from several of the Bengali discourses which I am in the habit of giving to my students in my school at Bolpur” (ix), but were evidently designed for Western consumption. The first lecture, “The Relation of the Individual Universe,” begins with a brief reference to Greece as a walled city, promoting a “divide and rule” mental outlook, a philosophy of categories, divisions and suspicions. The Indian mind, in contrast – and here Tagore follows Max Müller, at times, almost word for word – “took a distinct character” from the “forests [in which] our civilisation had its birth.” “His mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realise, to

enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his surroundings” (4). Müller had used this approach to encourage potential Civil Service recruits to study Indian philosophy; Tagore's motives were less transparent. “Divide and rule” had a particular significance for Bengalis: a few years earlier the decision to partition Bengal evoked considerable reaction, with Tagore among the most vocal opponents of the action. But such specifics were incidental to Tagore's larger message: the Western soul was alienated from itself, from the sources of its being, and from nature.

The figure of Müller loomed large in the minds of readers, and sometimes turned up in peculiar ways in reviews. A review of *The Gardener* by R. Ellis Roberts in the *Daily News and Leader* began promisingly,

Nothing has vitiated English judgement on Oriental art and literature so much as the detestable habit of regarding the people of the East as essentially different beings from ourselves. It is still possible for a novelist to attain a popular success by writing of the Chinese as if they were a kind of malicious white ant, instead of a crowd of normal human beings. In America this outrageous sentiment has terrible consequences – wholesale murders and persecutions of negroes and Chinese. (Kundu 23)

But other stereotypes are possible, and Roberts writes, “India has suffered particularly, since the ill-advised enthusiasm of Max Müller, from the habit of regarding every Indian peasant as a yogi” (23). He concludes that this misperception has clouded the understanding of Tagore, and that “Mr Tagore's gift [is] indeed a pictorial, and not an intellectual nor a spiritual one. He has a keen and true eye both for colour and form; but there is no sign of any deep thought, or of any but the ordinary young man's ideas about love and God, either in this book or in 'Gitanjali'” (25). The tendency for Müller's name to arise in such contexts is best explained by a 1916 review in the *Nation* of two new Tagore volumes:

The modern period begins, we suspect, with Max Müller, and after him came Kipling, and at length Tagore. It happened to us in our schooldays that we read Max Müller with immense avidity. He set us dreaming continually of India. He made our horizon for us with his revelations of the origin of the Aryan languages and the primitive structure of Aryan society. We conceived from his pages

an almost oppressive veneration for the intellect of the Hindoo race, and the traditions of the Brahman cast. We visualized the difficulty of British rule in India in terms of the contrast between our practical outlook on life and their profound metaphysical vision. We recollect a moment of awe-stricken modesty when our schoolmaster tried to dazzle our ambition with the Indian Civil Service. We did not feel in ourselves in subtlety and in the depth of intellect required to rule this race of philosophers and saints. The impression, as notions fixed in early youth are apt to be, was lasting. We tried very hard to read the Vedas. We endeavored to master Indian systems of logic and metaphysic. We turned hopefully to Fergusson's monumental books on Indian architecture. The result was invariably disappointing, and from the poems the systems and the buildings we always rose with a sense of confusion and bewilderment. In all of them it was precisely the power of the shaping and constructive intellect which seemed to be wanting. Opulence, variety, subtlety, detail, there were in abundance, but never the compelling, masterful power of creative reason. We were baffled, but we clung to the conviction that the failure to appreciate was a fault in our own Western make-up. Everyone agreed that Indians are sages and metaphysicians. (96-97)

It is evident from these two reviews either that Müller's distinction between the ancient and the modern Indian had proved too subtle for his audiences, or that Müller's name had simply, in this latter-day climate of New Imperialism, become associated with an earlier and excessively liberal attitude towards Indians. For these two reviewers, at least, the arrival of Tagore announces not the arrival of the sage but the proof of his absence, and the end of the unhappy schoolboy's bondage to the Indian scholarly text. Just as Roberts had declared Tagore's gift to be "a pictorial, and not an intellectual nor a spiritual one," the reviewer in the *Nation* finds in Tagore proof that "the singularity of the Indian mind may lie not at all in any over-powering intellectual gift, but on the contrary, on its emotional side."

The Gardener, Tagore's second volume of verse, had appeared in late October; it was a collection intended to present a different side of the poet: the amorous youth ("When the two sisters go to fetch water, they come to this spot and they smile. / They must be aware of somebody who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water" [CP 104]), the youthful lover inspired or silenced by love ("I try to sing a song, but in vain. / A hidden smile trembles on your lips; ask of

it the reason of my failure" [116]), an observer of the psychology of love ("He put a flower in my hair. I said, 'It is useless!' But he stood unmoved. / He took the garland from my neck and went away. I weep and ask my heart, 'Why does he not come back?'" [114]), a singer of songs of earthly pleasures ("Brothers, let us squander our morning in futile songs" [147]). Pound was probably not far off the mark in claiming the volume represented "the Theocritan idylls of his youth," in his November 1 review in the *New Freewoman*, which he used as an opportunity to show off his privileged knowledge of Tagore, and even to drop suggestive hints about his familiarity with the Bengali originals:

The intelligent reader will do more than read the prose, he will try to reconstruct some idea of the original, of the long hyper-feminine rhymes, of the rhyme-arrangements like those of the pleiade, of the long bars of the Oriental ragini. He will try to fit into this sound picture the meaning expressed in translation. No one but an imbecile ever tries to read a translation without attempting in some way to reconstruct the original setting. (188)

On November 13 came the announcement that Tagore had been awarded the Nobel Prize. The next day the newspapers carried the story. And so began the second phase of Tagore's Western fame. Newspapers in Britain were generally pleased, if surprised, by the decision: "The choice of the receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature has furnished more than one surprise, but so far no selection has been quite as startling and significant as just announced," wrote the *Manchester Guardian* (Kundu 41). Popular British sentiments toward India appear to have been fairly benign at this time, and the press was inclined to set Tagore favorably against Kipling, already seen as an anachronistically shrill voice of imperialism, who had won the Nobel in 1906. Some, like the *Manchester Guardian*, were inclined to consider the award a political statement against Kipling: "one might almost think that Tagore had been raised up for the express purpose of refuting Kipling's best-known line, 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet'"; in this anxious, pre-war climate unity seemed much more desirable: "beneath the distinctions, which although they seemed fundamental prove to be superficial, that separate the races, Mr. Tagore has struck down to the principles that unify the

race" (45). Only a few papers found it necessary to sound the note of Western cultural superiority, the pro-imperialist *Daily Telegraph*, for example, reminding its readers that "no comparison can be made between his verse and that of West[ern] poets, and it is doubtful if, even in his wonderfully apt translation, Mr. Tagore's poems would have found a ready appreciation in England were it not for the fact that they resemble, although they can not be said to equal, the familiar models of Oriental literature contained in the Bible" (33).

The Nobel committee members were particularly impressed by the religious poems in *Gitanjali*, but were also familiar with Tagore's four English volumes published in 1913: *The Gardener*, *Glimpses of Bengal Life*, *The Crescent Moon*, and *Sadhana*. The committee was impressed by "the perfection with which the poet's own ideas and those he has borrowed have been harmonized into a complete whole; his rhythmically balanced style . . . his austere, by some termed classic, taste in the choice of words and his use of the other elements of expression in a borrowed tongue" (Frenz 127-28). His poetry was seen by the committee as "by no means exotic but truly universally human in character" (128). The *Daily News and Leader* observed that "The Nobel Committee is a conservative body, and the scepticism of Anatole France and the pessimism of Hardy are too unorthodox to find favour" and this assessment of the Committee's religious conservatism is borne out by the pronounced emphasis on the religious, and particularly, the Christian elements, in Tagore's Brahmo perspective. In the Committee's presentation speech, oblique references to the not-always-visible fruits of the missionary movement segue into a discussion of Tagore's father, "one of the leading and most zealous members of a religious community to which his son still belongs," the Brahmo Samaj, "founded in the early part of the nineteenth century by an enlightened and influential man who had been much impressed by the doctrines of Christianity, which he had studied also in England" (130). Tagore is depicted in the speech as a prophet, "a bearer of good tidings which are delivered, in language intelligible to all, from that treasure house of the East whose existence had long been conjectured," but nevertheless, "as far removed as anyone in our midst from all that we are

accustomed to hear dispensed and purveyed in the marketplaces as Oriental philosophy” (131). Tagore's rejection of Hindu pantheism and from “painful dreams about the transmigration of souls and the impersonal *karma*” is approvingly noted (131), as is his avoidance of “a mysticism that, relinquishing personality, seeks to become absorbed in an all that approaches a nothingness” – a code phrase for the Buddhism's anti-Christian eschatology of nirvana.

The Tagore industry continued to flourish. Maud Gonne managed to acquire a Bengali tutor, Devabrata Mukherjea, for her daughter Iseult in 1914,²⁸ and they were hoping to put together a volume of French translations. (Andre Gide's translation of *Gitanjali* had recently appeared). In July, she wrote Yeats that

he & Iseult are working hard at the translations. They have already translated a good many poems of Tagores direct from the Bengali – some from the Gardner – some that have not been translated into English, some of them are very beautiful & I think their translations are very good. They have tried to translate as literally as possible & they have obtained wonderful beauty & freshness of expression. I think you will think their work very good. I cant tell you how glad I am to find Iseult really working & interested in the work. (Finneran 293-94)

Maud and Iseult wanted Yeats “to write to Mr. Tagore as soon as possible saying what you think of Iseult's style, & asking permission for them to bring the poems out as a book if they can find a publisher in France.” This was rather urgent, she informed “dear Willie,” because there was a competitor: “a Jewess, a Mlle Carpetis, who has been in India & who knows the Tagores (especially the artist) & who wants to get the right of translating Mr. Tagore's work in French.” They were sending some samples of Iseult's work to Tagore, but were concerned that “he doesnt know French well enough to really appreciate the style.” Yeats, whose French was probably not much better than Tagore's, consulted Mabel Beardsley, who apparently had some criticisms of the spelling, grammar, and word choice. These were passed on to Maud, who defended Iseult against the charges in a letter

²⁸ Mukherjea was the translator of Tagore's play, *The Post Office*, performed at the Abbey Theatre the previous May.

to Yeats on September 25. But she conceded that "He & Iseult are very lazy & I have had hard work to keep them to translating." She added, "of course Mukerjea has fallen in love with Iseult, which has complicated things a bit." Mukherjea, perhaps not incidentally, was expected to return to India the following week if he could get a boat.

III. The decline

"It was pleasant to see homage paid so readily to an Indian; nothing of the kind had happened before," Will Rothenstein recalled in his memoirs. "I was concerned only lest Tagore's saintly looks, and the mystical element in his poetry, should attract the *Schwärmerei* of the sentimentalists who abound in England and America, and who pursue idealists even more hungrily than ideals. Tagore had, indeed, all the qualities to attract such. It was easy to protect him at first . . ." (265-6). Rothenstein, who saw himself as Tagore's protector and guide became increasingly disturbed as Tagore's social horizons widened. If only Tagore could restrain himself from the temptations of fame, he thought, his friends could continue to guide his career in a productive direction.

But great fame is a perilous thing, because it affects not indeed the whole man, but a part of him, and is apt to prove a tyrannous waster of time. Tagore, who had hitherto lived quietly in Bengal, devoting himself to poetry and to his school, would now grow restless. As a man longs for wine or tobacco, so Tagore could not resist the sympathy shown to a great idealist. He wanted to heal the wounds of the world. (283)

The unexpected award of the Nobel Prize to Tagore in November of 1913 came initially as a pleasant surprise to his supporters, but it also made Tagore into a public object. First signs of an anti-Tagore backlash came in January, 1914. Richard Aldington included Tagore in his series of verse parodies in the *Egoist*:

Come, my songs, let us go to America.
Let us move the thumbs on our left hands
And the middle fingers of our right hands

With the delicate impressive gestures
Of Rabindranath Tagore.

The *Daily Citizen* inquired, in its review of the past year's books, "Do Prizes and Petting Spoil Poets?":

And what of our mystical poet-philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore? I hope Nobel Prizes and much petting will not spoil him, and that he will drop a certain tendency to affect[at]ion and return to the simplicity of his Gitanjali. So with Yoshio Markino, whose idiosyncracies and way of writing English get rather on one's nerves. Let him become again our laughing philosopher, and his work will be more valuable and more amusing. (Kundu 53)

The *Evening Standard and St. James 's Gazette* offered some mildly offensive rhymes on the theme of the difficulty of pronouncing Tagore's name (Kundu 53). And later that year in a review of the play *Chitra*, E. M. Forster acknowledged that "it is difficult to listen through the noise and the nonsense of the last two years and catch the authentic voice of Tagore beyond" (328). The following year the poet Joyce Kilmer was mounting an attack on the "Tagore Craze" in the journal *America*, an attack happily played up by the *Literary Digest*,²⁹ which thought the attack at least had "an air of novelty":

If Tagore had been born in Brooklyn, he would never be a fashionable poet. There is a quaint exotic aroma about his poems, like sandalwood or stale cigarets or the back room of a Chinese laundry. He writes about temple-bells and water-jars and the desert: it is all so nice and Oriental! And then he teaches such a comfortable philosophy: just have a good time and love everybody and your soul wil migrate and migrate and migrate until finally it pops off into the Infinite!

It was "puzzling and offensive," the *Literary Digest* agreed, to find Americans and Englishmen "humbly kneeling before the clever Oriental journalist . . . who would substitute fatalism for hope, Nirvana for heaven, and . . . Krishna for Jesus Christ." D. H. Lawrence, in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, was even more direct: "one is glad to *realise* how these Hindus are horribly decadent and

²⁹ "An Attack on the Tagore 'Craze,'" *Literary Digest* (21 Aug. 1915): 352.

reverting to all forms of barbarism in all sorts of ugly ways. We feel surer on our feet, then. But this fraud of looking up to them – this wretched worship-of-Tagore attitude – is disgusting” (Aronson 37).

As Tagore's fame grew and his Western contacts widened, Will Rothenstein, the man who “discovered” Tagore for the West, became increasingly embittered. His close friend Max Beerbohm enjoyed provoking him about it, and during the war years the two, together with Rothenstein's wife Alice, collaborated on a sonnet lamenting Tagore's fame in a lengthy exchange of letters:

(AR) Tagore, the nature once so clean we knew
 (MB) Before you sailed from India's coral strand
 (WR) That nature once we thought to understand
 (AR) Is now become a thing for fashion's view,
 (MB) Equivocal in form, subfusc in hue,
 (WR) Obnoxious to the scent, a thing to brand.
 (AR) What might it yet have been had not this land
 (MB) Unfortunately made a pet of you?
 (WR) Now turn a turbid ear to what I fain
 (AR) Would tell you while there is yet time and hope.
 (MB) Could'st thou but be a bright black boy again
 (WR) Along the Ganges ghats where many a corpse
 (AR) Would caution thee and tell thee to use soap
 (MB) As do the Orpens (sometimes called the Orps) (Beerbohm
 63)

It is the satirical Max who injects the strongest elements of racialism, referring to Tagore as subfusc (dusky) in hue in line 5 and sentimentalizing over the impossibility of the return of Tagore to his status as a “bright black boy.” (Interestingly, it was always Tagore's “Aryan features” that were commented on by the press). But if the strongest elements of racialism are Max's, Will and Alice are quite complicitous in this ritualized derogation: Will with his introduction of the description, “Obnoxious to the scent, a thing to brand,” Alice with her references to cleanliness and uncleanness. The poem leads up to a message to Tagore which is never delivered (“Now turn a turbid ear to what I fain / would tell you . . .”). The point, however, is not the message but the communal act of calling out or naming – or rather, the reclamation of the right to call out or name; the actual event of naming Tagore (presumably as “nigger”) is an event to be avoided if possible.

It is generally agreed that Tagore's fame in England and America declined by the early twenties. Of the books that appeared after 1914, which included five volumes of poetry – *Fruit-Gathering* (1916); *Stray Birds* (1916); *Sacrifice and Other Plays* (1917); *The Lover's Gift and Crossing* (1918); *The Fugitive* (1921) – three volumes of essays – *Personality* (1917); *Nationalism* (1917); *Creative Unity* (1922) – and four volumes of short stories – *The Hungry Stones* (1916); *Mashi and Other Stories* (1918); *Stories from Tagore* (1918); *Broken Ties and Other Stories* (1925) – only the 1936 *Collected Poems and Plays* gives an indication of a continuing British and American appetite for Tagore's works after the mid-twenties, although many of the earlier volumes remained in print. But in fact, the decline appears to have begun much earlier, perhaps as early as *Nationalism* (1917), but certainly by *Creative Unity* (1922).

From the accounts of Tagore's American 1917 tour in Calcutta's *Modern Review*, it would appear that his fame there remained high. American audiences, it would seem, happily devoured all of the cultural criticisms Tagore had to offer. The March issue recounted his obliging deconstruction of the Western mentality for a Wisconsin interviewer: "You pile system upon system, and when one system fails, you turn and devise another and yet another. . . . You are content to grovel in the sand and make therein little, narrow, intricate patterns, and content to dwell within the boundaries of these little patterns" (372). Audiences were delighted. The April issue printed an extract from an unnamed Midwestern newspaper's review of his "Cult of Nationalism" lecture: "One felt that here was a dissector carving out our foolish boasts and our smug comfortabilities into their essentials, and finding, for the most part, little or nothing." The reporter is clearly overwhelmed, stripped naked by the prophet's words: "His indignation burns. His wrath sears. His sense of the unseemly and the scandalous is a benediction for the sole reason that it is conviction. How paltry are the things we tolerate. How dirty. It is refreshing to meet this manly man of an outside world very near to us and more valuable, by far, than it is near."

In England, however, Tagore's star was perhaps shining less brightly in 1917. Pound, who

had complained to Henderson the previous October about “the Tagore muck” (Nadel 163) wrote her in February,

I'm glad Tagore hasn't gone to pot personally, His work has and Yeats says he will no longer stand criticism, and that he has taken to composing in English, which will destroy all the advantage he had in using familiar idiom, and also le[a]d him to express only thoughts that will fit into such English as he knows. The descent from Yeats to Evelyn Underhill, was *facilis* like the more famous *descensus*. Poor Rabby. (Nadel 187-88)

Pound – still nursing a three-year-old wound over Tagore's choice of Evelyn Underhill to assist him in translating *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* – was evidently still inclined to be openly critical of Tagore only if given the nod by Yeats.

The waning enthusiasm of Tagore's most eminent supporters no doubt contributed to his decline in Britain, but there were other contributing factors. There were changes in the post-war British attitude towards India, with Gandhian nationalism rapidly gaining steam. Tempers flared on both sides after the Amritsar massacre of 1919, which prompted Tagore to officially request to be relieved of his knighthood (his request was denied). The feeling of unity had vanished. Pound had perhaps foreseen this when he quipped in a 1915 letter to Alice Corbin Henderson, “Raby Tagore is knighted as I suppose you know. Some change in the official attitude toward Suspect No. 12 Class b. 108” (Nadel 108). E. M. Forster, too, had by this time little hope for unity between English and Indian, as his *A Passage to India* made evident (1923). Tagore's increasingly international status no doubt was a contributing factor. It meant lessened dependence on England for Tagore, and greater uncertainty about Tagore's political inclinations for England. Tagore's anti-British and anti-European sentiments became the subject of interest: in January, 1921, Tagore was reported in the *Times* as having “expressed his view that the League of Nations is a league of robbers” while on tour in Europe (113); three months later, back in England, he was recorded in the *Morning Post* as saying, in an address to Indian students, that “Western civilization was of no benefit to native races” (114).

Particularly irksome to the British was Tagore's reception in Germany, where he visited in

1921. The earlier British and American response paled against the mass adulation accorded him by the Germans. When Tagore lectured for the first time in Berlin University in June 1921, the London Daily News reported “scenes of frenzied hero-worship . . . In the rush for seats many girl students fainted and were trampled on by the crowd” (Aronson 24). That summer, Tagore's German publishers ordered two million pounds of paper on which to print his books, more than 800,000 of which had been sold by October (23). “These statistics are indeed bewildering,” as Alex Aronson notes, for “German enthusiasm for poetry had in no way been more emphatic in the past than in France or in England” (23-24). Tagore's German visit was still on the mind of a reviewer of *Creative Unity* in the *Manchester Guardian* a year later:

The popularity of Rabindranath Tagore in this country has never reached the amazing measure accorded to him in Central Europe since his lecture-tour through Germany a year ago. Nor is it easy for us to explain why a people who normally breathe the air that more than once has nurtured philosophical greatness can be stirred to wild enthusiasm for what at its very best must be regarded as little else than a poetical presentment of doctrines already restated in terms of European thought. (Kundu 121)

The reviewer answers his conundrum by suggesting that “It is wine and sunlight to them at this stage to be succoured with words which tell of 'this aberration of a people decked with the showy title of 'patriotism,' proudly walking abroad passing itself off as highly moral influence.'”

The backlash over Tagore's fame, the increasing tension between England and India as a result of the growing nationalist movement, Tagore's failure to remain simply poet and guru by entering into the discussion of nationalism, the increasing tension between England and India as a result of the growing nationalist movement, the concern over his post-war trips to such recent enemy territory as Germany and Italy, the increasing tension between England and India as a result of the growing nationalist movement – all of these may be cited as factors in Tagore's decline in the West. Tagore arrived in the West from exotic India, and while in some ways his reception transcended the usual limits of exoticism, in other ways it did not. After all the soul-searching, a 1921 *Manchester*

Guardian review of *The Fugitive* could still claim, “We treasure the volume as we treasure a Persian carpet or a Japanese print; the colour is good, but we do not understand the thoughts of those quaint figures boating or fishing in the sunlight or in the rain” (Aronson 14). The adulation accorded to Tagore owed something to Tagore's novelty, and like any exotic commodity, this novelty was bound to decline.

Sarojini Naidu: The Nightingale as Nationalist

In April of 1917 *Poetry* magazine “discovered” Sarojini Naidu's first book of poetry, *The Golden Threshold*, first published a dozen years earlier. In part it was Arthur Symons' glowing introduction that caught the attention of the reviewer, Eunice Tietjens, yet Tietjens, at the time deeply entranced by the Orient,³⁰ was also captivated by the “elusive personality of this young Hindu woman,” whose poems she found “strangely alluring.” “These are subtle, delicately-wrought lyrics, self-conscious with the same quiet poise that pervades the Hindu classics, a poise that disregards with mystic certainty the confusing sense of the plurality of the universe which colors so much western thinking.” A passing reference to “more strongly nationalistic” poems seems to cloud this picture of the poet's commitment to the mystical oneness of the universe, but Tietjens has little interest in this, choosing rather to focus on one lyric in particular which “might almost, in its color and imagery, be an incidental lyric in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*,” the classical poetic drama which had been, since William Jones's eighteenth-century translation, the standard of comparison for Indian poetry.

Several months earlier the *New Republic* had been sufficiently less enthusiastic (in these waning days of the “Tagore craze”) to title its review simply “Another Hindoo Poet”; it was argued that, although written by “a Hindoo woman of pure blood,” there was “nothing specially Hindoo in the book now published; it is European in structure, and even in tradition it is European.” “Girton and King's College have done their work thoroughly,” lamented the reviewer,³¹ who went on to argue that the British poet Laurence Hope (author of the exotic *Indian Love Lyrics*) was more

³⁰ In the same year Tietjens published *Profiles from China*, a volume of poetry based on recent travel experiences.

³¹ The colleges can hardly be blamed or credited for Sarojini's style, since she attended few lectures there.

authentically Indian than Naidu: Laurence Hope, the reviewer suggests, “needed just India for a setting – needed the cruel heat of the Indian day and the hallucination of the Indian night,” while “Sarojini Naidu's poems might have suggested themselves in Connaught or Cornwall or even in New Jersey.” Naidu “seems Indian by obligation: take away the Indian decoration, which is extraneous and not, in sum, very much, and what have you but some very musical western poetry – English poetry?” Two reviews, only months apart, one proclaiming a poet who captured the essence of classical Hinduism, the other refusing to acknowledge anything more than a decorative Indianness, both, however, fixated on the question of the authenticity of the poet's representation of India to a Western audience. Of these two opposing, but equally limited, views, the latter has had somewhat more weight in determining Naidu's place in the English canon, or rather, her lack of one. As the *Cambridge History of English Literature* pronounced in 1945,

Some of her songs are little more than exotically sentimental utterances that might have come from an English writer who knew the East by hearsay: but others give vivid vignettes of native life and some embody the spirit of Oriental devotion. In general her work is more remarkable for its command of English than for any revelation of India (914)

Naidu's failure to reveal something new about India has not been as much at issue in Indian appraisals of her work, where her alleged overdependence on English Romantic poets as models has been considered her major failing. “It is true,” writes M.K. Naik,

that her verse, at its worst, suffers from sentimentality, vagueness, sloppiness, a lack of intellectual fibre and a cloying sweetness. It is also unfortunate that though she possessed a sharp wit and a fine comic sense, she did not allow these to function in her poetry. She failed to grow as a poet too, devoting in mid-career to politics what could have gone into poetry. (215)

Yet, Naik continues, her finest lyrics

are not just a weak echo of the feeble voice of decadent romanticism; they are an authentic Indian English lyric utterance exquisitely tuned to the composite Indian ethos . . . Of all her contemporaries she had perhaps the finest ear and her mastery of word-music is indisputable.

Naik's description of her poetry as “an authentic *Indian English* lyric utterance” – an authentic hybrid – displaces the (Western) question of whether she presents an authentic monocultural Indian voice. And yet it is the limitations of this hybrid voice that are consistently stressed in Naik's reading of her work, and indeed, in much of the recent Indian criticism of it.

Coming to Naidu's poems through this critical history, we may easily lose sight of what a remarkable and unique figure Naidu really was. What was involved in Naidu's efforts to acquire an English poetic voice at a time when English poetry offered limited openings for the Indian, and when both English and Indian poetry offered little hope of recognition for the female poet? Naidu's carving-out of a position for a female poetic voice, between the doubly-silencing constraints of colonialist racialism and Indian patriarchalism, necessarily demanded concessions to both of these fields of power, concessions which have, predictably, subjected her work to intense criticism by readers approaching her work from feminist and post-colonial perspectives. In my reading of her work, I would like to focus on the difficulties Naidu faced in acquiring this poetic voice, and examine the way it enabled and empowered her participation in a field of Indian nationalist politics which restricted access to Indian women.

Sarojini Chattopâdhyây was born in 1879 in the native state of Hyderabad, where the ruling Nizam enjoyed a relatively independent status under an agreement which allowed the British Army to maintain a garrison there. Her Bengali Brahmin father, Dr. Aghorenath Chattopâdhyây, had studied science at Edinburgh and returned to settle in Hyderabad, where he served as a physician under the Nizam and later founded Nizam College. In an unpublished autobiographical fiction entitled “Sunalini: A Passage from Her Life,” Sarojini later recalled the intellectual ferment surrounding her father, epitomized in the moonlight gatherings of which

he was the chief, the host of a coterie of men of all nationalities and creeds, of all sorts and conditions: wild young poets, with garlands round their hair intoning their delicious verses, and sage philosophers solving the deepest problems of humanity; saints, who had given up their lives to prayer and meditation on things occult,

and astrologers who had studied the secret of the stars; atheists and theologians, princes and paupers, dreamers and alchemists, Hindu pundit, Moslem Mollah, and Christian priest: and while they closed in the heat of an endless discussion, a bewildering rapid³² and delightful interchange of thoughts and ideas utterly at war with one another, unheeded by any, and noticed by none, Sunalini would steal in behind her father's seat and breathlessly drink in the confused babel of wit.³³

The often-discussed account of Sarojini's first-reluctant, and then emphatic, embrace of English appears in Arthur Symons' introduction to *The Golden Threshold*:

Sarojini was the eldest of a large family, all of whom were taught English at an early age. "I," she writes, "was stubborn and refused to speak it. So one day when I was nine years old my father punished me—the only time I was ever punished — by shutting me in a room alone for a whole day. I came out of it a full-blown linguist. I have never spoken any other language to him, or to my mother, who always speaks to me in Hindustani." (12)

English is thus presented not only as the law of the father, but as the only law actually enforced by punishment. The law (as zealously internalized by Sarojini) prohibits what is literally "the mother tongue," thus distancing her from the language of her mother, who continues to speak to her in Hindi while Sarojini, positioning herself in linguistic exile, responds only in English. Her subsequent embrace of poetry, however, is presented as a partial compensation for this loss, and as a retribution against her father's will "that I should be a great mathematician or a scientist." "The poetic instinct, which I inherited from him and also from my mother (who wrote some lovely Bengali lyrics in her youth) proved stronger. One day, when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum in algebra: it *wouldn't come right*; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down." Thus, as Sarojini recounted it to Symons, began her career as an English poet. She wrote "a long poem *à la* 'Lady of

³² The replacement of "bewildering" with "rapid" in describing her sense of the "interchange of thoughts and ideas" in her father's "salons" seems to me again important in the question of her early "positioning" in relation to intellectual discourse: it makes a statement of her ability to understand and control that discourse.

³³ "Sunalini: A Passage from her life" (3-4). Despite the fictionalized name, the piece is clearly autobiographical.

the lake," a poetic drama, a novel, and "fat volumes of journals."

Sarojini graduated from the University of Madras at the age of twelve and in 1895, at the age of sixteen, she was sent to England on a scholarship from the Nizam. Accompanied to England by none other than theosophist (and, later, political activist) Annie Besant (Khan 7), she began her studies at Kings College, Cambridge. There she found the lectures tiresome, however, and after a brief stint at Girton, she finally stopped going to lectures entirely.

L "What we wished to receive": Gosse and Symons

When Sarojini met Edmund Gosse in January of 1896, it was, she wrote him, the fulfilment of a premonition that "the magical name [of Gosse] was to be one of the strongest and most inevitable influences on my life" (Dwivedi 54). Gosse was then a well-known critic and occasional poet, and perhaps Naidu was aware of Gosse's earlier patronage of Toru Dutt, the Indian poetess whose brief fame in the 1870s had been cut short by her tragic death. When Gosse read some of Sarojini's early work, he was impressed with her skill as a poet but felt disappointment and embarrassment at the content of the poems. "Many were Western in feeling and imagery; they were founded on reminiscences of Tennyson and Shelley; I am not sure they did not even breathe an atmosphere of Christian resignation" (4).

Gosse's response may be attributed to what Homi Bhabha has called the profound and disturbing effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse (86). Gosse's observation that Sarojini's poems "had the disadvantage of being totally without individuality" confirms his uneasiness with a mimicry that, in Bhabha's words, "conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (88). By offering a mimicry of English poetry, "skilful in form, correct in grammar and blameless in sentiment," as Gosse concedes, Sarojini threatens the autonomy of the authentic subjectivity presented in the English poem, a cultural form very close to the heart of the idea of "Englishness." "I laid

them down in despair," Gosse recalls. "This was but the note of the mocking-bird with a vengeance. It was not pleasant to daunt the charming and precocious singer by so discouraging a judgment; but I reflected on her youth and her enthusiasm, and I ventured to speak to her sincerely. I advised the consignment of all that she had written, in this falsely English vein, to the waste-paper basket" (4).

Her father had earlier withheld his approval until she embraced English; now Gosse, her surrogate English father, was withholding approval for her too-successful "false" appropriation of English. Gosse then proceeded to outline to Sarojini a program for salvaging her poetic subjectivity, a program which largely determined the course of her poetic career:

what we wished to receive was, not a *réchauffé* of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had soul. (4-5)

If Gosse's suggestion illustrates the Western desire for an authentic voice of the Orient (a role that Tagore would come to fill), it did offer Sarojini a means of adapting her poetic talents to the English literary marketplace. She was "to write no more about robins and skylarks, in a landscape of our Midland counties, with the village bells somewhere in the distance calling the parishioners to church, but to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid populations of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province" (5). By these means, she would become, as Gosse saw it, "a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan, not a clever machine-made imitator of the English classics." The advice was "instantly accepted and with as little delay as possible acted upon," as Gosse recalls, "with the docility and the rapid appreciation of genius." When Gosse expressed his approval of her new work, she wrote to him:

You cannot know what these words meant to me, how people always colour my life, how when I am in the very depth of self-disgust and despair – as I often am – they will give me new hope and new courage – no, you cannot know! Poetry is the one thing I love so passionately, so intensely, so absolutely that it is my very life of life, and now you have told me that *I am a poet* – I am a

poet! I keep repeating it to myself to try to realise it. (Dwivedi 54)

The passage underscores Sarojini's need to have her poetic voice recognized and validated as a poet by a suitable authority figure. While it would be easy to dismiss this as a mere craving for parental approval, this would, I think, misrepresent what was really at stake: the claim of the Indian woman to the power of the poetic voice. This was, indeed, the crossing of the "golden threshold," which became the figure for her first volume of poetry, and for her entry into the nexus of colonial power relations.

Permission to cross the golden threshold was not granted without a substantial cost. Such costs were characteristic of what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have called in *The Empire Writes Back*, the second phase of post-colonial literature, a phase in which "natives" are permitted access to publication under imperial license. "The institution of 'Literature' in the colony is under direct control of the imperial ruling class who alone licence the acceptable form and permit the publication and distribution of the resulting work."³⁴ Having renounced subversive mimicry, Naidu's verse, reconstructed by Gosse to conform with the interests of the colonial gaze, is licensed for publication. In the process, the poet is re-presented as a figure of the primitive and exotic East, and a source of knowledge for the West. In his introduction to her second book, *The Bird of Time*, Gosse wrote:

she is in all things and to the fullest extent autochthonous. She springs from the very soil of India; her spirit, although it employs the English language as its vehicle, has no other tie with the West. It addresses itself to the exposition of emotions which are tropical and primitive, and in this respect, as I believe, if the poems of

³⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (6). I am inclined, however, to think that the authors' emphasis on the complete, direct, and exclusive control of access to publication overstates the case for India at the turn of the century, where "native" printing presses did indeed need to be licensed, but nevertheless produced a substantial volume of "literature" which was merely supervised, rather than controlled, by representatives of the British Empire. Thus, Naidu's desire to be recognized as an English poet in England and by the English cannot be explained by "exclusive" British control of publication; I am arguing that it can be accounted for by a recognition of the particular status this form of literary recognition conferred on her, which bypassed the complicated access to literary status imposed on women in India, providing her with immediate and literary status transferrable to the Indian scene.

Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of savant or historian. They have the astonishing advantage of approaching the task of interpretation from inside the magic circle, although armed with a technical skill that has been cultivated with devotion outside of it. (6)

Naidu thus becomes, in Gosse's account, an informer to the West, like Kipling's Kim, a revealer and interpreter of Eastern secrets "inside the magic circle," an illuminator – like Conrad's Marlow – of "the dark places of the East." Permission to cross the "Golden Threshold" is exchanged for access into "the magic circle," figuring a double exchange of access into spaces respectively prohibited to the Indian poet and the Western reader.

Sarojini continued to be invited to the Gosses' – "one of the most welcome and intimate of our guests" (3) – and it was there in 1896 that she was introduced to another important poet, Arthur Symons, then at the peak of his fame as editor of the *Savoy*.³⁵ Sarojini and Symons became quite close that spring and summer, as their extant correspondence shows, although it is not entirely clear whether Symons – who met her just after his mother's death and an emotionally wrenching romantic breakup – conceived of her as daughter, lover, mother, or, as seems likely, all three: the seventeen-year-old girl who "had in her all the wild magic of the East," someone "to whom one could tell all one's personal troubles and agitations, as to a wise old woman," and "one of a few girls whom I made love to in different years who would have married me" (Symons, *Mes Souvenirs* 33; *Golden Threshold* 16; *Letters* 233).

During Sarojini's long sojourn in Italy and Switzerland she and Symons continued an intimate correspondence, and when she returned in the spring of 1898 they again became close. In August of that year, however, she decided that her intention to marry Dr. Naidu had not changed, and determined to return to India despite her father's objections. Her views prevailed, and the

³⁵ The first issue of *Savoy* – marketed, with the help of art director Aubrey Beardsley, as the successor to the notorious *Yellow Book* – had appeared in January.

wedding took place on December 2, 1898, in Madras. Settling down to married life and having children – one per year from 1901 to 1904 – did not prevent her from becoming increasingly interested in the Indian political situation, and she continued to write poetry. “Do you know I have some very beautiful poems floating in the air,” she wrote Symons in 1904, “and if the gods are kind I shall cast my soul like a net and capture them, this year” (*Threshold* 13). Later that year she sent these poems to Symons, and through his arrangements they were published the following year.

II. *The Golden Threshold*

The Golden Threshold (1905) represents Sarojini's work over the course of nearly a decade. In 1896 Symons had published Sarojini's poem “Eastern Dancers” in the *Savoy*, a poem which may have appealed to Symons because of his own fascination with dancers as much as for its sinuous long lines and exotic imagery. Like another early poem “Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad,” it is full of intense, exotic images, and is very much of a piece with the decadent poetry of Symons and his associates. In “Nightfall,” the “speckled sky ” that “burns like a pigeon's throat / Jewelled with embers of opal and peridote,” the “languid and luminous faces,” and the “Liesurely elephants” that “wind through the winding lanes” could be straight out of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, or any of a number of Oriental poems by Symons.

The poems in *The Golden Threshold* celebrate a wide range of Indian cultural traditions. The fishermen in “Coromandel Fishers” (which takes its title from the Coromandel coast in Southeast India) are devoted to their work, as are the “Palanquin Bearers” and the “Snake-Charmer,” in their respective poems. Even “Suttee” presents a sympathetic picture through in its presentation of a widow's speech of devotion:

Life of my life, Death's bitter sword
Hath severed us like a broken word,
Rent us in twain who are but one. . .

Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone? (46)

All of India's religious traditions are viewed by Naidu in a positive light. The "Ode to H.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad" is the poet's public offering, in the Mughal tradition of the royal ode, celebrating the harmonious cultural diversity within the Nizam's domain:

Deign, Prince, my tribute to receive,
This lyric offering to your name,
Who round your jewelled sceptre bind
The lilies of a poet's fame;
Beneath whose sway concordant dwell
The peoples whom your laws embrace,
In brotherhood of diverse creeds,
And harmony of diverse race (59-60)

Naidu's interest in Indian cultural diversity is also reflected in the sources of her materials. Her interest in folk traditions comes through in many poems – "In Praise of Henna," "Harvest Hymn," "The Festival of Serpents" – and many of her poems are translations or re-creations of folk songs in various Indian languages.

Though it has commonly been held that "The poems of Sarojini . . . show no evidence of crises and no turning points in her career as an Indo-Anglian poet" (Khan 3), there is a discernable movement toward poems with a more overt political content. More importantly, she was discovering a new public role for her poetry. Women's involvement in Indian nationalism offered a response to the British portrayal of the Empire as the salvation of Indian womanhood. Naidu's entry into the political sphere in 1902, at the urging of the prominent nationalist leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale, followed in the wake of the triumphant appearance of Sarala Devi, a member of the Tagore family, at the Indian National Congress of 1901. Sarala Devi had composed a song "in which she linked together the different provinces and combined the watchwords of the various races and creed[s]," and sang it on the opening day of the Congress. "After the second stanza was sung, every person in the huge pavilion joined in the refrain. Such a scene was never before witnessed at the gathering" (Singh 580-81). At the 1904 Congress, Naidu read her ode, "To India":

O young through all thy immemorial years!
 Rise, Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,
 And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,
 Beget new glories from thine ageless womb!

The nations that in fettered darkness weep
 Crave thee to lead them where great mornings break
 Mother, O Mother, wherefore dost thou sleep?
 Arise and answer for thy children's sake!

Thy Future calls thee with a manifold sound
 To crescent honours, splendours, victories vast;
 Waken, O slumbering Mother and be crowned,
 Who once wert empress of the sovereign Past.

The poem's strongly nationalist message is conveyed by the traditional image of India as mother, an image Naidu continued to skillfully employ in later writings, and by her characteristic image of "awakening," whose frequent appearance in Naidu's writing links her personal and political struggles. In "To India," Naidu places herself in a tradition of the patriotic song drawing on the influential "Bande Mataram" of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee a generation earlier. In doing so, she transfers her authority as an "English poet" into a different sphere, where English is transformed from the language of mimicry or colonialist exoticism into a means of linking together the disparate linguistic populations of India.

III. On Behalf of Her Sisters: The Poet as Activist

In the decade following the publication of *The Golden Threshold*, Naidu continued to write poetry, publishing her second collection in 1912. The following year, suffering from ill health, she was back in England. On June 16, 1913, she presided over the garlanding of Tagore by the Indian students of Great Britain; the London *Times* reported on her "striking speech" in which she said that "her heart had been pledged for years to every succeeding generation of students" and spoke of "a subtle bond between the poet and the student" as well as "the more sacred bond of nationhood" (Kundu

18). Others present were Gokhale and “the Hon. Mr. Jinnah,” future leader of Pakistan.

She renewed her old literary friendships and made new ones. The circumstances under which her home became the site for the fateful meeting of Ezra Pound and the widow of Ernest Fenollosa in late September remain somewhat uncertain.³⁶ She met with Yone Noguchi more than once. On January 30, Arthur Symons had written to John Quinn, “at Sarojini's I met Yone Noguchi who gave me a Japanese translation of my *Symbolist Movement* – jolly enough to be in Jap language!” (284).³⁷ Symons later wrote Quinn (3 May 1914) that Sarojini was “one of a few girls whom I made love to in different years who would have married me. But I was dead against those affairs”; in a letter to Julia Marlowe, too, Sarojini was “a little Indian Princess, an old flame of mine, who is now in London, whom I see here and there” (*Letters* 231, 233). Most important, however, was her first meeting with Gandhi in August of 1914 (*Dustoor* 3-4).

In 1915 Naidu gave a speech supporting home rule at the Indian National Congress in Bombay. Modestly dismissing her own political qualifications, she nevertheless turned her position as the token woman to political advantage, pressing for unity among the disparate populations of India through an appeal to a unified sisterhood:

since it is the desire of so many people here present that some woman from amidst you, some daughter of this Bharat Mother, should raise her voice, on behalf of her sisters, to second and support this resolution on Self-Government, I venture – though it seems presumption so to venture – to stand before you and to give my individual support as well as to speak in the name of many millions of my sisters of India, not only Hindu, but Mussalman, Parsi and other sisters, for the sake of Self-Government which is the desire and the destiny of every human soul. (*Speeches* 174)

Self-Government, she argued, was inseparable from Indian unity, which demanded freedom not only

³⁶ See O. Pound and Litz (264). The implications of this meeting will be discussed in the final chapter in this section.

³⁷ Naidu's invitation to Noguchi to tea at the Lyceum Club on April 9 survives among Noguchi's letters (*Collected English Letters* 216)

from British rule but from “that infinitely subtler and more dreadful and damning domination of your own prejudices and your own self-seeking community or race” (*Speeches* 175). She ended with a poem written for the occasion entitled “Awake,” which added the call for unity to the message of the earlier poem “To India,” and expanded on the “Mother India” imagery of the earlier poem:

Waken, O mother, thy children implore thee,
Who kneel in thy presence to serve and adore thee!
The night is aflush with a dream of the morrow,
Why still dost thou sleep in thy bondage of sorrow?
Awaken and sever the woes that enthral us,
And hallow our hands for the triumphs that call us!

“Awake” is not the only overtly political poem included in the final volume of poetry published in Sarojini’s lifetime,³⁸ *The Broken Wing* (1917). In “The Gift of India,” the gift referred to in the title is both the “gift” of the material wealth of India, “rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold” and, more importantly, the priceless gift of a mother India who has “yielded the sons of my stricken womb / To the drum-beats of duty, the sabres of doom.” Indian soldiers have been sent to fight in Europe’s war, and the poem, written in August, 1915, commemorates those who have already sacrificed their lives defending England in France or her imperial interests in the Middle East:

Gathered like pearls in their alien graves
Silent they sleep by the Persian waves,
Scattered like shells on Egyptian sands,
They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,
They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France.

Though of course this is only the latest instance of Britain’s use of her colonial subjects to fight its wars, it is an act of sacrifice not to be forgotten: “Remember the blood of thy martyred sons.” Other poems in the volume include a poem dedicated to Gandhi and a memorial verse to Gokhale, “the great saint and soldier of our national righteousness . . . [whose] death was a sacrifice in the cause

³⁸ With the exception of the collected edition of her poems entitled *The Sceptred Flute*, published in 1928. A group of poems probably written in the twenties was published posthumously in 1961 as *The Feather of the Dawn*.

of Indian unity," which offer additional indications of her political leanings. Naidu continues to offer picturesque images of Indian life in poems like "Wandering Beggars" and "Imperial Delhi," and expressions of Indian religious views in such poems as "The Prayer of Islam" and "Kali the Mother"; but a significant number of the poems stray from the Gossean program. There are a substantial number of love poems, poems to her children, and personal crisis poems such as "Farewell," "The Challenge," and the title poem, "The Broken Wing," in which the poet indicates her determination to transcend her personal suffering.³⁹

Shall spring that wakes mine ancient land again
Call to my wild and suffering heart in vain?

A long series of love poems entitled "The Temple" ends the volume. There is no record of Gosse himself criticizing the book, but James Cousins did so in his 1918 study, *The Renaissance in India*. Cousins' objections to the love poems ("In its pre-occupation with love, it appears to go off into a *cul-de-sac*" [251]) and to political poems like "Awake" ("There is not an atom of cerebral stuff in the lines: they are exclusively rhetorical, and in the rumtity tumtity measure of the poorest English minor poetry" [253-4]) testify to the continuing dominance of the Gossean idea of "what we wished to receive" more than two decades later.

With the exception of a small collection of verse probably written in the twenties, and posthumously published as *The Feather of the Dawn*, Sarojini gave up writing poetry and devoted herself to politics. For a time she was perhaps India's most prominent spokesperson on women's issues. The curious paradox, as Cousins perceived, is that "in her life she is feminist up to a point, but in her poetry she remains incorrigibly feminine: she sings, so far as Indian womanhood is concerned, the India that is, while she herself has passed on towards the India that is to be" (262). Though Cousins is aware that many of the poems are simply "deliberate presentations of phases of

³⁹ "The year 1915 was sad and depressing to Sarojini. Her dear father had died in January and just after a month Gokhale had also passed through the door of darkness" (Dwivedi 93). She also suffered from chronic health problems.

Indian life that have come under her eye and touched her heart" (259), he castigates her poetry for "its perpetuation of the 'door-mat attitude of womanhood'" (261), an appropriate enough image for lines like those in "The Feast": "Sweeter shall my wild heart rest / With your footprints on my breast."

More recently, critic Meena Alexander has framed the feminist problematic of Naidu's verse by inquiring into the way "her images of private, pained women suffering emotional deprivation, even psychic imprisonment, stand as a direct foil to the public life she so fearlessly took to." Was she, Alexander asks, "indeed able to cauterize her private pain through her poems and then move outwards into the public sphere? Or did the poems with their sometimes cloying diction, their female figures trapped in an unredeemed sexuality force her to leave them behind, the writer herself consumed more and more by the political struggle so that by 1917 she effectively stopped writing?" (51). This question will no doubt remain a central question for readers of Sarojini's work.

Politically, if not poetically, Sarojini was active in women's causes. In 1915 she had proposed a resolution on "Women in National Life" at the India National Social Conference. She urged Indian leaders to "let the womanhood of the country wake and work" (*Speeches* 70-1), and invoked comparison with changes in Western attitudes towards women's roles:

When I was in Europe a little more than a year ago after 15 years of absence from the continent of progress, during my last visit to Europe, what struck me in that great continent of rapid changes, of evolution going on at a rate that one can hardly calculate by the hands of a clock, that it was the womanhood of Europe that had begun to realise the full measure of its strength, the full height of its responsibility, the full sanctity and seriousness of its duty in the nation-building of Europe. Everywhere I found that women of all classes that had been considered luxury-loving had become transmuted into the servers of the country's good. (71)

Indian women too, she argued, are beginning to wake. She recalls arguments made particularly towards muslim leaders and makes the same plea to her mostly Hindu audience:

It was I who said, Oh men, unless and until you give to your women all those equal privileges that form the highest and noblest

teaching of your great nation-builder and prophet, you will not attain that regeneration of your race [,] that renaissance of Islamic glory, and today, in the presence of this great gathering chiefly of Hindus, I say, oh friends, oh brothers, oh sisters, look back to the past and look forward to the future, and let your future draw its diffused inspiration, its highest vitality, just from those living traditions that are our greatest inheritance. We ask . . . for a restoration of those rights . . . that are our immortal treasures. We ask only that we may be given that chance to develop our body and spirit and mind in that evolution that will re-establish for you ideal womanhood, not an impossible womanhood such as poets may dream of, but an ideal womanhood that will make noble wives who are helpmates, strong mothers, brave mothers, teaching their sons their first lesson of national service. (74)

The following December in Lucknow, a certain cynicism seems to have entered her speech at the close of the conference. She noted that it is “Woman's privilege to have the last word . . . though that last word is sprung on her by the tyranny of the leaders that demand home rule”; nevertheless she stood ready “to vindicate the readiness of my sex, to stand by the men of India . . . I rise to obey the mandate of this tyranny” (177), though as a poet she felt she was “merely a spectator from the watch-tower of dreams.”

In March, 1918 she gave several speeches to students at Jullundur. In one, she pressed the audience to find justification for the emancipation of Indian women in Indian tradition:

Have you forgotten the heroic stories and scriptures of your own motherland? It was the privilege of India – to possess women – who were bolder and braver than men. Yes, even to-day the need is that we the women of India should be bold and go to Yama Savitri-like and beg of him a new life for Mother India. (203)

Naidu's message must have encountered deep resistance from some segments of the Indian audience, and her arguments at times seem geared toward an audience highly skeptical of altering patriarchal tradition. We find Naidu reduced to such arguments as “an educated woman can look after her house better than her illiterate sister” (203), and the promise that liberated womanhood will be better equipped to assist Indian manhood in its far more difficult tasks:

Woman will be your guardian angel. She will cheer you up when you are gloomy. She will be your support in desolation. She will

be a light when you are in darkness. The liberty of the soul will be India's share only when Woman is free. (205)

Just as she envisions an education system that reconciles the “best traditions of the East and West” (209), she envisions the future of female subjectivity as one that combines self-surrender and self-realization, “the typical characteristics of Indian womanhood” which she is pleased to say that she finds manifest at the school she is visiting: “in this institution [the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya] I find manifest that spirit of self-surrender, joyous self-surrender, and self-realization. These are the qualities that make Indian women great and these are the qualities that I am glad to find in this Vidyalaya” (201). Here, the editor of her speeches notes, her remarks were greeted by “loud cheers.”

Partha Chatterjee's perceptive analysis of “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question” offers us a means of understanding what appear to be substantial limitations in Naidu's feminist position. These limitations were not Naidu's alone; for as Chatterjee notes, “recent historians of a liberal persuasion have often been somewhat embarrassed by the profuse evidence of women writers of the nineteenth century, including those at the forefront of the reform movements in middle-class homes, justifying the importance of the so-called 'feminine virtues'” (246-7). Such positioning, Chatterjee argues, was the price demanded by nationalist ideology in exchange for its qualified approval of certain reforms in the material conditions of women, including access to education, reforms whose potential threat to the spirituality of the home could only be countered by reinforced feminine values. “The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility” (248).

In 1919 Sarojini went to England as member of deputation of the All-India Home Rule League (Dwivedi 31), where she lectured in the wake of the infamous massacre at Jallianwallah bagh. In 1924 she traveled to West Africa, and in 1925 was named president, at Gandhi's suggestion, of the Kanpur session of the Indian National Congress. In 1928 she traveled to the U.S. and Canada as Gandhi's special envoy of Gandhi (Dwivedi 38). The stops on her lecture tour included Chicago

(where she stayed at the Hull House), Cincinnati, Minnesota, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Washington, and California.

In 1930 she took over after Gandhi's arrest during the famous Salt Satyagraha. Her close relationship with Gandhi has produced numerous apocryphal stories such as her first meeting with him "in an obscure part of Kensington" in 1914 (Dustoor 3-4); They became so close that Gandhi allegedly took to calling her "Granni," while she, in retaliation, referred to him as "Mickey Mouse" (Gupta 14). Naidu was with Gandhi when he broke his epic fast in 1943, reciting Tagore's poem "This my prayer to meet my Lord" (Gupta 14). After independence, in 1947, Naidu's appointment as governor of Uttar Pradesh made her the first female governor of an Indian province, a post which she held until her death in 1949.

Contemporary approaches to modern South Asian literature have in recent years been dominated by the Subaltern Studies movement, best known through the work of Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak. The work of these critics represents an important attempt to turn the focus of attention away from the task of preserving the legacy of the Indian elite and toward the difficult goal of enabling the subaltern to speak. As Ranajit Guha writes:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism . . . shar[ing] the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the conscious – nationalism – which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings – to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. (Guha 1)

My intention in citing these lines is not to critique the subalternist project, but rather to suggest that the need for revisionism of literary canons in America and England differ greatly from those in South Asia, where the position of Naidu in the academic literary canon is already firmly established. While the inclusion of a writer like Naidu (or, for that matter, even the Nobel Prize-winning Tagore)

in canons of twentieth-century English poetry is greeted here as a radical gesture, in South Asia, it is about as radical as suggesting that a writer like Frost or Tennyson ought to be accorded a place in the canon. At least a dozen books on Naidu have appeared in India in the past twenty years, for the most part reaffirming her role in Indian literary history, albeit with the usual reservations. Thus, an Indian critic like Susie Tharu, of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages at Hyderabad, can afford to direct her efforts to underscoring Naidu's elitist affiliations – “the hub of Naidu's world is a cultured, refined upper class,” she notes (261) – and calling attention to the “peculiar formation of the Indian intellectual” which demands servility to a (colonial) order, and makes a poet like Naidu into both exhibit and exhibitor: “our country is the spectacle, our lives a masquerade, and the poet must strain to keep it so” (261). In South Asia, I would suggest, a feminist, subalternist revisionism can afford to launch such attacks against writers like Naidu because their position in literary history is already secure. In the West, we are faced with the problem of acknowledging the validity of the subalternist critique, while at the same time insisting on Naidu's importance in literary history. To accord Naidu her rightful position in the history of twentieth-century English-language poetry does not imply that we ought to be oblivious to the concessions required of the poet by the patriarchal and nationalist orders which granted her the right to speak; indeed, it demands that we be particularly cognizant of her work not as the unmediated expression of Indian womanhood, but as a struggle for a voice whose potential empowerment is made possible only at an enormous cost.

“What About My Songs”: Yone Noguchi in the West

“Looking back on them now,” wrote *Poetry* magazine's assistant editor Eunice Tietjens, describing Yone Noguchi's early poems from the perspective of 1919, “one can see how directly they forecast the modern movement. They were in free verse – in the nineties – they were condensed, suggestive, full of rhythmical variations. In matters of technic they might have been written today” (97). The choice of the word “forecast” is interesting here; one might, as Yoshinobu Hakutani has argued, have used the word “influenced.” Noguchi was well known in literary circles in California, where he lived from 1893 to 1903, and following the publication of *From the Eastern Sea* in 1903, to a much wider British and American audience. He met Yeats and Laurence Binyon on a visit to England in 1903, and was invited to lecture at Oxford in 1913 by poet-laureate Robert Bridges. During the latter visit he spent time at Yeats' studio discussing Japanese literature with the Irish poet and his young American friend Ezra Pound at a time when both were engaged with the Japanese Noh drama. Noguchi's other notable literary friends in the West included, among others, Witter Bynner, George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Arthur Symons, and Edmund Gosse. But in spite of his impressive career, Noguchi has been conspicuously absent in accounts of the development of modern poetry. This essay will offer a brief examination of Noguchi's contribution to modern poetry, and of some aspects of his critical reception in the West.

I The American Poet, 1893-1903

Noguchi was born in Japan in 1875 and, having been encouraged in his study of English by his

teachers,⁴⁰ came, at the age of eighteen, to San Francisco, where, he later wrote, “my first despair . . . was my linguistic incompetency, which made me mad even to curse over the Japanese teachers who had not given me the right pronunciation of even one word” (*Story* 8). During his first three years in America he lived among Japanese immigrants, put himself through school working as a “schoolboy,” or domestic servant, and worked on *The New World*, a Japanese-language newspaper based in San Francisco, mainly as a translator.

In 1896 he became acquainted with Joaquin Miller, a well-known California poet who had written several books of rustic verse. Miller, Noguchi later wrote in his autobiography, “was regarded most reverently by Japanese as a *sennin* or ‘hermit who lived on dews.’ His great personality, it was said, was in his denying of the modern civilization; his only joy in life was to raise roses and carnations” (*Story* 39). From a more practical perspective, Miller’s home in the Oakland hills, known then to locals as “the Heights” and today as Joaquin Miller Park, had been suggested to the young poet as a “place to sleep and read without doing much manual work” (56). He sold all of his books – six or seven of them – except his Poe (56), and set out for the Heights in April. He fell in love with the place at once, and ended up staying four years. “What pleased me best,” he admitted, “was Miller’s manner in calling me ‘Mr. Noguchi,’ as it was the first occasion to hear myself so addressed since my arrival in California; hitherto I had been a Charley or a Frank according to the employer’s fancy” (58). Since Miller was not much of a bibliophile, Noguchi’s Poe became a dominant influence. The words of “Annabel Lee,” he wrote, “grew almost chiselled in my mind” (17). “At the highest moment of my Poe saturation, I confess, I felt I was a Poe myself, and could not speak any other language but Poe’s” (18). He began to publish some of his verse in the *Lark*, a famous, though short lived, California magazine edited by Miller’s friend Gellett Burgess (41), and the poems

⁴⁰ Following the restoration of the Meiji Emperor in 1868, the Japanese government expanded its recent program of sending young Japanese abroad to be educated in the West. It may be supposed that Noguchi’s decision to seek his fortunes in the West owed something to the climate of Western curiosity then present in Japan.

were well-received, though at one point he was, with some justification, accused of Poe-plagiarism. He remained receptive to other influences, of which the transcendentalism of Thoreau and Whitman was undoubtedly foremost, although at one point Omar Khayyam became a factor, and Noguchi confesses he “soon began to assume the rustic rôle of that Persian poet” (60).

With the assistance of Miller, Gellett Burgess, and Porter Garnett, he published his first book of poetry, *Seen and Unseen or, Monologues of a Homeless Snail*. Reviewers in the *Bookman*, the *Critic*, and the *Dial* were intrigued by the poetry though unimpressed by the book’s title.⁴¹ Whitman is clearly the dominant stylistic influence in these early poems, and in much of his later work as well. And yet the paradox of Noguchi’s poetry is the curious way in which the miniaturism and detail of classical Japanese poetry is married to the exuberance of the Whitmanesque yawp. The result is a tendency toward long metrical lines densely packed with curious word constructions in which the descriptive and the symbolic compete for space with the philosophical – all of which are disrupted by the occasional and often jarring interventions of a direct speakerly voice. For example, in “What About My Songs”:

The known-unknown-bottomed gossamer waves of the field are
colored by the traveling shadows of the lonely, orphaned
meadow lark:
At shadeless noon, sunful-eyed, – the crazy, one-inch butterfly
(dethroned angel?) roams about, her embodied shadow on
the secret-chattering grasstops in the sabre-light.
The universe, too, has somewhere its shadow; – but what about my
songs?
An there be no shadow, no echoing to the end, – my broken-
throated flute will never again be made whole. (SWI 63)

Noguchi’s peculiar adjective and noun phrases, which carry into English the intricacy of certain Japanese forms like the haiku and tanka, are often poems in themselves. Though not a native speaker of English, Noguchi does not shy away from neologisms, as when he calls the one-inch butterfly

⁴¹ See *Critic* 29 (14 Nov. 1896): 32; *Bookman* 4 (Dec. 1896): 288; and *Dial* 22 (16 Mar. 1897): 187.

“sunful-eyed”; each image calls forth a flood of associations which are permitted to flow into the poem, though condensed into the least possible space; thus the possibility that the butterfly may be a dethroned angel, though of no particular importance in the symbolic economy of the poem, is permitted, though relegated to a parenthesis. Often Noguchi’s imagistic phrases, like the “secret-chattering grassstops,” are startling and effective, though his elaborate excesses, like “The known-unknown-bottomed gossamer waves of the field,” sometimes fall flat.

In Noguchi’s second volume, *The Voice of the Valley*, which appeared in 1897, Noguchi continued to plunder the legacy of Whitman, to which he now added Milton, whose poems were his companions on the walking tour of Yosemite Valley which inspired many of the poems. The opening lines of “Song of Day in Yosemite Valley” bring together the grandeur of Milton and the long free verse lines of Whitman:

Thunderous opening of the unseen gate of solemn Heaven’s
Eternal Court!
Behold, clouds, tenants of the sky, sweep down from the Heavens
unto a secret palace under the Earth! (79-80)

Later in the poem, however, Noguchi carves out a niche in this magisterial voice for his own poetic persona:

I, a muse from the Orient, where is revealed the light of the dawn,
Harken to the welcome strains of genii from the heart of the great
Sierras –

The transcendentalist unity of the poet with nature is a theme that recurs in a number of Noguchi’s poems; and Noguchi is particularly at home with this theme which had, in its earlier American forms borrowed much from Buddhist thought.⁴² For Noguchi, becoming one with nature in Yosemite is a ritual of purification:

I proffer my stainful body and leprous soul with blackest shape
unto thee;

⁴² See Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992).

I am united with the Universe and the Universe with me.

Around this time, Noguchi began efforts to widen his literary contacts, directing his energies towards poets and critics in the New York and Chicago literary communities. With the help of his California associates, Noguchi embarked on a publicity campaign, sending letters and poems to Charles W. Stoddard in Washington, D.C., Edith Thomas in New York, and numerous others. His plans for a trip to the East Coast did not materialize until 1900, when he left California for New York, stopping en route in Chicago, where he made important connections with Frank Putnam, then editor of the *National Magazine*, and Onoto Watanna, a novelist and short-story writer who claimed to be half-Japanese.⁴³ On the East Coast, where he arrived in late June or early July, he lived briefly in Brooklyn and Avon, New York, before traveling to Washington, where he established a deep friendship with Stoddard, a former Californian and friend of Miller, with whom he had been in correspondence for several years. During his stay in Washington he also met Ethel Armes, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, and his first East Coast love interest. In late December Noguchi returned to New York and took a room at 80 Riverside Drive, where he remained until summer.

Noguchi was at this time working on a novel – his only published fiction – presented as the diary of a young Japanese girl, “Miss Morning Glory”: *The Diary of a Japanese Girl* (1902). He was still unsure of his command of English, and had begun the project with the assistance of Blanche Partington, a writer for the *San Francisco Call*, whom he had met in 1898 (CEL 8-11). Now in New York and without an assistant, Noguchi took out a newspaper ad in the *New York Herald*. It was noticed by another young woman, Leonie Gilmour, who responded. Noguchi wrote back a charming if ungrammatical letter on February 4, 1901:

Dear Madam:

⁴³ Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Eaton), who was actually half-Chinese, will be discussed in the next chapter. Noguchi mentions his periodic meetings with her in New York, where she came to assist with a theatrical adaptation of her novel, *A Japanese Nightingale*, in his letters to Frank Putnam.

Permit me! I am a young Japanese who advertised in the Herald and received your letter. I called on your place but not finding even a person.

I don't need any English teacher – yes, I do! I want one who can correct my English composition. Can you take such a task? I suppose that you are able, with good English and literary ability. About three pages a week. How much you charge? Pray, answer me! (50)

Gilmour took the job, and by July she and the poet had become romantically involved.

The Diary of a Japanese Girl was completed and serialized that year and published in book form in 1902. Later that year, Noguchi began preparations for a trip to England. Leonie Gilmour remained behind, as did Ethel Armes, toward whom Noguchi still harbored a romantic interest.

II. The British Sensation, 1903

Noguchi's rise to fame in London is a fascinating study in itself. While some critics have linked his success to the pro-Japanese climate that followed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, it is clear that Noguchi's public-relations savvy and relentless marketing skill were the main factors: his success was his own. Moreover, he was following in the footsteps of his mentor, Joaquin Miller, who had made a successful transatlantic promotional tour three decades earlier.

His arrival in London on November 20, 1902 had not been auspicious. "I hate London, Frank. Really I am longing for your great, clean, wholesome Amerikey," he wrote Putnam,⁴⁴ after settling into a small, cheap room near Oxford Street. He submitted a collection of poems he had brought with him to John Lane, but three weeks later, having heard nothing, he was becoming discouraged. Noguchi's situation improved somewhat when he moved in with a Japanese artist friend from his California days, Yoshio Markino, but Christmas and New Years passed, and still, Noguchi

⁴⁴ Yone Nogochi's letters to Frank Putnam are in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

heard nothing from Lane. Finally, he decided to take matters into his own hands. As Markino recalled,

Yone and I went to the printing-office, and a few hundred copies of "From the Eastern Sea" were ready, so we carried them home. It was such a cold night and my hands had no feeling at all. Then the pavement was quite frozen, and it was so slippery and almost impossible to walk with my worn-out boots. Yone warned me not throw them on the mud because he could not afford to print them again.

On the same night Yone sent more than half to some important literary people and newspapers. Every one of them welcomed this little brown book (pamphlet, rather), but one of them (I think it was Mr. William Rossetti) wrote Yone kindly enough to warn him that unless he obeyed the regulations of Publishing Law he would be punished. We both were so frightened, and next day we went to Somerset House and registered his name and sent copy each to the British Museum, Oxford and Cambridge. Many people came to buy Yone's book. About business matter he was as bad as myself. He could not ask the payment. He presented each copy to everybody who came to buy. One evening he said to me, "I cannot afford to present all my book."

I said, "Of course you cannot; why don't you ask them the payment?"

"But, Markino, just think how could I ask two shillings for this, although I put on that price?"

While we were talking a very young fellow came to buy Yone's book. It was Arthur Ransome (he was only seventeen or eighteen then). I told Ransome that Yone wanted two shillings a copy. Ransome was willing to pay. Yone shouted, "No, Markino It is 'lie!' it is 'lie!'" and ran out of the room. However, Ransome insisted to leave two shillings. We decided to buy some cigarettes, and when Ransome came we three should enjoy the smoking. Afterwards I learnt that Ransome was as poor as we were then.
(75-76)

It was clearly an amateur production, but the pamphlet turned out well, and the results were hardly less than miraculous, as Noguchi described to Putnam on January 27:

Dear Frank:

Yone Noguchi at last! London found out Yone! I grew tired with John Lane's slowness, and I demanded to have my Ms. returned.

And He [sic] returned my book of poems without saying whether he liked my writing or not.

I published a little pamphlet which I sent to you other day.

Such a hit, Frank!

I supposed that you have read the Outlook which I sent. The Outlook gave me that special article on two days after publication. Slow London and quick criticism! Good! St. James Gazette said very nicely.

And Arthur Symons – a clever young critic – wrote me saying he was going to write something about me.

So, Frank, your friend Yone Noguchi's prospect rather looks bright.

William Michel [sic] Rossetti – brother to Dante and Christina, a great critic – called on me. Such a dear old man! I dined with him. Many London writers had written nice letters, and I feel happy, Frank.

And my book will be out in next month from the Unicorn Press. The Unicorn press is very quiet and in high standing among London publishers. They always publish nice pictures. When my book will come out I will not miss to send one copy to you. I pray you will give me a friendly criticism.

At last, Frank!

I am welcomed by London. It rather seems to me so, I cannot say anything definite.

Mr Rossetti is going over my poems.

And my pamphlet is going very scarce. So before all my copies will be exhausted I send one copy to your wife. Well, Frank, someday, such a book will be splendid valuable. Ahem! Ha, ha, ha!

I published one hundred eight copies and have only twenty copies left now.

So, I will not sell any more.

I am glad then, that you are having happy life. I am envious really, Frank!

My best wishes to your wife! Tell her why I send one copy.

Yone

In fact, there was a good deal more to the story than what Noguchi told Putnam in the letter. He later sent Putnam a fuller narrative account, in which he described in greater detail his publicity efforts.

What a fear and courage I showed in sending out some copies to the press and to the leading English writers! Next morning, look, the letter of Duchess of Sutherland was waiting for my rise. Greeting and good wishes for my success she sent me. She recognized "a scent from the cherry blossoms, from the wood of the tea houses, of the shower of the Inland Sea" in my work. And she asked five more copies. Laurence Housman, author of "English-woman's Love Letter," sent me some suggestions, and

Arthur Symons, the critic, promised to write me up in the Saturday Review. Sir Leslie Stephen paid me compliments, and Thomas Hardy wrote me a letter. Duke of Argyll wrote me too. Sir Lewis Morris sent me a kind words from Camarthen. I was invited to come to meet Ellen Terry. The letter with the English crown on was from the Queen. It was the third day of the publication that the Outlook gave three pages for my sixteen-page pamphlet, under the heading of "a Friendly & Allied Poet." Most certainly my name was made, – yes, at once.

While Noguchi had always relied on such direct methods, from the time when he showed up at Joaquin Miller's place, the idea of approaching Britain's royalty and her most famous writers in much the same manner was remarkable, to say the least. The sixteen-page pamphlet, printed on a low grade of heavy, dark-brown paper, was presumably sent to all the influential literary names Noguchi could procure addresses for. And many indeed replied, some with short notes (Arthur Conan Doyle: "All thanks for your most original and interesting poems"; Sir Leslie Stephens: "Thanks for your little book!"), some with skepticism or criticism, but many with admiration, gratitude, and in some cases invitations. So it was that Noguchi soon found himself in the home of William Michael Rossetti, where he was encouraged to sit on a couch once owned by Shelley and admire the Rossettis' collection of Japanese prints. A month later he was writing to Leonie:

I made many a nice young, lovely, kind friend among literary *genius* (attention!) W. B. Yeats or Lawrence Binyon, [George] Moore and [Robert] Bridges. They are so good; they invite me almost everyday. They are jolly companions. (CEL 106)

From the Eastern Sea, in both its original sixteen-page form and its enlarged, book form, was the volume with which Noguchi's reputation was made. The poems in *From the Eastern Sea* reveal a broadening of technique as well as a wider range of influences. "Apparition" (92), a poem that Noguchi later saw as a milestone poem (*Story* 24), has a control and tightness of form absent in much of the earlier poetry, and seems to reflect a new concern for form, with closer stylistic links to the Japanese:

'Twas morn;
I felt the whiteness of her brow

Over my face; I raised my eyes and saw
The breezes passing on dewy feet.

'Twas noon;
Her slightly trembling lips of passion
I saw, I felt, but where she smiled
Were only yellow flakes of sunlight.

'Twas eve;
The velvet shadows of her hair enfolded me;
I eagerly stretched my hand to grasp her,
But touched the darkness of eve.

'Twas night;
I heard her eloquent violet eyes
Whispering love, but from the heaven
Gazed down the stars in gathering tears. (*FTES* 7)

“Apparition” is not quite an Imagist poem; there is a lingering Pre-Raphaelitism in “The velvet shadows of her hair enfolded me” and the liberal use of synaesthesia (“I heard her eloquent violet eyes / Whispering love”) is more reminiscent of the early French Symbolists. Rossetti later wrote perceptively,

Noguchi has a singular faculty, more boldly applied than the Western nations are accustomed to, for merging sounds into sights, or vice-versa, the perceptions of sense into the abstractions and invitations of the spirit: he brings to our consciousness matter and thought in a perpetual flux, phenomena adumbrating ideas, a homogeneous kosmos. (*Pilgrimage* 161)

Noguchi later wrote of “the sudden awakening of the Celtic temperament in my Japanese mind” (“A Japanese on Some English Poets” 422), which may be the source of the dreamy atmosphere of poems like “How Near to Fairyland” (*FTES* 46). As Ikuko Atsumi notes, Leonie Gilmour was half-Irish, and Noguchi may have learned something of the Irish Renaissance from her (Noguchi, *CEL* 14). The effects of the Celtic influence (for example, the dreamy vagueness later repudiated by Yeats) may be felt in some of Noguchi’s worst excesses, apparent in lines like “The purple-robed breeze (O fine frenzy!) / Stole away amid the trees, as a silent monk retires” (*FTES* 41). Even here, however, the intervention of the vernacular Whitmanesque voice (O fine frenzy!) hopelessly disrupts the sustained

dreaminess such a style seems to demand.

In "Under the Moon," the moon serves to produce of clusters of images, functioning not unlike the blackbird in Wallace Stevens' famous poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (though the guiding aesthetic tends towards a unified effect rather than cubist fragmentation).

I was in the lullaby of the moon,
As a tree snugly wrapped in the mist:
I lost all my earthly thoughts.
The moon was voiceless as a nun
With eyes shining in beauteous grief:
The mystic silence of the moon
Gradually revived in me the Immortality.

The moon provides the fixed point for the poetic investigation of subjectivity, then becomes the point of comparison through which the poet explores external modes of beauty, infinity, and perfection:

There is nothing like the moon-night
When I, parted from the voice of the city,
Drink deep of Infinity with peace
From another, a stranger sphere. There is nothing
Like the moon-night when the rich noble stars
And maiden roses interchange their long looks of love.
There is nothing like the moon-night
When I raise my face from the land of loss
Unto the golden air, and calmly learn
How perfect it is to grow still as a star.

The moon-night is more than simply atmosphere, for the poem is both an expression of the poet in a solitude ultimately transformed by the imagination into an Edenic paradise ("as Adam / Not yet driven from Eden, and to whom / Eve was not yet born"), and at the same time an affirmation of a transcendentalist Zen-poetic, with its final insistence that "What a bird / Dreams in the moonlight is my dream: / What a rose sings is my song." The ineffable bird-dream and rose-song become signifiers of the striving to attain the union of mind and nature so central to Noguchi's poetics.

From the Eastern Sea was so successful that it inspired the poet and humorist Owen Seaman to publish a parody in *Punch*. In the piece, titled, "The New 'West-Östliche Divan'" in mock-

homage to Goëthe's cross-cultural poetic collection, Seaman wrote,

Sequent upon the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the profound sensation produced in the literary world by Mr. Yone Noguchi's fascinating volume of verse, *From the Eastern Sea*, in which he attempts to clothe his native phantasies in a loosely-fitting English dress, has caused Mr. Punch to anticipate an immediate boom in Oriental methods. These methods being still unfamiliar, the following fragmentary essays in this kind, composed by his request, will kindly be regarded as tentative. (Seaman 240)

The parodies seek to subvert Noguchi's metaphorically exuberant style by applying it to the political satire typical of *Punch* and Seaman's work in particular, producing an effect of bathos that is not without humor. In the first of the parodies, "To the Sleeping Beauty of Devonshire," attributed to "Lord R-s-b-ry," Noguchi's high romantic style is played to the hilt on a love object entirely unworthy of attention:

The deafness of my Beloved is the deafness of the Sea.
Her peach-blossom lips are parted,
Her chin droops like a nocturnal petal
On the indolence of her heaving bosom.
My song is wasted on her: my
Song is no more to her than
A rivulet trickling from the unresponsive dome
Which is the back of a duck.

It is hardly surprising that Noguchi's style invited parodies; the later modernists were often parodied in a similar fashion. Seaman seems to have chosen Noguchi simply because he was at the moment noteworthy, and because exoticism could be used as a source of humor. Moreover, Noguchi was a foreigner, with a second-language command of English. "I hope you will not think me unsympathetic, if I say that as English poetry your work can scarcely take high rank," wrote the critic William Archer to Noguchi, illustrating what was probably a common attitude among English readers in his day. "It is impossible for anyone to really excel in poetry written in a language which is not his mother tongue," Archer continued. "Your knowledge of English is quite remarkable," Archer continued, "but it is not perfect, and your metres are not known in English verse" (*CEL* 92). Noguchi's metres, of course, are no longer unknown in English verse, and while many contemporary

poetry critics still share Archer's view that good poetry demands linguistic mastery, we are no longer as certain that there is only one correct form in which this mastery can be expressed.

Ikuko Atsumi may be right in suggesting that it was Noguchi's "love drama" that called him back to the States in late March 1903, before even seeing copies of the enlarged edition of *From the Eastern Sea*, although it is also possible that, despite his success, he had simply run out of money (he asked Frank Putnam to meet his ship to prevent being refused entry, since, he told Putnam, foreigners were often expected to show money on their arrival – about forty dollars – and he didn't have it).

By mid-April, Noguchi had taken rooms at 315 East 26th Street in Manhattan, and was involved in a number of writing projects. He was also involved with several romantic projects, namely Ethel Armes and Leonie Gilmour. Noguchi's inability to choose decisively between them was to produce the worst scandal of his American career, for after quietly marrying Leonie in November 1903, he began planning a return trip to Japan: Ethel, rather than Leonie, was to join him as his wife. Noguchi indeed returned to Japan in the fall of 1904, intending for Ethel to arrive in spring, but Putnam and Stoddard got wind of the plan and intervened, informing Ethel about Noguchi's "other wife" and persuading Noguchi to reunite with Leonie, who was then living with her mother in Los Angeles raising her and Noguchi's son. With Putnam and Stoddard acting as go-betweens, Leonie was finally persuaded to join Noguchi, and arrived in Japan with their son, Isamu, in the early months of 1907.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Isamu Noguchi describes his parents' relationship as "almost like a business relationship. She was an excellent editor for him" (Hakutani, "Father and Son" 32). They remained on friendly terms, however.

III. The Japanese Professor, 1904-1913

Within a year of Noguchi's return to Japan in 1904, he had been able to secure a professorship in philosophy at Keio University in Tokyo. Noguchi was able to use his experience of the West to academic advantage. He continued to write books, now in Japanese as well as English. If *From the Eastern Sea* was Noguchi's best-received book of English verse, his books published in Japan exhibited a more marked turn toward a modernist style. In *The Summer Cloud*, published in Tokyo in 1906, all 62 of the poems are prose poems, and their effect is remarkably like that of Tagore's *Gitanjali* poems, which they precede by some six years. Due to their limited distribution outside of Japan, however, they remained relatively unknown in the West until the publication of Noguchi's *Selected Poems* (1921).

In some ways, *The Pilgrimage*, published in Japan in 1909, was a reversion to Noguchi's older style. The structure and tone of the poem, "The Eastern Sea," derive in an obvious way from Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree":

I say farewell to the Western cities:
I will return to the Eastern Sea,—
To my isle kissed first ever by the sun,—
I will go now to my sweetest home,
And lay there my griefs on a mountain's breast,
And give all my songs to the birds, and sleep long.

The influence of Keats is apparent in "The Nightingale," though Noguchi's bird is of a different feather, a more Conradian bird who evokes and conveys by suggestion "Triumph, rapture and art . . . with thy self-same word," and a proto-Poundian bird as well: "What a discoverer of the newest language!"

The most radical breaks are found in poems like "The Fantastic Snow-Flakes" and "Fantasia," where Noguchi's orchestration of imagery, mood, and voice is exhilarating and confident:

Bah! What fantastic snow-flakes, eh,
Dancing merrily, ha! ha! ha!

Lo, their tiny feet raising so! (*Pilgrimage* 22)

“The Fantastic Snow-Flakes” is a meditation on death: the snowflakes must eventually fall and die, but “What a fantastic end to die / In the dying music of ancient love!” the poet exclaims, as the flakes stick together in their fall. The poet challenges the lover in the poem to approach death with the same recklessness, though the lover is afraid. “Fantasia” also is a meditation on the transience of life, evoked by a stream of images, over which the poet as artist is supreme orchestrator:

Let the clouds flit through the window at the left;
 The dancers shapeless in pain and pride,
 From the right dance in as a tide:
 A spirit of pagan days, sick in joy,
 That rose at the sound of their stamping feet,
 I'll sing a song that makes the seas the hills.
 Rags to roll me in, pieces of dream,
 (Morality begins, I am afraid, where I stop my song.)
 So with my heart of nocturnal fear,
 I have chosen the sky red in memory and art.
 Let the stars fall in the garden rose:
 The leaves and my souls in a thousand guises
 Hurry to the ground to build a grave. (*Pilgrimage* 32-33)

Noguchi was also developing as a prose writer. Following the success of the early volumes of poetry, Noguchi found himself invited to help fill the growing demand of contemporary literary publications for knowledgeable interpretations of the East. He was quite aware of the limitations of Western attempts to represent Japanese culture. In his San Francisco days, he recalled, “the vogue of the *Mikado* or the *Geisha*, a comic opera . . . made my true Japanese heart pained, as I thought it was a blasphemy against Japan” (*Story* 16). During the two decades following *From the Eastern Sea* he contributed more than two dozen articles to the *Bookman*, the *Critic*, the *Nation*, and other periodicals on a wide variety of topics, including Japanese art and literature as well as his experiences in England and America.

In 1904 Noguchi published in the journal *Poet Lore* an article on “Japanese Women in

Literature” and one on “Modern Japanese Women Writers” in *The Critic*.⁴⁶ “Japanese Women in Literature” in particular is a spirited defense of Japanese women writers. “In the ‘Manyoshū,’ or ‘Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves’” (an important eighth century poetic anthology), women’s “skill in phraseology and their delicacy of sentiment,” Noguchi argues, “was far superior to the men’s” (88). “Our Japanese women are not justly treated in America,” Noguchi wrote. “Their literary achievement is unfortunately neglected from notice” (91). The *Critic* also that year carried an article by Noguchi on “Modern Japanese Literature.”⁴⁷

In 1912 and 1913 his interests were more political, and he published articles in the *Nation* on the question of the naturalization of Japanese immigrants (he is, surprisingly, opposed, on the grounds that East should remain East and West, West), and on the revolution in China, which he at that time regarded as unimportant.

IV. The Distinguished Lecturer, 1913-14

Noguchi was back in England in 1913, where he was invited by Robert Bridges, then Poet Laureate, to give a lecture at Magdalen College on “The Japanese *Hokku* Poetry,” as well as lectures at the Japan Society and the Royal Asiatic Society. A letter to Leonie written in January gives a sense of his enthusiastic reception and busy schedule on this second English visit:

Dear Leonie,
I am quite all right in London, people here show so much interest to myself. You might say that I am lionized [in] England. A few nights ago I gave a lecture at the Japan Society which turned out in quite a good shape. I will be a great of honour at Poets Club's dinner, and am hoping to read some poems of mine, or will lecture on Japanese poetry. Yesterday I was invited by Bernerd [sic] Shaw and tonight am going to take a dinner together with Yeats. And

⁴⁶ *Critic* 44 (May 1904): 429-32; *Poet Lore* 15.3 (July 1904): 88-91.

⁴⁷ *Critic* 41 (March 1904): 260-3.

so on – you see, I am splendid in condition, but not financially. And that will be another matter altogether. I have been asked by quite many papers to write on something, but I am tremendously busy – drinking tea or eating English pudding, and have no time for my writing. But I hope that this strange rush will soon be over. Then – will London forget of me? Or I might forget London altogether. All the papers here are extremely kind to me, and say verily nice things about me. A few nights ago I dined with Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate, who was exceedingly interesting [sic] British type of poet: I am going to spend a day or two with him at his home near Oxford. And my Oxford lecture will begin on the 29th. (CEL 215)

Noguchi's writings and lectures of this period were collected in *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* (1914) and *The Spirit of Japanese Art* (1915), both of which were published in Cranmer-Byng's *Wisdom of the East* series. *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* not only attempts to make Japanese poetry comprehensible to the West, but also suggests that Western poets have much to learn from the Japanese.

For a poet to have few lines in these prosaic days would be at least an achievement truly heroic; I think that the crusade of the Western poetry, if it is necessary, as I believe it is most momentous, should begin with the first act of leaving the "words" behind, or making them return to their original proper places . . . poetry will take care of itself all by itself without any assistance from words, rhymes, and metres. I flatter myself that even Japan can do something towards the reformation or advancement of the Western poetry, not only spiritually, but also physically. (18)

Noguchi stresses the importance of an appreciation of silence, citing both Basho Matsuo, originator of the seventeen-syllable haiku form, and Stéphane Mallarmé, to whose work he may have been exposed through Symons and Yeats. A poem by Lizette Wordworth Reese is taken as a specimen of Western wordiness:

what a pity to become an American poetess if she has to begin her poem with "Oh, gray and tender is the rain" – such a commonplace beginning. I declared bluntly that I, "as a Japanese poet," would sacrifice the first three stanzas to make the last sparkle fully and unique like a perfect diamond. Explanation is forbidden in the House of Poesy for Japanese . . . (21)

Ezra Pound was of course developing a similar doctrine at about this time, and Pound had certainly

been aware of Noguchi's work after Noguchi wrote to him in 1911. Yeats too was moving towards a more spare style. It is likely that Noguchi's influence on Pound and Yeats has been underestimated, but it remains difficult to judge the precise nature and full extent of that influence. Hakutani points out that "Yeats's interest in Japanese painting and noh coincided with the publication of Noguchi's essays and lectures on these subjects" (SP 14), and there is the curious example of the copy of Pound's famous "Metro" poem among Noguchi's papers titled by Pound "To Yone Noguchi." On the other hand, any argument concerning Noguchi's influence on Pound will have to come to terms with evidence that suggests that Pound harbored a certain degree of personal and professional animosity toward Noguchi. This appears to have been to a certain extent fostered by Noguchi's response to the younger Pound's work, beginning in 1911, when Noguchi, evidently trying to stay current on new developments in English verse and, at the same time, to publicize his recent work, initiated a correspondence:

As I think you may not know my work at all, I send you, under a separate cover, my new book of poems called *The Pilgrimage*. As I [am] not yet acquainted with your work, I wish you will send your book or books which you like to have me to read. This little note may sound quite businesslike, but I can promise you that I can do better in my next letter to you. (Kodama 4)

Pound responded with a friendly letter expressing his delight in the poems, his thoughts about East / West unity coming through the arts, his apologies about the absence of critical writings (he might, he says, "be more to the point if we who are artists should discuss the matters of technique & motive between ourselves") and copies of his two volumes of verse, *Exultations* and *Canzoni* (CEL 211). Noguchi, however, did not keep to his promise to "do better" in his next letter to Pound; his response, polite but brief – hardly compensating Pound's effort – read: "Many thanks for your kind letter with *Exultations* and *Canzoni*. I was glad to be acquainted with *Exultations*, and what a difference of your work from mine! I like to follow closely after your poetry" (Kodama 5). Pound may have felt slighted in this early correspondence.

Pound was fairly well established by late 1913 when Noguchi arrived in London, and he may have nursed a sense of injury from this early correspondence. Noguchi does not appear to have taken Pound as seriously as Pound needed to be taken. In Noguchi's 1916 reminiscence in the *Bookman*, "A Japanese Poet on W. B. Yeats," which describes an evening spent in conversation with Yeats, Yeats begins with a discourse on the invigorating effect of "the folk element" in literature: "From such a view I am pleased with the Japanese *No* plays, specimens of which I have seen through the late Fenollosa's posthumous translation which my friend, Ezra Pound is just now editing" (431). "I confess my mind is perfectly saturated now with the plays," Yeats tells him. Later, the two are joined by Pound and "his young friend sculptor" who Noguchi describes as looking "delightfully barbarous as if they had left but a moment before their hidden shelter covered by ivy vines" (432). Pound's arrival makes Noguchi feel uncomfortable in his formal attire; Pound, for his part, "a present day faun in appearance with his uncombed hair where pigeons might like to be nesting," sinks into a couch – "I was glad that he knew very well the place where he fitted perfectly," Noguchi notes – and, in Noguchi's rendering of the conversation, says nothing for the duration of the meeting (Gaudier-Brzeska, the sculptor, speaks once, in defense of Western civilization, but is corrected by Yeats). While Yeats and Noguchi engage in animated conversation about ghosts (Pound's least favorite topic of conversation) and about the comparative social meanings of women's clothing, Pound remains silent in the background.

Pound's dislike of Noguchi is evident in two 1914 letters. In the first, to *Poetry* magazine's assistant editor Alice Corbin Henderson on January 27, two days before Noguchi's first Oxford lecture, Pound – then *Poetry*'s international editor – notes that he has rejected two of Noguchi's articles (possibly taken from his Oxford lectures): "Yone Noguchi has sent me two bad jobs which I shall return. If he has anything worse, it may as well come here for rejection"⁴⁸ (66). Pound's

⁴⁸ Henderson, incidentally, reviewed – quite favorably – Noguchi's *Spirit of Japanese Poetry* in the November, 1915 issue of *Poetry*.

meaning here is somewhat ambiguous, but less so is the second letter, to his mother, in which he states, "Yone Noguchi dined with me on Tuesday; interesting *litterateur* of the second order. Dont like him so well as Sung, or Coomaraswami.⁴⁹ Still you neednt repeat this, as the acquaintance may grow and there's no telling when one will want to go to Japan" (Kodama 216).

It is possible that Pound's view of Noguchi improved, or that Noguchi was an influence on Pound despite the tension between the two;⁵⁰ he would certainly have been familiar with most, if not all, of Noguchi's work. At the same time, however, it is clear that Pound sought to distance himself from Noguchi, preferring to cite the Fenollosa materials, which he exclusively controlled, as his sources.

⁴⁹ Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) was the son of a leading Tamil in Ceylon and his English wife, Elizabeth. His father, encouraged by Disraeli and others to enter politics, died on the verge of his departure to England in 1879, leaving Ananda to be raised by his mother. In 1897 he entered University College, London, where he took First Class Honours in Geology and Botany; a Doctorate from London University followed in 1906, with a thesis on Ceylonese mineralogy. Settling for a time in Ceylon with his first wife, Ethel, he presided over the Ceylon Social Reform Society, urging the retention of Ceylonese customs and discouraging "the thoughtless imitation of unsuitable European habits and customs" (Lipsey 35). It was as an art historian, however, that he was to become best known. His first book on the subject, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, was published in England in 1908. In 1909 he stayed with the Tagores at their family home, Jorasanko, in Calcutta (141). (An essay on "Poems of Rabindranath Tagore" is included in his book of nationalist essays, *Art and Swadeshi* [Madras, 1911]). His second wife, Alice Richardson, a professional musician, studied Indian music while accompanying him to India in 1911; back in England the following year, her recitals were greeted with acclaim by the likes of Tagore and Yeats (162-63). During the next few years, spent shuttling between India and London, Coomaraswami contributed articles on Indian art to the *New Age*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Scribners'*. In 1917 he took over the curatorship of the Indian art collection of the Boston Museum, which hoped to build a collection to rival its enviable East Asian holdings, acquired in previous decades by Fenollosa and his associates. For an account of Coomaraswamy's influence on European attitudes towards Indian art, see Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 277-86.

Sung is unidentified.

⁵⁰ One may speculate, for example, that the tension between the two reflected a kind of "anxiety of influence," to use Harold Bloom's phrase.

V. The Japanese National, 1914-1947

From London Noguchi made a brief excursion to Paris in April. On his return, he wrote to Leonie that he was “awfully tired of Europe” (CEL 217). But he continued on, as planned, to Berlin and then to Moscow, where H. G. Wells had directed him to a friend who might show him “the artistic & dramatic things” of the city (CEL 216). It was to be his last European visit, and soon after he returned to Japan, the war in Europe had begun. Noguchi’s English writings during the war became increasingly political; however, he continued to publish on literary topics – mainly such reminiscences of his pre-war visit to England as those discussed above. Noguchi’s adulation of Yeats and other poets did not prevent him from becoming increasingly critical of Western politics. In 1914 and 1915 he published scathing attacks in the *Nation* on the failure of the West to settle its disputes amicably.⁵¹ In a letter to the editor of the *Nation* written weeks after the outbreak of hostilities and entitled “The Downfall of Western Civilization,” he writes:

Sir: What does the present European war mean to us Orientals? It means the saddest downfall of the so-called Western civilization; our belief that it was builded on a higher and sounder footing than ours was at once knocked down and killed; we are sorry that we somehow overestimated its happy possibility, and were deceived and cheated by its superficial glory. We now see that it was merely a mirage or optical illusion of a thing which, in its truest sense, never existed; or if it ever existed, it was simply a changed form or crafty masquerading of an avaricious instinct of primitive barbarism. The Western people, with all sorts of colleges and institutions in their most advanced order, are, after all, like their naked friends in far-away Asia or Africa

Noguchi does not lose the opportunity to point out how the Japanese have been victimized by the myth of a civilized Europe:

We have been looked upon as a dangerous element, particularly by the Americans, who sent us peace envoys on several occasions; it was their stupidity not to think that their own West . . . was still

⁵¹ *Nation* 99 (8 Oct. 1914): 432; *Nation* 101(29 July 1915): 145-6.

more dangerous than the East where Confucius's analects are not a dead language.

He recalls with some irony that "it was the German Emperor who drew a picture calling us Yellow Peril, when we won a fight from China."

Two articles in the *Bookman* in 1919, one in the form of a letter addressed "To the Americans" and the other on "Whitmanism and its Failure" seem to mark the closure of a certain phase of his relationship with the West, characterized by curiosity and, generally, approval, and the beginning of a new phase marked by the emergence of cultural critique.⁵² "To the Americans" is a polite but extended critique of American values and the American national self image. Noguchi's essay resembles Ruth Benedict's famous late book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, in that both take Japanese values as a position from which to wage a attack on American values. Noguchi's deep familiarity with Western and particularly American values is crucial to his strategies, which depend on his ability to be simultaneously insider and outsider. America, he argues, remains caught within an inherited romantic optimism, combined with a naivete derived from long isolation. Americans are as a result "strong, fearless and even foolish," but should "be thankful for being able to act foolishness." When he calls Americans complacent, it is, he says, "from my desire to reveal the really fortunate fact, that you have found it hardly necessary to study the geography of the rest of the world. In other words, you have found the whole universe in your own selves," much as did Thoreau, "who discovered all the phenomena of the Arctic regions only in Concord." As travelers (and "where are the people who travel so extensively as you," he asks), Americans "return home . . . without a knowledge of the country or countries where they have travelled . . . the chief joy of travelling for you, I dare say, is to find your own America in the other country, I mean, how your civilization is invading there." Americans have no need to leave their country to discover the world, however, since "the other countries come to you, as if ants swarming round a big lump of sugar." "Who," he asks,

⁵² *Bookman* 47 (July 1918): 473-9; *Bookman* 49 (March 1919): 95-7.

“will blame you if you feel superior to those poorly dressed immigrants?”

Noguchi's politeness seems to increase as his critique cuts nearer to the American bone. “Perhaps you will be displeased when I say that your American civilization is tinted with a certain provincialism; I mean it in the real and true sense, because the true essence of provincialism protects you from the degeneration in which your individual personality would lose its royal colour.” American literature is great because of this provincialism, and because “at the risk of your displeasure, dilettantism there reigns in its real meaning,” a dilettantism that is contrasted favorably to literature of “professional” writers. “It is a general rule that the real life of authors declines with the passing-away of dilettantism into sad professionalism.”

American education also gets a mixed review. “I read somewhere,” he writes, “that the American education is given into the untrained hands of the lowest bidder. It is true that your women even with their brains much injured or weakened by magazine reading and candy-eating, control the larger part of your educational field, perhaps driving the men away like Bret Harte's heathen Chinese with their cheap labor; still I believe that your educational condition is ten-times better than that of Japan where only tired, spiritless men . . . are used.” The American system, with its “half-paid women . . . encourages the feminine sort of civilisation . . . and instils the religion of woman-worship, into a tender brain.” “The work of American women,” though undesirable from Noguchi's masculinist standpoint, nevertheless “successfully checked the vulgarisation of the country in the hands of men with only monetary aspiration, almost without time for reflection and culture.” The American entry into the war may have the effect of making America more “man-like,” since it should entail a masculine venturing out from the closed and feminized domestic space which is isolationist America. “If so, it will do you good certainly. The careless extravagant mind of your female civilisation is bound to grow sober, grave and thoughtful.”

Ultimately, Noguchi's message to Americans is a call to American men to reestablish control over American culture:

Your fair daughters are far too civilised and, of course, too educated for your own men. Who patronises the art of your country? Your women. Who support your stages? Your women. And who control your literature? Your women. I used to hear, fifteen or twenty years ago, that your women could not keep away from Omar of Persia and chicken salads. They might be to-day cringing round Tagore of India and Chinese vases of jade. So long as things look and sound exotic and mysterious, your women are content with them.

Whether Noguchi's critique of American Orientalism as a feminine diversion alienated his own readership, male or female, can only be speculated on. Certainly, Noguchi must have been aware that he appealed to at least some of his readers through his exoticism, and perhaps he wished to imagine a more masculine role for his own poetry, based on the masculine figure of travel rather than the feminine figure of domestic artifact.

If there is a latent self-criticism inherent in "To the Americans," it is made somewhat more explicit in his other 1919 piece, "Whitmanism and its Failure," where Noguchi confronts the anxiety of influence stemming from his earlier embrace of Whitmanism. Noguchi's evaluation of Whitman now bears much of the weight of his critique of American idealism expressed in "To the Americans." Like America, Whitman is too naive and idealistic, even somewhat embarrassing: "His thought as well as his faith was often licentious, always too innocent; when I find him today to be unpractical and utopian, I cannot help calling him a failure or a bankrupt." Noguchi, having long ago exchanged his bardic life for a university position, has likewise exchanged his youthful idealism for pragmatic realism. But as he sees it, it is not himself but the *zeitgeist* that has changed:

The Whitmanism which strengthened the human mind of half a century ago with its simplicity of prophetic idealism, and warned America not to forget God's freedom and joy, was too absolute, because it was not builded on practical execution; it was too dreamy, because it stood on reminiscent optimism which is often irresponsible. How will this Whitmanism, if it insists to stay with us, meet with those confused civilizations and cultures freely invading from all Europe and even from Asia? America of today, who has already left the stage of adolescence, must treat humanity more practically, and rearrange life more realistically; naturally the meaning of American freedom and democracy must alter in color

and tone.

It is likely that Noguchi's new role as gadfly to the West eroded some of the popularity he had gained as the enthusiastic, self-appointed bardic ambassador of pre-war internationalism. His rejection of the West coincided with the waning interest in things Oriental, and in the twenties, his English publications dwindled, and his poetic production after *Japanese Hokkus*, published in 1920 (and dedicated to Yeats), ceased entirely. In 1921 Porter Garnett, one of Noguchi's literary associates from his early days, wrote in the *Nation*,⁵³

It seems rather strange, indeed, that in these past years, when the question of vers libre has engaged the attention of so many commentators, so little heed has been given to this Japanese poet who in the nineties so completely anticipated the imagist matter.

Though Garnett believes the days of Japanese influence almost over, he regrets passing up an early opportunity to collaborate with Noguchi on translations of classical Japanese poets.

In his later years Noguchi appears to have made little effort to cultivate the Western reputation he had gained with his youthful energy and enthusiasm. Noguchi's absence from the scene made it easy to write him out of the histories of modernism which were being constructed by Pound and others in the late teens and twenties. As we begin to reevaluate the legacy of modernism, we need to reconsider Yone Noguchi's role as both forerunner and influence in the history of modernist poetry, as an important early figure in the Asian-American literary tradition, as the first important modernist poet of California, and as a cultural liaison between East and West. Had Noguchi remained in America, instead of returning to Japan after eleven years, he might be considered the first important Japanese-American poet. His poetry was not merely an importation of Japanese verse – and, thus, avoided being categorized as “mere” exotica; rather, it was a complex, cross-cultural and trans-national interweaving of languages, styles and forms.

⁵³ The *Nation* 113 (7 Dec. 1921): 666.

“Orient from all Quarters”: Modernism and the Far East

The influence of Chinese and Japanese poetry and the Japanese Noh drama on modernist writers, particularly Pound and Yeats, is widely known, and has received fairly extensive critical attention. Literary-historical accounts of these crucial influences usually begin in 1913 with Pound's acquisition of the notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa following his introduction to Fenollosa's widow on September 29 of that year. (Interestingly, this meeting occurred at the home of Sarojini Naidu, who, as noted in a previous chapter, had returned to London earlier that year.) Pound had been mildly interested in East Asian poetry for several years. His poem “In a Station of the Metro,” a first attempt to incorporate an Eastern flavor in his own work, had been conceived in 1911 and reworked over a period of two years. Earlier in 1913 he had responded enthusiastically to Allen Upward's “Scented Leaves – From a Chinese Jar,” an imitative poetic sequence which appeared in the September 1913 *Poetry*. After receiving the Fenollosa materials – five years of concentrated notes on Chinese poetry and Japanese drama prepared by Fenollosa with the help of Japanese tutors – Pound began the poetic versions of Fenollosa's prose translations of Chinese poetry which appeared as *Cathay* (1915).⁵⁴ In the winter of 1914-15 Pound was revising Fenollosa's lecture notes on “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry” – “a whole basis of aesthetic,” as Pound saw it, though the tepid

⁵⁴ On Pound's Chinese translations see Wai-lim Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969); Hwa Yol Jung, “Misreading the Ideogram: From Fenollosa to Derrida and McLuhan,” *Paideuma* 13:2 (1984): 211-227; Gyung Ryul Jang, “Cathay Reconstructed: Pound Inventor of Chinese Poetry,” *Paideuma* 14:2-3 (1985): 351-362; Ronald Bush, “Pound and Li Po: What Becomes a Man,” *Ezra Pound among the Poets*, ed. George Bornstein (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985): 35-62; Cordell D. K. Yee, “Discourse on Ideogrammic Method: Epistemology and Pound's Poetics,” *American Literature* 59:2 (1987): 242-256; Yao Xin Chang, “Pound's Chinese Translations,” *Paideuma* 17:1 (1988): 113-132; David Gordon, “Pound's Chinese: A Dead Language?,” *Paideuma* 18:1 (1989): 197-201; Ming Xie, “Elegy and Personae in Ezra Pound's *Cathay*,” *ELH* 60 (1993): 261-81; Zhaoming Qian, “Translation or Invention: Three *Cathay* Poems Reconsidered,” *Paideuma* 19:1-2 (1990): 51-75; Guiyou Huang, “Ezra Pound: (Mis)Translation and (Re)-Creation,” *Paideuma* 22:1 (1993): 99-114; Ming Xie, “Pound, Waley, Lowell, and the Chinese 'Example' of Vers Libre,” *Paideuma* 22:3 (1993): 39-68; Zhaoming Qian, “Ezra Pound's Encounter with Wang Wei: Toward the 'Ideogrammic Method' of The Cantos,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 39:3 (1993): 266-82.

response of numerous journal editors, which delayed its publication by four years, indicates that his enthusiasm was not universally shared. Fenollosa's materials on the Noh became the basis for *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (1916) and "*Noh*," or *Accomplishment* (1917). The former volume contained an introduction by Yeats, with whom Pound lived at Stone Cottage in Sussex during the winters of 1913-1916. Yeats had become deeply interested in the form, which influenced many of his own plays, beginning with *At the Hawk's Well* (1916).⁵⁵

Critical as the Fenollosa notebooks were to the explosion of interest in East Asian literatures (not only for Pound and Yeats but for others such as Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Witter Bynner, Arthur Waley, to whom I shall return), I do not want to overemphasize the centrality and originality of the Pound⁵⁶/ Fenollosa contribution.⁵⁷ I want, rather, to argue that the widespread

⁵⁵ On the influence of the Noh on Yeats's dramatic theories, see Akhtar Qamber, *Yeats and the Noh* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974); Daniel Albright, "Pound, Yeats, and the Noh Theatre," *Iowa Review* 15:2 (1985): 34-50; Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray, *Yeats and the Noh: a comparative study* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1990); Steven Putzel, "Poetic Ritual and Audience Response: Yeats and the No," *Yeats, and Postmodernism*, ed. Leonard Orr (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1991): 105-25; Yasunari Takahashi, "The Ghost Trio: Beckett, Yeats, and Noh," *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture*, ed. Yoshihiko Ikegami (Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1991): 257-67.

On Pound and the Noh, see Nobuko Tsukui, *Ezra Pound and Japanese Noh Plays* (Washington, D.C.: UP of America, 1983); Sanehide Kodama, *Ezra Pound & Japan: Letters and Essays* (Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1987); Yoko Chiba, "Ezra Pound's Versions of Fenollosa's Noh Manuscripts and Yeats's Unpublished 'Suggestions & Corrections,'" *Yeats Annual* 4 (1986): 121-144; Akiko Miyake, Sanehide Kodama and Nicholas Teele, eds., *A Guide to Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa's Classic Noh Theatre of Japan* (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation; Otsu, Japan: Ezra Pound Society of Japan, 1994).

On Pound and Yeats at Stone Cottage, see James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) and Richard Londrville, "Fenollosa and the Legacy of Stone Cottage," *Paideuma* 22:3 (1993): 101-08.

⁵⁶ In her dissertation on *The Orient as Pretext for Aesthetic Revolution in Modern Poetry in English* (U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1987), Kathleen Flanagan argues that Pound's insistence on making the Orient an ideal category and appropriating it for his own literary and cultural purposes was in fact typical of late nineteenth-century Orientalist writings, which tended to present the East as "a peaceful, meditative, and spiritual alternative to a Western society that they found largely aggressive and acquisitive."

⁵⁷ There were, for example, earlier Noh translations and studies in English: Thomas McClatchie, *Japanese Plays (Versified)* (London: W. H. Allen, 1890); Osman Edwards, *Japanese Plays and Playfellows* (London: W. Heinemann, 1901); F. V. Dickins, *Primitive and Mediaeval Japanese Texts*

interest in East Asian cultures which facilitated the production and reception of these works was merely a component of the general interest which I have characterized as “exoticism.” It was much the same general interest in “the East” that had propelled Rabindranath Tagore to fame during the previous year, with the help of Yeats and Pound, and it is worth noting that the announcement that Tagore had won the Nobel Prize came in November of 1913, just as Pound was beginning his work on the manuscripts. India and Tagore were then the rage; surely China and Japan could not be far behind.

Since the Boxer rebellion of 1900, China and its volatile political climate – in which anti-foreign factions competed with the pro-Western reformists like Sun Yat-sen – had been watched with increasing scrutiny in the West. Of considerable interest was the sudden end of the centuries-old Manchu dynasty on February 12, 1912, with the forced abdication of the boy emperor, P'u-Yi.⁵⁸ Similarly, Japan, which had been the subject of growing interest after being opened to the West by the American force under Commodore Perry in 1854, had established itself as a world power in the 1890s, a status formalized by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, and again demonstrated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Japanese power threatened to compete with Western expansionism, and demanded close scrutiny.

Translated into English (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1906); Marie Charlotte Stopes, *Plays of Old Japan: The 'No'* (London: W. Heinemann, 1913). Stopes, whose 1913 book offered an excellent introduction to the Noh three years before Pound, wrote, “these treasures are practically unknown to the reading public of the West, notwithstanding the interest that has been taken in ‘things Japanese’” and noted concerning previous translations that “in most cases these . . . are such as appeal primarily to scholars, and do not reach the wider public” (1).

⁵⁸ P'u Yi is familiar to Western audiences as the subject of Bernardo Bertolucci's 1987 film, *The Last Emperor*.

I Ezra and Dorothy: Orient from all quarters

Pound's letters to his future wife Dorothy Shakespear offer some suggestive clues about the development of Pound's Chinese and Japanese interests. In examining the dispersions of statements about "Oriental" matters in this epistolary discourse it seems plausible to distinguish three distinct periods: (1) preceding his introduction to Mary Fenollosa, (2) between Mrs. Fenollosa's offer to present her husband's notebooks to Pound and his actual receipt of the materials in December, and (3) following the acquisition of the notebooks. Correspondingly, Oriental references in these periods may be taken to illustrate (1) Pound's prior receptivity to the Orient, (2) his anticipation of and (3) his reaction to the Fenollosa materials.

By locating Pound's Oriental interests on the map of exoticist strategies which I have been tracing in these chapters, I hope to raise questions about some of the common ways these interests are commonly reconstructed by Pound scholars. First, there is the "myth of origins": the assumption, implicitly or explicitly made, that Pound (/Fenollosa) can be credited as the originary importer(s) of either Chinese or Japanese poetry or Japanese theatre into the English-language literary tradition. Secondly, there is a frequent assumption that the sudden appearance of the Fenollosa materials was solely responsible for Pound's interest in the Orient, and that Pound adopted them only because of the remarkable affinity he discovered between Fenollosa's theories and his own, and between Chinese and Imagist poetry. There is some truth to this latter assumption, but it tends to conceal the fact that Pound's interest in the Orient, *predating* his discovery of the Fenollosa materials, did much to pave the way for his acceptance and use of them.

The weight of this argument must rest on the first of the three periods I have outlined, the period preceding Pound's meeting with Mary Fenollosa, which holds indications of the degree and direction of his prior receptivity to the Orient; secondarily, there must be some demonstration of a continuity between these prior interests and Pound's later, post-Fenollosa interests. Towards these

ends, I propose to examine the pre-Fenollosa Orientalism of both Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, offering for consideration Dorothy's interest in East Asian decorative objects, their mutual interest in the Oriental collections of the British Museum, and the influence of others intrigued by the Orient such as Allen Upward, Harriet Shaw Weaver, and Laurence Binyon. Taken together, these seemingly minor interests, I will argue, illustrate a pattern of Orientalist desire-formation.

Dorothy's interest in Oriental decorative objects appears to have predated Pound's literary interest in the Orient. When Dorothy went to Italy in April of 1912, she had to put her Oriental interests on hold ("one has to forget Chinese ideas entirely") but she was again thinking of the Orient while preparing for her return in May: "we go home tomorrow . . . My newly papered room will need some Jap prints perhaps. Or you might like one?" (O. Pound & Litz 206, 230). In Sussex, in September, she tried to do a painting of Pound's "brown silk Venus room" but "it turned into a very evil room, with blue & green Chinese tapestries" (258). An Oriental purchase was always worth a comment: in October Dorothy wrote, "I bought my winter frock (dark blue – with Chinese embroideries) yesterday" (266), and in December, "I have bought a little new treasure – in an old curiosity shop down there – it is a snuff box, I suppose – in tortoiseshell, beautifully carved. . . . It looks chinese. Do tortoises grow in the Yangtse Kiang?" (289).

The Oriental Division of the Print Room at the British Museum began to exert a considerable fascination on both Ezra and Dorothy in 1913. "I contemplated mediaeval japanese prints at the [British Museum] & feel ages older & wiser," Ezra wrote her in January. While there, he had talked with Laurence Binyon, also a poet, who worked there; "Bin-Bin," as Pound called him, had "lament[ed] that England will never have a collection comparable to the 'Fuller' lot in the U.S." (177). By September, Dorothy was herself pining for a visit, but she had no permit, and, moreover, the Print Room, in the process of moving its quarters, was closed. "The Print Room is closed for ever so I can't look you out anything," Pound wrote on September 17 (256). This did not faze Dorothy, who wrote Pound four days later that she was "sending to have my print room licence

endorsed" (258). Pound wrote back, "That print-room is closed INDEFINITELY – while they move into the new wing of the museo – which means, I should think, six months – There's small use of your imagining you'll be let into *that* plaisance, and unless there are prints at the S. Kens[ington museum] I don't know what will become of you. You'll have to read the Mahabarata or something else extensive" (259). It was true: "That beastly Print Room *is* shut, with a vengeance" Dorothy reported on October 9. Pound was sympathetic, and offered books to salve her Oriental cravings: "In lieu of the print-room you can have Giles' 'Hist. of Chinese Lit', & a book of Japanese ditto, & the new Tagore, & Upward's 'Divine Mystery'" (270).

The Oriental interests of friends and literary acquaintances fueled Ezra and Dorothy's desires. Their musician friend Walter Rummel reported on his visit to Debussy in April: "Debussy & his Chinese things must be charming," Dorothy mused (198). In September, Pound became enthused about Allen Upward's "Scented Leaves – From a Chinese Jar": "The chinese things in 'Poetry' are worth the price of admission" (256). Pound sought out Upward, and wrote on September 23: "Upward of the chinese poemae is quite an addition. He is off for greece possibly in a months time. I may go down to the I[sle]. of Wight with him for a visit before then" (259).

To summarize: in the year or so preceding the arrival on the scene of Mary Fenollosa, we may observe the presence and formation of distinct Oriental desires focused on decorative objects, artworks, and basic literary knowledge; at the same time that we see these desires reflected and amplified in Ezra and Dorothy's private discourse, we may observe these desires as they play off against those of other artists, musicians, and writers who had successfully incorporated Oriental elements in their work.

On September 29, 1913, Pound met Mary Fenollosa at Naidu's. "I seem to be getting Orient from all quarters" he wrote on October 2. "Have done shows chinesesques, borrowed the Mahabarata, been taken to a new curious & excellent restaurant chinois. . . . Dined on monday with Sarojini Naidu and Mrs Fenolosa [sic], relict of the writer on chinese art, selector of a lot of Freer's

stuff [the Freer Collection of Oriental art at the Smithsonian], etc.” Pound had also been to visit Harriet Shaw Weaver (supporter of the *New Freewoman* and future editor of the *Egoist*) at her home, Cedar Lawn in Hampstead: “I got real japanese prints – I don't mean on paper – at Cedar Lawn ('Ampstead of all places),” he wrote, “but I believe the Weavers are leaving it and as I've just met 'em I dont see how you can be set there to paint it.” Dorothy must have been jealous. And finally, he had got hold of some translations of Confucius and Mencius: “I'm stocked up with K'ung fu Tsze, and Men Tsze, etc. I suppose they'll keep me calm for a week or so” (264)

This Oriental onslaught of late September clearly acted as a catalyst for Pound; his interests, and those of Dorothy as well, began to acquire a more serious, directed quality. Pound's interest in India was waning, particularly since Tagore's departure on September 4; China was clearly on the horizon. On October 7, he wrote: “I have a huge hunk of the Mahabarata on the 'secretoire'. I wonder if I'll ever read it. I find the chinese stuff far more consoling. There is *no* long poem in chinese. They hold if a man can't say what he wants to in 12 lines, he'd better leave it unsaid. THE period was 4th cent. B.C. – Chu Yüan, Imagiste – did I tell you all that before???” (267). Dorothy wrote back, “Please tell me about the 4th Cent B.C. Chinese. I expect they're right about having no long poem” (269).

In mid-November Pound was secluded with Yeats at Stone Cottage in Sussex for the first of three winters spent there as Yeats's secretary. He wrote Dorothy shortly after arriving, “I read Kung-fu-tse, & a barbarous Indian thing and I read ghosts to the eagle” (274). Meanwhile, Dorothy was busy trying to teach herself Chinese. On November 20 her letter began with a Chinese ideogram and the cryptic salutation, “Beloved 'Mao.’⁵⁹” The same letter goes on to demand, “can I have any of the Chinese poems to read – some time?” – a reference to several short translations Pound had made of early Chinese poems, on the mistaken belief – following Giles – that they had been written in

⁵⁹ Evidently, a metonymic reference to Ezra as “hair”: in a subsequent letter she records, “I had my Mao washed yesterday” (286).

vers libre.⁶⁰ He wrote back, "I will copy those – no I won't I'll bring 'em on Wednesday," and explaining in in mock Chinese-pidgin: "Them Chineze (Chinese poems). They are only very small 3 1/2 poems" (276).

That Pound had not received any of the notebooks from Mary Fenollosa by this time (although they were presumably expected, and began arriving a few weeks later) indicates that Pound and Dorothy were already preparing a fairly substantial foray in the direction of China. Dorothy was learning the language, while Ezra was practicing his own "translations" and thinking optimistically about the affinities between Chinese and Imagist short poems and free verse.

Mrs. Fenollosa wrote Pound from Alabama on the 24th of November, "I know you are pining for hieroglyphs and ideographs: but I must keep to our plan and send the No stuff first. That is a complete book in itself" (Kodama 6). The first package was shipped, as promised, on the 25th, and Pound's craving for "hieroglyphs⁶¹ and ideographs" – significant, as it illustrates that Pound was already contemplating uses for ideograms before reading Fenollosa's "Chinese Character" essay – was apparently not long kept unfulfilled, for Pound reported to William Carlos Williams on December 19, "I am very placid and happy and busy. Dorothy is learning Chinese. I've all old Fenollosa's treasures in mss" (*Letters* 27).

Dorothy, meanwhile, was becoming, or trying to become, immersed in the Orient. "I have found a nice portrait of you in one of my Japanese picture books!" she jokingly reported on

⁶⁰ The poems, which were later published in *Des Imagistes* and later in *Lustra*, included "After Ch'u Yuan," "Liu Ch'e," and "Fan-Piece for her Imperial Lord." Giles had described the "wild irregular metres" of these poets (50), and Pound in an essay in *Poetry*, referred to them as "the great *vers libre* writers before the Petrarchan age of Li Po . . . a treasury to which the next century may look for as great a stimulus as the renaissance had from the Greeks" (*Literary Essays* 218). Both Giles and Pound were mistaken about the absence of rhyme and metre in these poets, as Ming Xie points out in "Pound, Waley, Lowell, and the Chinese 'Example' of Vers Libre," *Paideuma* 22:3 (1993): 39-68.

⁶¹ "We have not one classic tradition to revivify, we have China and Egypt, and the unknown lands lying upon the roof of the world – Khotan, Kara-shar, and Kan-su" (*Literary Essays* 224).

November 22. In early December, she was anxiously awaiting the reopening of the Print Room: "Are there any old Chinese M.S.S. at that blooming museum that you will want copied?" she wrote to him, wanting to be helpful, though the silliness of the idea immediately occurred to her: "(Brilliant idea! how can he want them copied until he knows what they're about?)" (285-6). In the meantime, "there is said to be a marvellous collection of Jap. prints at S. Kensington Museum now – a Loan Exh: & worth seeing" (286). By January of 1914 she had set her sights on the main reading room instead: "I am in communication about an entrance ticket for British M[useum] reading room – where I say I am studying Symbolisme – but where I mean *privately*, to study Ching Chang Chinese!" (295). Pound replied that it was not necessary to bother with the Symbolisme pretext, since no one at the Museum cared, but suggested that "the oriental room is a much pleasanter place to work in than the 'reading-room,'" and she would be able to pursue her study of Chinese there since he had written to Mary Fenollosa again for "that simple introduction to Chang"⁶² (i.e., Chinese) (297). Dorothy's response is a revealing one: "My only reason for wishing to pursue Symbolisme is that I shall have to tell my parents what I am doing – at first anyway – and I would much rather keep the Chinese secret – as it amuses me much more, & I am likely to go on longer if amused! Comprends-tu?" (300). The forbidden pleasures of the Orient had to retain an aura of secrecy, even if it was not necessary.

II. Fenollosa: fructifying the exotic

Fenollosa was intrigued by elements of secrecy surrounding the Noh, and his writings conveyed an aura of penetration into forbidden spaces that was no doubt enjoyed by Pound and Dorothy Shakespear. "Mosse and I are the only foreigners who have ever been taught Noh," Fenollosa claimed, "and I am the only foreigner now practicing it" (Pound, *Translations* 238). Fenollosa depicts

⁶² As the editors note (297), this was probably Hillier's *Chinese Language and How to Learn It: A Manual for Beginners*, second ed. (1910).

the Noh as secret not only to foreigners but to most Japanese as well: "When a Noh actor was engaged by the Shogun he had to sign long articles to the effect that he would never divulge even to his wife or his relatives any of the doings or descriptions of things in the palace, also that he would not visit houses of pleasure or go to the theatre" (239). We are told of "a tradition of a young actor who wished to learn Sekidera Komachi, the most secret and difficult of the three plays, which alone are so secret that they were told and taught only by father to eldest son" (241). The inclusion of these forbidden and secret texts in *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* undoubtedly heightened their exotic appeal.

But Pound did not want to play up Fenollosa as an exoticist. Fenollosa "cannot be looked upon as a mere searcher after exotics," wrote Pound in his introduction to "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" (1919). Pound meant that Fenollosa did not simply wish to immerse himself in the exotic for its own sake: "his mind," he wrote, "was constantly filled with parallels and comparisons between eastern and western art. To him the exotic was always a means of fructification. He looked to an American renaissance" (357). Evidently, for Pound, exoticism "as a means of fructification" – like sex for the sake of reproduction – is healthy; whereas "mere" exoticism for its own sake is not. To place this in the context of hybridity, we may say that Pound's emphasis is on hybridity's productivity, rather than on the lack from which hybridity is in flight. In saving Fenollosa from the charge of "mere searcher after exotics," however, the critical word is "mere," for elsewhere, Pound cannot help presenting Fenollosa as a romantic hero of the scholarly exotic quest:

The life of Ernest Fenollosa was the romance par excellence of modern scholarship. He went to Japan as a professor of economics. He ended as Imperial Commissioner of Arts. He had unearthed treasure that no Japanese had heard of. It may be an exaggeration to say that he had saved Japanese art for Japan, but it is certain that he had done as much as any one man could have to set the native art in its rightful pre-eminence and to stop the apeing of Europe. He had endeared himself to the government and laid the basis for a personal tradition. When he died suddenly in

England the Japanese government sent a warship for his body, and
the priests buried him within the sacred enclosure at Miidera.
These facts speak for themselves. (213)

Romance, unearthing treasure, attaining a high position in a strange land – all of these are components of exoticist narrative, as I have outlined it in previous chapters.⁶³ If Fenollosa was not actually viewed as a god by the Japanese, he certainly came close (in Pound's account) and yet his actions were in the service not of imperialism, but of a cultural counter-imperialism: Fenollosa is credited with saving “the native art in its rightful pre-eminence” and stopping “the aping of Europe.”

But Fenollosa was quite clear about what he saw as the West's need to culturally colonize the East. True, this was part of his visionary outlook towards the future: “vistas of strange futures unfold for man, of world-embracing cultures half weaned from Europe, of hitherto undreamed responsibilities for nations and races” (357). His language makes it quite clear who his work is intended to benefit: “The Chinese problem alone is so vast that no nation can afford to ignore it. We in America, especially, must face it across the Pacific, and master it or it will master us. And the only way to master it is to strive with patient sympathy to understand the best, the most hopeful and the most human elements in it” (358). The phrase “the Chinese problem” reminds us that this is an essay written in the years of unprecedented Chinese emigration to the United States, of the Chinese Boxer Rebellion and of the Japanese “yellow peril,” of concern over China's anti-foreign sentiments and trade barriers. But if Fenollosa's rhetoric is reminiscent of Müller's enumeration of the benefits of imperialist knowledge-gathering, Fenollosa appears nevertheless overtly opposed to imperialism and current strategies of trade-by-force: “The duty that faces us is not to batter down their forts or to exploit their markets, but to study and to come to sympathize with their humanity and their generous aspirations. . . . We need their best ideals to supplement our own—ideals enshrined

⁶³ The desire to penetrate the highest levels of the Chinese Empire for the sake of saving the Chinese from their own internal and external threats is precisely the premise of Victor Segalen's exoticist novel, *René Leys*.

in their art, in their literature, and in their lives” (358).

Fenollosa's arguments for the value of Chinese poetry frequently deploy primitivist strategies. First of all, Primitivism is deployed in support of his “decision” to study Chinese poetry through Japanese sources: “several centuries ago China lost much of her creative self, and of her insight into the causes of her own life, but her original spirit still lives, grows, interprets, transferred to Japan in all its original freshness” (360). The central argument of the essay – the supremacy of the ideogram as a poetic “medium” – depends on “the enormous interest of the Chinese language in throwing light upon our forgotten mental processes” (375). The development of Western logic, according to Fenollosa, has been an error. “In diction and in grammatical form science is utterly opposed to logic. Primitive men who created language agreed with science and not with logic. Logic has abused the language, which they left to her mercy. Poetry agrees with science and not with logic” (382). The “primitive” ideogram, though more basic to thought, is nevertheless capable of abstraction, *contra* James Legge: “No attenuated idea exists which it might not have reached more vividly and more permanently than we could have been expected to reach with phonetic roots. Such a pictorial method, whether the Chinese exemplified it or not, would be the ideal language of the world” (386). “Is it not enough,” he asks, “to show that Chinese poetry gets back near to the processes of nature by means of its vivid figure, its wealth of such figures?” For “the prehistoric poets who created language discovered the whole harmonious framework of nature, then sang out her processes in their hymns” (386).

Fenollosa's reflections on the Noh take similar primitivist directions. “The Japanese people have loved nature so passionately that they have interwoven her life and their own into one continuous drama of the art of pure living” (*Translations* 268). In his earlier works on the visual arts, Fenollosa had explained “how the inflowing of such an Oriental stream has helped to revitalize Western Art, and must go on to assist in the solution of our practical educational problems.” Oriental literature, he now argues, may have a similar revitalizing effect, for “there are several phases

of Oriental poetry, both Japanese and Chinese, which have practical significance and even inspiration for us in this weak, transitional period of our Western poetic life" (268). Here, he has in mind "a form of drama, as primitive, as intense, and almost as beautiful as the ancient Greek drama at Athens," namely, the Noh (269). Fenollosa deploys the West-empowering strategy of distancing the contemporary non-Westerner (a strategy seen earlier in Müller's denigration of the modern Indian): "This ancient lyric drama is not to be confounded with the modern realistic drama of Tokio, with such drama, for instance, as Danjuro's. This vulgar drama is quite like ours, with an elaborate stage and scenery, with little music or chorus, and no masks; with nothing, in short, but realism and mimetics of action" (271). Only the archaic and the primitive is of value, and the Westerner is better trained to recover it than the "native."

While it would be a mistake to reduce Fenollosa to the exoticist and primitive strategies I have noted, it is important to note the way these strategies align his work, and that of Pound, with other productions of the exotic and primitive in the contemporary discourses of the Orient. Hugh Kenner writes of Pound's *Cathay*, "Its real achievement lay not on the frontier of comparative poetics, but securely within the effort, then going forward in London, to rethink the nature of an English Poem" (199). This may, in retrospect, appear true. But whatever its real achievement may have been, it is clear that "the frontier of comparative poetics" (and comparative cultures) did play an important part in conditioning the interest of both Pound and his audience in Chinese poetry, and that Pound's interest was inseparable from the exoticist interests of curiosity, collecting, penetrating forbidden spaces, attaining cultural mastery over the Orient, as well as his desire to be part (ideally, leader) of a new Orientalist literary and artistic movement.

III. The Orient “revealed”

John Gould Fletcher traced a different genealogy of interest in Asian poetic forms in his retrospective essay on “The Orient and Contemporary Poetry” (1945), although he later became allied with Imagism after Pound's Oriental conversion. “Sometime about the year 1910, I first became aware of the fact that the Chinese people had known a great literary flowering, and had enjoyed great writers of their own,” Fletcher recalled. While at Harvard he had become interested in the Oriental Wing of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (148). Chinese Literature in translation followed. “Just what book first introduced me to them, I do not know; but I suspect it was Herbert A. Giles' *A History of Chinese Literature*, published in 1901” (159). Giles' book, which Pound had with him at Stone Cottage (Carpenter 222) led Fletcher to the translations of James Legge – whose “more than Scotch matter-of-factness, as well as his utter inability to appreciate any poetical qualities in the Chinese written character” repelled him – and to Confucius (149). Around this time Fletcher also came across Judith Gautier's *Le Livre de Jade* (1867), and Cranmer-Byng's *A Lute of Jade* (1909). “They acted on me as a revelation,” Fletcher recalled (150). Fletcher became interested in Japanese forms as well (partly through Yone Noguchi, “whose poetry also had had, since 1912, some effect on my own” [159]). The poems entitled “Symphonies” and those “The Ghosts of an Old House” in Fletcher's *Goblins and Pagodas* (1916) are modeled, respectively, on Chinese and Japanese forms (160). *Japanese Prints*, which followed in 1918, was inspired by a show of Japanese paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago in January and February of 1915 (160-61). But as Fletcher notes, “the Japanese manner, or as much of it as I could temporarily employ, soon lost interest for me, in favor of a more complex attempt to relate my own capacities as a poet to my American background” (161).

Cultural interest in Japan⁶⁴ had its roots in late Victorian Japonisme, a movement particularly influential in the visual arts, where a number of French Impressionists, including Manet, Degas, and Monet, incorporated Japanese styles in their work; in England, Whistler was the most prominent representative.⁶⁵ Japonisme found musical expression in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, *The Mikado* (1885) and in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1905), which was based on David Belasco's 1899 dramatic adaptation of John Long's 1898 story.⁶⁶ In literature, the most popular "interpreter" of Japan was American expatriate Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), whose *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), *"Out of the East": Reveries and Studies in New Japan* (1895), *Exotics and Retrospectives* (1899), and *Japanese Fairy Tales* (1899) presented sympathetic portraits of still-surviving, exotic "old Japan" threatened by Western modernization. A collection of his translations of poetry, *Japanese Lyrics*, drawn from various writings, appeared posthumously in 1915.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ On "cultural" Japonisme, Toshio Yokoyama explores Victorian periodicals and their representations of Japan in *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation 1850-80* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Clay Lancaster discusses the impact of Japanese displays in American international exhibitions such as the Philadelphia Centennial (1876) and World's Columbian Exhibition of (1893) in *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: Walton H. Rawls, 1963). On American literary representations of Japan (as well as China and India) see Beongcheon Yu, *The Great Circle: American Writers and the Orient* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983).

⁶⁵ On Japonisme in the visual arts, see Siegfried Wichman, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence in Western Art Since 1858* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981); Julia Meech-Pekarik and Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Japonisme Comes to America: The Japanese Impact on the Graphic Arts 1876-1925* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990); Frank Whitford *Japanese Prints and Western Painters* (London: Studio Vista, 1977); Klaus Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting, from Whistler to Matisse*, tr. David Britt (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1992); Chisaburo Yamada, *Dialogue in Art: Japan and the West* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1976); Elisa Evett, *The Critical Reception of Japanese Art in Late Nineteenth Century Europe* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982); Gabriel P. Weisberg and Yvonne M.L. Weisberg, *Japonisme: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York; London: Garland, 1990.

⁶⁶ Long's story originally ran in the *Century* magazine in 1898; Belasco's play enjoyed a five-year run in New York from 1900-05. See John Luther Long, *Madame Butterfly, Purple Eyes, etc.* (New York: Garrett Press, 1969); David Belasco, *Six Plays* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1928).

⁶⁷ On Hearn, see Carl Dawson, *Lafcadio Hearn and the Vision of Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992) and Vera Seeley McWilliams, *Lafcadio Hearn* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin co., 1946). On Hearn and Yeats, see Barbara Hayley, "Lafcadio Hearn, W. B. Yeats and Japan," *Literature*

A number of Japanese writers were able to find openings for their work in this climate of interest. A previous chapter has explored the way Yone Noguchi was able to market his writings in this climate of interest in Japan. Noguchi arrived in London shortly after Pound's acquisition of the Fenollosa notebooks, and while there, gave a lecture at Oxford on "the Japanese Hokku poetry" and lectures at the Japan Society, and the Royal Asiatic Society on other topics related to Japanese literature and drama (including the Noh). Yoshinobu Hakutani argues, in "Ezra Pound, Yone Noguchi, and Imagism," that Noguchi was Pound's most likely source for information about Japanese hokku poetry. But Pound's feelings towards Noguchi, as we have seen, were mixed at best.

Pound was on better terms with Tamijuro Kume, a Japanese painter, who had begun taking lessons in No and Kyogen when he was still in primary school, and who went to Europe after graduation to study oil painting. According to Kodama, Kume met Pound during World War I (2). It seems likely, however, that Kume was the "T.G. Komei" who contributed an essay in late 1913 "On Japanese Poetry" to the journal *Poetry Review*,⁶⁸ which Pound must certainly have read. Kodama argues that Kume "played a crucial part in Pound's rendering of the No plays and Dulac's production of Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well*" – for example, "he performed *utai*, the vocal part of the No, at Pound's flat in London" – but observes that "nothing much is known about the actual role he played in assisting Yeats and Pound in their research" (2-3). Pound later helped Kume to exhibit his paintings in Paris and New York. He died in the Japanese earthquake of 1923.

Another Japanese writer and artist in London during the early years of the century was Yoshio Markino, with whom Noguchi stayed in 1903. In addition to illustrating a number of books, Markino contributed numerous essays to periodicals and published two memoirs: *A Japanese Artist*

and the Art of Creation, eds. Robert Welch and Suheil Badu Bushrui (Totowa, NJ : Barnes & Noble, 1988): 43-60.

⁶⁸ Komei, T. G., "On Japanese Poetry," *Poetry Review* 3 (1913): 289-93.

in *London* (1910) and *My Recollections and Reflections* (1913).⁶⁹ Markino, like Noguchi, had spent time in California (which he characterized as painfully racist) before heading to London. There, he studied art and sought to establish himself as an artist, eventually with some success. He was invited to collaborate on a production of a Japanese play entitled "The Darling of the Gods," starring Sir Herbert Tree as a Japanese villain, in November, 1893. His two autobiographical works contain some scattered observations on Chinese and Japanese poetry and drama: as a post-impressionist painter, Markino was interested in the tendency of certain styles of Chinese odes to present "the mental impression as it casually happens to be at the moment" (*My Recollections* 221).

Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944) was born in Japan to a German father and Japanese mother, educated in Germany, and arrived in the United States at the age of fifteen. To summarize in a paragraph Hartmann's varied life and career as actor and dramatist, artist and art critic, and poet would be impossible, but among his dozens of published books and articles, several, concerning Japanese literary subjects, may be cited as contributions to the general interest in things Japanese: "The Japanese Conception of Poetry" in the *Reader* (1904), his articles on "Japanese Fiction" and "Japanese Drama" in *Forum* (1911-12), and his collection of *Tanka and Haiku, Japanese Rhythms* (1916) some of which were translations of Japanese originals and others of his own construction.⁷⁰

Onoto Watanna was the pen-name of Winnifred Eaton (1875-1954), who wrote a series of successful Japanese romances between 1899 and 1922, of which the most popular, *A Japanese Nightingale*, was produced on Broadway in 1903. Though half-Chinese, she preferred to claim a half-

⁶⁹ See Yoshio Markino, *A Japanese Artist in London* (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs, 1910); *My Recollections and Reflections* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), published in the U.S. as *Recollections and Reflections of a Japanese Artist* (Philadelphia, G. W. Jacobs, 1913). Markino's essays have recently been collected in *Alone in this World: Selected Essays* (Brighton: In Print, 1993).

⁷⁰ "The Japanese Conception of Poetry," *Reader* 3 (Jan. 1904): 185-91; "Japanese Fiction," *Forum* 45 (June 1911): 725-733; "Japanese Drama," *Forum* 47 (June 1912): 724-34, *Tanka and Haiku, Japanese Rhythms*, (San Francisco, 1916; New York, 1920). For a general survey of Hartmann's work, see Marshall Van Deusen, "Sadakichi Hartmann," *DLB* 54: 154-163.

Japanese identity, presumably because in Canada (where she grew up) and in the United States, Japanese immigrants tended to receive better treatment Chinese. Her sister Edith Eaton (1865-1914) also became an "Oriental" writer, publishing as "Sui Sin Far" a collection of short stories about Chinese immigrants, entitled *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.⁷¹

The role of these Asian or part-Asian interpreters of the East has rarely received even the briefest mention in accounts of the development of cross-culturalism in the modernist period, though they all achieved some success and, in most cases, contributed in significant ways to the production of knowledge about East Asian cultures.

IV. Honorable mention: the later interpreters

A number of other British and American poets followed in the wake of Pound, translating Chinese or Japanese poetry. Most of them adopted in some form the two-stage translation process involving an initial translation into English prose followed by a poetic adaptation. Though I will not discuss these in detail here, it is worth noting that many of them were good translations: often more accurate than Pound's, and with helpful introductions, glossaries, or notes which Pound's editions did not provide. (Where Pound did provide introductions, in the Noh books, they were his own rambling observations interspersed with fragments of Fenollosa's notes or intended essays.)

Arthur Waley was among the few translators who managed the entire process himself. His

⁷¹ See Onoto Watanna [Winnifred Eaton], *Miss Numé of Japan: A Japanese-American Romance* (Chicago: Rand, 1899); *A Japanese Nightingale* (New York: Harper, 1901); Sui Sin Far [Edith Eaton], *Mrs Spring Fragrance* (Chicago: McClurg, 1912). Amy Ling discusses the Eaton sisters in *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990) and in "Creating One's Self: The Eaton Sisters," *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992): 305-18. See also Yuko Matsukawa, "Cross-Dressing and Cross-Naming: Decoding Onoto Watanna," *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks (Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1994): 106-125.

170 Chinese Poems (1919) was translated into free verse with rather greater accuracy than those of his predecessor, Pound, though with somewhat less style. Among the many critics who have treated Amy Lowell's translations and adaptations from the Chinese in *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921) with scorn, Hugh Kenner's influential account in *The Pound Era* is certainly among the most derisive. Kenner focuses on Lowell's competitive streak: "the Orient was Amy's by right of Lowellship," he states, pointing to her stated desire to "knock a hole in Ezra Pound's translations" (292, 293). Lowell had treated some picturesque Oriental themes in her early volumes, and began working on translations in 1917 in collaboration with an old acquaintance, Florence Wheeler Ayscough, who had some knowledge of Chinese. The resulting poems are not as impressive as the best of Pound's, but they are far greater in number and provide a much better overview of classical Chinese poetry (particularly that of the T'ang dynasty) as well as a useful introduction and notes.

Witter Bynner began working on Chinese poetry with a colleague, Dr. Kiang Kang-hu at the University of California at Berkeley in 1918. Kiang had fled to the United States after the collapse of Sun Yat-sen's reform movement in China earlier in the decade. Bynner, who had spent 1917 in China and Japan, proposed to collaboratively translate an eighteenth-century Chinese anthology known as the *Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang*, to be entitled *The Jade Mountain*. Though scheduled to appear in 1921, the book did not appear until 1929, although a number of the poems appeared earlier in periodicals.

The vogue for East Asian translations often presents exoticist strategies in their most appealing garb. In the best cases the treatment reflects a genuine interest and respect for relatively unknown cultures, and the end product reads as a tribute to the cross-cultural potential of art. At the same time, however, we see the impossibility of completely separating this desire for knowledge from Western expansionism, or of separating the respect and even adulation bestowed on "Oriental" literary forms from the disrespect and derision with which actual "Orientals" were all too often treated. These curious "splits," to use Homi Bhabha's term once again, are effects of the process of

negotiation through which the West processed “the East,” and renegotiated Western identity in relation to a newly present East.

In discovering and retracing the forgotten and lost paths which led man from the state of nature to the civil state . . . the attentive reader cannot help but be struck by the immense space which separates these two states. It is in this slow succession of things that he will find the solution to countless moral and political problems which the philosophes cannot resolve . . . In a word, he will explain how the human spirit and passions, altering imperceptibly, change their nature, so to speak; why our needs and pleasures change, at length, their objects; why, the original man having gradually vanished, society offers nothing more to the eyes of the wise than an assemblage of artificial men and manufactured passions which are the product of all these new relations and without any foundation in nature.⁷²

J. J. Rousseau

Primitivism

I. Some Versions of Primitivism

In his “Discourse on the Origin of the Inequalities of Man” (1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau already grasps the crisis of modernity that is to play a dominant role in twentieth-century primitivisms. It is a crisis brought on by the increasing recognition that man is himself constructed by the systems which he himself has built, and an associated anxiety about the value of those systems. The model of the primitive offers, at least in the abstract, the possibility of transcending the system, of returning to a pristine and determined state, from which perspective the trajectory of “civilized” system-building may be reassessed: to be validated or critiqued. Easily adaptable to the analysis of systems of economics, literary production, sexuality, law, even identity itself, the notion of the primitive has had extraordinarily wide application from the romantic to the modern period, and persists, in modified form, in the postmodern critique of subject-formation – though, indeed, postmodernity, with its critique of the “myth of origins,” devotes considerable effort to its deconstruction.

⁷² My translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, ed. Jacques Roger (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971), 233.

In this section I will be primarily interested in the primitivist strategies of early twentieth century poetry, which also have a romantic precursor. Just as Rousseau used a primitivist historiography to ground his theory of social and political change in the "Discourse," Shelley, in "A Defence of Poetry," sought to ground his theory of the poet as legislator of the world on the theory that "in the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry." Like a child, whose "every inflexion of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it," Shelley's savage "expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects" and as a result, "language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects, and of his apprehension of them" (480-82).

The search for the primitive in Rousseau and Shelley may be read as a strategy to remediate the absence at the core of Western subjectivity: to find an original, complete subject – in Rousseau's case, pre-political man; in Shelley's, the pure poet confronting impressions of an undivided world. As we begin our survey of primitivist strategies in the early twentieth century, we will do well to retain a sense of this confrontation with absence, and its corollary figure of the crisis of the construction of subject and world which inhabits the split between civilized and primitive.

II. Primitivism and Modern Art

Historians of modern poetry have always recognized its close relationship with concurrent developments in modern art, and it is often suggested that the interest in primitivism in modern poetry is derivative of an earlier interest evident in the visual arts. It is therefore worth considering in some detail the development of this primitivist movement in the arts.

The entry point of primitivism into modern art (leaving aside the Post-Impressionist primitivism of Gauguin) is generally fixed as 1906-7, the period in which Picasso and then Matisse

first encountered “art nègre” at the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris, and imported elements from it into their work. The nature of this early influence remains something of a vexed question among art historians. Gertrude Stein’s assessment presents an extreme, though hardly atypical, position:

African art commenced in 1907 to play a part in the definition of what Picasso was creating, but in the creations of Picasso really African art like the other influences which at one time or another diverted Picasso from the way of painting which was his, African art and his French cubist painting comrades were rather things that consoled Picasso’s vision than aided it, African art, French cubism and later Italian influence and Russian were like Sancho Panza was with Don Quixote, they wished to lead Picasso away from his real vision which was his real Spanish vision. (19)

Recent art historians have similarly wavered on the issue of influence. As William Rubin, in his introduction to the catalog from the important 1984 Museum of Modern Art retrospective exhibition *Primitivism and Modern Art*, puts it, “That tribal art influenced Picasso and many of his colleagues in significant ways is beyond question. But that it caused no fundamental change in the direction of modern art is equally true” (17). Rubin discusses at some length the problem of determining specific influences and prefers finally to speak of “affinities”: a term which seeks to illustrate the ostensibly shared aesthetics of modern and primitive art without requiring specific explanations or narratives of how these aesthetics came to be shared. Rubin’s decision to center the show on “affinities” is criticized at some length by James Clifford. In the discourse surrounding the exhibition, Clifford points out, “statements carefully limiting its purview . . . coexist with frequent implications of something more. The affinity idea is wide-ranging and promiscuous, as are allusions to universal human capacities retrieved in the encounter between modern and tribal” (193).

Though Rubin is not oblivious to the historical existence of imperialism and racialism, his unwillingness to concede their importance to the study of artistic primitivism is symptomatic of the approach of most art historians to the topic. In this view, racialism and imperialism are irrelevant to modernist primitivism for two reasons: first, modern artists completely misunderstood primitive

art, so therefore their attitudes towards the primitives who created it don't refer to any real individuals. And secondly, even if they did, it wouldn't matter, since primitivism took an entirely positive view of primitive art. Rubin manages both of these arguments in the same paragraph. Comparing Primitivism to Japonisme, which he sees as similarly non-referential, Rubin argues that "the notion that 'primitivism' is pejorative . . . can only result from a misunderstanding of the origin and use of the term, whose implications have been entirely affirmative" (5). But this argument can easily be shown to be fallacious. The following is Marius de Zayas, the official authority on primitivism at Stieglitz's 291 gallery in New York, in his introduction to what Gail Levin describes in the catalog as "one of the first occasions when African sculpture was exhibited in America as art" (462): the show of "African Savage Art" at 291 in November, 1914.

Negro art, product of the "Land of Fright," created by a mentality full of fear, and completely devoid of the faculties of observation and analysis, is the pure expression of the emotions of a slave race – victims of nature – who see the outer world only under its most intensely expressive aspect and not under its natural one. (7)

In de Zayas's view (expressed at greater length in his 1916 book, *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art*), the primitive qualities of the African, namely his fear, stupidity, and racial inferiority, are directly responsible for the salutary effects of his art on the modern (Western) artist's conception of form, which include "teaching us to see and feel its purely expressive side and opening our eyes to a new world of plastic sensations" (7). The details of de Zayas's theory may not resemble other artistic primitivisms, but his rhetorical strategy of countering – if not surpassing – affirmation with denigration of the primitive may be found in most writings on "primitive" art in this period.

And such, it seems, was the message visitors to such exhibits expected and received. Forbes

Watson reviewed the exhibit in the *New York Evening Post*:

"African Savage Art" is the sign at the street door of the Photo-Secession Gallery, 291 Fifth Avenue, which has opened its tenth season with an exhibition of statuary in wood by African savages. The word art is in large letters, for this, according to the

announcement, is the first time in the history of exhibitions that "negro statuary" has been shown "as art." And yet it is strange, considering that nowadays nearly everything made by man, in one guise or another, is shown "as art."

In the case of these exhibits it was not necessary to explain that they are savage. Savage indeed! The rank savor of savagery attacks the visitor the instant he enters the diminutive room. This rude carving belongs to the black recesses of the jungle. Some examples are hardly human, and are so powerfully expressive of gross brutality that the flesh quails. The origin of these works is somewhat obscure. The gallery describes them as "the root of modern art," and this might be admitted in the same sense that the family of apes may be called the root of modern man. But to whatever period they belong, and whoever created them, there can be no doubt that they convey a sense of a race of beings infinitely alien to us.

Some of them at least do, for there is much variety in the work. An effort has been made to show it in a setting of crude and violent color. One or two of the masks are comparatively highly developed in workmanship and design. But the most striking piece is a mask which lies on a table in a corner, coarse, black, indescribably African. It recalls the haunting sense which broods over Joseph Conrad's story of the Congo, "Heart of Darkness," the sense of an earth vegetated to the point of suffocation, dank and barbaric. It is a nightmare not soon to be forgotten. When the outer door is reached again no insistent signs are necessary to inform you that you have seen savage art. The good, familiar daylight, the friendly white faces on the street, come as a relief after this blackness.

The reviewer's mission has become a *minor journey into the heart of darkness*, as Watson takes evident pleasure in recounting. The discursive features of Watson's journey are, of course, highly derivative of Conrad's primitivist strategies. Watson's repeated assertion that signs were unnecessary to indicate the "rank" savagery of the artifacts confirms the gallery's naming of the savage. At the same time, however, it expresses anxiety about the necessity of naming, for recognition of the savage should be (and for Watson, is) self-evident; to be required to name the savage might be taken to imply that the distinction is not an innate one: "the stereotype," Homi Bhabha points out, "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (66). The hybridity-constituting processes of identification and disavowal are particularly visible here; we may say that Watson reconstitutes his

identity through his ritualized gallery visit into savagery, inviting the reader's participation in disavowing the nightmarish and barbaric works of "beings infinitely alien to us."

De Zayas, largely responsible for the "African Savage Art" exhibit, was not the only artist to trumpet the cause of African Art to Stieglitz. Another important influence was the painter Max Weber. Weber's receptiveness to primitive art owed something to his teacher, Arthur Wesley Dow, himself a protégé of Oriental art scholar Ernest Fenollosa. Dow, according to one of his students, promoted both Japanese aesthetics and an appreciation of the primitive state of mind (Levin 453). Weber arrived in Paris in late 1905, and by 1908 was painting with Matisse, who had by then already amassed a collection of primitive art. Later that year Weber met Picasso, and they discovered a shared interest in the work of Henri Rousseau, whom Weber had befriended the previous year (Levin 454). After returning to New York, Weber helped organize a Rousseau exhibition at 291, and contributed essays to Stieglitz's magazine, *Camera Work*.

Weber was also a poet, and a number of his poems were directly inspired by primitive art. The poem "Bampense Kasai," inspired by a mask produced by an artist of the Kasai people of what is now Zaire, appeared in both his *Cubist Poems* (1914) and *Primitives: Poems and Woodcuts* (1926):

Mask Bampense Kasai,
 Crudely shaped and moulded art thou
 In weighty varied solid frightful form,
 Through thy virility brutality and blackness,
 I gain insight subtle and refined.
 Then 'tis true Kasai that the sculptor in thy making
 Was not the jungle savage
 But high spirited and living soul,
 In carving thy features Bampense Kasai,
 In the crudest geometric form,
 Thy savage maker makes an art
 At once untrifling big and powerful.
 Surely not ignorance but fear and love and spirit high,
 Made him make you Bampense Kasai.

Weber's thought here is much like that of de Zayas: through the object's "virility brutality and blackness" the artist gains "insight subtle and refined," though here the "untrifling big and powerful"

art suggests, in addition to fear, “love and spirit high” and prompts the artist to speculate that in the artistic act of creation the jungle savage transcends his savagery and becomes a living soul.⁷³ The qualities associated with the primitive underwrite modernist – and particularly, cubist – qualities Weber and his associates had come to accept or value: ugliness, crude geometric form, the capturing of power and energy, spirituality.

Another artist interested in the primitive and, like Weber, associated with the Stieglitz circle was the painter Marsden Hartley. Hartley, like Picasso and Matisse before him, was inspired by primitive artifacts at the Trocadero while in Paris, and appears to have become specifically interested in Native American art while in Munich in 1913 with Kandinsky and the Blaue Reiter group. In 1914, after a brief visit to the United States, Hartley returned to Germany and began a series of paintings based on Native American symbols and color schemes. The Indian figured occasionally in Hartley's writings as well, which include a longish poem entitled “The Festival of the Corn,” published in *Poetry* magazine in the early twenties. The poem was based on a dance Hartley witnessed while in New Mexico in 1918-19; by that time, a number of artists and writers in Taos had become interested in the Indian, as will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

The gospel of primitive art was spread in American art circles not only by artists but also by art patrons and collectors. One important collector was Walter Conrad Arensberg, who amassed an impressive collection of pre-Columbian and other primitive art, and, equally importantly, was active in the literary community as well. William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens counted themselves as friends of the Arensbergs, and the connection was to have important repercussions for

⁷³ The 1926 volume *Primitives* not only presented Weber as a lover of the primitive but as a primitive himself. In the introduction Benjamin de Cassares writes: “Max Weber is a veritable primitive. He has the child-mind, the Earth-mind, a mind innocent of the stupefying complications and complexities of civilization. His soul is always in the attitude of wonder, awe and worship. He sees the eternal through all time-forms. He is kin to William Blake and Henri Rousseau. He stammers out his wonder before the universe and the art of man.” The always fastidiously-dressed Weber hardly seems to conform to this image.

both of them.⁷⁴

The various qualities associated with primitive art and artists enable us to locate a variety of primitivist strategies in the discourses of modern Western art. The inclusion of primitive art within the field of art could function as an act of counter-cultural positioning for the artist or group embracing it, or, conversely, it could function more conservatively as a demonstration of the broadmindedness of Western culture and its cultural institutions.⁷⁵ West-affirming qualities associated with the primitive included what Sally Price calls “the popular image of Primitive artists as the unthinking and undifferentiated tools of their respective traditions – as people who are essentially denied the privilege of technical or conceptual creativity” (60). Specific qualities associated with the primitive were used as support for modernist tendencies in the direction of expressionism:

A widely accepted belief . . . is that, more than any art from the world's Great Civilizations (whether Western or Oriental), primitive art emerges directly and spontaneously from psychological drives. Just as children cry when they are hungry and coo when they are content, Primitive artists are imagined to express their feelings free from the intrusive overlay of learned behavior and conscious constraints that mold the work of the Civilized artist. (Price 32)

Such characteristic gestures of disavowal were generally accompanied, in a hybrid movement, with gestures of identification. Consider the curious circle by which the Blaue Reiter member Wilhelm

⁷⁴ On Arensberg, see *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977), a special issue on “New York Dada and the Arensberg Circle,” particularly Judith Zilczer’s “Primitivism and New York Dada” (140-42) and Patrick L. Stewart’s “The European Art Invasion: American Art and the Arensberg Circle, 1914-1918” (108-112). Robert Crunden’s chapter on “Walter and Louise Arensberg” (409-443) in *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism 1885-1917* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) provides a helpful account of the range of Arensberg’s literary interests and literary and artistic acquaintances, but with, surprisingly, no reference to his interest in primitive art. Selected items from the Arensbergs’ pre-Columbian collection are catalogued in *The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1954).

⁷⁵ Underlying the “warmth and pride” associated with “the debut of Primitive Art in an elite Western cultural institution,” Sally Price identifies the “unstated premise that such events come about through an enormously commendable broadmindedness and largess on the part of the host culture. Virtually by definition, the European/Euro-American heritage is uniquely equipped, the logic goes, to allow for such enlightened appreciation of cultural diversity” (25-6).

Worringer, constructs, in 1906, a narrative of disavowal and identification with the primitive artist:

it is because [primitive man] stands so lost and spiritually helpless amidst the things of the external world, because he experiences only obscurity and caprice in the inter-connection and flux of the phenomena of the external world, that the urge is so strong in him to divest the things of the external world of their caprice and obscurity in the world-picture and to impart to them a value of necessity and a value of irregularity. To employ an audacious comparison: it is as though the instinct for the "thing in itself" were the most powerful in primitive man. Increasing spiritual mastery of the outside world and habituation to it mean a blunting and dimming of this instinct. Only after the human spirit has passed, in thousands of years of its evolution, along the whole course of rationalistic cognition, does the feeling for the "thing in itself" re-awaken in it as the final resignation of knowledge. (71)

The spiritual insecurity of modern man, his Bergsonian sense of the "flux of the phenomena of the external world," the artist's quest for the "thing in itself" are simultaneously mapped onto the primitive and distanced by the circular temporality of "re-awakening."

III. A Proliferation of Primitives

Patterns of influence among primitive artists and poets are instructive, but any account of primitivism which simply demonstrates these without attempting to account for the general fascination with the primitive during the early years of the century is bound to be inadequate. And indeed, accounting for this sudden proliferation of primitivisms is no simple matter. Critics who have noted the phenomenon have sometimes supposed a link with the First World War: Isaacs and Coles, for example, write of primitivism as "a therapeutic alternative to the insidious disease of Western culture . . . especially acute among alienated individuals who, after witnessing the First World War, were made abruptly aware of the self-destructive capacity of machinery and weaponry" (3). The problem with this compelling argument is that the primitive proliferation seems to have begun just before the war. Primitivist strategies become a significant component of English-language

poetics, particularly in American poetry, in the decade beginning around 1913, emerging more or less simultaneously with a number of other primitivist phenomena in other cultural domains, including music, the visual arts, a number of academic disciplines, and popular culture.

Primitivism entered music from several directions. Wagner may have paved the way for an appreciation of primitive myth in music, but in 1913 the world was not quite ready for Stravinsky's *Sacré du Printemps* (1913), with its central motif of a “primitive” sacrifice, whose initial performances provoked riots. Secondly, there was the introduction of jazz as a musical form newly available to a growing white audience which initially valued the music for its “primitive” qualities. In popular literature, 1914 was the year Edgar Rice Burroughs' book, *Tarzan of the Apes* was published (it had been serialized in 1912). In film, the same year saw the release of D.W. Griffiths' *Birth of a Nation*, in which African Americans were depicted as a dangerous savage race. Interest in fossil finds led to speculative reconstructions of the lifestyles of primitive man in periodicals like the *Illustrated London News*.⁷⁶

Among the academic disciplines, anthropology was finally becoming a respectable and established discipline whose influence was being felt in other fields. One could peruse the twelve volumes of the third and grandest edition of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, published between 1911 and 1915, or the inexpensive Home University Library edition of *Anthropology*, by Oxford's R. R. Marett. The study of the classics had begun to be revolutionized by the “Cambridge Ritualists,” who borrowed heavily from Frazer: Jane Harrison's *Themis* (1912) and *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) and Gilbert Murray's *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912) argued for the importance of anthropology to an understanding of the Greek culture that produced the classics, and struck a blow at the

⁷⁶ A primitive man graces the cover of the December 28, 1912 issue: “Akin to the Ape: The earliest known inhabitant of England — the Man of Sussex, a reconstruction of his head” (the picture by A. Forestier). In the March 8, 1913 issue: “Art before the Dawn of History: The Prehistoric Craftsman.” Somewhat more attractively drawn, again by Forestier, he is shown at work on a dagger. Fossil finds are illustrated on the facing page. The April 19, 1913 issue features “Halling man . . . of the days nearing the close of the Pleistocene period.”

domination of the discipline by philologists. Medievalists like Jessie Weston were making similar efforts. In the growing field of Psychoanalysis, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* was published as a series of articles beginning in 1912, and in book form in 1913. One of the founding works of sociology, Emile Durkheim's *Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse*, arguably the first sociological study of primitive religion, appeared in 1915. Meanwhile, race theories abounded, and Eugenics seemed to be emerging as a serious science.

What common elements are discernible in these diverse developments occurring in widely different cultural locations at about the same time? There are, I would argue, two conditions which enabled the production of this array of primitivist strategies. First, there were preconditions associated with models of historicity. Primitivist strategies could be built on either a biblical or evolutionist model of historicity, but they generally required a commitment to one of several models of linear cultural temporality – most commonly, the belief that the path of development is similar for all cultures. These conditions made it possible to link Western pasts with non-Western presents. Secondly, the rise of imperialism provided an impetus for the development of primitivist strategies both in the production of raw information which could be transformed into knowledge about the Western primitive past, and in the demand that imperialism presented for knowledge about subject peoples, which primitivism-based theories could claim to provide.

Linear historicity and imperialist discourse-production provided the discursive substrate on which primitivist strategies were constructed. I use the term “primitivist strategies” somewhat loosely here to refer both to what may strictly be considered *discursive strategies*, in Foucault's sense, and what would more appropriately be called *rhetorical strategies*. The distinction, which hinges on the degree of personal agency or textual control to be attributed to specific writers, is one which is rather

difficult to make in practice, and which I shall not generally belabor in my analyses.⁷⁷ Nor will I be interested in the question of the validity of characterizing particular attributes of individuals and societies as “primitive”; for, while it seems to me not impossible to identify the conditions under which such characterizations could be said to be true,⁷⁸ this seems to me a rather minor issue in comparison to the question of what particular “primitive” qualities become interesting or important to particular individuals or groups at a particular time, which is to say, the question of the emergence and deployment of primitivist strategies in discourse. These primitivist strategies, which may be characterized as the hybrid formations of civilized and primitive identities in a variety of discursive locations, were invariably structured as binary oppositions or hybrid splits: vitality and decadence, rootedness and rootlessness, freedom and constraint, simplicity and complexity. The positive attributes associated with the primitive in most of these instances (Griffiths' being an obvious exception) reveal their function as cultural critique directed at undesirable aspects of “civilization,” thus pointing to widespread dissatisfactions with many aspects of “civilized” culture in the period, ranging from the social costs of industrialization to the inadequacy of literary forms for addressing modern concerns. Perhaps, then, it is possible to think of the proliferation of primitives as a side-effect or symptom of modernity, manifested most strongly in the period of most rapid technological and social change. Primitivism could even be closely allied to progress, as in William Carlos Williams' reflections on the period: “There was heat in us, a core and a drive that was gathering headway upon the theme of a rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principle of all art, in the local conditions” (*Autobiography* 146).

⁷⁷ This is of course the same problem encountered by Said in *Orientalism*, and one which has generally plagued literary applications of Foucauldian discourse theory, the problem being that discourse theory – by limiting its field of authority to the historical description of dispersions of statements – does not provide a general methodology for moving from an analysis of discursive patterns to an account of their causes.

⁷⁸ See, for one recent attempt, Torgovnick (18-23).

The chapters that follow will look at how this primitivist rhetoric, this marriage of the primal and the local, functioned in the literary scene of early modernism, with particular attention to the strategic effort in the American poetry to create a distinct (i.e. “post-colonial”) American poetry. “The Childhood that Never Was” reads the Pacific Island poems and letters of Rupert Brooke in dialogue with Gauguin's Tahitian narrative, *Noa Noa*, and against Freud's critique of the notion of primitive lawlessness. Brooke and Gauguin, I argue, construct a quest narrative whose goal is a return to the primitive through sexual possession of the exotic other. The remaining four chapters consider primitivism in the American poetic scene of the early modernist period. “Vachel Lindsay's Primitive Vaudeville” examines Lindsay's proto-multiculturalism, and his promotion as a “primitive poet” by Harriet Monroe. “The Red Man in the Drawing Room: T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Nativism” offers a reconsideration of Eliot's review of a 1918 anthology of Native American verse and explores the reasons for his dismissal of the book's “nativist” claims. Nativism, the idea that American poetry could be both grounded in and regenerated by a rediscovery of its “native roots,” is also among the poetic strategies Wallace Stevens considered and rejected, as I argue in “Wallace Stevens: The Comedian as Colonist,” which focuses on Stevens's famous early long-poem, “The Comedian as the Letter C,” a poem whose adventure story / discovery narrative structure calls attention to its colonialist subtext. The final chapter, “Forgotten Jungle Song: Primitivist Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance,” suggests that the poets of the Harlem Renaissance had compelling reasons to consider the deployment of primitivist strategies in their work, and explores some of the ways these African American poets embraced or resisted these strategies. While the use of primitivist strategies was sometimes merely an attempt by these poets to cater to the interests of white audiences, many black writers recognized that the valorization of “the primitive” offered a model, albeit a problematic one, for the assertion of the value of their African heritage.

*When the Tahitian princess
Heard that he had decided,
She rushed out into the sunlight and swarmed up a cocoanut palm tree,*

*But he returned to this island
And wrote ninety Petrarchan sonnets.⁷⁹
(Ezra Pound, "Our Contemporaries.")*

The Childhood That Never Was: Rupert Brooke's Primitive Paradise

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud addresses "a contention which is so astonishing that we must dwell upon it. This contention holds that what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions" (36-37). Freud is skeptical of this claim, attributing it to "insufficient observation and a mistaken view" of the manners and customs of primitive peoples and races. "Later experience," he writes, "has corrected some of these judgements." Yet he is not willing to reject the idea altogether: "It seems certain that we do not feel comfortable in our present-day civilization, but it is very difficult to form an opinion whether and in what degree men of an earlier age felt happier and what part their cultural conditions played in the matter" (39). In his earlier *Totem and Taboo* (1912), Freud had argued that there was a significant *resemblance* between "primitive" and "civilized" systems of prohibition: "It may begin to dawn on us that the taboos of the savage Polynesians are after all not so remote from us as we were inclined to think at first," he writes there (29). In the later book he notes that "as regards the primitive peoples who exist to-day, careful researches have shown that their instinctual life is by no means to be envied for its freedom. It is subject to

⁷⁹ *Blast* 2 (July 1915), reprinted in *Personae* (122).

restrictions of a different kind but perhaps of a greater severity than those attaching to modern civilized man" (69). The classic instance of these severe restrictions was the Polynesian institution of the *taboo*. Thus the idea that primitive life is better than civilized life simply because it offers freedom from restraints is, in Freud's view, based on a fallacy.

But an uncertainty persists: if Freud can do without the *primitive*, he cannot do without the *primal*. The primal is for Freud the site of primal instincts and urges and the home of the parricidal primal horde. "It is impossible," he writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts" (49). The existence of this primal state underpins much of Freud's work. The primal scene described in *Totem and Taboo*, in which the sexually-possessive father is vanquished by the primal horde of his sons, becomes for Freud the originary myth of civilized society: henceforth, the sexual possession of women will no longer be the exclusive right of the primal father, but will be regulated by the incest prohibition. The patriarchal family which is the eventual result of this primal sexual revolution establishes a new paradigm for sexual control: a law of the father based on the prohibition of incest (179). In this state, an unfulfilled longing to emulate the primal father remained, but was compensated by the new patriarchy, which "gave back to fathers a large portion of their former rights," and by the introduction of father-deities, products of "the persistence of an unappeased longing for the father" (185). The primal scene thus produces both religion and patriarchal society, and sets the stage for the Oedipal drama with its production of gender roles.

In a perceptive rereading of Freud's originary myth of gender construction, Judith Butler points out that "the taboo against homosexuality must precede the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual 'dispositions' by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible" (64). Freud's developmental narrative, in Butler's reading, is symptomatic of the process by which patriarchal law seeks to disguise this genealogy. "The law both produces

sexuality in the form of 'dispositions' and appears disingenuously at a later point in time to transform these ostensibly 'natural' dispositions into culturally acceptable structures of exogamic kinship" (64). What Foucault termed "the repressive hypothesis," symptomatic not only of Freudian discourse, but of the discourse of sexuality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries generally, is the ostensible result of this process.

The repressive hypothesis underlies of a number of primitivist strategies which aim toward a recovery of an enabling "primitive" sexuality via a return to an erotically-constituted primitive state situated before or beyond the constraints of patriarchal law. The return to this state is presented in these writings as personally or artistically redemptive. Though Freud attempted to dissociate the "primal state" from actual "primitive" societies, many writers, as Freud himself pointed out, had found and continued to find in existing "primitive" societies a release from the social constraints associated with modern civilization. This primitivist strategy must be read, I would argue, not only psychoanalytically, as a pursuit of a pre-patriarchal, primal sexuality, but also historically, as its articulation develops within the discursive history of representations of the otherness of "primitive" cultures. Rather than beginning with Brooke's voyage to the Pacific Islands in 1913-14, I would like to approach Brooke's voyage through the series of earlier voyages which formed his expectations: voyages which in many cases also produced and reproduced colonial institutions and modes of interaction on the islands. Reading Brooke as an example of what Ali Behdad has called the "belated traveler," I propose to examine the way Brooke reiterates early primitivist strategies associated with the Pacific Islands. Beginning with the journals of Captain Cook and the writings of the missionaries who followed in his wake, and later, in the literary and artistic voyages of Herman Melville and Paul Gauguin, we may find the elaboration, from different interests and perspectives, of an idea of erotic primitivism in opposition to civilized (and often patriarchal) law, an idea which lent itself to both cultural affirmation and cultural critique.

I. The Island Paradise

Of all the regions associated with the primitive, it was the Pacific Islands that were most strongly marked by the image of paradise: a place without boundaries, a place of unfettered desire where man was naked, freed from the constricting garments of civilization. Conversely, it was also a place of excessive license, of unspeakable rites and cannibalism. Both of these images originate in the three voyages of Captain Cook in the 1770s.

Missionary writings of the early eighteenth century predictably tended to emphasize the excessive license rather than the paradisaical aspects of the islands. The first contingent of missionaries arrived in Tahiti in 1797. They were to produce a substantial body of ethnographic literature, for, as Christopher Herbert argues,

In order to justify their aggressive incursions into native societies, missionaries needed therefore to be able to appeal to a discourse which endowed them with incontestable moral authority over indigenous populations. So it was a principal function of this discourse, which they made it their business to produce, to people the South Seas with the very beings that had, for expediency's sake, to be found there: depraved, brutish savages. (158)

The early missionaries argued for the need to reconstruct Polynesian culture from the ground up, supporting their claim with ethnography's new theoretical model of culture as a systematic and indivisible whole (Herbert 198-9).

The missionary project influenced literature in direct and indirect ways. Harriet Martineau, herself a missionary of sorts, produced one of the first significant South Sea island novels: In *Dawn Island* (1845), savage customs are made to give way both to Christian values and to commercialism. Similarly, in R. M. Ballantine's *The Coral Island*, one of the many South Seas adventure stories of the 1850s and 1860s, missionaries rescue the young narrator and his friends from certain death among the savages.

Other writers, drawing on a long tradition of travel writing as well as an emerging anti-

missionary anthropological literature, were outspokenly critical of missionary efforts. A prime example is Melville's *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), the semi-autobiographical account of a stay among the Marquesas islanders that established the author's later much-regretted reputation as "a man who lived among the cannibals." In *Typee*, Melville is highly critical of the missionaries and their self-serving ethnographic accounts: "Did not the sacred character of these persons render the purity of their intentions unquestionable, I should certainly be led to suppose that they had exaggerated the evils of Paganism, in order to enhance the merit of their own disinterested labours" (234). The alleged blessings of civilization are, in Melville's view, highly questionable: "the devoutest Christian who visits [the Hawaiian Islands] with an unbiased mind, must go away mournfully asking -- 'Are these, alas! the fruits of twenty five years of enlightening'" (179-80).

In his criticism of these bringers of civilization Melville shows himself to be fully steeped in the Enlightenment tradition of primitivism as cultural critique. "There were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity" Melville observes, as a prelude to his own idiosyncratic list of the islands' comparative advantages over modern civilization: "no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in *Typee*; no unreasonable tailors and shoemakers, perversely bent on being paid," and so forth. The "artless vivacity and unconcealed natural graces" of the "savage maidens" are contrasted favorably with the "stiffness, formality, and affectation" of their Western counterparts (225). Edmund Gosse would many years later tell Rupert Brooke that "one only finds in the South Seas what one brings there"; typically, however, what the visitor brought was the expectation of the inverse of what was associated with "home," in this case, Melville's unpleasant recollections of American commerce and American women.

Melville was like many Westerners in that he saw the primitive as a mixture of noble and ignoble qualities, ranging from the paradisal to the unspeakable. Primitive cultures were variously "placed" between these two extremes. The sliding scale between peacefulness and ferocity offered a

supplemental mode of categorization to the evolutionary scale which ranked groups as relatively civilized or primitive. The Pacific Islanders, though scoring poorly in the important categories of human sacrifice and cannibalism, were thought to most closely approximate the Edenic mode of living. Nevertheless, the islands too could be, and were, categorized on this scale, beginning in the ethnological discourse of Captain James Cook, who, in making contact with hundreds of “virgin” populations, sought out clues to the minute differences among the different island groups. The names of various islands, when not chosen to honor some European benefactor such as the Earl of Sandwich, often reflected these modes of categorization: the “Society Islands” (which included the highly-rated Tahiti and Marquesas) and the “Friendly Islands,” for example, contrasted to the “Cannibal Islands” (now Fiji). Mayne Reid, the well-known writer of adventure stories for boys (and one of favorites of the young Tom Eliot), devoted a chapter each to “The Feegees, or Man-Eaters” and “The Tongans, or Friendly Islanders,” in his 1860 ethnological compendium for boys, *Odd People*, thus reproducing in textual form the Manichean distinction between good and bad islanders.

While Western writers quarreled over the good and bad qualities of primitive life, islanders, missionaries, and politicians squabbled over island possessions. France's takeover of Tahiti and the Marquesas took place over several decades; we in *Typee* an account of Melville's arrival in 1842 at the precise moment of French annexation; by an odd coincidence, half a century later, we find Gauguin, in *Noa Noa*, narrating his arrival in the same islands at the precise moment at which France formally assumed political control on the death of the last puppet king, Pomare V. Britain briefly annexed the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in 1843, though for the most part Britain, America, and Germany would remain content sharing the exploitation of the islands until the 1890s, when the United States annexed Hawaii and divided Samoa with the Germans.

As colonialism in the islands progressed, the images of fierce, man-eating natives were increasingly relegated to the background. The possibilities of native resistance were rendered increasingly difficult by the growing Western presence in the Islands; native populations had been

reduced by disease, and “offensive” cultural traditions “reformed” by concentrated missionary efforts. The attractions and seductions of “the amorous islands,” in contrast, were foregrounded.

II. Gauguin's Quest

Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa* (1897), a narrative account of the first (1891-93) Tahitian voyage undertaken by of the artist, may be regarded as a primitivist classic presenting one of the most determined and focused examples of the deployment of primitivist strategies in the areas of sexuality and artistic production. For Gauguin, the pursuit of art and the pursuit of the primitive became synonymous, and both were mediated by the quest for the exotic woman. As I will argue, Gauguin presents his quest as a spiritual autobiography on several levels: as a travel narrative chronicling his journey away from civilization and “back” to the primitive, as a narrative of his artistic development, chronicling his recovery of a more pure and potent art form, and, borrowing from anthropological models, as a series of initiation rituals leading inevitably to an “adulthood” signified by sexual possession of the primitive “other.” (In the reading that follows, I have relied on the published version of *Noa Noa*, produced collaboratively by Gauguin and Charles Morice, who worked from Gauguin's notebooks. I rely on the published text because it was this version that became, in a large part, the source of the “Gauguin myth,” but it is necessary to point out that the text was considerably embellished by Morice, in ways that altered both its structure and content.⁸⁰)

Gauguin's first reaction on arriving in Papeete, Tahiti's central town, in 1891, is to recognize

⁸⁰ *Noa Noa* was published in the *Revue Blanche* in 1897, and in expanded form as a book in 1901. The draft notebooks Gauguin gave to Morice, have since been published, and are translated into English in Nicolas Wadley's *Noa Noa: Gauguin's Tahiti*, from which my citations are taken.

Alfred Werner's position in his introduction to the earlier English edition was that “whatever stylistic changes Morice may have made, the first *Noa Noa* no less than the second version emits, on every page, the true Gauguinesque spirit, as revealed to us through his other writings and, of course, through his paintings, sculptures, and graphic work” (ix). My reasons for dissenting from this view will be discussed below.

it as a spoiled paradise:

It was Europe – the Europe which I had thought to shake off – and that under the aggravating circumstances of colonial snobbism, and the imitation, grotesque even to the point of caricature, of our customs, fashions, vices, and absurdities of civilization. (7)

Papeete is only the shell of a lost paradise; the real paradise is either hidden or located in the past.

The death of King Pomare marks the loss of the authentic Tahiti:

A profound sadness took possession of me. The dream which had brought me to Tahiti was brutally disappointed by the actuality. It was the Tahiti of former times which I loved. That of the present filled me with horror. (18)

Nor is the loss merely symbolic, for, by prior agreement, following Pomare's death the island would come under French rule, and thus, “the natives of neighboring islands were hastening hither to attend at the last moments of their king, and at the definite taking possession of their empire by France” (8). That Gauguin's arrival coincided with France's official acquisition of the island is more than an unfortunate coincidence. Gauguin was able to look to Tahiti as the site of his primitive fantasy precisely *because* the island was coming into French possession. Indeed, his visit was officially sponsored by the French government. Gauguin, like many Frenchmen, had been exposed to island charms at the 1889 Exposition Universelle. Guidebooks were becoming available: the first *Guide de Tahiti* went on sale in Paris that year, although Gauguin seems rather to have consulted Enrique's *Les Colonies Françaises*, published later that year (Danielsson 33). In short, Tahiti was being made available to the French public as it could not have been without the French political involvement and mass-commodification for tourism derided by Gauguin.

Gauguin's cynicism about the political process which had enabled his presence was to become a standard feature of the modern rhetoric of the “lost paradise.” But Gauguin recognizes – as would the tourist industry that followed him – that all is not lost. The rediscovery of the primitive can still occur, both in the external search for the not-yet-sullied places on the island, and more importantly, in the internalized process by which the self will shed, in stages, the accumulated layers

of civilization, finally uncovering an inner, primitive mystery.

Leaving Papeete, Gauguin removes himself to a rented hut in Mataeia. Here, he writes,

I am far, far away from the prisons that European houses are.
A Maori house does not separate man from life, from
space, from the infinite (26)⁸¹

Having reconfigured his domestic space from the constricted to the infinite, Gauguin must next learn new modes of survival, beginning with a rejection of European concepts of economy:

I had imagined that with money I would be able to find all that
was necessary for life. I was deceived. Once beyond the threshold
of the city, we must turn to Nature in order to live. (27)

Nature demands skills that Gauguin lacks: the ability to climb trees, to fish, to climb mountains. In this primitive economy Gauguin discovers his inferiority to the “savages” around him. Another aspect of the primitive economy is its minimal demands of work: “Why work? The gods are there to lavish upon the faithful the good gifts of nature” (39). Thus work, money, and domestic imprisonment emerge, through their absence in the primitive economy, as Gauguin's signifiers of the painful price of modernity.

In Mataeia, Gauguin undergoes a regime of “decivilization”:

Civilization is falling from me little by little.
I am beginning to think simply, to feel only very little
hatred for my neighbor – rather, to love him.
All the joys – animal and human – of a free life are mine.
I have escaped everything that is artificial, conventional, customary.
I am entering into the truth, into nature. (41)

In this passage, considerably rewritten by Morice,⁸² there are few objective correlatives to the transformation described, and indeed his reintegration into a social fabric ostensibly without customs

⁸¹ This is mostly Morice. Gauguin had written, “In my sleep I could imagine space above my head, the vault of heaven, not a prison in which one stifles. My hut was Space, Freedom” (17).

⁸² Gauguin had written, “I became, each day, a little more savage – my neighbours were almost my friends – dressed like them, fed like them. In the evening I would go to the house where the natives from round about met” (23).

and conventions hardly seems plausible. The transformation of Gauguin as social being is paralleled by the transformation of his art:

Why did I hesitate to put all this glory of the sun on my canvas?
Oh! the old European traditions! The timidities of
expression of degenerate races! (30-1)

Gauguin is not so naïve to suggest a painting without conventions; rather, the timid and degenerate European conventions are replaced by other conventions presented as more virile.

In one of the narrative's central scenes, Gauguin goes on a pilgrimage to obtain wood for carving with a young, quasi-androgynous native named Jotefa. Here Morice's published version varies considerably from Gauguin's more homoerotic version. Morice chose not to include a passage in which Gauguin describes his "weariness of the male role, having always to be strong, protective; shoulders that are a heavy load. To be for a minute the weak being who loves and obeys" (25). This confrontation with androgyny and homoeroticism leads up to an episode of violence against the patriarchal father, as figured by the rosewood tree which is violently attacked by Gauguin:

I struck out with joy. My hands became stained with blood in my
wild rage, my intense joy of satiating within me, I know not what
divine brutality. (50)

"This cruel assault," he writes, "was the supreme farewell to civilization, to evil," and an act of purgation: the "last evidence of the depraved instincts which sleep at the bottom of all decadent souls."⁸³ But this confrontation with the phallic father, like that of the primal horde in Freud's narrative, is a reconstitution of masculinity rather than a deconstruction of it. Gauguin is reborn as "a true savage, a real Maori" (51). Gauguin's narrative corresponds to Freud's *in reverse*: for here, it is the patriarchal father (root of civilization and evil) who is destroyed in order to permit Gauguin to recover the status of the primal (savage) father, possessor of all women.

⁸³ With some modification by Morice. Gauguin had referred, before describing the attack on the tree, to "his burden of an evil thought, a whole civilization had been before me in evil and had educated me"; afterwards, he remarks, "Well and truly destroyed indeed, all the old remnant of civilized man in me. I returned at peace, feeling myself thenceforward a different man, a Maori" (28).

The next narrative event involves another initiation ritual (again undertaken voluntarily) in which Gauguin spends the night in a forest haunted by Tupapaüs, evil spirits that haunt sleeping men. Initiation rituals of this type are generally understood to signify the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and thus, marriageable status. But having struck symbolically at the root of patriarchal "civilization," Gauguin nevertheless cannot recover the sexual power of the primal father. A scene in which Gauguin frightens a naked young girl drinking from a spring leaving her "furious"⁸⁴ seems to signify Gauguin's confrontation with his own identity as an undesirable, voyeuristic lecher, perhaps accounting for the transition to the third and final component of the quest, the quest for the primitive woman, whom he intends to possess in a more or less conventional marital manner. As Peter Brooks argues,

Noa Noa from the outset establishes itself as a quest, a journey back from a rotten civilization toward the savage state, which is also the place of a lost Maori culture. And in this quest, the Tahitian women will naturally – as if predetermined by the prehistory of European contact with Tahiti – play a central role, as the literal point of entry into the Maori soul. (61)

The search for a woman who embodies the primitive mystery is Gauguin's perpetual fixation, as it had been for Pierre Loti before him. At Papeete, Gauguin had taken as his "Vahine" (wife or lover) a half-caste girl named Titi, and, lonely at Mataia, sent for her. She was not, however, what he ultimately sought. As he describes her,

Titi had a terrible reputation at Papeete of having successively brought a number of lovers to their grave. But it was not this which made me put her aside. It was her half-white blood. In spite of traces of profoundly native and truly Maori characteristics, the many contacts had caused her to lose many of her distinctive racial 'differences.' I felt that she could not teach me any of the things I wished to know, that she had nothing to give of that special happiness which I sought. (21-2)

Gauguin's happiness (as interpreted, apparently, by Morice) can only be produced by a woman who

⁸⁴ The scene is strongly reminiscent of both the conventional biblical subject of "Susanna and the Elders" and of Gauguin's own painting "Pape Moë."

completely embodies “racial 'difference,'” and who will thus project him as her savage Maori mate.

The quest for the primitive woman comes to play a critical role in Gauguin's artistic endeavors (it must be pointed out that Morice's published narrative differs considerably in its presentation of this theme from the notebooks, as will be discussed below). An episode involving the artist's painting of a neighboring woman, who rather unwillingly allows him to paint her, is presented as one one of both artistic and sexual possession:

I was aware that on my skill as painter would depend the physical and moral possession of the model, that it would be like an implied, urgent, irresistible invitation. (33)

The act of painting is equated with the act of desiring: both aim at possession of the model. He imbues the painting with the magical power of an urgent, irresistible sexual invitation. The successful work is thus associated with the breakdown of impediments to his sexual desire:

I worked in haste and passionately, for I knew that the consent had not yet been definitely gained. I trembled to read certain things in these large eyes—fear and the desire for the unknown, the melancholy of bitter experience which lies at the root of all pleasure, the *involuntary and sovereign* feeling of being mistress of herself. Such creatures seem to submit to us when they give themselves to us; yet it is only to themselves that they submit. In them resides a force which has in it something superhuman—or perhaps something divinely animal. (33-4)

Here, Gauguin allows the woman a modicum of subjectivity: her feeling of being mistress of herself is sovereign though involuntary, and even when she submits to “us” (Gauguin shares this colonizing male gaze with a reader presumed to be similarly positioned) she is only submitting to herself. This “discovery” of female sexual desire represents, in effect, the “breakthrough” of the painting: recreating the woman's sexual desire in the painting is the key that will enable the painter's sexual possession of the model. But the dependence on feminine desire entails a relinquishing of masculine control, which the commentary following implies can only be gained back by the “recognition” that feminine desire is the desire to be raped:

All, indeed, wish to be 'taken,' literally, brutally taken (*Mati*, to

seize), without a single word. All have the secret desire for violence, because this act of authority on the part of the male leaves to the woman-will its full share of irresponsibility. For in this way she has not given her consent for the beginning of a permanent love. It is possible that there is a deeper meaning in this violence which at first sight seems so revolting. It is possible also that it has a savage sort of charm. I pondered the matter, indeed, but I did not dare. (34-5)

Despite the amateur ethnological support for this insight, Gauguin cannot finally emulate the “savage” rapist.

Both the painting-as-possession scene and the discussion of women's desire as the desire to be raped were largely Morice's contribution, presumably aimed at the interests of the colonialist male reader. Of the neighbor woman's resistance to being painted, Gauguin had written in the notebook, “Was it an inner struggle, or caprice (a very Maori trait), or even an impulse of coquetry that will surrender only after resistance? I realized that in my painter's scrutiny there was a sort of tacit demand for surrender, surrender for ever without any chance to withdraw, a perspicacious probing of what was within” (20). Morice's revised version makes explicit an equivalence of painterly with sexual success which Gauguin only hints at in his statement that he worked on the painting “with passion,” and in his reference to the model's “coquetry” and “surrender.” But if, here, Morice is only bringing to the fore what is submerged, the same cannot be said for Morice's reworking of the discussion of rape, which appears quite differently in the notebooks. “Is it necessary to *take them* in the Maori fashion?” Gauguin asks, seemingly perplexed, in his first reference to the subject (16). Then in a later passage: “Alone. I saw plenty of calm-eyed young women, I wanted them to be willing to be taken without a word: taken brutally. In a way a longing to rape. The old men said to me, speaking of one of them: '*Mau tera* (take this one)'. I was timid and dared not resign myself to the effort” (23). Morice's considerable alterations here call attention to his questionable transformation of “Gauguin” from a confused, self-conscious, and habit-bound exploiter of colonized women into a confident pursuer of a male fantasy of sexual conquest. In the original account,

Gauguin is well aware of the rape fantasy as male projection, and it is never presented as the fantasy of Maori women.

Finally, Gauguin will go off in search of a wife. He finds one, a “child of about thirteen years” (66)⁸⁵ in “a little valley where the inhabitants still lived in the ancient Maori manner” (61). Tehura, whose parents are happy to part with her (she is, indeed, from another island), comes with Gauguin to Mataia after the agreement, and even returns again, after the obligatory post-nuptial visit to her parents' home, this time to stay. His project may now proceed: some months later he notes,

Now that I can understand Tehura, in whom her ancestors sleep and sometimes dream, I strive to see and think through this child, and to find again in her the traces of the far-away past which socially is dead indeed, but still persists in vague memories. (92)

The result is a sort of eroticized ethnology. The end of the book consists of a lengthy discussion of Maori mythology, ostensibly gleaned from Tehura, but in fact mostly borrowed from Moerenhout's *Voyages aux Îles du Grand Océan* (Brooks 69). The end of the search is the body of the primitive woman, a body which bespeaks the infinite as well as the past. Interestingly, the word “noa” of the book's title, which Gauguin translates as “fragrant,” is mentioned also in *Totem and Taboo*: “The converse of 'taboo' in Polynesian,” writes Freud, “is '*noa*,' which means 'common' or 'generally accessible'” (24). The very language of the island seems to condone a reading of the beguiling island fragrance as “that which is permitted.”

III. Rupert Brooke

In October of 1913 Rupert Brooke left America, where he had been traveling for some months, for a tour of the South Seas. Already a poet of no small reputation, he carried with him at least two pieces of psychological baggage: a well-formed set of literary expectations of what a voyage into the

⁸⁵ Morice added the parenthetical phrase “the equivalent of eighteen or twenty in Europe.”

primitive implied, and an obsession with love, embittered by a recent relationship gone sour and several years of sexual frustration. On the ship, “Three passionate Pacific women cast lustrous eyes towards me; but with a dim remembrance of the fates of Conrad characters who succumbed to such advances, I evade them” (515). Brooke was the flower of the emerging Georgian poets, and the leader of a group of youthful, rebellious, and idealistic intellectuals who enjoyed such pastimes as nudism and camping out. Virginia Stephen, his childhood friend, dubbed them “the Neo-Pagans.” Members of the group, including Brooke and James Strachey, experimented with homosexuality and in general questioned the received sexual mores of the time. As a member of this group of self-styled sexual radicals who had called into question patriarchal civilization, Brooke had already sought an oppositional position in relation to the sexual law of patriarchal civilization, and his voyage of escape and self-rediscovery must be read as a navigation between patriarchy and its Neo-Pagan critique, and between hetero- and homosexuality. For, in spite of his legendary good looks, Brooke's sexual frustrations, his biographers unanimously agree, had reached alarming proportions. Utopian nudity and frankness between the sexes according to a platonic ideal had rendered most of Brooke's relationships with women in his circle sexually sterile. Or rather, Brooke proved unable to resolve in his own mind the sexual and platonic. (“This uncertainty contributed heavily to his nervous breakdown in early 1912,” writes William Laskowski [6]). As Adrian Caesar argues, Brooke “was deeply uncertain as to his sexual identity, but seems to have wished to choose either homosexuality or heterosexuality” (34). Brooke's sexual relationship with Katharine “Ka” Cox had ended disastrously and only exacerbated his confusion.

Brooke's decision to journey to North America and the Pacific Islands in 1913 has been read by his biographers as “an attempt to purge himself completely of his unhappy affair with Ka” and “a search for oblivion, to release Rupert from conflicts that arose in his motherland but could not be resolved there” (Delaney 204), and as “an attempt to purge himself of what he perceived as the weaknesses in his character” (Laskowski 21). As he sailed out into the Pacific, he had Conrad,

Kipling, and, most of all, Gauguin on his mind. “You may figure me,” he had written to Edward Marsh shortly before leaving San Francisco, “in the centre of a Gauguin picture, nakedly riding a squat horse into white surf” (*Letters* 513). In contrast to Gauguin, however, Brooke's voyage was conceived as an effort to resolve a conflict not only with the constrictive sexuality of patriarchal law, but also with the counter-threat represented by the ambiguous Neo-Pagan model of sexual relations. From his familiarity with these textual precursors, Brooke appears to have understood that his conflict could be resolved, or at least staged, by returning to a primitive, pre-adolescent, or even infantile sexuality – a sexuality prior to patriarchal law, as Freud or Judith Butler would say. Returning to this childlike state, he would attempt to either re-navigate his entry into patriarchal heterosexuality or to confirm an alternative position.

His arrival in Samoa, his first stop, met, and even exceeded, his expectations. “Great bronze men, with gilded hair, and godlike limbs lay about on the grass” (521). Watching a Samoan dance, performed aboard ship (where Brooke and his fellow passengers evidently slept during their stay) Brooke found it all “very thrilling and tropical and savage” and claimed he “felt strange ancient raucous jungle cries awaking within [him]” (521-22). But one Samoan image would stick with him through the entire trip:

I went [for] a walk under the coco-nut palms, with a naked baby of five or six holding each hand (one said his name was *Fred*), and several more twining round my ankles. I had a coco-nut – for it was hot – in the house of a white trader who had married a native. Have you ever sent a chocolate-coloured youth up an immense almost perpendicular coco-palm to pick a baby coco-nut, and then drunk the milk? It is the most refreshing thing in the world, on such an occasion. (521)

Watching the tree-climbing native as he labored for Brooke's milk-drinking satisfaction was an image that would persist with Brooke for the entire trip, to such an extent that Pound would employ it as the basis for his parody of Brooke. In Pound's version, however, Brooke's later female romantic interest (the “Tahitian princess”) is substituted for the “chocolate-coloured youth” of the actual scene;

Pound, who seems to have thought Brooke a rather simple and explainable creature, was either oblivious to, or uninterested, in the difference.⁸⁶ Since the coconut scene takes on an almost obsessive role in Brooke's epistolary imagery, it is worth dwelling a moment on some of its peculiarities. First, its colonial implications: Brooke is here introduced to the satisfactions of dictating his desire to "natives" who eagerly perform his requests; moreover, the scene occurs at the home of a white trader whose native wife similarly figures as a colonized gratifier of desire. Second, the infantilization of the scene: one has the impression of a world filled with "baby" things: baby coconuts, baby children (of five or six?), and milk, "the most refreshing thing in the world." Brooke's fascination with this dreamlike scene begs to be read psychoanalytically: as a castration fantasy, as an invocation of memories of infantile gratification; without arguing for any one particular interpretation we may say that Brooke's fascination constitutes a recognition that the imagery here offered the kind of material required for his introspective quest.

Brooke's letters from the islands are interesting for their wit, their style, their willingness to self-examination – forthright and at the same time quite self-consciously constructed. The letters to Cathleen Nesbitt (his ostensible "intended") have a sensual edge to them, as if Brooke felt Nesbitt to be daring him to enter a forbidden, sexual unknown. Brooke had met Nesbitt, whom he had first seen on stage playing Perdita in a production of *The Winter's Tale*, at the end of 1912. According to Paul Delany, "the affair with Cathleen was ardent but strictly Platonic, by mutual consent" (204). Nevertheless, Brooke had thoughts of marriage to Nesbitt, hoping that the trip would purge his memories of Ka.

In Hawaii, Brooke stayed at the famous Moana hotel, but found Honolulu "a dreadfully American place, just like any city in the States or Canada" (*Letters* 523). Nevertheless, he had no trouble evoking a less civilized atmosphere in "Waikiki," his first important island poem:

⁸⁶ "If he went to Tahiti for his emotional excitements instead of contracting diseases in Soho, for God's sake let him have the credit of it," Pound wrote Harriet Monroe (*Letters* 64-65).

Warm perfumes like a breath from vine and tree
 Drift down the darkness. Plangent, hidden from eyes
 Somewhere an *eukaleli* thrills and cries
 And stabs with pain the night's brown savagery.
 And dark scents whisper; and dim waves creep to me
 Gleam like a woman's hair, stretch out, and rise;
 And new stars burn into the ancient skies,
 Over the murmurous soft Hawaiian sea.

And I recall, lose, grasp, forget again,
 And still remember, a tale I have heard, or known,
 An empty tale, of idleness and pain,
 Of two that loved – or did not love – and one
 Whose perplexed heart did evil, foolishly,
 A long while since, and by some other sea.

Waikiki provides the background imagery, the *eukaleli* supplying the plangent tone and the waves a metonymy of the poem's own remarkable rhythm. The subject of the poem – sometimes identified with the ever-present Ka Cox, but perhaps more likely Noel Olivier, to whom the poem was sent – remains vague, its tensions unresolved. The tale – perhaps an empty tale – of two that loved – or did not love – might be known, or merely told, might be remembered or forgotten. But at the center of the poem is the “evil” done by “the perplexed heart” of one, presumably, Rupert.

From Hawaii Brooke quickly moved on to Fiji. En route, he wrote to Edward Marsh:

You think of me in a loin-cloth, brown & wild, in the fair chocolate arms of a Tahitian beauty, reclining beneath a bread-fruit tree, on white sand, with the breakers roaring against the reefs a mile out, & strange brilliant fish darting through the pellucid hyaline of the sun-saturated sea. Oh, Eddie, its all true about the South Seas! I get a little tired of it at moments, because I am just too old for Romance, & my soul is seared. But there it is: there it wonderfully is: heaven on earth, the ideal life, little work, dancing singing & eating, naked people of incredible loveliness, perfect manners, & immense kindness, a divine tropic climate, & intoxicating beauty of scenery. (525-6)

Brooke has not even seen Tahiti yet, although he has already completed in his mind the image of himself entwined in “the fair chocolate arms of a Tahitian beauty.” Brooke's desires are mediated by the images and literary scenes into which he is constantly placing himself. He wants nothing better than to relive a scene from a Gauguin painting or a Kipling story (“It is incredibly like a

Kipling story," he writes, describing his travels, "& all the people are very self-consciously Kiplingesque" [526]), experiencing the appropriate experiences in the appropriate attitudes, while avoiding the unpleasant fates of certain Conrad characters (by now, apparently, largely forgotten).

Brooke's own ability to verbally paint scenes was at least equal to his desire to live among them, and while his journey was indeed "belated," it was not merely derivative. Brooke's voyage, one may say, "quotes" earlier voyages in much the same manner as "The Waste Land" quotes poems out of "the tradition." In Brooke's writing, the voyage too has a tradition, and the art of the voyage (and the voyage narrative) is to inhabit this tradition and yet create a new voyage. On the other hand, if my argument is correct, Brooke was strongly motivated – for his own idiosyncratic reasons – by the desire to follow in Gauguin's footsteps in pursuit of a liberating primitive sexuality.

In what was to be the most important statement of his primitive ethic, Brooke tried to examine his feelings in a letter from Fiji to Edmund Gosse on November 19:

The attraction's queer. It's not really Romance. At least, I associate with Romance, something of veiled ladies, and moonlit serenades, and narrow Venetian or Oriental streets. Something just perceptibly feverish. But this is quite another world. It's getting back to one's childhood, somehow: but not to the real childhood, rather to the childhood that never was, but is portrayed by a kindly sentimental memory; a time of infinite freedom, no responsibility, perpetual play in the open air, unceasing sunshine, never-tiring limbs, and a place where time is not, and supper takes place at breakfast-time and breakfast in the afternoon, & life consists of expeditions by moonlight and diving naked into waterfalls and racing over white sands beneath feathery brooding palm-trees.

Oh, it's horribly true, what you wrote, that one only finds in the South Seas what one brings there. (530-1)

Brooke's definition of "Romance," here, characterized as mysterious, alluring, slightly unhealthy, and associated primarily with the Orient, corresponds roughly to the common characterizations of what I have called "the exotic." This is precisely *not* what Brooke finds in the islands; here, he finds, rather, the primitive: "the childhood that never was," not so much Freud's unconstrained, primal society as a world of preadolescent sensuality, the world of Peter Pan, which was, as Laskowski points

out, Brooke's "favorite celebration of eternal youth" (23). The features of Brooke's primitive utopia, infinite freedom, irresponsibility, play, sunshine, nudity, have easily recognizable opposites in modern British urban life: obligations, responsibilities, work, bad weather, lack of play, devotion to time and efficiency, prescribed hours for meals. If Gosse is right that "one only finds in the South Seas what one brings there," it might be added that what one brings is the expectation of the opposite of what one has at home: the idyllic primitive is the inverse of the oppressive modern.

But like Gauguin, Brooke cannot completely fit in. "One feels that one's a White Man – ludicrously." Nevertheless his response to this feeling of estrangement is to take a paternalistic attitude:

These dear good people, with their laughter and friendliness and crowns of flowers – one feels that one *must* protect them. If one was having an evening out with Falstaff and Bardolf themselves, and a small delightful child came up with 'Please I'm lost and want to get home', wouldn't one have to leave good fellowship and spend the evening in mean streets tracking its abode? That's I fancy, how the white man feels in these forgotten – and dissolving – pieces of heaven, the South Seas. And that perhaps is what Stevenson felt. I don't know enough about him. His memory is sweet there, in Samoa; especially among the natives. (531)

In this colonialist allegory it is the innocence of the natives that calls forth the duty of the colonist, just as Prince Hal is recalled to his responsibility in Shakespeare's play. Stevenson stands here as the model of the paternal colonist. It is odd, however, to see Brooke invoking what is essentially the missionary narrative; particularly so since, as I have been arguing, for Brooke, the positions are generally reversed: it is the primitive child who leads the civilized adult to the pre-oedipal "home."

But the natives do not figure only as child-like innocents, particularly in Fiji, the legendary Cannibal Islands: "not so attractive a place as Samoa, but more macabre . . . just what I've always imagined Avernus to be like" (535). Fiji was, he thought, "heavy with the White Man's Burden," and he was struck by the "jolly grinning fuzzy-haired Fijians, who care nothing, and know nothing, of burdens, Empire, or responsibility, nor that they are a dying and defeated race. They merely like

sunshine, and people, and fishing, and food and especially swimming in the sea" (538). To Jacques Raverat he could take a more lurid tone, tantalizing him with descriptions of "the women with a gait like – oh, like no one you've ever seen in your misty tight-laced feminist lands" (540). And of course, being in Fiji, there was need for the obligatory cannibal reference, a duty which he discharged in a letter to Violet Asquith, presenting himself in mock danger:

It's twenty years since they've eaten anybody, in this part of Fiji, and far more since they've done what I particularly and unreasonably detest—fastened the victim down, cut pieces off him one by one, and cooked and eaten them before his eyes. To witness one's own transubstantiation into a naked black man, that seems the last indignity. (541)

And he provocatively asked Cathleen Nesbitt,

Would you marry me if I turned up with two vast cannibal servants, black-skinned and perpetually laughing—all of us attired only in loincloths and red flowers in our hair? I think I should be irresistible. (552)

What are we to make about Brooke's jokes to Nesbitt about the primitive life in general and about nakedness in particular? "I had a great time in Samoa, sharing the sports and festivities of the naked brown savage," he had written her. "That's the life for a lad like me" (537). Nudity has a complex range of meanings for Brooke and his British circle, for whom it served as a marker of difference. For Brooke it appears to generate a certain unease as well as a sense of non-conformist pride, especially in his letters to Nesbitt. The naked brown savage and the naked black cannibal serve as props for Brooke's fantastic and intentionally provocative scenes which play on the shock of the primitive as well as the comic-grotesque possibilities of cannibalism. One may also note the ideological functioning of the cannibal joke: though Brooke presents himself as a liberal cultural relativist, vigilantly blaming himself for "unreasonably" detesting a particularly gruesome form of cannibalism, it is not the act of cannibalism itself around which the joke turns but rather the image of "one's own transubstantiation into a *naked black man*" (my italics), which is presumed to evoke horror in the listener. The understatement of "the last indignity" merely underscores that what is

at stake here is the anxiety related to a collapsing of the distinction between the well-dressed white men and the naked black men. The acts of vivisection and cannibalism, here merely the relatively insignificant vehicles for his transformation, become themselves the subject for a humorous sonnet, which Brooke thinks would “do well for No. 101 and last, in a modern sonnet sequence”

The limbs that erstwhile charmed your sight,
 Are now a savage's delight;
 The ear that heard your whispered vow
 Is one of many *entrées* now;
 Broiled are the arms in which you clung
 And devilled is the angelic tongue; . . .
 and oh! my anguish as I see
 A Black Man gnaw your favourite knee!
 Of the two eyes that were your ruin,
 One now observes the other stewing.
 My lips (the inconstancy of man!)
 Are yours no more. The legs that ran
 Each dewy morn their love to wake,
 Are now a steak, are now a steak! . . . (541)

Yet the same letter also expresses Brooke's love for the islands. “Fiji in moonlight is like nothing else in this life or the next,” he remarks. “I love England; and all the people in it; but oh, how can one know of heaven on earth and not come back to it?”

Although he had injured his foot on a coral reef, he was ready, by late December, to continue to Tahiti. “I go down to the coast to catch a boat to New Zealand, where I shall post this,” he wrote his mother. “Thence to Tahiti, to hunt for lost Gauguins. Then back to barbarism in America” (544). His boat is delayed, however, and he is disappointed to learn, he writes Nesbitt, “that a man got to Tahiti two months ahead of me, and found—and carried off—some Gauguin paintings on glass” (550).

There were no undiscovered Gauguins awaiting Brooke in Tahiti, but there was something, from Brooke's point of view, even better, a young Tahitian woman named Taatamata.⁸⁷ Brooke could

⁸⁷ Taatamata is also referred to variously in Brooke's writings as “Tuate Mata” and “Mamua.” In her surviving letter, she signs herself as “Tatamata” (*Letters* 654).

now live out the Gauguin myth himself. He was fully prepared for it. The previous November, while in Samoa, Brooke had observed that

The Samoan girls have extraordinarily beautiful bodies, & walk like goddesses. They're a lovely brown colour, without any black, Polynesian admixture: their necks & shoulders would be the wild envy of any European beauty: & in carriage & face they remind me continually & vividly of my incomparable heartless & ever-loved Clotilde. Fancy moving amongst a tribe of Clotildes. Can't you imagine how shattered & fragmentary a heart I'm bearing away to Fiji & Tahiti. And, oh dear, I'm afraid they'll be just as bad. (525-6)

In Tahiti, despite the pretence of resistance, Brooke undoubtedly expected to succumb to temptation. On February 7, he wrote again to Cathleen Nesbitt. (He had apparently already mentioned the affair in a previous letter, for he mentions that he is wearing a flower in his hair from Tuatamata, who is not otherwise identified.) His Britishness seems to be receding and he seems in danger of “going native”:

Tonight we will put scarlet flowers in our hair and sing strange slumberous South Sea songs to the concertina and drink red French wine and dance obscure native dances and bathe in a soft lagoon by moonlight and eat great squelchy tropical fruits. . . (563)

He has also, he mentions, decided to stay for another month.

Brooke's most important island poem was also written that month. “Tiare Tahiti” narrates a somewhat absurd attempt to explain the Christian heaven to his island love:

Mamua, there waits a land
Hard for us to understand.
Out of time, beyond the sun,
All are one in Paradise,
You and Pupure are one,
And Taü, and the ungainly wise.
There the Eternals are, and there
The Good, the Lovely, and the True,
And Types, whose earthly copies were
The foolish broken things we knew;

The lesson becomes increasingly absurd as the poet describes these platonic forms:

Never a tear, but only Grief;
Dance, but not the limbs that move;

Songs in Song shall disappear;
Instead of lovers, Love shall be;

and finally reverts to a celebration of life over heaven, the actual over the ideal, concluding that “There's little comfort in the wise.” In contrast to the number of Brooke's poems in which the poet broods over thoughts of death and the question of the afterlife, the tone of “Tiare Tahiti” seems especially lighthearted.

On March 7 he wrote to Edward Marsh,

I have been nursed & waited on by a girl with wonderful eyes, the walk of a goddess, & the heart of an angel, who is, luckily, devoted to me. She gives her time to ministering to me, I mine to probing her queer mind. I think I shall write a book about her—Only I fear I'm too fond of her. (565)

The scene is reminiscent of the scenes in *Noa Noa* in which Gauguin probes the “primitive recesses” of the mind of his native wife. Brooke's ambivalent attraction and distancing from his primitive other suggests the failure of his search for a pre-patriarchal sexuality. The desire to textualize the “queer mind” of the other expresses the desire to bring the primitive other under the law of patriarchal discourse. It was now important to convey the sense that he was maintaining his distance, to deny that he was going native. His fear of the other and desire to be re-constrained by patriarchal law and (heterosexual) domesticity is expressed in a letter to Marsh:

O my dear, I really do feel a little anchorless. I shall be glad to be back among you all, & tied to somewhere in England. I'll never never never go to sea again. All I want in life is a cottage & the leisure to write supreme poems & plays. (565)

The feeling of anchorlessness is the inverse of the feeling of enclosure from which the primitive quest begins. The “successful completion” of the primitive quest is the desire to be re-constrained in familiar boundaries. It is above all this trajectory of the primitive quest that lends it to commodification as a form of twentieth-century tourism.

But despite Brooke's partial reversion to civilized values, departure was difficult. “I've got out of Tahiti – not without tears” he wrote to Nesbitt in April (570). But being back in San

Francisco was an almost unbearable shock. In a state of near-crisis he wrote to Marsh:

Oh, God! oh, God!

How I hate civilization & houses & trams & collars. If I got on the *Tabiti* & went back again, shouldn't I find a quay covered with moving lights & lovely forms in white & pink & scarlet & green? And wouldn't Taate Mata be waiting there to welcome me with wide arms? (577)

But Brooke quickly adjusted. His “successful” recuperation of patriarchal and civilized values through the (failed) quest for the primitive is nicely summed up in role which he came to play as spokesman for the ideal of the nation-state. When the war broke out, shortly after his return, he quickly enlisted, and in October, after brief training, he was off to Antwerp. After his death in the spring of 1915 from an infected mosquito bite his poem “The Soldier” was to make him the most famous poet of the war. Henceforth he was to be associated not with a tropical paradise but with “some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England.” His legacy, appropriately enough, centers on the image of burial. Brooke's embracing of the primitive body, with its laughter at the discourse of immortality, is represented in the Brooke myth as effectively buried, covered over by Brooke's final alignment with the myth of the patriarchal nation-state, guarantor of immortality to its primal horde through the spiritualized identification with the eternal name of the primal father.

Vachel Lindsay: Multiculturalism as Primitive Vaudeville

From 1913, when “General William Booth Enters into Heaven” appeared, to 1918, the year of “The Chinese Nightingale,” Springfield, Illinois's Vachel Lindsay was the darling of the Chicago Renaissance, vigorously supported by *Poetry* magazine, which claimed to have discovered him. “Any discussion of American poetry which leaves him out is in danger of being discarded by the next age,” wrote Harriet Monroe in 1917. In fact, the reverse has been true; it is the accounts that left Lindsay in that have generally been discarded. But while Lindsay rarely figures in contemporary accounts of modernist poetry, his impact was deeply felt. Lindsay needs to be reread, not simply because of this largely unrecognized influence, but also because he represents the farthest reach among poets of the period toward a multiculturalist aesthetic. Though a strong ethnocentric bias, often colored by evangelical Swedenborgian Christianity, pervades the poems, Lindsay's attempt to reconstruct an American myth based on cultural diversity deserves attention as a forerunner of contemporary multiculturalism.

I. Saving the Africans

Lindsay's often contradictory views on race require careful analysis. On the one hand, he was outspoken about the evils of racism. He wrote in “Adventures Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons,” “it seems to me Mason and Dixon's line runs around every country in the world, around France, Japan, Canada, or Mexico or any other sovereignty. It is the terrible line, that should be the line of love and good-will, and witty conversation, but may be the bloody line of misunderstanding” (24). On the other hand, a mere glance at the section titles of “The Congo” – “Their Basic Savagery,” “Their Irrepressible High Spirits,” and “The Hope of Their Religion” – illustrates how little success

Lindsay had in transcending the cultural stereotyping of the period.

But Lindsay was blissfully unaware of the problems of stereotyping in his representations of other cultures and races, and no doubt believed his poems contributed to the “love and good-will, and witty conversation” between the races that he valued. Aldon Nielsen suggests that “Lindsay is so much the product of the set of discourse agreements operating in Uncle Remus that he simply cannot hear the objections of those who exist outside that set of agreements” (31). “My ‘Congo’ and ‘Booker T. Washington Trilogy’ have both been denounced by the Colored people, for reasons that I cannot fathom,” Lindsay wrote to Joel Spingarn, chairman of the NAACP in 1916. “So far as I can see they have not taken the trouble to read them through. The third section of the Congo is certainly as hopeful as any human being dare to be in regard to any race” (*Letters* 134). But in a letter to his editor at Macmillan four months earlier he declined a suggestion that he produce “an entire book of this nature,” pointing out that

if it comes, it will have to come after more experience and observation with the colored folks. It certainly cannot be done in a hurry. All the brotherhood I have for the blacks dates from the Springfield race-riots of 1908 when, for six months thereafter as a local Y.M.C.A. worker, etc, I cultivated a people I thought deeply wronged. I have worked that knowledge pretty thin by now. (*Letters* 128-9)

Lindsay rarely objected to interpreting his own poems, and he was particularly anxious to explain “The Congo” to Harriet Monroe in 1914, since he intended to recite it at an upcoming award banquet at which W.B. Yeats would be present.

The first section deals with the basic savagery of the negro. The Refrain is ‘Mumbo Jumbo Will Hoodoo You’. By implication, rather than direct statement, the refrain stands for the ill fate and sinister power of Africa from the beginning. I do not say so – but the Civil War was a case of Mumbo Jumbo hoodooing America. Any Lynching is yielding to the power of the Hoodoo. Any Burning alive, or hand-cutting depredations by Leopold, is a case of Mumbo Jumbo Hoodooing Civilization. In the second section the Irrepressible High Spirits of the negro – as set forth in a sort of Grand Opera Minstrel Show in a part compensates for and overcomes the Hoodoo he brings. All the ragtime elements of our

minstrelsy and the Cake-Walk, etc are here symbolized. The third section is an idealized Camp-meeting – transferred to the banks of the Congo, along with a prophecy of the redemption of the race through their religious instinct, and the death of Mumbo-Jumbo. (*Letters* 90)

The emphasis on Mumbo Jumbo and “Hoodooing,” the crux of the poem, is nevertheless ambiguous. Here, the central question is the relationship between Mumbo Jumbo and the Civil War, Southern lynchings, Belgian atrocities and these signifiers associated with “the ill fate and sinister power of Africa from the beginning.” A generous reading might attempt to draw a connection between Mumbo Jumbo and white exploitation, while a more critical reading would find Lindsay in effect holding the negro culpable for his own exploitation and torture. A third reading, probably more in line with Lindsay's beliefs, might externalize Mumbo Jumbo, attributing responsibility for its evil effects to neither race. But hoodoo is brought by the negro, like a disease, and thus must be compensated for and overcome. (Interestingly, this compensation is seen to occur through *performances*, not only preaching but also ragtime, minstrelsy, and the Cake-Walk). Lindsay's negro myth thus to a certain extent falls into a long racist tradition of seeing the negro as responsible for his own oppression. Nevertheless, the poem contradicts this sense of responsibility by externalizing the evil, making possible the defeat of Mumbo Jumbo in the third section “through their religious *instinct*.”

For Louis Untermeyer he dissected the poem somewhat differently, as a distillation of “acceptable” discourses about the Negro:

It is equal parts (1) The death of a Missionary on the Congo.⁸⁸ (2) a Cannibal War dance.⁸⁹ (3) The Springfield Illinois Race Riots (4) The Burnings alive of negroes in the South. (5) The Camp-Meetings of half-Wild negroes. (6) A Bert Williams Negro Comedy Co. (7)

⁸⁸ In October 1913, Lindsay attended a Sunday service at the First Christian Church of Springfield. “The minister, Brother Burnham, spoke sadly from the pulpit of the death by drowning in the River Congo of his old college friend, Brother Ray Eldred, a missionary” (Ruggles 52-53).

⁸⁹ Lindsay had witnessed the dancers of Dahomey at the Chicago World's fair (Cooley 52).

A Minstrel Show. (8) Joseph Conrad's African sketches. (9) Uncle Tom's Cabin. (10) The Emancipation Proclamation. (11) The Songs of Stephen Collins Foster (10) The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois. All boiled down and served to a rag time tune. Everything but Booker T. Washington – though I think him worthy. (*Letters* 95)

Lindsay's recipe provides a useful picture of the range of discourses through which an educated, liberal, middle-American might view the race question in 1914. The exotic extremes are represented by the cannibal and the missionary, while closer to home, race riots and lynchings place both races in a bad light. Mysterious camp meetings represent a black culture to which whites are denied access, while vaudeville offers an acceptable form of access to black cultural production. Finally, the negro may be understood through exemplary texts including adventure stories (Conrad), folk tales (Stowe), historical documents (The Emancipation Proclamation), traditional songs (Foster), and works of social criticism (with Du Bois replacing Washington in name, if not in spirit).

II. Lindsay the Primitive Poet

The awards banquet was a great success for Lindsay. In his speech Yeats called him a fellow craftsman and spoke about "General Booth":

Since coming to Chicago I have read several times a poem by Mr. Lindsay, one which will be in the anthologies, "General Booth Enters into Heaven." This poem is stripped bare of ornament; it has an earnest simplicity, a strange beauty, and you know Bacon said, "There is no excellent beauty without strangeness." (Williams 102-3)

Monroe, it turns out, had thoughtfully placed a copy of "Booth" in Yeats's room the night before the banquet (*Letters* 91), and in her write-up of the affair in the next issue of *Poetry*, tellingly arranged Yeats's comments on "Booth" so they seemed to refer to "The Congo," presumably hoping to drum up excitement over the soon-to-be-published poem:

The keen spirit of the assembly was lifted to delight by the

speaker's gracious compliment to Lindsay, who was still little known in spite of the acclaim given to 'General Booth' over a year before. And when the new poet responded by reciting for the first time 'The Congo,' then still in manuscript, the 'strange beauty' of the poem came to the audience with an accolade, as it were of authoritative praise. (Williams 103)

It was an important moment not only for Lindsay, but for the Chicago poetry community as well, and Yeats's arrival from overseas to validate Lindsay as a "fellow craftsman" might well be taken to mark the beginning of the Chicago Renaissance. The *Dial*, Chicago's other major literary journal, also reviewed the event enthusiastically,⁹⁰ expressing its hopes that Lindsay might come to express "the emotion of the Middle West" (57:283).

Yeats's question to Lindsay at the banquet, "What are we going to do to restore the primitive singing of poetry?" became the question Lindsay pursued in his July contribution to *Poetry*, "Mr Lindsay on 'Primitive Singing.'" His response was to draw a comparison between the Greek lyric, in which "music was the handmaid of verse" and the "higher vaudeville." The comparison served as a pretext for the introduction of a new poem, "The Fireman's Ball," which Lindsay described as "an experiment in which I endeavor to carry this vaudeville form back towards the old Greek precedent of the half-chanted lyric" (161). The link with the Greeks was a discovery not of a new method but of a new justification for what Lindsay had in fact already been doing. Nevertheless the appellation of "primitive poet" stuck, partly because it provided a link between what Lindsay was doing and other poetry that Harriet Monroe and associate editor Alice Corbin Henderson were interested in promoting. Ellen Williams, in her study of Monroe, suggests that the "Note on 'Primitive Singing'" "reads like a melange of Harriet Monroe's and Yeats's ideas," and points out that Lindsay "did not go on to preach a poetics of primitivism in later issues" (108). But in her introduction to Lindsay's book, *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914), Monroe solidified and extended this link:

⁹⁰ Though somewhat belatedly, on October 16, 1914 (281-3).

Mr Lindsay's plea for a closer relation between the poet and his audience, for a return to the healthier open-air conditions and immediate personal contacts, in the art of the Greeks and of primitive nations. Such conditions and contacts may still be found, if the world only knew it, in the wonderful song-dances of the Hopis and others of our aboriginal tribes. They may be found also, in a measure, in the quick response between artist and audience in modern vaudeville. They are destined to a wider and higher influence; in fact, the development of that influence, the return to primitive sympathies between artist and audience, which may make possible the assertion once more of primitive creative power, is recognized as the immediate movement in modern art. (viii-ix)

Vaudeville, the wonderful song-dances of the Hopis, the open-air art of the Greeks, all these came together in Monroe's shrewd description of Lindsay's "primitive" method.

III. Saving America and the World

Lindsay's new American myth begins with an identification with the American Indian. In "Our Mother, Pocahontas," he writes,

We here renounce our Saxon blood.
 Tomorrow's hopes, an April flood
 Come roaring in. The newest race
 Is born of her resilient grace.
 We here renounce our Teuton pride:
 Our Norse and Slavic boast have died:
 Italian dreams are swept away,
 And Celtic feuds are lost today

At the same time, however, Lindsay celebrates the expansionist myth of Johnny Appleseed: "Sowing, he goes to the far, new West, / With the apple, the sun of his burning breast" (88). The apple is "allied to the thorn, Child of the rose," important because the rose, throughout Lindsay's work, is the symbol of the west, as opposed to the lotus of the East.

The lotus means all the million contradictory things which stand for Asia from the beginning. All those that mourn, all those that rejoice, in the East, turn to the lotus.

In like manner, the rose means Europe and America from

the beginning. Christ says: "I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley." (xliii)

His poem "The Wedding of the Rose and the Lotus" was "written on the near-completion of the Panama Canal." Though it purports to be a marriage of equals, its symbolic economy suggests otherwise. "The lotus speaks of slumber: / The rose is as a dart," we are told, and, while "The genius of the lotus / Shall heal earth's too-much fret," "The rose, in blinding glory, Shall waken Asia yet." The association of the lotus with sleep is partly a pointer to the Buddhist doctrine of nirvana, but it also carries the stereotypical connotations of laziness and passivity. Lindsay had extolled his enthusiasm for Buddhism – and its limitations – to fellow Oriental aficionado Arthur Davidson Ficke in 1912: "I heartily congratulate you on Hisa-Gatami. I have a fellow feeling for any man who has been moved by Buddhism. It has been with me a tower of strength – and I am no Theosophical sentimentalist, vague Emersonian, or missionary-hating man, either," he confided. Nevertheless, he wrote, "I am perfectly willing to admit that he is an inferior Master to the Man of Nazareth that he never stretched out his hand for the nails, and that the thorn will win in the end over the lotus – but I prefer to be cosy with Buddha . . ." (*Letters* 65).

If Lindsay's Orient is, like his Africa, heavily dependent on racially-charged images, here again Lindsay could also present himself as conscious of, and opposed to, the evils of cultural stereotypes. To George Sterling, a California poet, he wrote in 1913,

I have just finished a Pro-Japanese poem ["The Jingo and the Minstrel"] which I suppose you as a Californian will not like a bit . . . my point is that whatever we do or feel in regard to the Coolie as an individual we must respect the Japanese History, the dignity of their traditions, the nation as a whole. I find so few really cultured people know even the merest backbone of Japanese Feudal History and customs. They imagine the Japanese as a bunch of monkeys of most immoral breed who by some Satanic chance have suddenly learned to become perfect wizards at fighting and building warships. The same people twenty years ago thought of Japan as a Nation of Dolls that could somehow talk and walk – and wore exceedingly pretty costumes. (73-4)

Lindsay could, however, be aware of such stereotypes without entirely transcending them himself.

Much of his knowledge of matters Oriental came from his family; his sister and brother-in-law had begun working as missionaries in China in 1905 (an adventurous proposition, so soon after the Boxer Rebellion, which had been primarily directed at Western missionaries and their Chinese converts).

Lindsay's most successful Oriental poem, "The Chinese Nightingale," one of the three poems for which he is generally remembered, was written while his parents were on a visit to China in 1914. Though set in a San Francisco laundry, its main interest is in its melancholy evocation of an exoticized imperial China, as told by a mysterious "Chinese lady of high degree" who appears in Chang's shop after he lights some incense and five firecrackers in a pan (the latter evidently for dramatic effect), upon which Chang's grey joss and grey bird (the nightingale of the title) come to life. The tale told, rather provocatively, by the lady to Chang, concerns China's lost grandeur, and celebrates the great classical culture of China, particularly the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–219 A.D.):

"When all the world was drinking blood
 From the skulls of men and bulls
 And all the world had swords and clubs of stone,
 We drank our tea in China beneath the sacred spice-trees,
 And heard the curled waves of the harbor moan.
 And this gray bird, in Love's first spring
 With a bright-bronze breast and a bronze-brown wing,
 Captured the world with his carolling.
 Do you remember, ages after,
 At last the world we were born to own?
 You were the heir of the yellow throne –
 The world was the field of the Chinese man
 And we were the pride of the Sons of Han?
 We copied deep books and we carved in jade,
 And wove blue silks in the mulberry shade"

In contrast to this colorful and learned past – full, admittedly, of doll-faced children and pretty costumes – Chang's present is drab and grey, a world of street-lamps, railroad-yards and clock-towers. Lindsay's view of Chinese history as decline is made even more clear in "Shantung, or the Empire of China is Crumbling Down," in which Confucius walks the streets of old Shantung where "Venomous foreigners harry mandarins / With pitchfork, blunderbuss and snickersee" and a Chinese

sea-child taunts him to "Say farewell to China now; / Live like the swine, / Leave off your scholar gown."

Lindsay's vision of a multicultural America accommodating Pocohontas, Johnny Appleseed, the Chinese immigrant and the saved African, General Booth and his Salvation Army could not transcend the limitations of thought of his day. The incursions of race-theories and concessions to prejudice would within decades mar the otherwise-promising utopian visions of American diversity. American poetry failed to pursue the path opened by Lindsay and urged by Harriet Monroe, who wrote in her 1917 review of *The Chinese Nightingale*:

Mr Lindsay represents a tendency much richer and more indigenous than that personified by the Imagists, for example, however fine and high theirs may be. His roots run deep into the past of American literature; Mark Twain and Riley and Brer-Rabbit Harris were his collateral relatives, and all the wild lore which is in our western blood – our love of the wilderness, the folk-sense of magic in nature and life, the instinct of sympathy with all kinds and races of men – all this is in Vachel Lindsay's tendency, and he carries a good share of the new movement on his shoulders.

Despite Lindsay's exemplary American pedigree, his "richer and more indigenous" tendencies, his sympathies and folk-sense, Lindsay proved hardly more enduring than the vaudeville with which he occasionally associated himself.

**The Red Man in the Drawing Room:
Modernism and the Poetics of Nativism**

Foucault suggests that in analyzing discursive strategies we must be sensitive to a number of questions. First, we must note the points of diffraction of a discourse, that is, the points at which “two objects, or two types of enunciation, or two concepts may appear, in the same discursive formation, without being able to enter – under pain of manifest contradiction or inconsequence – the same series of statements” (65). Secondly, we must be sensitive to the position of a discursive formation within the economy of the discursive constellation to which the discourse belongs. In other words, “the discourse under study may also be in a relation of analogy, opposition, or complementarity with certain other discourses” (66). Finally, we must take into account “the function that the discourse under study must carry out in a field of non-discursive practices” (68). Here, we should examine “the rules and processes of appropriation of discourse” – who has the right to speak, socially or institutionally – and also “the possible positions of desire in relation to discourse” (68).

In this chapter I will examine the emergence of Native American poetry as a new object of interest in the field of American literature around the time of the First World War, with particular attention to the anthology of Native American verse, *The Path on the Rainbow* (1918). My examination will begin with, and center on, T.S. Eliot's February, 1919 review of the anthology in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, entitled “War Paint and Feathers,” a short piece which speaks to many of the concerns of discourse strategy analysis noted by Foucault. The review begins as follows:

The Ustumsjji are a vanishing race. The last repositories of the Monophysite heresy,⁹¹ persecuted and massacred for centuries (on religious grounds) by the Armenians, the remnants of a unique civilization have taken refuge in the remote gorges of the

⁹¹ The Monophysite heresy involves the belief that Christ is of one nature, i.e. partly divine and partly human.

Akim-Baba Range. Here the explorer discovered them, and was privileged to hear their Shikkamim, or wandering bards, prophets, and medicine-men, recite or chant, to the music of the pippin or one-stringed gourd, the traditional poetry of love, warfare, and theology.

But suddenly, egged on by New York and Chicago intelligentsia, the romantic Chippaway bursts into the drawing-room, and among murmurs of approval declaims his

MAPLE SUGAR SONG

Maple sugar
is the only thing
that satisfies me.

The approval becomes acclamation. The Chippaway has the last word in subtlety, simplicity, and poeticity. Furthermore, his continent is backing him. For, says the editor,

it becomes appropriate and important that this collection of American Indian verse should be brought to public notice at a time when the whole instinctive movement of the American people is for a deeper footing in their native soil.

The Red Man is here: what are we to do with him, except to feed him on maple sugar? And it is not only the Red Men, but the aborigines of every complexion and climate, who have arrived, each tribe pressing upon us its own claims to distinction in art and literature.

At the center of this apparently whimsical passage is the ostensibly amusing primitive poet, burst into the drawing room of literary society for public inspection. What sort of discursive configuration has produced the question of this figure's status and function? Leaving aside for the moment the question of points of diffraction in the discourse, which will be our main interest, we may begin with a few remarks on the "discursive constellation" invoked by the passage. Of primary interest here is the linkage with anthropological discourse, in which Eliot had a more-than-passing interest.⁹²

⁹² Although Eliot's anthropological work at Harvard has been known at least since Harry Costello's account of *Josiah Royce's Seminar 1913-1914* (1963), the nearly exclusive emphasis on Eliot's knowledge of Frazer and Weston remained characteristic of Eliot criticism until the early seventies. (See, for example, Brian Vickery's chapter on Eliot in *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* [1973]). William Harmon's study, "T. S. Eliot, Anthropologist and Primitive" appeared in *American Anthropologist* in 1976, but appears to have had little if any immediate impact on Eliot scholars. In the mid-eighties Robert Crawford (1984) and Marc Manganaro (1985) published dissertations on several aspects of Eliot's primitivism. Parts of Manganaro's thesis appeared in two articles, "Dissociation in a 'Dead Land': The Primitive Mind in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot" (1986) and "Beating a Drum in a Jungle: T. S. Eliot on the Artist as 'Primitive,'" (1986). Crawford's book,

Anthropology was by this time firmly established as an academic discipline; moreover, anthropological works were of a sufficiently general interest that literary periodicals in England and America considered them worthy of review: they were part of the cosmopolitan field of knowledge through which modern Western man was constructed at the center of a global field of primitive and exotic cultures. In this passage we may easily find the predictable theme of “the vanishing primitive” and its associated “allegory of salvage,” which James Clifford argues “is built into the conception and practice of ethnography as a process of writing” (113). Here, too, we must note the presence of what might be called “imperialist philology,” the project of collecting literary specimens of the global cultural field. Finally, the phrase “the romantic Chippaway” links him to the discourse of the Noble Savage.

The question of the relationship of the passage to the field of non-discursive practices is somewhat more complex. We must first of all consider the position of the “Red Man” – finally, after centuries of “pacification,” rendered a safe object of literary contemplation. Then, we must consider him as a representative of “America” in a field of “Aborigines of every complexion and climate,” a representative who, not incidentally, has become the subject of investment or, perhaps, something less serious, like gambling: “his continent is backing him.” (That this non-seriousness might be reduced to the level of childish play is suggested by the phrase, “egged on by by New York and Chicago intelligentsia”.) Eliot chooses the drawing room as the symbolic site of literary activity (the drawing room of J. Alfred Prufrock, one might say). But now we arrive at the crux of the issue: “The Red Man is here: what are we to do with him, except to feed him on maple sugar?” “We,” that is, of the largely synonymous populations of practitioners of drawing-room discourse, and readers of British literary periodicals such as the *Nation and Athenaeum*. And here we come to the question of the “rules and appropriation of discourse”: who will speak for and identify the importance of this

new object of literary discourse?

This question, as I have suggested, hinges on a “point of diffraction” in the literary discourses which are at work in positioning the Native American poet as an object of interest. Eliot’s interest in this review is not to denigrate the importance of the savage. “Just as it is necessary to know something about Freud and something about Fabre,⁹³ so it is necessary to know something about the medicine-man and his works,” he writes. “The maxim, Return to the sources, is a good one.” More specifically, Eliot is interested in appropriating the primitive poet *as a poet*. “Primitive art and poetry,” he writes, “help our understanding of civilized art and poetry” and “can even, through the studies and experiments of the artist or poet, revivify the contemporary activities.” Nor is the poet’s interest in the primitive merely incidental; for, as Eliot sees it, “the poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry (accomplished, not merely produced) since its beginnings – in order to know what he is doing himself.” Primitive poetry is thus a serious matter, as the poet and artist – like the anthropologist – recognize, and they “will be the last people to tolerate the whooping brave, with his tale of maple sugar, as a drawing-room phenomenon.” Eliot thus appropriates for the poet, artist, and anthropologist the authority to speak of and for the American poet. But the point of diffraction we are interested in here centers on the question of what the importance of the Native American poet will be.

I. Modern Poets and Native Americans

For the poets who became interested in the Native American in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, there were three dominant concerns. First, there was what I would term the “post-colonial imperative.” American poets and artists in the second decade of the twentieth century came

⁹³ Renowned French entomologist Jean Henri Fabre (1823-1915).

to feel that the Native American could play a role in the creation of a distinctively American cultural tradition. Like other post-colonial literatures, American literature continued to feel itself burdened by its colonial heritage. (As a “settler colony,” the United States could not depend on the rhetorical strategy, common to postcolonial discourse, of a return to an “authentic” precolonial cultural state.) The dependence of American poets and artists on European traditions was felt to be oppressive and inappropriate to the United States' new international stature. Native Americans were ostensibly free of such dependence and were thus seen as distinctively and unquestionably American. In becoming attached to the land, the modern American necessarily, it was argued, associated himself with the Indian.

The second aspect of the new interest in the Native American was his potential as an ideal subject for a glorification of the primitive, with all of its inherent possibilities for cultural critique. That this new interest in the primitive was largely a phenomenon imported from Europe was not of great concern; the important thing was that these were America's own primitives, aborigines not of some distant colonial territory or exotic island, but the very spaces in which modern Americans were constructing their towns and cities. The Native American might thus be made a figure for all that was perceived to be lost in American urban culture: community, cultural identity, unity with nature, a sense of connection with the land, a purposeful poetry integrated with the rhythms of life.

Thirdly, the plight of the vanishing natives was a subject which could evoke sympathy, especially within the new urban and immigrant culture which had little direct experience of Indians, and thus had no reason to regard them as a threat. This “pacification” of the Indian threat was a necessary precondition for the Indian's adoption as a cultural ancestor. Thus when Louis Untermeyer, commenting on the new interest in the Indian as poet, quipped that “a good Indian, according to his students, is not so much a dead Indian as a singing one,” he was making a genuine observation, since allowing that the Indian had a culture, and moreover, an interesting and even important one, had to involve a radical restructuring of the American colonialist ideology which saw

the Indian as an uncultured and dangerous savage. In 1910, the Indian population was the lowest ever. Just as, for the ethnographer, the “vanishing primitive” provided “a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice” (112), for the poet, the vanishing Indian, and particularly the vanishing Indian poet, might be approached as an object of pathos, and with a sense of moral purpose.

Of all the uses of the Native American for the modern poet, the most important – that of providing an indigenous grounding for the American poet – was also the most difficult. As Americans had historically been much more interested in exterminating or at least removing the Indian than in learning from him, the idea of deriving an American poetic tradition from the American Indian would seem to necessitate a deep denial of history. But, as Walter Benn Michaels points out about American novels of this period, “killing Indians is no obstacle to being Indians” (“Race” 665). In Britain, the acceptance of the (Asian) Indian as a primitive ancestor was a comparatively simple matter, since it was the ancient Aryan Indian rather than the contemporary one who was of interest, and the linguistic commonality of English with ancient Aryan Sanskrit had long offered an accepted link between the British and the imperial charges on whom they lavished so much scholarly attention. One solution to this difficulty was to establish linkages through the land and the names attached to places. Whitman, in “Starting From Paumanok,” described

The red aborigines,
 Leaving natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds
 and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names,
 Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez,
 Chattahoochee, Kaqueta, Oronoco, Wabash, Miami,
 Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,
 Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging the
 water and the land with names.

Whitman's sentiments are with the pioneer, not the Indian; the Indian simply melts away, “A new race dominating previous ones and grander far,” leaving “A world primal again.” Another solution was to adopt Native American figures such as Hiawatha or Pocahontas as part of the new American

mythology. Thus Vachel Lindsay, in "Our Mother Pocahontas," went so far as to write, "We here renounce our Saxon blood," announcing a new race "born of her resilient grace."

II. The Discovery of Indian Poetry

The first important book to introduce the Native American as poet to the American public was Natalie Curtis's *The Indian's Book* (1907), actually a collection of songs, complete with translations, transliterations, and musical transcriptions. Despite the resistance of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to her efforts to collect materials on government reservations (she went over their heads, enlisting the help of President Roosevelt) Curtis succeeded, with the help of Mrs R. Osgood Mason, later "Godmother" of the Harlem Renaissance, and others, in producing a volume which she hoped "might help to revive for the younger generation that sense of the dignity and worth of their race which is the Indians' birthright, and without which, no people can progress" (xxi). It was reviewed widely and favorably by such publications as the *Dial*,⁹⁴ which placed it at the head of its list of holiday books. "To most White readers," the review suggested, "this book will be a revelation of the vaguely stirring genius and the art, mystic in its intent, spontaneous in its symbolism, of a child race." The question of what "The Indian" may have thought of *The Indian's Book*, with its ostensible function of preserving their birthright, was apparently not a question that occurred to reviewers.

In addition to providing the first popular introduction to Native American verse, *The Indian's Book* was also significant, as Michael Castro points out, as "the first major statement of the theme that has characterized twentieth-century writers' interest in the Indian: that the red man represented in some way the missing aspects of the American self" (11). As Curtis wrote elsewhere, "The undeveloped talents native to the aboriginal American are precisely those in which the Anglo-

⁹⁴ *Dial* (Dec 1, 1907), cited in Castro (10).

Saxon is deficient."⁹⁵ But such views were not embraced by all reviewers. When a similar note was sounded in Frederick R. Burton's *American Primitive Music* (1909), the response of Louis James Block the reviewer for the *Dial*, was by no means supportive:

Mr. Burton suggests the use of the Indian melodies as thematic material for American composers. He deplores the dearth of folk-music among us, and thinks that our poverty in this respect may change into something approaching the European opulence by turning to the unexpected sources of wealth furnished by our mountains and prairies. He also alludes to the abundance of tunes, mostly religious, thrust into our lap by the negro. It must, however, occur to everyone that this is after all alien material. (85)

These two reviews in the *Dial* illustrate divergent racialist characterizations of the American Indian: in the Curtis review the Indian is characterized as a member of "a child race," while in the Burton review he is thought of as "alien." Over the course of the next decade, the "child race" view would gain ascendancy, as American poets sought to find their own absent poetic childhood in the primitive song of the Native American.

III. *Poetry Goes Native: Henderson, Monroe, & Pound*

Harriet Monroe's interest in the primitive was evident as early as 1914, when, introducing Vachel Lindsay's *The Congo* to the literary public as an example of "primitive" poetry, she wrote of the healthier conditions for poetry of "the primitive nations [which] may still be found, if the world only knew it, in the wonderful song-dances of the Hopis and others of our aboriginal tribes" (viii). But *Poetry's* advocacy of Native American poetry later in the decade owed substantially less to Monroe than to her former assistant editor, Alice Corbin Henderson. Henderson became a Native Americanist almost accidentally, when, having contracted tuberculosis, she moved to Taos, New Mexico for the sake of her health. "Great God," wrote Pound, in June of 1916, on hearing of the

⁹⁵ *American Review of Reviews* 36 (Nov 1907): 63. Cited in Castro (11).

unexpected retirement of his preferred correspondent at *Poetry*, “what classics are you to read, without greek or latin?” (150). Fortunately, the Pueblo Indians of Taos were available to provide Henderson with intellectual stimulation. Six months later, she wrote enthusiastically to Pound,

I am *much* interested in the Indian dances – have seen two. Not at all what one might expect – The Eagle dance as fine as Pavlova – Their sense of costume – Works, etc. in manner of these Pueblo Indians [in Paris, Chicago or New York⁹⁶] – They would not lack interpretation. A *theatric* interpretation, I mean. There has never been a shred of it that I can find! – I hope to see the *Buffalo Dance* on the 23rd. – (My remissions are rare, however.) When you get through with China, come out here and do the Indian. Not the “big injun” of commerce but the ones that *you* would find. W.P.H.⁹⁷ is making some fine things of the dances. (174)

Henderson's suggestion to Pound to “come out here and do the Indian” failed to produce even the slightest response from Pound, whose interest in “the primitive” began and ended in his fascination with the race-essentialism theories of Leo Frobenius. The Buffalo Dance became the subject of a poem (entitled “Buffalo Dance”), which appeared with others in *Poetry*'s “Aboriginal Poetry” issue of January, 1917.

Strike ye our land
With curved horns!
Now with cries
Bending our bodies,
Breathe fire upon us;
Now with feet
Trampling the earth,
Let your hoofs
Thunder over us!
Strike ye our land
With curved horns! (235-6)

“By now you've seen the aboriginal number, ye gods!,” she wrote Pound in February. “I had no idea that my things were to be so determined! I'll work on the things before they go into a book.” (192).

⁹⁶ I am interpolating the apparent sense of the transcription of this phrase. Nadel's transcription of the bracketed passage reads: “. . . were as even Paris, as they are Chicago or New York . . . ”

⁹⁷ W.P.H. was Henderson's husband, William Penhallow Henderson, a painter, who had begun to use Indian motifs in his own work.

Henderson's self-deprecating appeal to Pound again produced no response, though Pound responded almost point by point to the rest of her lengthy letter. He did, however, observe that "The AMURkhn pote still suffers from appalling lacunae in his mental furnishings and from an utter lack of ideals." (203).

Henderson, who must have felt slighted by Pound's evident lack of interest in her new work, refrained henceforth from bringing up the subject of Native American poetics and culture, though it became her major literary preoccupation in the following decades. She published two collections in the twenties: her own *Red Earth* (1920), and an edited anthology, *The Turquoise Trail*, in 1928.

IV. The Path on the Rainbow

Henderson's translations were typical of a new approach to Indian poetry: like the translations of Constance Lindsay Skinner, Mary Austin, Pauline Johnson, and Frank Gordon, they were usually presented as "interpretations" rather than as literal translations. As Skinner put it, "Authors of these Interpretations who have been inspired by the Native poems – have yielded to Indian beauty, willingly sought to enter into the Indian consciousness and to sing of it from within, interpretatively" (Cronyn 347). Though most of the interpreters drew on first-hand experience of Native cultures – one, Pauline Johnson, was even part Mohawk – they permitted themselves a certain freedom of translation, and relied less on contextual explanations and footnotes. This made their work more accessible to the general public than that of the ethnographers, but also more subject to criticism with respect to their claims of authenticity.

By 1918, a substantial body of Native American poetry in translation and "Native-inspired" poetry existed, covering the full range from the painstakingly documented translations intended, at least, to be literal to the most whimsical Indian-inspired primitivist flights of fancy. Moreover, a wide range of tribes had been subjected to the efforts of ethnographers, translators, and interpreters.

There was enough material, in short, for a new anthology, which George Cronyn (author of an undistinguished 1914 collection of poems, entitled *Poems*) undertook to edit, delegating the introduction and afterword to the better-known Mary Austin and Constance Lindsay Skinner.

The commanding tone of Austin's introduction must certainly have made an impression on "those unaware until now of the very existence of such a body of aboriginal verse." No mere collection of literary curiosities, this "first authoritative volume of aboriginal American verse," she argued, was of interest because of "the relationship which seems about to develop between Indian verse and the ultimate literary destiny of America" (xv-xvi).

That there is such a relationship any one at all familiar with current verse of the past three or four years must immediately conclude on turning over a few pages. He will be struck at once with the extraordinary likeness between much of this native product and the recent work of the Imagists, *vers librist*s, and other literary fashionables. He may, indeed, congratulate himself on the confirmation of his secret suspicion that Imagism is a very primitive form; he may, if he happens to be of the Imagist's party, suffer a check in the discovery that the first free movement of poetic originality in America finds us just about where the last Medicine Man left off. But what else could he have expected? (xvi)

Such claims could hardly have been made while Imagism remained under Pound's stewardship, but Pound had by then moved on to Vorticism, relinquishing "Amygism" to the forceful Amy Lowell, who was herself interested in Indians, and on good terms with Austin. But Austin's arguments are rather unpersuasive: if there is a resemblance between the poems of the anthology and those of the Imagists and *vers librist*s, it is hardly likely to be explained by the fact that the poetic practices of Native Americans had much in common with those of the Imagists. That there is a resemblance between the translated product (as opposed to the "native product," a phrase which Austin slips in rather disingenuously) is no doubt to be explained both by the difficulties of translation, which made free verse a far more suitable form than rhymed verse, and by either a direct Imagist / *vers librist* influence or at least a sense that the liberated forms of Imagism made the relatively unstructured translations acceptable as poetry. The debate over whether the translations were *Imagist* poems thus

helped obscure the deeper question of whether many of them were “poems,” in the Western sense, at all. One cannot, also, avoid sensing a certain animosity towards the Imagists in this passage. The reader with a “secret suspicion that Imagism is a very primitive form” is reminiscent of Victor Plarr, who commented in his 1914 “Note on a Savage Poet” on the similarity between the products of his imagined “savage poet” (an Australian aborigine) and “the verse of the moment.”

But the resemblance to contemporary American verse is only part of Austin's argument for the importance of Native verse. After pointing out that the poetic faculty is “of all man's modes, the most responsive to natural environment,” she goes on to state that it is also “the first to register the rise of his spirits to the stimulus of new nationalist ideals.”

If this were not so there would be no such thing as nationality in art, and it is only by establishing some continuity with the earliest instances of such reaction that we can be at all sure that American poetic genius has struck its native note. Therefore it becomes appropriate and important that this collection of American Indian verse should be brought to public notice at a time when the whole instinctive movement of the American people is for a deeper footing in their native soil. (xvii)

Austin's point that poetry is the first to register nationalist ideals is debatable, but she was certainly right about the presence of a “movement . . . for a deeper footing in their native soil,” as works like Van Wyck Brooks' *America's Coming of Age* (1915), Waldo Frank's *Our America* (1916), and later, William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain* (1925) attest. That the Native American was the perfect vehicle for this nativist movement was demonstrated, as Austin saw it, by his “instinctive” and “unconscious” attraction to poets and artists: “It is the certificate of our adoption, that the young genius of our time should strike all unconsciously on this ancient track to the High Places” (xvii).

“The certificate of our adoption” implies not so much an adoption *by the Indian* – for he is, even for Austin a “child race” – as a co-adoption by the land itself. But by suggesting – as she does at several points – that Native American poetry could be thought of as approaching that of the Homeric Greeks, Austin does hint at the possibility of an ancestral role: “For such illuminating

gleams that Indian poetry can throw on the genesis of inspired literature, its study would be worth while, even if without the renewal of our native stock of poetic forms and figures" (xxvii-xxviii).

V. The Maple Sugar War of 1919

In spite of Austin's inspired rhetoric, the critics were not entirely pleased with *The Path on the Rainbow*. Surveying the "fragmentary" offerings of Native American verse to date, Louis Untermeyer found "singularly little . . . that is either thorough or convincing" (240). Untermeyer may not have known much about Indians, but he could easily recognize a poorly-edited poetry anthology. His complaint about *The Path on the Rainbow*, the same one T. S. Eliot would make seven months later, concerned the problem of translation:

Translation, at the best, is a difficult and ungrateful performance for both interlocutor and audience. But the translating of folk songs and aboriginal chants is an even more hazardous matter. So much that is idiomatic escapes or is distorted or is, most often, entirely misunderstood.

The overcoming of these barriers was in Untermeyer's view, the task of the editor. "If Mr. Cronyn is a genuine student of Indian folklore," Untermeyer wrote, "he is to be blamed for not having made the volume more communicative and less cryptic; many of these songs cry aloud for nothing so much as footnotes." He complains also of "the arbitrary arrangement of words and a pretentious typography that is foreign to our native – though it may be native to Ezra Pound, 'H.D.' and Richard Adington [sic]," and gives, among other examples, the poem "Maple Sugar," which he terms "redolent of Others and the Kreymborg-Johns' naivete." Though Untermeyer conceded that "as an ethnic document this anthology is of indubitable value," it was also, he felt, "a rather forbidding pile" and "a crude and top-heavy monument" (241).

This was criticism Austin and Cronyn were not going to take lying down. Austin responded first, beginning with a general attack on the *Dial's* decision to give "a book of such national, one

might say international interest to be reviewed by one whose mind has so evidently never visited west of Broadway” (569). “It begins to be a question in America,” Austin wrote (anticipating the arguments of latter-day multiculturalists), “whether a man is entitled to describe himself as a man of letters at all who so complacently confesses his ignorance of and inability to enter into the vast body of aboriginal literature of his country, literature that rises to the saga form easily comparable to the great works on which European literature is built, and to epics that for sonority and richness of figure approach and at times equal the epics of Homer.” Austin defends the charge of mistranslation by observing that “When one considers how many readings of Sappho and even of Shakespeare are in doubt, it is not surprising that Indian verse should occasionally suffer at the hands of the translator.” But in responding to Untermeyer's charge concerning the poems' occasional banality, Austin unwittingly concedes the weightiest of Untermeyer's charges: the need for footnotes. “Indian poets are like other poets, occasionally banal and commonplace, but it is again pertinent to suggest that something more than a 'mere man of letters' is required for the appreciation of literature which is different from one's own, or the fashion of the hour.”

Austin's argument grows weaker, however, when she offers a more nuanced interpretation of the “Maple Sugar” song:

Ten thousand American boys in a foreign land singing Home Sweet Home is a very moving thing, and twice ten Indians at the ragged end of Winter, when the food goes stale and their very garments smell of wood smoke, singing their maple sugar song might sing a great deal of poetry into it -- poetry of rising sap, clean snow water, calling partridge, and the friendly click of brass bowls and birch-bark sap buckets.

For Austin, the point of this comparison between the indigenous nativism of an Indian song and the American soldiers' “Home Sweet Home” – a tune imported from Europe – was self-evident. But Untermeyer chose to misconstrue the point, reading her rather spurious interpretive note as helpful “documentation” of the sort he found wanting. “This,” he wrote, in his response to Austin, “is the sort of interpretive note that would have made valuable much that at present is inconsequential.”

Now that Austin has risen to the bait, Untermeyer cannot resist adding “by way of discourteous conclusion,” that

a whole volume of footnotes would not have explained the inclusion of Carl Sandburg's “translation” of a non-existent Indian croon, the sentimental jingling of Miss Johnson's *The Lost Lagoon*, and the too frequent attempts to make an obvious primitive emotion look like a piece of preciousness.

(The maple-sugar song of Eliot's “Red Man” would, incidentally, be received as just such a “piece of preciousness” by his drawing-room audience.)

At this point the battle was joined by Cronyn, who felt obligated “to emerge in self-defense from what the critic evidently considers a purely nebulous state, and take up arms in his own behalf” (162). He blamed the damaging Sandburg mis-attribution on a printer's error, and Pauline Johnson's inclusion – which he, too, opposed – on his “deference to wishes of the publishers,” whose arguments hinged on Johnson's Canadian popularity and Indian ancestry.

“There remain,” Cronyn, continued, “the questions of footnotes and of the value of some of the songs themselves.” This, of course, could only be resolved by reopening the case of the mysterious maple sugar song. “It is so unintelligible, inconsequential . . . dressed in its absurd pretentious *vers libre* make-up!” writes Cronyn, patronizingly. “But when Mrs. Austin explains the primitive background, the thing at once becomes illuminatingly satisfying.” Untermeyer is taken to task for his desire “to have all the poems similarly bulwarked by picturesque explanatory matter.”

You see, the real secret of the poetry of the above song is, that the Indians are hungry, hungry for maple sugar. To critics who have lost their primitive gusto for maple sugar that sensation may well be a riddle.

Sarcasm aside, at the core of Cronyn's defense is an essentially primitivist argument: there is no real need for footnotes because the Indian is a primitive version of us; we have only to look within ourselves and find our “primitive gusto for maple sugar” to understand the meaning of the song. Another example, a brief love song, is offered, with comic “picturesque notes” added. “All of this

may make Mr. Untermeyer happy and contented, but personally I have cherished a passionate distaste for footnotes ever since that wretched academic period when, for every line of poetry or drama read, one had to plough through a jungle of notes at the bottom of the page, or at the back of the book. It seemed to me then that there was only one creature more horrible and contemptible than the teacher who sandbagged poetry, and that was the editor who crucified it with unnecessary notes" (162-3).

The battle may at this point have been left as a stand off: no doubt, the reader is as likely to side with Cronyn against the "teacher who sandbagged poetry" and "the editor who crucified it with unnecessary notes" as against him, and the teacher who inadequately explained the poetry and the editor who left out crucial information. But Cronyn's response was not quite the end of the *Dial* debate; Mary Austin had not yet responded to Untermeyer's response to her earlier response to his now five-and-a-half month old review. Moreover, she appeared determined not only to have the last word on the maple sugar question, but to defend her argument about the Imagism of the poems as well.

Mr. Untermeyer speaks of the Indian verse as a "crude reduction to Imagist verse form." What I tried to say before and Mr. Untermeyer still misses, is that Indian verse form *is* Imagism. It was not "reduced" to that form, it was made that way originally.

The Maple Sugar Song is wheeled out one last time to support this claim; but Austin's arguments do more harm than good to her Imagist claim:

In its original form the Maple Sugar song reads exactly as it was written in the Anthology. It is a three phrase song literally translated by one of the most careful students of Indian poetry, Frances Dinsmore. The Indian words being longer, fill out the measure of the rhythm, and in case the words do not quite fill out the measure, the Indian poet, contrary to our modern use, does not add more words, but fills in the measure with meaningless musical syllables.

The Imagists who claimed to "use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something" would have had difficulty tolerating "meaningless musical syllables," even if they were

not technically "words." Austin damages her case further with a more technical discussion of the translation question:

Miss Dinsmore's translations are ethnic rather than poetic. I do not happen to know the Chippewa language in which the song was originally written, but I do know the genius of Indian languages in general. They are holophrastic, that is to say, one word is actually made up of the essential syllables of a whole descriptive phrase. For example, there is an Algonquian word which an ethnologist would translate accurately as Dawn. But a poet would translate it no less accurately and more adequately and more Indianly as "Hither-whiteness-comes-walking." In the same manner the word which Miss Dinsmore translates as maple sugar, might actually have been something like this "the sweet-white-downdripping-blood-of-the-maple-tree" or "the-sweetness-which-I-draw-from-the-maple-with-my-flint-knife."

The problem of the holophrastic linguistic features calls into question the possibility of a literal translation, which must choose at least between holophrastic adequacy and reduced simplicity. Austin may have been hoping that the argument would have the effect of Fenellosa's essay on "The Chinese Written Character as a Basis for Poetry," much cherished by Pound, but since her revelations illustrate Dinsmore's failure to take into account these interesting linguistic features, they merely do more damage to her defense.

Austin's final attack concedes some failure, while launching a final attack against Untermeyer's authority as reviewer:

Now my contention has been from the beginning that unless Mr. Untermeyer knew something of the genius of the aboriginal Indian language, unless he knew something of Imagism besides what it looks like on paper, he had no right to review this book. Certainly he had no right to condemn it because it does not come within his notion of what poetry is in New York today. I admit the errors in editing the book, and particularly I admit my own liability to err in a subject so broad and so little studied, but I deny Mr. Untermeyer's right to object to the inclusion of particular poems in the book because they do not please him. Many Indian poems are banal, many are "jinglingly sentimental" as he describes Miss Johnson's Paddle Song, albeit Miss Johnson is, I understand, the only contributing translator with Indian blood, and probably closer than any of us to the genuine poetic values of what she translates.

Who, then, is authorized to validate the adequacy of the translations? Regrettably, not the editors themselves, who hardly come off as authorities on Native American languages, and not “the only contributing translator with Indian blood,” who Austin – on racial grounds – sees as “probably closer than any of us to the genuine poetic values of what she translates,” a writer summarily discredited by both sides, who represents the absent and inadequate authority of the Native. Pauline Johnson, as the Red Woman in the drawing room, is presented as an embarrassment to serious students of Indian poetry, and the scandal of her performance underscores for both sides the necessity that the Indian must be interpreted and re-presented. Thus the *Dial* debate ended – and it did end here, in the August 23, 1919 issue, the editors firmly regretting “that pressure of space on this department compels them to announce this discussion of Mr. Untermeyer's review as closed.”

It is at this point that T. S. Eliot enters the picture. Coming to his October *Athenæum* review through this history, we can now better understand Eliot's decision to begin “War-Paint and Feathers” with his romantic Chippaway bursting into the drawing room, egged on by the New York and Chicago intelligentsia, and among murmurs of approval declaiming his “Maple Sugar Song.” Eliot's review is almost identical in tone to Untermeyer's: both begin with sarcastic references to the faddishness of the primitive, and work their way into a more serious discussion of the need to take the Indian seriously and the need to properly edit his works. Both critics quote passages representing the nativist argument without either assenting to or dissenting from the argument. What distinguishes Eliot's review is the emphasis on *the poet* as the ultimate authority on the question of Native American poetry (the anthropologist, also accorded a voice, gets second billing). The poet, according to Eliot, “is the first person to see the merits of the savage, the barbarian and the rustic, he is also the last person to see the savage in a romantic light, or to yield to the weak credulity of crediting the savage with any gifts of mystical insight or artistic feeling that he does not possess himself.” But Eliot's interest in “the savage” is distanced from the nativist imperative, although there is a muted reference to primitive poetry having “more significance, in relation to its own age or

culture, than 'Kehama' and 'Aurora Leigh' have for theirs.”

If the nativist impulse is not behind Eliot's interest in the primitive, how are we to account for his interest, which was arguably greater than that of other writers of the period? The answer, which will come as little surprise to Eliot scholars, is to be found on Eliot's interest in mysticism.

VI. Eliot's Primitive Mysticism

The mystical state is, for Eliot, precisely what connects the *poet* with the *primitive*. The poet, he had written, is “the last person . . . to yield to the weak credulity of crediting the savage with any gifts of mystical insight or artistic feeling *that he does not possess himself*” (my italics). The theoretical support for this assertion crucial to Eliot's thinking is to be found in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Les Fonctions Mentales dans les Sociétés Inférieures*. As William Harmon argues, the conception of the primitive in both Eliot's criticism and creative work owes “its contours and emphases to Lévy-Bruhl . . . more than to any other single source” (803). *Les Fonctions Mentales* was published in 1910, and Eliot may have come across it when in Paris in 1910-11; he had certainly read it by the time of the 1913 Royce seminar when he used it in his paper on the interpretation of primitive ritual.

Lévy-Bruhl begins his analysis of “the primitive mind” with a rigid distinction between primitive mentality and “our” mentality. The difference hinges on the conception of representation itself. “Our” conception of representation is an intellectual one, but for “primitives” representations are “blended with other elements of an emotional or motor character” (772). Representations have a sacred character as a result of the intense states of their acquisition (for example, in religious rituals).

If I were to express in one word the general peculiarity of the collective representations which play so important a part in the mental activity of undeveloped people, I should say that this mental activity was a *mystic* one. In default of a better, I shall make use of this term— not referring thereby to the religious mysticism of

our communities, which is something entirely different, but employing the word in the strictly defined sense in which "mystic" implies belief in forces and influences and actions which, though imperceptible to sense, are nevertheless real. (774)

Thus, for the primitive, reality, inseparable from representation, is itself mystical. Animals and plants have mystical properties, as do parts of the body, and these mystical properties are often more important than "the attributes of which our senses inform us" (776). The same may be said of other natural phenomena. The sacredness of these representations in "primitive society" means that they are resistant to change: thus, for example, the stability of art forms and housing structures (778). "Our" mentality is essentially different from the primitive's, Lévy-Bruhl argues, because our scientific and rational physical world is completely distinguishable from the realm of representation; we are able to separate the objective physical world from supernatural and animistic beliefs about its objects. The primitive's inability to make this distinction, to separate the physical world from its representation, makes it impossible for "us" to "yield entirely" to the primitive's mentality (781).

Lévy-Bruhl supports his theory with "well-known" facts about primitives: the primitive's fear of pictures, which are regarded as being real just as the things they represent, the collapsing of the distinction between animate and inanimate objects (776). "Thus rocks, the form or position of which strike the primitive's imagination, readily assume a sacred character in virtue of their supposed mystic power. Similar power is ascribed to the rivers, clouds, winds" (776). Eliot's favorite example, however, was the "Bororo Indians who convince themselves that they are parrots," mentioned in "Euripides and Professor Murray" (SW 72), his 1916 review of Webb's *Group Theories of Religion and the Religion of the Individual* (116), and his 1924 review of W. J. Perry's *The Growth of Civilisation and The Origin of Magic and Religion*.

While Eliot appears to have accepted much of Lévy-Bruhl's theory as written, he dissented at one critical point. In the Royce seminar paper he wrote that Lévy-Bruhl "appears to me to draw the distinction between primitive and civilized mental process altogether too clearly" (Crawford 192).

This denial, as it were, of the *essential difference* of the primitive mind – at least in the special case of the poet, as he would later argue – was Eliot's crucial step toward “recovering” the power of the primitive, and establishing the poet's privileged access to it.⁹⁸

This belief in the poet's special relation to the primitive is expressed in a number of Eliot's essays and reviews. In a 1918 review of Wyndham Lewis's novel *Tarr*, Eliot wrote, “The artist, I believe, is more primitive, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it” (106). But the most forceful and extended treatment of the notion of the primitive poet is to be found in the 1919 review of *The Path on the Rainbow*. Disregarding the book's eloquent nativist arguments that American poetry could and should be grounded in native soil through an appreciation of Indian verse, Eliot dismissed these arguments by portraying them as drawing-room provincialism, and sought, instead, to present the primitive poet as an originary poetic ancestor. Primitive art and poetry, Eliot argued, “help our understanding of civilized art and poetry.” They can even “revivify the contemporary activities” by allowing the poet to “return to the sources.” But if this special relation to the primitive is an *innate* characteristic of the poet, it is also, paradoxically, a *cultivated* one. The poet should read primitive poetry (and read about primitive poets) because

the poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry (accomplished, not merely produced) since its beginnings—in order to know what he is doing himself. He should be aware of all the metamorphoses of poetry that illustrate the stratifications of history that cover savagery.

These observations may be read against “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” published in the September and December *Egoist*: “The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from

⁹⁸ It is also a somewhat risky move, as it collapses Lévy-Bruhl's distinction between the mystical mental state of the savage – his essential and ineluctable state – and that of the civilized mystic, which is an *alternative* state of consciousness.

Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order," Eliot wrote (38). The review extends this Eurocentric conception of "Tradition" to include a pre-Homeric, pre-European, tradition, which Eliot, like most anthropologists of the day, found still evident in existing "primitive" societies.

The point Eliot makes in his review – that "the poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry . . . since its beginnings—in order to know what he is doing himself" – is much the same as the point he makes in "Tradition," where the formation of the poet from the literary past is both automatic and, at the same time, something to be cultivated.⁹⁹ The primitive poet plays a critical role in this poetic self-construction because he represents the core of the poetic identity, the poetic identity in its natural setting. And as Eliot sees it, what poetry is "about" in this primal situation is the mystical union of self with world. Thus, civilization is represented not so much as a linear progression but as a kind of layering over which must be consciously shed layer by layer in order to recover what the poet in fact already is.

Eliot's strategic interest in the Red Man is thus quite different from the use proposed by Austin and Cronyn. Eliot has little interest in the idea that Native American verse might provide "a certificate of our adoption" for the American poet, for Eliot, in returning to the colonial mother-country, has already refused this adoption. I have characterized this difference, above, as a point of diffraction in the literary discourse. Despite the alternative positioning of Native American verse adopted by Eliot, Native American verse continued to find a small niche in the literary marketplace. Even Louis Untermeyer recognized the movement in his 1921 revised edition of his anthology of

⁹⁹ This double construction of cultural identity as something simultaneously innate and constructed is part of a constellation of ideas of race and culture prominent in the period, as Walter Benn Michaels has shown. Michaels argues that this doubleness unhinges the ultimate incoherence of progressive era's conceptions of race and culture, which vacillated between contradictory understandings of cultural identity based on (innate) race and (acquired) culture. In Oliver La Farge's *Laughing Boy*, "Neither what she was born nor what she has done is sufficient to confer cultural identity; she can make herself a Navajo only by doubling Navajo birth with the doing of Navajo things" ("Race" 679).

Modern American Poetry. In the preface to the original 1919 edition – written in August, the very month the *Dial* controversy ended – he had written,

I will not go into greater detail concerning the growth of an American spirit in our literature nor point out how, in many of the poems in the present collection, the authors have responded to indigenous forces deeper than their backgrounds. I will, however, call attention in passing to the fact that, young as this nation is compared to her transatlantic cousins, she is already being supplied with the stuff of legends, ballads and even epics. The modern singer, discarding imported myths, has turned to celebrate his own folk-tales. (xi)

For Untermeyer, in 1919, a series of poems treating “the figure of Lincoln” provided the sole representation of this folk element. But in the preface to the revised, 1921 edition, Untermeyer recognized “The New Folk-Poetry,” a category which included not only “adaptations and localized versions of English ballads and border minstrelsy” and the cowboy songs of John A. Lomax, but also “those who have attempted to bring the spirit of Indian tunes and chants into our poetry” of whom “Mary Austin, Natalie Curtis Burlin and Lew Sarett are chief” (19). In his 1923 study, *American Poetry Since 1900*, Untermeyer devoted three pages to “The Amerindian” (slightly more than the two pages devoted to “the Aframerican”), rehashing his earlier critical discussion of the translation problem, but conceding the “brave attempts . . . to re-express the spirit of the original songs and chants” by Burlin, Skinner, Fletcher, and Henderson, and singling out Austin (whose book, *The American Rhythm*, had appeared earlier in the year) and Sarett as “the workers in this field who have plowed deepest” (375).

"Hartford," Stevens says, "is a very American city, but here that includes, yes, a strong cultural tradition. Our businessmen are well educated, they read books, some of them even write: there's Mr. —, for instance, the chief Mififi of a company"

"The chief what?"

"Oh—" laughing— "Mififi, panjandrum, beadman, you know. He goes away each summer to live the life of a painter."

(Brazeau 129)

The Comedian as Colonist

In his influential 1940 reading of "The Comedian as the Letter C" Hi Simons called the poem "the culminant work of an acknowledged master's first period" (453). Most critics have since acknowledged the poem's importance as an allegorical account of the development of Stevens' aesthetic. As A. Walton Litz notes, the poem belongs "to a familiar literary genre, the voyage of discovery that becomes an 'introspective' voyage of self-discovery, but its deeper affinities are with the confessional fictions produced by the Romantic impulse to explore and define the self" (120). For Harold Bloom, the poem's relation to its predecessors is somewhat paradoxical: "it is the satyr-poem or parody that culminates and almost undoes the tradition of the High Romantic quest-poem," he writes, and "yet it shares fully in the obsessive quest that it only ostensibly mocks." Thus, for Bloom, the poem is exemplary of the anxiety of influence, and he reads it, accordingly, as an allegory of the poetic crisis that silenced the poet in the years following the publication of *Harmonium* (69, 72).

The figuration of self-discovery as *quest* is so deeply ingrained in English literature that Stevens' choice of the discovery narrative as an appropriate form for his allegory of poetic self-discovery seems an entirely natural one. But the "naturalness" of this allegory, I would argue, demands further scrutiny. The classic discovery narratives in the English tradition — those, for

example, of Raleigh, Drake, or Captain Cook – are, first and foremost, artifacts of colonialism, however much we may wish to read them as explorations of the Western “self” discovering its limits in the field of the “other.” The adventure novel, a genre so closely intertwined with the discovery narrative genre as to be almost inseparable from it, is even more conspicuous in its linking of the discovery of selfhood with the project of colonial expansion, particularly in its late-nineteenth-century forms. “The adventure tales that formed the light reading of Englishmen for two hundred years and more after *Robinson Crusoe*” were not only, as Martin Green has argued, “the energizing myth of English imperialism” (3), they were also an important part of the upbringing of the boys and girls of the British Empire. Such stories, needless to say, were widely read in America, as indeed the centrality in the American tradition of Melville’s seafaring tales and Poe’s “Narrative of A. Gordon Pym” attests.

Just as “Alastor” – “The Comedian’s” precursor poem, according to Bloom – figures within a certain moment of British imperial interaction with the East,¹⁰⁰ Stevens’s persistent use of “exotic” and “primitive” images reflects a certain moment in the American dialectic of imperialism and isolationism. As I will argue in this essay, the particular features of Crispin’s quest in “The Comedian” cannot be properly understood without an understanding of these discursive contexts. In my view, the poem’s generic affinities to the discovery narrative signify not only an adaptation of Romantic precursor poems, but also an exploration of the possibilities of poetic expression in a world of Empire – possibilities that involve the imaginative appropriation of the exotic and the primitive.

¹⁰⁰ More specifically, the years of expansion of the British East India Company, the cultural impact of which is reflected in Shelley’s enthusiasm for the “Oriental” poems of Southey, Peacock and Moore, and his own deployment of Eastern imagery and themes in such poems as “Zeinab and Kathema” and “The Indian Girl’s Song.”

I. Stevens and the Exotic

“Wallace Stevens is an explorer of the exotic,” Allen Tate observed in an early review of *Harmonium* (Doyle 57). Stevens’s imaginative geography in general inclines toward the area extending from the South Atlantic states to the Caribbean, enforcing, in effect, a Monroe Doctrine of the imagination, a sphere of influence appropriate to a period of steady U. S. involvement in the Caribbean in the decades following the Spanish American War and increased concern over Mexican political instabilities. The opening of Cuba to American tourism offers a background to “Academic Discourse in Havana,” where Cuba provides an antidote to civilization: “Canaries in the morning, orchestras / In the afternoon, balloons at night,” the “Grand Decadence” of Cuba supplementing the more easily accessible tropicality of Florida which, in “Nomad Exquisite,” “Brings forth hymn and hymn / From the beholder” just as “the immense dew of Florida / Brings forth / The big-finned palm / And green vine Stevens’s poetics accord a place of importance to the exotic, an importance that is deeply entrenched in the symbolic order of *Harmonium* and by no means merely decorative. Though the particularities of the exotic imagery that Stevens chooses vary from poem to poem (as of course they must, given the dependence of exoticism on novelty), their function – the possibility of an escape from the quotidian – remains fairly constant. What varies is the *motive* for escape or the *value* placed upon it.

The quotidian presents problems as a poetic space for Stevens – problems Stevens confronts, and increasingly, in his later work, overcomes – and the exotic offers a generative linguistic space in which the poet discovers or rediscovers a fresh poetic subjectivity. In “The Cuban Doctor” the poet’s reveries are invaded by an Indian who strikes “Out of his cloud and from his sky.” In the following poem, “Tea at the Palaz of Hoon” the poet transcends “the western day” into the vaguely exotic world of the poem where he inquires,

What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?

What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?
 What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained
 And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
 I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
 Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
 And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

The imagery arrives already questioning its source; and that source, we are told, is the imagination of the poet. The exoticism of the imagery functions as a proof of authenticity: the poem is no mere mimetic reproduction, but a product of a special function of the imagination accessible to the poet. This special faculty of the poet to generate images outside of the normal range of everyday experience again enables Stevens's poetic voice.

This special faculty of the poet is again pointed to in the next poem in *Harmonium*, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," where the poet laments the lack of strangeness in the surrounding houses, noting sadly that "People are not going / To dream of baboons and periwinkles." "Only, here and there, an old sailor, / Drunk and asleep in his boots" transcends these disappointingly ordinary dreams, and "Catches tigers / In red weather."

But Stevens may be selling his neighbors short; if he, like the old sailor, dreamt of baboons and periwinkles (or at least, could conceive of someone doing so), perhaps his neighbors did too. Such, at least, is implied by the argument of Fredric Jameson, who reads Stevens' exoticism as reflecting "a particular moment in the development of modern capitalism," a moment in which both tourism and third world objects come to carry special meanings for Americans of a Stevens's social class:

There is, in other words, a subterranean relationship between the 'umbrella in Java' – the fantasy of the exotic holiday – and the 'umbrella *from* Java,' the luxury item whose own capacity to generate images, daydreams and semic associations lies in its origins in a distant place and culture, and in the momentary function of a Third World handicraft industry to produce just such objects of

consumption for the First World. (186)

Thus for Jameson the exotic image in Stevens provides not so much an escape from the quotidian as a signifier of the universality of the poet's vision. The exotic, Jameson argues, "completes" Stevens's poetic world, enabling the production of "an autonomous or semi-autonomous space . . . that can now be felt to 'represent' the real world in its fundamental oppositions (nature versus culture, or, in other words, landscape versus luxury consumption objects; and First World versus Third World)."

Stevens, like his former Harvard classmate, the art collector Walter Arensberg, was a connoisseur of exotic objects. One of his sources for these objects was Harriet Monroe's sister, whose husband was the U.S. minister to China. In the same letter in which Stevens broke the news to Monroe that *Poetry* would not be getting the final version of "the Crispin poem," he thanked her for having her sister send him some tea from China. "For a poet to have even a second-hand contact with China is a great matter," he writes, "and a desk that sees so much trouble is blessed by such reversions to innocence" (*Letters* 230). Later that year he thanked her for another gift, this time of "a benevolent old god," "a blissful adventure" for which he was much indebted (*Letters* 230-31).

James Clifford has suggested in an essay entitled "On Collecting Art and Culture" that collecting is a universal human activity, albeit one that takes on different meanings in different cultures:

All such collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self. But the notion that this gathering involves the accumulation of possessions, the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience), is surely not universal. (218)

"In the West," Clifford argues, "collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity." The collected object further enables vicarious travel through contemplation, and this strategy is employed in the very language of Stevens's poem, as Alison Rieke has argued in her essay, "Stevens' Armchair Travel: The Sound of the Foreign." Words, Rieke argues,

are “vehicles for the poet’s mental travel: words are themselves committed wanderers, and Stevens uses their movement to counter his own stasis” (166). Exotic words and objects offered Stevens objects of contemplation for imaginative travel; for, as he observes in “Academic Discourse in Havana,” “the sustenance of the wilderness, / Does not sustain us in the metropolises.”

II. Self-Discovery through Exploration

If the exotic is a major preoccupation for Stevens, “The Comedian as the Letter C” nevertheless begins with an assertion of man’s rootedness to the local, that “man is the intelligence of his soil, / The sovereign ghost.” For Crispin the truth of this statement is only determined after travels in exotic places, when he can agree that “That’s worth crossing seas to find.” Travel provides the experience through which Crispin discovers his limits. Justifiably dissatisfied with the mastery of his limited domain, where his position as the Socrates of snails and musician of pears demonstrates the inadequacy of his environment to provide for his intellectual and vocational needs, he is led to the sea, much like the boy-heroes of many Victorian adventure stories. Like these others who sought their fortunes overseas, Crispin aspires to great success, and even his pretensions to domination of the sea “Created, in his day, a touch of doubt.”

A great deal of the poem’s comic energy, however, stems from the fact that Crispin’s aspirations, couched in the heroic language of epic and adventure, are for the most part “merely” literary. The mapping of this search for a suitable poetic onto the framework of the adventure story is significant. Stevens, as Frank Lentricchia has amply demonstrated, thought of poetry as an effeminate occupation, and we may read this figuration of the poetic quest as voyage of discovery as an attempt to recover the “masculinity” and “seriousness” of the poetic vocation.

Crispin’s progress is marked by the series of initiation rituals that he undergoes. The poem begins with Crispin’s crisis of inadequacy:

The lutanist of fleas, the knave, the thane,
 The ribboned stick, the bellowing breeches, cloak
 Of China, cap of Spain, imperative haw
 Of hum, inquisitorial botanist,
 And general lexicographer of mute
 And maidenly greenhorns, now beheld himself,
 A skinny sailor peering in the sea-glass.

By throwing himself into his voyage, in which he is immediately and predictably “washed away by magnitude,” he enters into a process of self-discovery through confrontation with external forces, escaping the narcissistic contemplation of the self. Through this externalized self-discovery he can begin to confront the difficult questions of poetic identity in a manner that mirrors the adventure story hero's quest for personal identity, a quest that often requires the hero to establish a place in the social order by competing successfully with others. The wordy, watery realist Triton, whose verbosity Crispin must “stem . . . in the sea” seems an easy target, since he already lies groveling and self-divided: “Triton incomplicate with that / Which made him Triton.” The allegory of Triton has been read as a separation of “American Romantic Selfhood from its British precursor” (Bloom 74), rejection of “a watered down romanticism” (Litz 129), and a recognizing of “the stark realities of life” (Simons 455). Triton is in fact Crispin, “an ancient Crispin” who melts away like “dead brine” or “a dew in winter” reduced to a “merest minuscule in the gales.” Vanquished, Triton nevertheless lives on, though finally “negligible,” a reminder of an inherited language that cannot be entirely transcended.

The title of this first section of the poem is “The World without Imagination,” and its ending, with obvious parallels to Stevens's own development, is Crispin's discovery of a modernist poetic in the Pound-Williams vein: “Here was the veritable ding an sich, at last.” The *ding an sich*, or “the thing itself” in Williams's formulation, is “free / from the unavoidable shadow of himself / That lay elsewhere around him.” It is another of the cathartic transformations Crispin's undergoes: here, “the last distortion of romance / Forsook the insatiable egotist” and “Crispin beheld and Crispin was made anew.” The arrival of this modernist aesthetic does not seem to stem from

anything on Crispin's part other than his decision to become an introspective voyager, and the aesthetic itself is conspicuously empty of content, being composed of short, declarative sentences reminiscent of various modernist manifestoes, and with considerably more than a hint of parody. Appearing out of nowhere, the new aesthetic is an inescapable revelation whose beneficial effects – including the pseudo-rebirth as well as the accompanying relief from “the drenching of stale lives” that had previously plagued his voice – are balanced by the alienating and ominous effects of its arrival: the “veritable ding an sich” comes “with a speech belched out of hoary darks / Noway resembling his.” Yet with all its power, it is a “gaudy, gusty panoply” – an empty shell or suit of armor, a “caparison,” or rich covering, “of wind and cloud,” and is thus as hollow as it is potent, an impressive illusion of rhetorical strength, though – as “something given to make whole among / The ruses that were shattered by the large,” – it serves a necessary restorative function for the puny and battered Crispin.

III. The Maya Sonneteers

Crispin's contemplation of this new aesthetic is interrupted by his arrival in Yucatan, where new poetical concerns confront him. Here, he discovers the Maya sonneteers

who
still to the night-bird made their plea,
As if raspberry tanagers in palms,
High up in orange air, were barbarous.

The Maya sonneteers, with their romanticized primitivism, produce only temporary interest in the reformed but destitute Crispin, who quickly surpasses their timid efforts and plunges deeper “into a savage color.” Since Hi Simons' 1940 reading of the poem in which Simons argued that the Maya Sonneteers were “the minor romantics who were still dealing with sentimental conventions and ignoring the crude splendors of the contemporary when Crispin entered the literary scene” (456),

critics have pursued the specific referents of the Maya Sonneteers, assuming that Crispin's flirtations with their aesthetic allegorize Stevens' own aesthetic flirtations with established poetic schools in the manner of a *roman à clef*. Bloom, for example, contends that “The Maya Sonneteers’ may include such Harvard poets as Trumbull Stickney, George Cabot Lodge, and even Santayana” (75), while for Litz they suggest “the ‘local color’ work of his American contemporaries” that Stevens found irrelevant (130). Besides disagreeing with one another other, these readings fail to explain why Stevens chose to refer to these poets as “Maya Sonneteers.” Granted, all we really know of the Maya Sonneteers is that they neglect colorful or violent birds for night-birds, to whom they make mere “pleas,” not having a “violence for aggrandizement” as Crispin does, and that in the earlier version Crispin “arraigns” them before departing for Carolina, because “his soul” – presumably, unlike theirs – “feels the Andean breath.” However, we might do worse than to take “Maya Sonneteers” and the alternative “Mexican Sonneteers” literally. I would like to propose two possible readings of these terms, the first of which locates Stevens' interest in the Mayans in the context of the movement of American literary “nativism,” (thus locating the Mayan as a potential literary ancestor), and the second of which identifies a possible connection with contemporary Mexican poets who may have been known to Stevens.

Two letters Stevens wrote in the 1940s provide some clues about his attitudes toward the Mayans. A letter to Jose Rodriguez Feo in 1946 suggests that Stevens’s interest in the exotic extended only partly to the Mayans.

One great difficulty about everything Mexican is the appalling interest in the Indians: the Mayas and so on. It is just as if every time one picked up a number of the New Yorker one found a dozen illustrations of life among the early Dutch settlers. After all, few writers tell us what we really want to know about the Indians. One sees pictures of the Mayas, and this, that and the other. These things never take one below the surface and I have yet to feel about any Maya that he was made out of clay. Publications like Cuadernos Americanos convince one that he was made of putty. (*Letters* 543)

Certainly Stevens is as dismissive of the Mayans here as Crispin is. However, a 1948 letter to Leonard van Geyzel in Ceylon, with whom Stevens had corresponded periodically since pressing him into service in 1937 as a buyer of Indian art objects and figures,¹⁰¹ gives a less dismissive account of the importance of the Mayans:

I was interested in your remark about the indifference to Hindu art. I don't know whether you know about Maya art. This consists very largely of glyphs and sacrificial and calendar stones, all of them completely hideous. They are found in Mexico and in the jungles of Central America, Yucatan, and so on. Many people believe that these early Indians came from the South Pacific. We feel a special interest in things of this sort because they give us the antiquity which the English like to deny us. The English insist that Americans have no background. But after all, Ceylon belongs as much to us as it does to them so far as such a background belongs to either. Aside from that special interest, I think we feel the same aversion to Maya art that we feel to Hindu art even after we have taken into account the fact that Maya art is almost brute art while Hindu art is just the opposite. Both spring from alien imaginations and while the imaginations are different, the effect of each is pretty much the same. I am generalizing. There are certain Indian schools, particularly of painting, which come through perfectly. (*Letters* 614)

In both passages the main interest of the Mayans is their role as potential historical ancestor. Yet Stevens' attitude towards this idea of ancestry differs in the two letters. In the Feo letter, he castigates the Mexicans' overvaluing of the Mayan ancestry: this obsession, he feels is as absurd as if *The New Yorker* were to suddenly become interested in New York's early Dutch settlers.¹⁰² In the second letter he is more ambivalent, pointing out that "we" feel a special interest in the Mayans "because they give us the antiquity which the English like to deny us." There is a trace of irony here, but Stevens' peculiar logic makes it clear that these are questions that he takes seriously: if the British can claim India as a primitive ancestor, so can Americans, descended from the same stock. On the other hand,

¹⁰¹ In this letter he presses van Geyzel not to "think of sending anything more unless some time you are able to pick up one of the little figurines which I spoke of a few years ago: something native and real."

¹⁰² A better parallel would of course be the original *native* inhabitants of the New York area.

the aversion “we” feel to Mayan and Hindu art makes the value of such ancestry dubious.

Waldo Frank's *Our America* (1919) offers a typical view of Mayan culture in American literary circles at the time when Stevens was writing his poem. Frank saw Mayan culture as the highest achievement of the world of the now almost eradicated North American Indian:

In the central lands of Yucatan and Guatamala, this world perhaps reached its apogee. The Mayas builded great cities, and made beauty out of rock and upon walls, for whose like in profundity of form one must go back to India and Egypt. They wrote books that are still undeciphered. . . . But the ruins of their greatness in the tropic forests are not hard to read. They bespeak a rich and fertile people, accomplished in spiritual and aesthetic works. (107-08)

That the Mayans could provide, in any practical sense, an ancestral heritage for modern poets in the United States seems, on the surface, a fantastic idea at best. And there is little evidence of any modernist poets, least of all Stevens, employing Mayan poetic models in their poetry. Stevens obviously had some familiarity with Mayan cultural artifacts¹⁰³ – too much, as far as he was concerned – and was sufficiently interested to criticize writing about the Mayans that fails to “take one below the surface” and “tell us what we really want to know about the Indians.” Little enough was known about Mayan thought in Stevens' day, and their hieroglyphic writing has only recently become minimally decipherable. There is no indication that Stevens read or was aware of the one significant Mayan literary work that was available, the *Popol Vuh*. What is important, however, is the nativist aesthetic associated with the Mayans: the almost mystical idea that a culture is rooted to and in some sense emanates from a place, an idea that will become important later in the poem when Crispin attempts to establish his own poetic colony.

We should not, however, disregard a second possible association between the Maya sonneteers

¹⁰³ Perhaps partly derived from his friend Walter Arensberg, who would eventually amass one of the great collections of pre-Columbian artifacts, now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It is interesting to note that Frank Lloyd Wright was experimenting with Mayan architectural motifs around 1914.

and the Mexican modernist poets, whose work was becoming known in the English-speaking world.¹⁰⁴ An article on the subject by Irving Ormond, entitled "Mexico's New Poets," appeared in *The Bookman* in March, 1919. Ormond's discussion of Amado Nervo's "Pajaro Milagroso" (Miraculous Bird), in particular, suggests parallels with Stevens's sonneteers. In the Amado poem the miraculous bird is the airplane, described in lofty language as the realization of the dream of Icarus: "to-day, over your tombs, there flies, buzzing, the miraculous bird of the snowy wings, that crystallizes the dream of the ages!" (105). The connection between Nervo's plea to the exoticized airplane-bird and the Sonneteers' pleas to the night bird "As if raspberry tanagers in palms, / High up in orange air, were barbarous" is admittedly a tenuous one. Nevertheless it seems possible that Stevens heard the call of Ormond's article, that "surely our own new poets should not disdain the rich fields of modern Mexican verse" (106), and encoded his response in his own poem. If the connection here is uncertain, it is nevertheless important to raise the questions of whether and to what extent North American modernists like Stevens were aware of the earlier Latin American movement of *modernismo*, and whether common interests in primitivism and exoticism between the movements might indicate a greater degree of Latin American influence on the modernist movement than has been previously noted.

IV. A Primitivist Aesthetic

That Crispin's first encounter is with Mayans suggests that we might read the narrative as a telescoped account of European colonization in the New World. His next adventure, however, "stopping, on voyage, in a land of snakes," reminds us that such a reading should not be taken too literally, and

¹⁰⁴ Mexico had of course become the site of increasing American interest in the previous decade, following the overthrow of despotic President Diaz, reaching its peak in the United States' efforts to capture the renegade Pancho Villa in 1916 and early 1917.

that Crispin's story owes as much to the adventure story as to the genre of discovery narrative.

Crispin, we are told,

Found his vicissitudes had much enlarged
His apprehension, made him intricate
In moody rucks, and difficult and strange
In all desires, his destitution's mark.

Travel, according to the common view, enlarges the mind, but at the same time, it makes one aware of one's provinciality, or what we might call the regional limitations of the subject. In the case of the "destitute" Crispin, the encounter with the exotic refigures his desires, leaving him "intricate" but also "difficult and strange." And here, as well, we begin to see the first products of his new writing, a poetry that quickly becomes dominated by a primitivist aesthetic.

His violence was for aggrandizement
And not for stupor, such as music makes
For sleepers halfway waking. He perceived
That coolness for his heat came suddenly,
And only, in the fables that he scrawled
With his own quill, in its indigenous dew,
Of an aesthetic tough, diverse, untamed,
Incredible to prudes, the mint of dirt,
Green barbarism turning paradigm.
Crispin foresaw a curious promenade
Or, nobler, sensed an elemental fate,
And elemental potencies and pangs,
And beautiful barenesses as yet unseen,
Making the most of savagery of palms,
Of moonlight on the thick, cadaverous bloom
That yuccas breed, and of the panther's tread.
The fabulous and its intrinsic verse
Came like two spirits parleying, adorned
In radiance from the Atlantic coign,
For Crispin and his quill to catechize.
But they came parleying of such an earth,
So thick with sides and jagged lops of green,
So intertwined with serpent-kin encoiled
Among the purple tufts, the scarlet crowns,
Scenting the jungle in their refuges,
So streaked with yellow, blue and green and red
In beak and bud and fruity gobbet-skins,
That earth was like a jostling festival
Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent,
Expanding in the gold's maternal warmth.

Crispin's primitivism is composed of at least three distinct strands of thought that may be characterized respectively as *wildness*, *sensuality*, and *earthiness*. They are presumably untamed and sensual, as they are "incredible to prudes," and come from the earth, as they are "the mint of dirt." As if nature directly writes the poetry, his fables are written in the quill's own indigenous dew. In contrast to the Maya Sonneteers who fled from the barbarism of mere raspberry tanagers, for Crispin, barbarism becomes paradigm: the poet's language recovers its primal function of signifying otherness.

Helen Vendler argues that

Stevens' resolute attempts to make himself into ribald poet of boisterous devotion to the gaudy, the gusty, and the burly are a direct consequence of a depressing irony in respect to the self he was born with and an equally depressing delusion about the extent to which that self could be changed. (52)

This mode, according to Vendler, with its "stressed physicality and stressed tropicity" is not "destined to become Stevens' persistent mode." The fading appeal of the primitive is already evident in Stevens's second book, *Ideas of Order*. In "Farewell to Florida," the opening poem, the poet turns away from "the vivid blooms" of Florida, and rejoices in the ability "To stand here on the deck in the dark and say / Farewell and to know that that land is forever gone." "My North is leafless and lies in a wintry slime / Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds," the poet complains, yet it is precisely this leafless and slimy North to which he longs to return, "To be free again, to return to the violent mind / That is their mind, these men, and that will bind / Me round." If traces of primitivist nostalgia appear throughout these depression-era poems, clearly, as "Academic Discourse at Havana" tells us, "The air / Is not so elemental nor the earth / So near," and "the sustenance of the wilderness / Does not sustain us in the metropolises."

In "The Comedian" Crispin's primitivism is already somewhat distanced, a primitivism of the eye rather than the overgrown-boyish enthusiasm for the spontaneous and physical, the Dionysian vein that Vendler finds epitomized in "Ploughing on Sunday" and "Life Is Motion," and to which we might add Stevens's 1930 essay, "Cattle *Kings* of Florida," which celebrates "the old order of cattle

raising" before the Spanish-American war and "the old careless days of half a century ago with their easy money" (*OP* 212). In later poems the wild and boisterous primitive is almost entirely supplanted by an increasingly abstract idea of the primitive, as seen, for example, in Stevens' reflections on "the first idea" in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," or, at its most extreme, in "A Primitive Like an Orb," which is, of course, only about "primitives" in the mathematical sense. We must ask, however, whether this turning away from the primitive in Stevens' later writing implies, as Vendler argues, that in the earlier work Stevens "felt obliged to pretend an instinct for the fertility of earth, when his true instinct was for its austerities and its dilapidations" (45), and if so, why Stevens may have felt obliged to do so; or conversely, whether Stevens' early infatuation with a primitivism of "stressed physicality and tropicity" represents a phase in his own development, and one that simply declined, as our boisterous and wild inclinations often do, with age.

If an aestheticized *wildness* is one aspect of Crispin's primitivism, another is a similarly aestheticized *eroticism*. Crispin, unlike Rupert Brooke and the poet of "Alastor," does not encounter the erotic other in person,¹⁰⁵ but he does submerge himself in the sensuality and fecundity of a feminine-gendered nature. The Crispin who must, therefore, "make the most of savagery of palms" is, like Stevens, a poet who sees himself as intellectually over-endowed but with the needed exotic stimulation in short supply. When the stimulation, in the form of "The fabulous and its intrinsic verse" finally comes, he is ready for it. Crispin's relation to the primitive here is not purely

¹⁰⁵ In "Exposition of the Contents of a Cab" (*OP* 41), Stevens does experiment with a sexualized "other" with awkward results, as evidenced by the poem's later withdrawal from the second edition of *Harmonium*. In the poem, the imaginative "undressing" of a "negress" named "Victoria Clementina" with her seven white dogs, reveals that "She too is flesh, // And a breech-cloth might wear, / Netted of topaz and ruby / And savage blooms; // Thridding the squawkiest jungle / In a golden sedan, / White dogs at bay." The proximity between the "acceptable" content of the poem — envisioning a black American woman as an African queen — and the "unacceptable" — the undressing of what must have been for Stevens a taboo sexual object, is likely to have been the reason for Stevens's removal of the poem from the revised *Harmonium* (Martz 19-20). The closing lines of "Exposition" indicate the disappointment of not being able to participate in the erotic exoticism of primitive sexuality: "What breech-cloth might you wear, / Except linen, embroidered / By elderly women?"

voyeuristic, but neither is it, properly speaking, physical: language, rather, provides the medium through which he may be said to exercise himself in this primitive realm. But Crispin soon becomes sated with the sticky excess of this tropical space, with its “jostling festival / Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent, / Expanding in the gold’s maternal warmth,” and so his response is to turn away in disgust:

So much for that. The affectionate emigrant found
A new reality in parrot-squawks.
Yet let that trifle pass.

This trivialization of the primitive marks out the opposition between primitive and civilized, an opposition that provides one set of terms for Crispin's journey. Crispin is next seen having reverted to his scholarly mode, “inspecting the cabildo, the facade / Of the cathedral, making notes.” As Crispin approaches the Carolinas, he conceives his voyaging, according to another and parallel set of oppositions, as “A fluctuating between sun and moon.” While the moon is perhaps the “blissful liaison, / Between himself and his environment,” it is at the same time

Illusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse,
Wrong as a divagation to Peking,
To him that postulated as his theme
The vulgar, as his theme and hymn and flight,

Stevens' sun / moon opposition here provides the apparatus for a division of experiences of otherness, in the same manner as Rupert Brooke's distinction between Romance (“veiled ladies, and moonlit serenades, and narrow Venetian or Oriental streets”) and a “getting back to one's childhood” associated with the tropical “primitive” (*Letters* 530-31). For Stevens, the moon, associated with an over-civilized but still strange and alluring Orient, is inhuman, rarified, mysterious, feminine; the sun, as in the earlier “Sunday Morning,” is a juvenescent, masculine and godlike “savage source.” Within this dialectic of opposite pursuits Crispin is able to articulate his fluctuating needs, which throughout the poem continue to lean heavily toward the “solar” pole:

Crispin knew
It was a flourishing tropic he required

For his refreshment, an abundant zone,
 Prickly and obdurate, dense, harmonious,
 Yet with a harmony not rarefied
 Nor fined for the inhibited instruments
 Of over-civil stops.

This idealized place can only be constructed by the mind's modification of the reality that he sees "across his vessel's prow." The arrival of the "marvelous sophomore" coincides with spring, "A time abhorrent to the nihilist / Or searcher for the fecund minimum," but Crispin is no such nihilist, and the sensory overload of sights and smells that greet him on his arrival enables him to "round his rude æsthetic out," purifying it by making him see "how much / Of what he saw he never saw at all."

In "From the Journal of Crispin" the qualities of this place are elaborated in much greater length as what might be called *Americana*. Here, the "Provocative paraphernalia to his mind" includes

The shops of chandlers, tailors, bakers, cooks,
 The Coca Cola-bars, the barber-poles,
 The Strand and Harold Lloyd, the lawyers' row,
 The Citizens' Bank, two tea rooms, and a church.

We learn that "Crispin is happy in this metropole." The urban scenery provides material for a new poetic in which surrealist transformation of local elements is the dominant tendency. Whereas in Yucatan the exotic was familiarized and made earthy and natural, here the familiar is exoticized and made strange:

If poems are transmutations of plain shops,
 By aid of starlight, distance, wind, war, death,
 Are not these doldrums poems in themselves,
 These trophies of wind and war? At just what point
 Do barber poles become burlesque or cease
 To be? Are bakers what the poets will,
 Supernal artisans or muffin men,
 Or do they have, on poets' minds, more influence
 Than poets know? Are they one moment flour,
 Another pearl? The Citizens' Bank becomes
 Palladian and then the Citizens' Bank
 Again. The flimsiest tea room fluctuates
 Through crystal changes. Even Harold Lloyd
 Proposes antic Harlequin. The bars infect

The sensitive. Crispin revitalized
 Makes these researches faithfully, a wide
 Curriculum for the marvelous sophomore.

The surrealist transformation of familiar reality allows him to grip “more closely the essential prose” of “a world so falsified,” and this direct rendering of the false provides “the one integrity for him.” After this purifying ethnographic study of Americana – or in the final shortened version of the “Comedian” a similarly purifying immersion in “rankness” – Crispin is ready for the next stage in his story, his contemplation and near-enactment of “The Idea of a Colony.”

V. Crispin as Colonizer

The climax and goal of the great majority of European discovery narratives is the establishment or expansion of a colony or empire, and to the extent that the narrative logic of “The Comedian” is derivative of these models, the establishment of a colony would appear to offer a form of closure for the journey of Crispin.

To be sure, Crispin, with his “cloak / Of China, cap of Spain,” has been colonizing ever since leaving home. His poetic discoveries and acquisitions, leaving aside the inherited traditions that originally established his position as the Socrates of snails and lutanist of fleas, have all been found or borrowed within the colonialistic mode. Treading the footsteps of the Spanish explorers, his doubles in an earlier, alternative “Caribbean amphitheater,” Crispin does not see his borrowings as appropriation or theft but simply as a making use of freely given goods; as we have already seen,

The fabulous and its intrinsic verse
Came like two spirits parleying, *adorned*
In radiance from the atlantic coign,
For Crispin and his quill to catechize. (emphasis added)

He likewise has no qualms against borrowing local poetic methods until he finds them unsuitable, such as his trying-out of localism in the Carolinas. But in “The Idea of a Colony” Crispin finds

himself in an unaccustomed position of power, having by dint of the prerogative of “discovery” come into a position of control over the poetic productions of an entire continent.

Crispin’s half-serious poetic ideology concocted in “The Idea of a Colony” is beset by conflict and irresolution as he grapples with the question of imposing some kind of order on the cultural producers of his colony. His first thought on surveying his “still new continent” is to carry out the plan that has been driving him all along: his desire “to drive away / The shadow of his fellows from the skies.” This belated and inappropriate revenge on those who had earlier reduced him to a lutanist of fleas and Socrates of snails first takes the form of revolutionary pronouncements of an inverted cultural order. Crispin’s absurdist philosophy represents a doomed-from-the-start attempt to overthrow the order of things, replacing the present patriarchal order with himself as the new, absurdist patriarch, a kind of American *Ubu Roi*. His hymns celebrate

The florist asking aid from cabbages,
The rich man going bare, the paladin
Afraid, the blind man as astronomer,
The appointed power unwielded from disdain.

Crispin’s revolution calls to mind the equally ridiculous capitán profundo and his singing revolutionists in Stevens’s poem “The Revolutionists Stop for Orangeade.” But along with its planned hegemony of the absurd, Crispin’s colony-planning includes a more serious program prescribing an aesthetic of nativism as a foundation for a new poetic. In “The Journal,” Crispin’s prolegomena on this subject is preceded by a “delineat[ion] of his progeny,” who are to be “a race of natives in a primitive land . . . A race obedient to its origins.” As Waldo Frank argued in *Our America*, the attempt to identify American culture with European culture fails because

the European cultures, swept to America and there buried, were half-killed by the mere uprooting. They were never American: they could never live *in* America. The principle of death carried them from Europe: gave them the *coup de grâce* when they made their fitful stand for survival in a pioneering world. The Puritan culture also was an impermanent life. It grew to meet a particular condition: a condition at best fleeting and superficial. (106)

Rather, Frank argues, we must look to the “great and varied cultural world [that] already lay upon America before the coming of the pioneer” (106). In contrast to the American who “did not absorb or learn,” “the true marriage of the Indian and the Spaniard has brought about a native culture.” As a result, “the lowly Mexican is articulate, the lordly American is not. For the Mexican has really dwelt with his soil, cultivated his spirit in it, not alone his maize. The American must

identify with one’s native ground, to try to attune oneself to a place rather than to the expanse of a nation. The lowly Mexican is articulate, the lordly American is not. For the Mexican has really dwelt with his soil, cultivated his spirit in it, not alone his maize.”
(96)

Similar arguments were advanced by Mary Austin in her introduction to the 1918 anthology of Native American verse, *The Path on the Rainbow*. Austin argued that “it becomes appropriate and important that this collection of American Indian verse should be brought to public notice at a time when the whole instinctive movement of the American people is for a deeper footing in their native soil. It is the certificate of our adoption, that the young genius of our time should strike all unconsciously on this ancient track to the High Places” (xvii). This mystical identification with one’s native ground can be distinguished from the related movements of localism (which, as Martha Strom argues, Stevens probably picked up from the Stieglitz circle), and regionalism, movements that sought to emphasize “local color” but only occasionally demanded a psychic identity of the artist with the native land. This identity is critical to “The Comedian,” and is the main cause of Crispin’s failure. With a sincerity and pathos that is lacking in the published version, the narrator of “The Journal” describes this native race,

. . . from the obstinate scrutiny of its land,
And in its land’s own wit and mood and mask,
Evolving the conjectural resonance
Of voice, the flying youthfulness of form,
Of a spirit to be singer of the song
That Crispin formulates but cannot sing
It comes to that.

Crispin himself cannot attain this resonance of voice and youthfulness of form because, although

he has realized that “his soil is man’s intelligence,” he has learned it too late, and only after emigrating from the land of his “soil.” What place then is left in a nativist cultural economy for the “immigrant poet,” however potent he may be? Herein we have the crux of the poem: if we recall Crispin’s original aims as stated in the “Journal”— the trip undertaken as a self-validation, so that gazing in the mirror “Crispin may take the tableau cheerfully,” and the journal itself, intended as means to self-discovery and affirmation, to “discourse of himself alone, / Of what he was, and why, and of his place, / And of its fitful pomp and parentage” – we cannot help noting that both of these aims have, at this point in the narrative, failed. Far from enabling productive self-contemplation, the journey has silenced Crispin, who, as exile and immigrant, is rendered superfluous in his own colony.

Since he cannot produce a native song, Crispin goes in for textual scholarship (perhaps now looking more fondly back on his days as “general lexicographer of mute / And maidenly greenhorns” and “inquisitorial botanist”), and sets himself to collating and collecting the rainy creations of rainy men and the volcanic adornments of the virgins on Volcan del Fuego. Here, Crispin, frustrated artist, becomes jealous ethnographer, pondering

On what strange froth does the gross Indian dote
 What Eden sapling gum, what honeyed gore,
 What pulpy dram distilled of innocence,
 That streaking gold should speak in him
 Or bask within his images and words.

The doctrine is essentially identical to that found in “Anecdote of Men by the Thousand,” which opens with “The soul, he said, is composed / Of the external world.” Similar examples to those found in “The Comedian” are put forward: “There are men of the East, he said, / Who are the East.” But the repeated distancing device of “he said,” though dropped in the later stanzas of the “Anecdote,” would seem to reflect a similar discomfiture with an idea that nevertheless deeply

attracted Stevens.¹⁰⁶ Crispin is affected by the hope that the link between native poet and magical utterance might be revealed and the “dram distilled of innocence” discovered.

Crispin’s fascination with nativist cultural production inspires in him a desire to appropriate and control it. The principles of the colony which Crispin “propounds and propogates” in the “Journal” or “projects” in “The Comedian” are delineated in the nativist prolegomena which he inscribes with “Commingled souvenirs and prophecies.” It is here that Crispin begins to get into trouble. According to his plan, artistic productions will be assigned on the basis of group membership. The celebration of cultural difference gives way to something resembling the discriminative hiring practices criticized in recent attacks on multiculturalism:

The man in Georgia waking among pines
Should be pine-spokesman. The responsive man,
Planting his pristine cores in Florida,
Should prick thereof, not on the psaltery,
But on the banjo’s categorical gut,
Tuck, tuck, while the flamingoes flapped his bays.
Sepulchral señors, bibbling pale mescal,
Oblivious to the Aztec almanacs,
Should make the intricate Sierra scan.
And dark Brazilians in their cafés,
Musing immaculate, pampean dits,
Should scrawl a vigilant anthology,
To be their latest paramour.

(A limited catalogue, to be sure, but these are only, as we are told, “the broadest instances.”) The argument rapidly tends to absurdity as we learn that Crispin, in his attention “to smart detail” has not stopped after distributing jobs to appropriate natives, but has carried the process all the way

¹⁰⁶ Stevens continued to be preoccupied with this idea. His poem on Africa, “The Greenest Continent,” has similar concerns. As he explained his intended meaning in a letter to Hi Simons in 1940, “Consciousness of West (Europe) differs from the consciousness of South (Africa), etc., so the imagination of West differs from that of South, and so the idea of God and the idea of pure poetry, etc. differ” (*Letters* 369).

In the late (1955) and unpublished poem “Artificial Populations” (*OP* 138) Stevens’s interest in and hesitant valorization of “artificial” populations where “the Orient and the Occident embrace” would seem to indicate not so much a relinquishing of the idea of racial essence as a sense of a post-war need for healing between East and West.

down to the level of ordaining complex rituals for melons and peaches, lest any particular fruit should be without its appropriate “sacrament / And celebration.” Yet the problem is not so much the absurdity and complexity of these rituals and roles, but rather, that these rituals and roles are *prescribed* for all the participants. What stops Crispin here is his sudden sense of identification with his colonists, or “progeny,” in whose imagined existence he cannot but see his own overdetermined self at the outset of his voyage. It is not so much *empathy* as a recognition of a kind of *aesthetic failure* – a failure to escape the circular process in which the individual, disappointed by preexisting constraints or “fictions” by which he must abide, rejects these only to establish his own constraints or fictions to impose on others:

He could not be content with counterfeit,
With masquerade of thought, with hapless words
That must belie the racking masquerade,
With fictive flourishes that preordained
His passion’s permit, hang of coat, degree
Of muttons, measure of his salt. Such trash
Might help the blind, not him, serenely sly.

Thus, rejecting his plan pending further revision, Crispin acquiesces in his role as “a clown, perhaps, but an aspiring clown.” In a characteristic flip-flop, he acquiesces to serving “Gross apprenticeship to chance event,” refusing not only to determine the roles of others but even his own.

It is in this state that Crispin is left at the end of “From the Journal of Crispin,” the draft sent to Harriet Monroe in late 1921.

His colony may not arrive. The site
Exists. So much is sure. And what is sure
In our abundance is his seignory.

The reader of “The Comedian as the Letter C” in its final form need no longer harbor hopes or fears that Crispin’s planned colony will ever arrive: the ambivalent ending was cancelled in the revising of “The Comedian,” and the potential for colonial mastery was rejected in favor of a veering off into the quiet domesticity of the poem’s two added sections:

Perhaps if discontent

Had kept him still the pricking realist,
 Choosing his element from droll confect
 Of was and is and shall or ought to be,
 Beyond Bordeaux, beyond Havana, far
 Beyond carked Yucatan, he might have come
 To colonize his polar planterdom
 And jig his chits upon a cloudy knee.

He might have done *both*, that is, since three pages on we do in fact find him jiggling the chits on an already overcrowded knee. Crispin's rejection of this colony is not a complete rejection of the colonial project, properly speaking, since Crispin is at this point a *de facto* colonist. Rather, his retreat into a domestic narrative represents a choice of a certain type of colonialism – that of settler colonies like the United States – over another type more representative of Spanish colonialism in Latin America or British colonialism in India, in which the colonizer seeks to include the native population within the new colonial community. Even so, the narrator retains some wistfulness about this rejected mode of colonial control, as if its disavowal represents a dereliction of duty. But the very abundance that had enabled the planning of a colony here prevents the colonizer from colonizing. Returning to the original colonizing instinct, “to drive away / The shadow of his fellows from the skies,” he now reflects on “the difficulty of rebellious thought / When the sky is blue. The blue infected will.”

VI. The Domesticated Realist

As Stevens neared completion of his poem, he viewed it with mixed feelings. On September 23, 1922, he attempted to explain these in a letter to Harriet Monroe:

The desire to write a long poem or two is not obsequiousness to the judgment of people. On the contrary, I find that this prolonged attention to a single subject has the same result that prolonged attention to a senora has according to the authorities. All manner of favors drop from it. Only it requires a skill in the varying of the serenade that occasionally makes one feel like a Guatamalan when one particularly wants to feel like an Italian. I

expect that after a while Crispin (the present title is "The Comedian as the Letter 'C'") will become rudimentary and abhorrent. (*Letters* 230)

If Stevens felt he had attained his Señora through his prolonged attention to "The Comedian," he nevertheless had his doubts as to the poem's permanent value (although his self-criticism may also be read as an attempt to mollify Monroe, whom he had informed in the same letter of his decision to give the poem to a competing poetry journal). The addition of the concluding section has evidently not resolved the post-colonial crisis of the poem: Stevens still feels like a Guatemalan (the Mayans, of course, lived in Guatemala as well as Yucatan) rather than a sophisticated Italian.

Most critics have felt the final sections of the poem represent something of a failure.

Crispin's concluding discovery that

Whoever hunts a matinal continent
May, after all, stop short before a plum
And be content and still be realist

unleashes a storm of questions, as if the travel narrative itself is indignant at having come to a stop over nothing but a "good, fat, guzzly fruit." Crispin himself complains that he can herald his new realism neither with "profoundest brass," "fugal requiems," nor "a blubber of tom-toms," having ignominiously "turned to salad-beds" again. This is hardly surprising, considering that the ending of the poem is precisely anathema to adventure, if we accept Martin Green's definition of adventure as "a series of events, partly but not wholly accidental, *in settings remote from the domestic and probably from the civilized . . . which constitute a challenge to the central character*" (23, emphasis added).

The oppositions between primitive and civilized and between exotic and quotidian remain part of the cyclical movement of Stevens' poetic imagination, and Crispin's restless "fluctuating between sun and moon" continues to represent Stevens' later poetic tendencies. For if the domesticated ending of the poem represents a slippage of the quest narrative into another genre entirely, it nevertheless leaves the lure of the primitive and exotic intact. What is the good, fat,

guzzly fruit of the domesticated plum if not a scaled-down version of the exotic jungle fruits of the Caribbean amphitheatre? It remains an object of fascination, and an object to be consumed, and as such, it encapsulates, in miniature, the lure of the primitive and exotic.

“The narrative progress,” Helen Vendler argues in her discussion of the poem, “was deeply uncongenial” to Stevens’ mind, “which moved in eddies, never in dramatic sequence” (54). But the narrative is revealing for precisely this reason; it reveals, and attempts to account for, the primitivist elements of Stevens’ poetics in a way that his other poems do not. I have attempted to show how discovery narratives and adventure stories provide the form for “The Comedian,” how Stevens’ exoticism links his poetics to an American consumerism of the exotic (and to larger tendencies of imperialism’s fascination with the other), and how contemporary nativist movements in literature and the visual arts provide much of the terrain for Crispin’s journey. If these arguments are valid, we cannot continue to read “The Comedian” simply as the poet’s agon with his precursors and with poetic tradition.

Forgotten Jungle Songs: Primitivist Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance

Given the widespread deployment of primitivist strategies in American literary writing in the decade preceding the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, it was inevitable that black writers of the period should come to assess their validity and applicability to questions concerning the articulation of black identity. As I have argued, primitivism was not a unitary concept, but rather a set of related discursive strategies, which often valorized the configurations of cultures construed as “primitive.” Virtually all race theories of the day portrayed African cultures (or more commonly, African “culture”) as primitive; the least objectionable to many black writers were those that at least attributed a positive value to this primitive state. Indeed, primitivism may be seen as the beginnings of a cultural critique aimed at “modernity,” which sought to overturn the value-laden hierarchy of civilized and modern over savage and primitive, a preliminary stage to the eventual breakdown of the distinction itself.

Thus some African Americans saw the strategic embrace of a “primitive” identity or history as a means of empowerment and a claim to cultural superiority. Others rejected this strategy on the grounds that it was both inaccurate and demeaning; the modern African American, these writers argued, was neither “essentially” African nor primitive, and must find the road to empowerment elsewhere. And still others sought to find mediating positions, altering the parameters of “the primitive” to foreground certain qualities while denying the relevance of others. This chapter examines some of the ways in which these strategic positions came to be formulated, and examines their importance in the work of some of the more prominent poets of the Harlem Renaissance.

I. The Poet and the Mask

In analyzing these primitivist strategies in the work of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance it is important to foreground the question of audience. In 1903 W.E.B. DuBois, in his analysis of the double-consciousness of the American Negro, saw the plight of the black artist as a split between the competing demands of black and white audiences:

The would-be black savant was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood. The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people. (216)

Until the end of the nineteenth century, black poetry was also largely viewed as “a twice-told tale” by the white world. While literary black poetry was often categorically dismissed as imitative and inferior, there were other possibilities of appealing to the “larger audience.” Poetry that exaggerated the “blackness” of the poet — particularly through the use of dialect — could, as Paul Laurence Dunbar discovered, reach a large and enthusiastic audience. But there was a price: “We wear the mask that grins and lies, / It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,” he wrote.

Why should the world be otherwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

For Dunbar, wearing the mask meant writing the kind of dialect poetry that the white audience had come to understand as an authentic and non-threatening form of Negro cultural production. But, as Houston Baker writes, “it is as though Dunbar's speaker plays the masking game without an awareness of its status as a game. It seems that he does not adopt masking as self-conscious gamesmanship in opposition to the game white America has run on him” (*Modernism* 39). Catering

to white audiences' interests did have its advantages. In these early years of the century James Weldon Johnson, later one of the important voices of the Harlem Renaissance, could make a living writing variations on "coon songs" for Broadway musicals. Songs like "The Congo Love Song" and the immensely popular "Under the Bamboo Tree"¹⁰⁷ – a song that T. S. Eliot knew well, and borrowed from extensively in "Sweeney Agonistes" – presented primitive love in appealing, though stereotypical ways. Though it can hardly be said that Johnson's songs resisted the offensive images of the negro, they at least enabled him to educate himself at Columbia.¹⁰⁸

As jazz and primitive art filtered into white culture, by the twenties "the larger audience" became eager to consume an increasing variety of black cultural production, particularly that which displayed "the ruder souls of [black] people a-dancing and a-singing." This was not, however, "the soul-beauty of a race" that DuBois had in mind. Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine is a good illustration of prevailing attitudes. *Poetry* gave Fenton Johnson's *Songs of the Soil*, a collection of dialect poems and spirituals, a favorable review in 1917, and published three of his spirituals the following year. The review offers some clues as to why, over the course of the following decade, *Poetry* published none of the writers who came to be associated with the Harlem Renaissance:

As soon as the negro is educated he begins to think the white man's thoughts, or to try to think them; it is impossible for him to do otherwise. But his emotional reactions, his religious feeling and his imagination are racially different from those of the white man, and if his art is to amount to anything he will have to seek to give expression to what is essentially his. (158)

¹⁰⁷ "Under the Bamboo Tree," which appeared in a 1902 musical comedy *Sally in our Alley*, was sung in by "a Zulu from Matabooloo" in a conventionally romantic effort to woo his Zulu love. "The Congo Love Song," which appeared in a 1903 comedy, varied the formula only slightly, replacing the Zulu lover with a Kaffir chief (Levy 86-91). On "coon songs" and black theater see Thomas L. Riis, *Just before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989) and Allen Woll, *Black Musical Theater: From Coontown to Dreamgirls* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989).

¹⁰⁸ See Johnson, *Along this Way* (149-55); Eugene Levy, *James Weldon Johnson*, ch. 4; Lewis (145).

“Usually,” the reviewer argues, “when the negro poet discards dialect for plain English, his language is pale and academic, and his thought, again, is not his own but a weak dilution of some already diluted European model”; (s)he therefore recommends “that all negro poets make a study of their folk-songs, collecting all they can, for it is through such songs that they will learn to know their own race” (159).

The demands of the increasingly large, educated black audience, however, were quite different; for them, it could no longer be said that cultural production of a more self-consciously literary type was “Greek” to the artist’s “own flesh and blood.” Thus Black artists were caught in an artistic double-bind, having to choose between the “cultured” demands of the educated black audience and the “primitive” demands of a potentially much larger white audience.

One poet did bridge the gap between the audiences, and became a force to be reckoned with in American poetry: William Stanley Braithwaite, poetry editor of the Boston *Evening Transcript*, and of the annual *Anthology of Magazine Verse*. His conservative tastes irritated Ezra Pound, who, on being told in 1913 by Alice Corbin Henderson that Braithwaite was black, responded,

sorry <to learn that> Braithwaite is a nigger. I have taken the trouble to be more contemptuous to him than I should have ever thought of being to any one but a man of equal race. And now that I know his affliction I shall have to stop saying what I think of him. A Boston coon!! that explains a lot. Still his brand of intelligence is quite indistinguishable from most of his pale-face confreres. Poor devil. Please destroy this <last> sheet. (15)

Pound failed to keep his promise to be more condescending to the man of unequal race; when a 1915 Braithwaite article praising Frost irritated him, he wrote to the editor of the *Boston Evening Transcript* chastising “your (?negro) reviewer” with the observation, “I think it unwise that you should encourage that type of critic which limits the word ‘American’ to such work as happens to flatter the parochial vanity. It is not even Chauvinism. It is stupid” (*Letters* 62).

In practice, there was little difference between Braithwaite’s standards and those of other conservative poetry editors of the day. Braithwaite was, if anything, even more conservative in his

attitude toward writing about race. The sardonic account of Claude McKay, who as a waiter in New York wrote to Braithwaite in 1916, in hopes of establishing himself as a writer, is worth considering:

In Mr. Braithwaite's writings there was not the slightest indication of what sort of American he might be. And I was surprised one day to read in the Negro magazine, *The Crisis*, that he was a colored man. Mr. Braithwaite was kind enough to write me, a very interesting letter. He said that my poems were good, but that, barring two, any reader could tell that the author was a Negro. And because of the almost insurmountable prejudice against all things Negro, he said, he would advise me to write and send to the magazines only such poems as did not betray my racial identity.

The picture of Braithwaite may well be an accurate one, although McKay neglects to inform us that in fact he invited such a response by taking a very Braithwaitean tone in his own letter (not written in his own name but under the pseudonym Rhonda Hope) wondering, for example, “whether Fine Arts is not beyond nation or race – if one's mind can be limited to one's race and its problems when Art is as sublime as He who gave it to man” (Cooper 78-79).

Strategies involving primitivism were very much involved in this black artistic dilemma concerning the question of audience. For one thing, primitivism was on the mind of many of the white patrons who played a major role in funding artistic and literary projects. Among the most important of these was Charlotte Osgood Mason, who supported a number of writers and artists, in addition to bankrolling Zora Neale Hurston's ethnographic expeditions, for which she is now best known. Mason had been involved in earlier projects involving American Indians, even, David Levering Lewis notes, “trekking with Natalie Curtis to the Southwest to help gather materials for Curtis's *The Indian's Book*” (152). She was known as “Godmother” to writers and artists of the Renaissance. Harvard- and Oxford-educated Alain Locke, whose projects she generously funded, was her “precious Brown boy,” even if he could not take up her suggestion “to slough off white culture – using it only to clarify the thoughts that surge in your being” (Lewis 152, 154). Zora Neale Hurston, another of her “projects,” recalled her “curious” relations with Mason, and the way Godmother and her cronies would give her “a proper straightening” when she had “broken the law”

by “dissipating [her] powers in things that have no real meaning” (128-29):

There she was sitting up there at the head of the table over capon, caviar and gleaming silver, eager to hear every word on every phase of life on a saw-mill “job.” I must tell the tales, sing the songs, do the dances, and repeat the raucous sayings and doings of the Negro farthest down. She is altogether in sympathy with them, because she says truthfully they are utterly sincere in living. (129)

As Godmother was providing two hundred dollars a month for Hurston's ethnographic fieldwork, such demands had to be met. “She possessed the power to control people's lives,” wrote Langston Hughes. Hughes resisted. “She wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuitions of the primitive. But unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did. I was only an American Negro – who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa – but I was not Africa” (325).

For Alain Locke, defining the goals of the New Negro movement, there is an uneasy balance between a sense of the need for dialogue with white America and the need for black cultural self-determination. While it must be recognized “that the Negro of the Northern centers has reached a stage where tutelage, even of the most interested and well-intentioned sort, must give place to new relationships, where positive self-direction must be reckoned with in ever increasing measure,” nevertheless there is need for dialogue on several grounds. The New Negro “welcomes the new scientific rather than the old sentimental interest” (8) because science may offer a road to self-understanding. And

there is a growing realization that in social effort the co-operative basis must supplant long-distance philanthropy, and that the only safeguard for mass relations in the future must be provided in the carefully maintained contacts of the enlightened minorities of both race groups. In the intellectual realm a renewed and keen curiosity is replacing the recent apathy, the Negro is being carefully studied, not just talked about and discussed. In art and letters, instead of being wholly caricatured, he is being seriously portrayed and painted. (9)

The New Negro is “keenly responsive” to this new interest, argues Locke, who sees in the resulting

dialogue “an augury of a new democracy in American culture,” though the main interest for the “thinking Negro” remains “the necessity for fuller, truer self-expression [and] the realization of the unwisdom of allowing social discrimination to segregate him mentally” (9).

II. The Galvanizing Influence of African Art

“Race pride” and “race consciousness,” cornerstones to the New Negro movement, were closely linked to a new understanding of the African heritage of the black American. By the twenties the stock images of Africans as cannibals and savages had given way to a new set of images of Africans as proud and exotic, images which contemporary black Americans could experience as a heritage rather than a curse. The scramble for Africa had put Africa and Africans in the spotlight, European squabbles over possessions made Africa seem a more desirable and interesting place, and the production of literature which invariably accompanied colonial interest spurred the collection of knowledge about African peoples and customs.

This increased interest in Sub-Saharan Africa was accompanied by new discoveries in Egyptology. The publication of books such as those of preëminent Egyptologist E. Wallis Budge made ancient Egypt suddenly more accessible, and Egyptian style in the visual and decorative arts became an influential mode of Orientalism. Egypt was not considered a primitive culture, and, indeed, the strategy by which writers presented Egypt as representative of Africa as a whole was rather anti-primitivist than primitivist. Egypt served many writers as an example with which to counter the more negative forms of African primitivism.

Black writers began to adopt new perspectives on Africa, often capitalizing on the public interest in things Egyptian and African. African religion could be refigured from merely “heathen” to “mysterious and powerful.” Jean Toomer looked at black men in Georgia and saw

the men, with vestiges of pomp,

Race memories of king and caravan,
 High-priests, an ostrich, and a juju-man,
 Go singing through the footpaths of the swamp. (15)¹⁰⁹

African royalty provided an important locus of imagery for some black poets. In Helene Johnson's "Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem" (1923), the suggestion of royal African lineage provides an alternative explanation to that of racial inferiority as to why the poem's young male subject does not "fit in":

You are disdainful and magnificent –
 Your perfect body and your pompous gait,
 Your dark eyes flashing solemnly with hate;
 Small wonder that you are incompetent
 To imitate those whom you so despise –
 Your shoulders towering high above the throng,
 Your head thrown back in rich, barbaric song,
 Palm trees and mangoes stretched before your eyes.
 Let others toil and sweat for labor's sake
 And wring from grasping hands their meed of gold.
 Why urge ahead your supercilious feet?
 Scorn will efface each footprint that you make.
 I love your laughter, arrogant and bold.
 You are too splendid for this city street! (Honey 99)

The African heritage of African Americans was, however, recognized to be a more complex question by more philosophical-minded critics like Alain Locke. "Even with the rude transplanting of slavery, that uprooted the technical elements of his former culture, the American Negro brought over as an emotional inheritance a deep-seated æsthetic endowment," Locke argued in "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," an essay printed in *The New Negro* (254). However, "this offshoot of the African spirit blended itself in with entirely different culture elements and blossomed in strange new forms."

Only by the misinterpretation of the African spirit, can one claim any emotional kinship between them – for the spirit of African expression, by and large, is disciplined, sophisticated, laconic and fatalistic. The emotional temper of the American Negro is exactly

¹⁰⁹ Race identification was a troubling issue for the multiethnic Toomer, but his publisher Horace Liveright argued that "right at the very start there should be a definite note struck about your colored blood." Michael North points out that "this the ad department of Boni & Liveright did with a vengeance: in ads for *Cane* it offered 'negro life whose rhythmic beat, like the primitive tom-tom of the African jungle, you can feel because it is written by a man who has felt it historically, poetically, and with deepest understanding'" (164).

opposite. What we have thought primitive in the American Negro – his naïveté, his sentimentalism, his exuberance and his improvising spontaneity are then neither characteristically African nor to be explained as an ancestral heritage. They are the result of his peculiar experience in America. (254)

The influence of African art upon black American artists is mainly due, he argues, to “a growing influence of African art upon European art in general” (255-6). Although “the American Negro, even when he confronts the various forms of African art expression with a sense of its ethnic claims upon him, meets them in as alienated and misunderstanding an attitude as the average European Westerner” (255), nevertheless, “stimulated by a cultural pride and interest,” he “will receive from African art a profound and galvanizing influence” (256), an influence not different in kind from that of African art on European modernism but perhaps greater, since Negro artists as blood descendents are “bound to it by a sense of direct cultural kinship.”¹¹⁰

African primitivism was seen by Harlem Renaissance theorists like Alain Locke as a means of revitalizing Afro-American visual arts, and one finds early manifestations of this tendency already in 1914 with Meta Fuller's sculpture, “Ethiopia Awakening,” an important piece exhibited at the Making of America exposition in 1922 (Campbell, 170). Fuller, who had studied under Rodin, was not to remain under the spell of Africa. But Africa was to have a lasting influence on Aaron Douglas, one of the Renaissance's best-known artists. Douglas adapted stylistic elements from African sculpture, as well as distinctive African decorative motifs, into his distinctive drawings for *The New Negro* and other Afro-American publications. Integrating these elements with geometrical modernist elements, he was almost single-handedly responsible for the primitive-modern visual style that came to be associated with Harlem Renaissance publications.

¹¹⁰ Walter Benn Michaels reads this essay as an expression of the idea that “in taking up his ancestral legacy, the Negro is not only not imitating the European, he is not imitating the African either; he is, in effect, being himself.” For Locke, then, Michaels concludes, “the modernism of the Negro is a function of his racial identity, or rather, of his ability to establish the right relation to his racial identity” (“American Modernism” 47).

III. McKay's Primitivism

Locke's conclusion that the modern American Negro was as alienated from Africa as any other Westerner did not prevent writers and artists from seeking more than simply "a galvanizing influence" from Mother Africa and from the "primitive" folk cultures of the peoples of the African diaspora. Some writers, like Claude McKay, and to a lesser extent Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, rebelled against Locke's artistic program, which they saw as promoting middle-class Negro culture at the expense of Negro folk culture. McKay was especially critical, and thought Locke incapable of leading a Negro renaissance, due to "a kink in Dr. Locke's artistic outlook, perhaps due to its effete European academic quality" (313). Michael Stoff has suggested that "the primitivism in Claude McKay's art manifests itself even in his earliest efforts" (127). Stoff is thinking of McKay's two volumes of dialect poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, both published in 1912, which "capture the exotic and earthy qualities of the black peasantry with a lyrical sensitivity reminiscent of Robert Burns." Stoff is perhaps overstating the case: McKay's poems, which show an interest in representing Jamaican language and culture, are, like the poems of Burns or the plays of J. M. Synge, primitivist only in a fairly limited sense. McKay had earlier written poetry in a standard English diction and meter (his preferred form was the sonnet), but he agreed to write the dialect verse under the encouragement of his mentor, Edward Jekyll, an amateur ethnographer with a reasonably good ear for Jamaican English, whose meticulously transcribed and annotated collection *Jamaica Song and Story* indicates a genuine admiration for Jamaican culture. Jekyll was delighted with McKay's dialect poems, and arranged for their publication. McKay clearly appreciated the attention, later offering a kind fictional portrait of Jekyll as Squire Allworthy in his novel, *Banana Bottom*.

"Of all the Harlem writers and artists none grasped the lure of Negro Primitivism more eagerly than Claude McKay," argues Nathan Huggins (172). "Again and again, the message: the human and vital black man is alien in the sterile, mechanized European civilization" (173).

Huggins's claim that "McKay's poetry is surprisingly devoid of these themes – surprising since his novels are not" (164), is partly but not categorically true; there is at least one important poem from his *Liberator* years, the poem entitled "Outcast," that captures the essentials of McKay's primitivism:

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
 My spirit, bonded by the body, longs.
 Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
 My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
 I would go back to darkness and to peace,
 But the great western world holds me in fee,
 And I may never hope for full release
 While to its alien gods I bend my knee.
 Something in me is lost, forever lost,
 Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
 And I must walk the way of life a ghost
 Among the sons of earth, a thing apart.
 For I was born, far from my native clime,
 Under the white man's menace, out of time.

In the highly compressed imagery characteristic of McKay's lyrics, "the dim regions whence my fathers came," are the site of a lost pastoral, a place of vitality, darkness, and peace. The notion of race instinct is evident in the assertion of the "Words felt, but never heard" that the poet's "lips would frame" into "forgotten jungle songs." The poem does not resolve whether the speaker's sense of alienation – his sense of being enslaved, devitalized, reduced to a ghost, and "out of time" – are characteristics of the Western world *per se* or of his own deracinated and doubled position. The idea that a primitive African or Jamaican folk culture held something vital, something lost by the black man trying to live in the Western world, is a theme that reappears in McKay's novels of the late twenties and thirties, *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom*. In the last of these, set in Jamaica, the protagonist, Bita Plant, finally rejects "civilized" values to return to the ways of the folk, a return that McKay could never manage in his own life. In later life McKay would not attain the "full release" of the rejection of alien gods hoped for in "Outcast"; he would eventually, in fact, embrace Catholicism.

McKay saw black primitivism as an articulation of a genuine spiritual need, but he had

nothing but disdain for “white” primitivism. Although financial exigencies occasionally suppressed this feeling¹¹¹ in his dealings with white benefactors, he was outspoken in his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* about exploitative primitivists such as Nancy Cunard and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Cartier-Bresson, he wrote, “had a falsetto voice which was not unpleasant, but it wasn't so pleasant to listen to it reiterating that its possessor could fancy only Negro women because he preferred the primitive. That falsetto voice just did not sound authentic and convincing to me” (335). Such people, he wrote, reminded him of “white lice crawling on black bodies” (337). Cunard, whom he accused of trying to use his work in her *Negro Anthology* without payment, was, according to McKay, similarly exploitative in her negrophilia, which he attributed to unhealthy causes: “the reader gets the impression,” he wrote, “that the Cunard daughter enjoys taking a Negro stick to beat the Cunard mother” (344).

IV. Blood, Race, Atavism and Heritage

The idea that African blood was African blood whether in Africa or America is the motive behind such classic poems as Langston Hughes's “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” where the external rivers of black experience mirror the internal blood that connects the American Negro to his ancestors:

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
 I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
 I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
 I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went
 down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom torn
 all golden in the sunset.

“My soul,” he concludes, “has grown deep like the rivers.” The external continuity of black experience near the rivers is internalized; the soul is like a river through which black experience flows,

¹¹¹ David Levering Lewis notes that “the poet accepted [Charlotte Mason's] checks gratefully and wrote adoringly, thanking her for news clippings and renewed magazine subscriptions, and in return penning vivid descriptions of 'primitive' life in North Africa” (154).

the river that connects the timeless “I” of the poem. While the poem – written in 1918 when Hughes was still in his teens – suggests early leanings toward a notion of black racial identity, Nathan Huggins’s observation that Hughes “never used ‘primitive’ or African characteristics to explain American Negroes” (164) is, generally speaking, a valid one. Hughes’s reaction to Charlotte Mason’s entreaties – “unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, so I could not live and write as though I did” – has already been noted. Any early tendency he may have had to romanticize the idea of African heritage was to be dampened by his later impressions of the seaports of Africa which he visited as a sailor several years later. For Hughes, this was an Africa of seaports, prostitutes, and liquor – not a place for the recovery of lost ancestry.

While some of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance tended to idealize Africa and its attractions, others like Hughes and Claude McKay, offered a more sober picture. While ancient Egypt in McKay’s poem “Africa” is celebrated as a “Cradle of power,” this does not blind the poet to the lowly status of Egypt under British domination:

The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,
The sciences were sucklings at thy breast;
When all the world was young in pregnant night
Thy slaves toiled at thy monumental best.
Thou ancient treasure-land, thou modern prize,
New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!
The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes
Watches the mad world with immobile lids.
The Hebrews humbled them at Pharaoh’s name.
Cradle of Power! Yet all things were in vain!
Honor and Glory, Arrogance and Fame!
They went. The darkness swallowed thee again.
Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done,
Of all the mighty nations of the sun.

Nothing remains but the “sphinx of riddle eyes” who “Watches the mad world with immobile lids,” and no possibility of a return to Egypt’s former glory is suggested.

For many writers, however, the continuity of the modern African American soul with the Africa of the past remained a powerful and seductive idea. It was frequently expressed by the concept

of “atavism”: the idea that racial traits may remain dormant for many generations before reemerging. Atavism was supposed to be responsible for the inescapable, innate racial qualities which signified one's racial disposition: the call of the tom-toms, for example. For other writers, it was not a question of *racial* atavism but merely of *cultural* heritage; but, in practice, widespread confusions about race and culture (common even in anthropological and scientific writing) made the racial and cultural components of black ethnicity difficult to distinguish.

Countee Cullen's poem “Heritage” has been considered one of the central poems of the Harlem Renaissance, in part because it directly framed the question of the African-American's ambivalent relationship both to the primitive and to Africa. A poem of dense paradoxes and ambiguities, its form embodies the sleepless tossing and turning of the poem's speaker as he contemplates the vexed question of the meaning of African descent. The first stanza lays out the polarities of the poem, its double movement of attraction and repulsion:

What is Africa to me:
 Copper sun or scarlet sea,
 Jungle star or jungle track,
 Strong bronzed men, or regal black
 Women from whose loins I sprang
 When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
 What is Africa to me?

The speaker's desire for the paradisaical return to a strong, regal, and exotic source is countered by the paternal voice reminding him that he has been literally “removed” from this paradisaical homeland; thus the two iterations of the question “What is Africa to me” are in effect the production of a double voice whose split becomes wider as the poem progresses. Though the speaker “all day long/ want[s] no sound except the song / Sung by wild barbaric birds / Goading massive jungle herds” and must “cram against [his] ear/ Both [his] thumbs and keep them there” to keep out the sound of “Great drums throbbing through the air,” nevertheless he must concede that Africa is merely “A book one

thumbs / Listlessly, till slumber comes." Like the disconnected images of a grade-school primer, her bats and cats are unremembered, as are the snakes that "once a year / Doff the lovely coats you wear." Just as "the tree / Budding yearly must forget / How its past arose or set," the speaker has lost his past which he regards with mixed emotions. Particularly problematic is the sexuality associated with Africa: in contrast,

Here no bodies sleek and wet,
Dripping mingled rain and sweat,
Tread the savage measures of
Jungle boys and girls in love.

The attraction of the unrestrained sexuality is countered by a Christian sense of shame, and rain becomes the central figure of a tormented sexual desire which causes the speaker to "twist and squirm" as he resists the call to "Come and dance the Lover's Dance." "My conversion came high-priced," the rational voice intervenes to say; "I belong to Jesus Christ, / Preacher of humility; / Heathen gods are naught to me." Though the contemplation of a black Christ gives the speaker some relief, at the poem's end the conflict remains unresolved: "*Not yet has my heart or head / In the least way realized / They and I are civilized,*" and the flood and fire within remain uneasily suppressed. Huggins suggests that for Cullen, "Africa and 'Paganism' were instruments in his personal rebellion against the Christian church" (164). Yet it might also be argued that his rebellion against the Christian church was an expression of his desire to recover a lost African identity.

In Gwendolyn Bennett's poem, also entitled "Heritage" (published in the December 1923 *Opportunity*), the attitude towards the African primitive/exotic is unambivalent.

I want to hear the silent sands,
Singing to the moon
Before the Sphinx-still face. . . .

I want to hear the chanting
Around a heathen fire
Of a strange black race.

I want to breathe the Lotus flow'r,
Sighing to the stars

With tendrils drinking at the Nile. . . . (Honey 103)

"We want to sing the songs of birth," she writes in "To Usward," using the figure of the sealed jar to argue for a racial essence: "Like jars of ginger we are sealed / By nature's heritage."

Langston Hughes deployed the erotic attraction of Africa was in various ways in his first volume, *The Weary Blues* (1926). "Danse Africaine," for example, "A night-veiled girl / Whirls softly into a / Circle of light" while "the low beating of the tom-toms stir your blood." In "To Midnight Nan at Leroy's," "Shameless Nan" sings her blues and wants lovin':

Jungle lover
Night black boy
Two against the moon
And the moon was joy. (WB 30)

"Wouldn't no good fellow/ Be your man," the speaker comments. The African erotic is frequently associated with the figure of the dancer for Hughes. The poem "Nude Young Dancer" inquires

What jungle tree have you slept under,
 Midnight dancer of the jazzy hour?
 What great forest has hung its perfume
 Like a sweet veil about your bower?

What jungle tree have you slept under,
 Night-dark girl of the swaying hips?
 What star-white moon has been your mother?
 To what clean boy have you offered your lips? (33)

In these poems, Hughes's speaker is nearly always an observer whose descriptions are colored by Hughes's own subset of conventional African and primitive figures: the jungle, the tom-toms, the moon, the naked dance. Sexuality and the primitive were intertwined in the distinctive style that came to be associated with the Harlem Renaissance and many of its cultural productions.

Few writers of the Harlem Renaissance aligned themselves with Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa ideas, perhaps as much because Garvey had been discredited as "a West-Indian charlatan" (in his fellow countryman McKay's words) as because of their privileged status in America as the talented

tenth of the black community. But most recognized a need for a cultural recovery of African heritage.

Although it would be wrong to characterize the idea of a return to African cultural values in modern African-American and Caribbean cultures simply as a response to Western primitivism, it is nevertheless wrong, I believe, to completely separate the two. The dilemma of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance was much like that of the “native intellectual” as characterized by Fanon, who “brings back from his adventuring formulas which are sterile in the extreme. He sets a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people; but his inevitable, painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism” (221). This effort of the native intellectual at cultural rediscovery is, for Fanon, merely a prelude to the political struggle which will make possible the awakening of a national culture (233). In the American context, this political struggle failed to gather steam until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. But I would argue that the engagement of the Harlem Renaissance writers with primitivism should not be dismissed as “sterile in the extreme,” even if it did not produce immediate, large-scale political consequences. It gave writers greater access to the “larger audience,” albeit at a price. It offered claims to cultural superiority, and modes of cultural critique. It became part of the terrain on which the interests of folk culture and middle class were negotiated within the black literary establishment. And the engagement with primitivism was deeply involved with one of central issues of the Harlem Renaissance — and one of its most important poetical concerns — that of African heritage. Perhaps most importantly, by engaging with primitivism, and adapting it to serve black interests, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance offered an important counter-balance to more than a century of primarily Eurocentric primitivisms. By claiming and refiguring the primitive, these black writers exerted pressure on linear models of cultural development that were simultaneously being called into question by anthropologists like Franz Boas. Within a few decades, the linear primitive / civilized model would give way to new models of cultural relativism.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have offered an analysis of primitivist and exoticist strategies within the fairly narrow limits of a specific literary form, in a single language, over the course of a few decades. My main interest has been to show the depth and range of modern poetry's investment in non-Western cultures. At the same time, I have pursued a number of other objectives as well: the resolution of certain problems of discourse analysis concerning cross-cultural discourses and literary texts; the construction of a framework in which non-canonical poets like Laurence Hope and Yone Noguchi may be read alongside poets like Rupert Brooke and Wallace Stevens as participants in a culture-wide (and to a limited extent, cross-cultural) conversation about cultural difference.

Exoticism, as we have seen, was part of a complex, transnational conversation about cultural identity and poetics, which offered intriguing, but often limiting, strategic opportunities for both Western and non-Western writers. Exoticist opportunities were somewhat wider for Western writers: Kipling could interest an audience in a poetry which domesticated the exotic by making it accessible to a wide range of readers (a strategy well in line with imperialist interests) while a Violet Nicolson could deploy it in other ways, projecting seductive, transgressive worlds into the spaces of the exotic. What readers demanded from poets like Tagore, Naidu, and Noguchi, on the other hand, was a glimpse of otherness in an easily digestible form, and with assurances of authenticity.

Exoticism was part of the processing of information required for imperialist expansion. The seemingly limitless curiosity about the cultural practices of others, though frequently pursued with a smug, ethnocentric sense of Western superiority, also reflected deep doubts about Western civilization, finding its most potent areas of exploration in issues of deep cultural anxiety: sexuality, gender identity, materialism, social class. Strategies of identification and disavowal were part of an intercultural process of cultural hybridization, at times beneficially cross-cultural, at times mainly reinforcing power relations of imperialist, racial, gender, and class domination. The interest in non-

Western poetry and poetics was not immune to these double-edged processes of hybridization: modernist poetry, as we have seen, drew inspiration from the East, and yet ultimately closed out non-Western poets from its canonical borders.

In the introduction to the chapters on primitivism it was suggested that primitivist strategies might be divided into expressions of cultural critique and of cultural superiority or ethnocentrism. Most of the poets examined here have used both modes of expression. Rupert Brooke, like Gauguin, used the primitive paradise of the islands to express a critique of certain British or “civilized” values, yet his writings express as well a satisfaction with being British, a point which is well made in his most famous poem, in which his sacrificed body is imagined to mark a foreign field as “forever England.” For T. S. Eliot, primitivism, via anthropology, provided a way of cutting through the spiritual deadness of modern life to something mystical and living. Eliot's primitivism and Brooke's have, on the surface, little in common: nothing could be farther from Eliot's mind than climbing up a tree and picking coconuts, or making love to chocolate-armed Tahitian women.

The expressions of primitivism which may most easily be grouped together into something like a movement concern the strategic use of primitivism as a foundational strategy for American poetry which I have called nativism. Nativist primitivism provided a symbolic grounding for American poetry. This grounding may be seen as supporting the American transformation into an international political power and an Imperial power in its own right. The mythology of Indian ancestry helped to displace America's perceived status as a post-colonial culture dependent on Britain, the colonial parent.

Nativism did not appeal equally to all American poets, however. In particular, it had a diminished appeal to poets such as Pound and Eliot, who were attempting to promote a cosmopolitan cultural ideal, in keeping with their status as American exiles. Pound's schoolmate from Penn, William Carlos Williams, stayed at home and promoted the nativist cause, while Pound extolled the cultural benefits of living abroad. Stevens, who, like Eliot, attended Harvard, stayed at

home but remained somewhat ambivalent, as we have seen, about the virtues of nativism. Interestingly, the reputations of many of the poets associated with American nativism have not fared well; poets like Lindsay, Mary Austin, and Alice Corbin Henderson have been largely forgotten.

Deployments of primitivist strategies by writers of the Harlem Renaissance were both similar to and different from those of their White counterparts. Primitivism was used in critiques of White values, often focusing on White alienation from the body. Often, however, there was a strong ambivalence about the attractions of the primitive: Cullen's ambivalent heritage, Toomer's and Hughes's sense of distance from the primitive-erotic. And Africa, construed by some writers as the primitive source, was seen as providing a possible foundation for Afro-American culture and cultural production. African art might be appropriated by Afro-American artists and writers in a manner similar to – though, presumably, with more justification than – the appropriation of Native American cultural productions by American poets.

The taking-up of primitivism as itself an object of study in the late twenties and thirties indicates, I would argue, an important point of transition in the history of primitivist strategies. In 1928, Hoxie Fairchild, Professor of English at Columbia, published *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism*, a comparative study of primitivist themes in Romantic poetry. In the thirties, A. O. Lovejoy, best known for *The Great Chain of Being*, began with George Boas a systematic study of primitivism in antiquity. Lovejoy's student Lois Whitney's *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century* appeared in 1934, and was followed by Lovejoy and Boas's *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* the following year. (In the following decade, Boas also published *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* [1948]). The thirties also saw the first retrospective study in the field of art history, Robert Goldwater's *Primitivism in Modern Art* (1938). Whether the development of a metadiscourse of primitivism came about as a result of the waning of imperialism, shifts in anthropological conceptualizations of the primitive, or the counter-strategies of primitivized groups, is difficult to say with any certainty.

But the retrospective critical interest seems to inaugurate a period of decline in the enthusiasm with which the primitive and exotic were pursued.¹¹²

In recent decades, multicultural and post-colonial approaches in the literary field have radically restructured Anglo-American readings of non-Western cultures. Both approaches have generally opposed the characterization of non-Western cultures as primitive or exotic, and have sought out alternative frameworks to promote an increased interest in non-Western literatures and cultures.

As the study of postcolonial literatures and multiethnic literatures of the United States and Britain has become a dominant focus of scholarly research and pedagogical reform, much of the attention has been placed on recent and emerging literatures, but emphasis has also been placed on the need to recover alternative histories of earlier periods through the exploration of the literary productions of colonized and marginalized groups. The non-Western, Black, and women writers discussed in these pages were not excluded from access to publication, and indeed were read widely and with a great deal of interest. But they were subject to certain constraints based on audience expectations, and, more importantly, their failure to achieve lasting places in American and British literary canons calls attention to consistent and problematic tendencies of nationalism and gender hierarchization in twentieth-century literary historiography.

¹¹² One may, however, note a resurgence of interest in primitivism in general and primitive poetry in particular during the 1960s. The Beats, in particular, found primitivist cultural critique ready to hand, and one finds strong primitivist elements in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Jerome Rothenberg. Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* (New York: Doubleday, 1968, 1984), an anthology of "primitive" poetry – the word "primitive," here, "used with misgivings & put in quotes" (xxv) – may be seen as both a completion (in the sense of global collection) and revision of the "primitive poetry" arguments discussed in these pages. Rothenberg's "new" primitivism stresses "primitive" elements specific to the sixties' context – communality, the return to instinct and intuition, the link between sexuality and the sacred, explorations of poetry's possible link with altered states of consciousness, an "environmentalist" unity with nature, and so forth.

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