Remapping Race and Literatures of Asian Americans

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The reconstruction of minority literatures in the United States since the 1960s has been shaped partly by postfoundationalist discourses on alterity, both by the Left and Right, and partly by new demographic remapping of American cities in the last three decades. In their enthusiasm to rectify cultural and political oppression of the minorities and provide them with a sense of moral well being, Anglo-American discourses on otherness have suppressed cultural differences by placing heterogeneous ethnic groups into ponderous and spurious categories such as Asian American or Native American. The complex ambivalence of identities that have emerged in the literatures from the late 19th century written by writers of Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Burmese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, Cambodian, East Indian and Pacific Island descent have been largely ignored.[1] Asian immigrants are increasingly dissatisfied by standardized histories written about them by non-Asians that deliberately deny them the role of functioning as historical agents of social transformation and creators of a new culture in a hegemonic white society. And this has created the necessity to reconfigure Asian American ethnography based on the experiences of Asian Americans in the areas of family, sexu-

al relations, gender, culture and community politics. The infusion of minoritarian perspectives in the writing of Asian American histories have opened new possibilities allowing Asian American writers and scholars to shed Western cultural biases and stereotypes and renegotiate multiple sites in politics, culture and social change.[2]

The arbitrary definition of Asian American identity since the beginning of the twentieth century has been intrinsically linked to the definition of Americanness which consists of the threefold notion of a common ethic of racial-cultural authenticity, a multicultural democratic federalism and a national community of five races: white, black, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian.[3] The idea of national unity based on the ethnic-racial pentagon was cobbled together by federal bureaucrats of the Office of Management and Budget (O.M.B.), such as James Farmer and Alfred Blumrosen, in order to impose quotas and was ominously called O.M.B. Statistical Directive 15. The arbitrary nature of racial preference was underscored by the fact that in the mid-1970s the Federal Interagency Committee on Education (FICE) recommended the shifting of peoples from the Indian subcontinent from the white category to Asian and Pacific Islander category, thus allowing high caste Hindus to be considered for racial reservations. Later, the Statistical Directive 15 adopted the recommendations of the FICE and systematically excluded Asian and Pacific Islanders from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens.[4]

The arbitrary nature of racial definition extends to ethnic labeling as well. The ethnic term "Asian American" that has recently replaced the much-disliked racial label "oriental" does not have either a national or cultural basis. Nissei Japanese have little in common with South Asian software engineers

or Tajik tribesmen living in California Bay Area.[5] Most ethnic groups who do not share much in common with each other, now agree to function together under a pan-ethnic umbrella in order to procure for themselves political and economic advantages and deal effectively with American officialdom and incorrigible racism. Since the mid-1960s they have been forced to identify themselves with a polymorphous, but culturally obliterating category, to function as agents of social transformation. Submitting to cultural differences within a single political and cultural affiliation might seem to them an uncomfortable compromise. But it allows more effectiveness in campaigning for legal redress, social services, affirmative action, liberal admission policies, analysis of cultural products, identity politics, diasporics, human rights, countering anti-Asian violence and other social needs.[6]

The untranslatability of languages and cultures posit that diverse ethnic alliances take place to procure social advantage. These ethnic mergers ought not to be regarded as attempts to mix cultures and literary sensibility in a gesture of goodwill. Though the culture wars have given rise to the necessity of aggrandizing ethnic and sexual identities, it does not mean that literatures produced within these categories are homogenized through association. These categories are only intellectual and conceptual and not social and psychological though they are increasing used for social advantage and leverage.

Just as the theory and practice of new formalism and the grand canon strengthened the homogenization of ethnically disparate identities, the conceptual reframing of literary theory since the 1980s has questioned the arbitrary homogenization and canonicity. The postfoundationalist questioning of the philosophical construction of knowledge and judgement from Plato to Decartes (from earliest times to the seventeenth century) have destabilized

grand narratives, utopias, simplistic categories, rationalism and the subjective agency. This archaeology of knowledge has provided a new legitimacy to ongoing debates on school syllabi, popular culture and a more equal literary canon. These cultural debates have become more intense and contentious with the rise of post-structuralist, Foucauldian, new historicist, subalternist and unofficial discourses of knowledge that see hegemony and power in earlier models.

Ideologically speaking, a broad ethnic categorization attempts to center racial and sexual identities which orthodox Marxists, social feminists or welfare activists find hard to accommodate within their own political agendas. The Marxists see in the centering of the racialized body, a deliberate attempt to undermine the dialectics of class struggle and capital. The social feminists see the proviso of including the concepts of fantasy and psychic desire in framing a policy of sexual harassment as unwarranted. The welfare activists cannot entertain deviant pleasure and sexual choice as significant markers in designing national health policy.

The processes of globalization have accelerated the internationalization of Asian American identities by demonstrating the advantage of their bicultural and transnational character in understanding both Asia and the Anglo-American world. The rise in transnational studies and diasporic studies support this claim.[7] And since the changes in immigration laws in 1965, a period marked by the end of the Civil Rights Movement, Asians have once again begun immigrating to the U.S. In the mid-1980s and early 1990s Asian economies entered world stage, creating a new movement of labor and capital that increased the presence of a transnational Asian community in the U.S. These new migrations comprising the professional middle classes redefined

Asian American subjectivity, politics, Diaspora, transmigrancy, cultural dislocation, assimilation and community in the U.S. The contribution of transnational Asian American communities in the Pacific Rim and South Asian regions have created highly influential trans-Pacific and South Asian communities, which have significantly contributed to economic and intellectual growth in both Asia and America. Now South Asian communities and their literatures can function as cultural, political and economic bridges across the Pacific and Atlantic, giving rise to new opportunities and hazards.[8]

II

The notion that Orientals are not real Americans emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when cheap Chinese immigrant labor arrived in large numbers in California displacing local labor.[9] Since then the idea that the Asian American was a threat to the institution of the American family and subsequently to the American nation has gained ground. During the last 150 years the belief that Americans of Asian decent are always loyal to the country of their origin has negotiated labels of the oriental as a coolie, pollutant, deviant, yellow peril, model minority or gook. And this stereotype of the oriental as an unassimilated mysterious stranger has been strengthened through popular culture (music halls, songwriters, Gold Rush camps, Hollywood and *Newsweek*) and social commentaries. Over the years the shifting working class relations, middle class domesticity, the Second World War, Cold War policies and new global economy have intersected racial politics, films, fiction and non-fiction to create paradoxical images of Asian Americans as exotic seducers, cunning destroyers of white racial purity, hard-working labor displacing native workers. All these images have fed the racial myths of cultural stereotypes in a dominant white culture.[10]

Throughout the period of national mobilization in the 1940s, racial prejudice was heightened by the phobia of skin color. Anti-Japanese sentiment in popular American media represented the insanely smiling buck-toothed, yellow-skinned "Jap" as a subhuman monster who could be interned without any Christian compunction. Though the freedom of the Chinese and Filipinos was restricted, the Japanese Americans, Italian Americans and German Americans were especially targeted for their fascist sympathies. Suspected of disloyalty, the latter group was seen as unfit to be assimilated in the American mainstream.

The Japanese Americans especially were singled out and their property was appropriated when they were imprisoned in large concentration camps. The internment of Japanese Americans on the West Coast during World War II arose out of a misconception that Asians and Americans of Asian descent were one and the same thing. Both in America and Canada people of Japanese origins suffered enormously. In order to structure their sense of alienation in the internment camps many Japanese Americans contemplated, analyzed and wrote about their complex relationship to the country of their origin and the country of the adoption. Writers like Wakao Yamauchi, Hisaye Yamamoto, Valerie Matsumoto, Toshio Mori, Joy Kogawa all suffered the humiliating experience of the internment camps and used the raw of material of their experiences to construct stories of human bonding and suffering.

John Okada represents the Japanese American self-hatred and rejection of Japanese culture induced by their incarceration during World War II in his novel *No-No Boy* (1957). The novel tells the story of Ichiro who answers "No. No." to the 1943 Loyalty Questionnaire and refuses the draft. The Loyalty Draft made it mandatory for Americans of Japanese descent to serve in the

American armed forces and forswear allegiance to Japan. Japanese Americans like Ken Yoshida, together with 300 young men refused conscription on the grounds that first the American government doubted their loyalty to the nation by herding them in internment camps and then expected them to go to war. These men were sent to prison by the government and branded as traitors by their own community for resisting the draft and asserting their civil rights. Though President Truman pardoned the group in 1947, the Japanese American Citizens League took over fifty-eight years to recognize their efforts.[11]

In *No-No Boy*, Ichiro refuses to serve the American government that treats him as an enemy though he is an American. He argues that how can he forswear allegiance when he had never felt it at all. Matters are further complicated for Ichiro as his mother is pro-Japanese and his father arrested for his nationality. After serving two years in prison Ichiro returns feeling guilt shame and hostility towards his people. However Kenji, Ichiro's friend, who is a war hero and has lost a leg continues to cherish Ichiro. Kenji's death valorizes death in the cause of defending the nation. Kenji's patriotism becomes a foil to Ichiro's "no, no" to the draft. Both suffer through the choices they make.

The novel develops against the backdrop of racism: whites against Asians, whites against blacks, Asians against blacks; and foreign-born against American-born Japanese. Inter-racial conflicts are further compounded by Ichiro's inner turmoil that symbolizes the turmoil of the Japanese community itself. Individual guilt and conflict assumes a larger dimension as it engulfs America itself. Feeling uncomfortable at the Club Oriental Kenji leaves the club and drives aimlessly and wonders:

> Was there no answer to the bigotry and meanness and smallness and ugliness of people? One hears the voice of the Negro or Japanese or Chinese or Jew, a clear and bell-like intonation of the common struggle for recognition as a complete human being and there is a sense of unity and purpose which inspires one to hope and optimism. One encounters obstacles, but the wedge of the persecuted is not without patience and intelligence and humility, and the opposition weakens and wavers and disperses. And the one who is the Negro or Japanese or Chinese or Jew is further fortified and gladdened with the knowledge that the democracy is a democracy in fact for all of them. One has hope, for he has reason to hope, and the quest for completeness seems to be a thing near at hand, and then ... (Chapter 6).

Kenji's quest to find a complete human being within the framework of American democracy is belied repeatedly with the phrase "and then." For it is "and then" something happens and racism and discrimination rears its ugly head anywhere, and in anyone, leaving the American democratic experiment incomplete and unrealized.

Okada voices the problems of race and ethnicity not only in the relations between whites and nonwhites but within mixed races and amongst Japanese Americans themselves. It seems as if everyone without exception, sooner or later will discriminate on the basis of color, age, or culture. The tortured prose of *No-No Boy* expresses this concern:

> and then ... the Negro who was always being mistaken for a white man becomes a white man and he becomes hated by the Negroes with whom he once hated on the same side. And the young Japanese hates the not-

so-young, in turn, hates the old Japanese who is all Japanese and, therefore, even more Japanese than he ...

Wakako Yamauchi reaches further back in history to the period of immigration and rural farming like in her play *The Soul Shall Dance* (1974) that tells the story of two farming families (father-mother-daughter) struggling to survive during the Great Depression in America. They are able to lessen if not mitigate their suffering by adhering to their Japanese heritage and tradition. In her short story, "In Heaven and Earth" (1977), Yamauchi analyses the ways in which mother and daughter understand their relationship with a newly arrived migrant worker. And in 12-1-A (1993) she brings her Poston, Arizona internment camp experience into play. Just like her, the Tanaka family in the story seems confused about the tenets of American democracy, uncertain of their future and not so hopeful of the goodness of heart. Not all share the sensibility or worldview of Yamauchi. Japanese Canadian writer Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* both reveal the self-hated ethnicity of Japanese during the post-war period.

Yamauchi like Mori keeps the immigrant experience at the center of her literary consciousness. And as such issues of memory, imagining communal spaces, the inhospitality of America, the security of the diaspora are negotiated in her stories. In *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, Yamauchi writes:

My stories are about immigrants. There have always been immigrants. We were there in prehistory, travelers from another place, another continent, or just stragglers from a larger society. We are a tribe of wanderers remembering a garden we'd left or looking for an Eden that waits. Immigrant stories have a certain commonality. Just as all dogs snarl,

bite, hunger, and circle the nest before they rest, we as a species have common traits. We yearn for a more forgiving land, a truer love, and we huddle together for comfort and protection. We spring from this source and return to it for intimacy and warmth.

The sense of communal "intimacy and warmth" that the Japanese diaspora provides, allows characters to traverse the unfriendly and racist terra firma of America.

III

In the last forty years Asian American writing has moved from the invisible margins to a new reconfigured center. In the 1960's Asian American writings, such as Chinese American, Filipino American, Japanese American, Korean American, South Asian American and Vietnamese American were hardly known in the U.S.; and the struggles of their peoples were not clearly represented outside their communities. But within the next three decades writers and critical theorists have struggled to find a literary and social voice both in universities and schools of criticism.[12] Hisaye Yamamoto's *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* (1988), Wakako Yamauchi's *And the Soul Shall Dance* (1976) and *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (1994), Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, Richard Kim's *The Martyred* (1964) and *The Innocent* (1968), Kim Yong-Ik's *Love in Winter* (1969), Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), Bienvenido Santos's *The Volcano and Villa Magdalena* (1965), N.V.M. Gonzalez, *The Bamboo Dancers* (1964), Chuang Hua's *Crossings* (1968), Bette Bao Lord's *Eighth Moon* (1964), Cathy Song's *Picture Bride* (1983), *Frameless Windows,* and *Squares of Light* (1988), Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War* (1988) and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990), Janice

Mirikitani's *Awake in the River* (1978) and *Shedding Silence* (1987), Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and *Holder of the World* (1993) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) all published during the last forty years reflect the angst of cultural nationalism and acculturation in an American ethos.

In the mid-Seventies the notion of a unified American personality rooted in American nativity vis-à-vis a dual bicultural personality perennially oscillating between two cultures, was employed as a critical standard to assess Asian American sensibility.[13] Endorsing this perception, editors of *Aiiieeeee!* privileged writers of Chinese, Filipino and Japanese descent. But by the early 1990s literary critics such as Lisa Lowe, Oscar Campomanes, Shirley Lim and R. Radhakrishnan began questioning the overarching label "Asian American" within which a cohesive Asian American sensibility was encrypted. Instead they saw Asian American conglomeration as containing many stories of heterogeneity, exile and competing diasporas which forged unique identities of cultural nationalism in the American white society. The earlier twin tropes of nativity and biculturalism were replaced by the triple trope of heterogeneity, exile and diaspora.

Based on this new understanding, literary theorists reconfigured the contours of Asian American sensibility as they reexamined the role of cultural nationalism in the cooperative necessity of constructing Asian American identities and literatures in the United States. In her forward to *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*[14] Elaine H. Kim decenters the notion of a unified Asian American identity by introducing concepts of heterogeneity and diversity in understanding cultural nationalism in Asian American literatures. She confesses:

> I sought delimitations, boundaries, and parameters because I felt they were needed to establish the fact that there was such a thing as Asian American literature ... That is why cultural nationalism has been so crucial ... Insisting on a unitary identity seemed the only effective means of opposing and defending oneself against marginalization ... Yet Asian American identities have never been exclusively racial.[15]

To construct the Asian American category either as exclusively unitary or predominantly racial is to ignore recent issues of generation conflict, ethnic dominance and ethnic intermixing arising in response to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolishing quotas for NW European countries and the opening of opportunities for a new wave of Asian emigration and the nativity values of ethnically mixed Asian Americans.

Though the notion of heterogeneity has expanded the boundaries of Asian American literary canon to include works by subgroups such as Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Korean, Indian, Indonesian, Laotian, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Thai and Vietnamese, it has further splintered national identities. Undeniably, national and ethnic identities functioning within a broad rubric of Asian American possess their own power structures. The hegemony of earlier dominant immigrant groups such as the Chinese and Japanese continue to displace and erase the voices of weaker ethnic minorities such as the South Asian, Filipinos, Koreans, Cambodians and Vietnamese. Marginalized national and sub-national groups are under constant pressure of erasure or co-optation by major groups such as the Chinese, Japanese or South Asian Americans. In other words heterogeneity instead of collapsing cultural nationalism has helped in strengthening plural national identities.

Naheed Islam, in an essay suggestively titled, "In the Belly of the Multicultural Beast I Am South Asian," objects to the domination of Indian Americans in South Asian American literature. Conceding that South Asian subgroups must "continue to work with others" he voices his concern of losing his identity by being co-opted by them. He wonders: "But why would I be South Asian when I could be Bangladeshi? And the Tripuras, Shantals and Chakmas living within the borders of Bangladesh, brutally suppressed by the military, may choose to distinguish their identity from that nation-state."[16]

Pragmatic wisdom dictates that within the racial parameters of U.S.-centric grand narrative, each ethnic subgroup should not claim its singular identity, but work together within a broader coalition of Asian American union in order to be heard in America. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong suggests that different national groups can easily form a "textual coalition" as lots of them, especially Asian Americans, perforce share literary motifs, art, food and mobility and have experienced the racial dimension of the American reality.[17]

The desire to evolve an American identity as opposed to an Asian one, to omit the hyphen in Asian-American, seems the propelling idea of Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*. The narrator of the novel, who fails to enter into a dialogue with her father, wonders why her father tries to obliterate the memory of China and the past it stands for: "Do you mean to give us a chance at being real Americans by forgetting the Chinese past?"[18] Through the symbolism in the story Kingston wants to "claim America" for the Chinese Americans whose ancestors worked hard in sugar plantations in Hawaii, on the railroads, swamps and deserts in the U.S. while continuously living in the shadow of discrimination. However Kingston's story also destroys the myth of America as a pluralist democracy.

A shift in demographic pattern and the consequent emergence of immigrant writers have unfixed the margins between Asian and Asian American identities. After 1965 foreign-born Asians have outgrown American-born Asian thereby enriching Asian American literature by their strong ethnicity. Such authors to name a few are Agha Shahid Ali, Bharati Mukherjee and Meena Alexander (Indian), Bapsi Sidhwa and Sara Suleri (Pakistani), Renzi Crusz and Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lankan), Cecilia Brainard, Jessica Hagedorn and Ninotchka Rosca (Filipino), Le Ly Hayslip, Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh and Nguyen Qui Du'c (Vietnamese), S. P. Somtow and Wanwadee Larsen (Thai) and Wendy Law-Yone (Burmese).

Literary theorists promote different ways of claiming America. Should writers draw upon their American experience or Asian experience? Should they fuse both? These questions are difficult to answer. The fact remains that writers continue to walk a tightrope whether they write about their American encounters or express their disaporic nostalgia. Mukherjee advises writers to embody the American reality in their writings whereas Hagedorn wants writers to seek their roots in exile. Denying an American identity both in resentment and nostalgia, Asian American writers, especially from countries such as India, Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines, seek explanations to their predicament in postcolonial studies.

IV

The reconstituted racial identity of South Asian Americans since 1913 as part of the Asian-Pacific Islander category has been more beleaguered by race, ethnicity and loss of pride. But the second-generation attitudes of bi-ethnic Punjabi Mexicans in California or the New York South Asians are more at

ease in the two cultures. At the turn of the twentieth century young men from the British Punjab migrated to rural California to work on the farms. Restricted by miscegenation laws and racial prejudice to marry white women, they instead married women of Mexican descent and created Hindu families, which were typically American. The traumatic partition of the British India in 1947 and the subsequent creation of Muslim Pakistan and predominately Hindu India, forced then to reconstitute their identities and national loyalties in an increasingly multiethnic America.[19]

The second middle class and urban South Asian migration to big cities in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s especially New York and Chicago altered the cosmopolitan demography. The speed of acculturation and adaptability was quicker now than half a century ago. Soon second-generation children of South Asian immigrants formed the core of the "model minority" negotiating class mobility and racial prejudice in a new configuration of ethnography in American schools, academia and professional companies. The nativity Americans fuse the two cultures naturally while their foreign-born counterparts find fault lines and fissures in an attempt to construct their identities.

The interracial marriages and ethnic mixing have increased multiracial activism in recent times forcing the U.S. Census in 2000 to allow people to identify themselves with multiple racial groups.[20] In this climate second generation South Asians are less nostalgic of a homeland they have never grown in and possess a strong identification with New York slinky Tommy gear of break dance clubs.[21] Their parents continue to nurse the Bollywood nostalgia or espouse Hindu nationalism but their children adopt a transnational cosmopolitan culture by fusing bhangra and reggae rhythms and mixing ethnic

cultural identities with popular American culture.

Foreign-born writers in America take more time in settling down to a new intermixing of cultures in postethnic America. Meena Alexander in *Fault Lines* confesses that she has become a "woman cracked by multiple migrations" revisiting her ethnic background to understand her "fragmented life history"[22] In "Transit Lounge" she expresses her angst of losing the memory of her past: "In Manhattan, I am a fissured thing, a body crossed by fault lines. Where is my past? What is my past to me, here, now, at the edge of Broadway? Is America a place without memory?"

Mukherjee's involvement with the immigrant story is complex and her journey longer as she moved to the U.S. from Canada after she experienced intense racism. This has made her more tolerant of others. Her characters gradually evolve into the American way of life and become less uninhibited and more open-minded than before. "A Wife's Story" in *The Middleman and Other Stories*[23] tells the tale of a woman, Panna, who has "made it" in America. She senses the indignity of an immigrant together with a new sense of sexual and personal freedom that turns her into a new person. Though she shares a bedroom in New York with a friend, and longs for her husband's physical companionship, she does not wish to return with him to India. She has "broadened [her] horizons" in America, become a "referee" of "postcolonialism" as she watches a play insulting Indian and learns the language of America —"*trucks* have replaced *lorries* in my vocabulary (p. 32)." The story celebrates her new found sense of sexuality and femininity:

> In the mirror that hangs on the bathroom door, I watch my naked body turn, the breasts, the thighs glow. The body's beauty amazes. I stand

> here shameless, in ways he has never seen me. I am free, afloat, watching somebody else (p. 40).

Panna uses her Ph.D. as an excuse for not returning back. Her consciousness seems to be primarily located in her marital and immigrant status. We can see the beginnings of ethnic fibrillation in Panna with her Indian husband on the ferry to the Statue of Liberty, and the sangfroid initiative she takes during the tour of New York while initiating her dollar-spending husband to acquisitive delights of the city. Though she "feels dread" that her husband might leave her or accuse her of "infidelity," we know she will not "go back" even if the American dream insults and erases her identity:

> It's the tyranny of the American dream that scares me. First, you don't exist. Then you're invisible. Then you're funny. Then you're disgusting. Insult, my American friends will tell me, is a kind of acceptance. No instant dignity here.

A lot of psychological negotiations in Mukherjee just as in Lahiri seem contrived and unnatural, satisfying the fantasy of an ill-informed American audience and feeding the stereotypical fantasies of the strange orientals with their strange manners and customs. Panna's growing awareness of her physicality seem somewhat unnatural. She is not an adolescent girl, someone like Maggie Tulliver or Ada, who is awakening to her sexuality. One may sympathize with the creative consciousness of a writer in literature but to accept its authenticity is demanding too much from the reader.

Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* suffers from the same fate. In her short story "Mrs. Sen's" the professor's young wife Mrs. Sen baby sits for Eliot in her

campus apartment. The terribly inane scene where young Eliot smells the strange smells of mothballs and cumin while watching Mrs. Sen's center-parted braided hair filled with sindoor or "crushed vermilion seems hard to believe. Here's what happens:

> From where Eliot sat on the sofa he could detect her curious scent of mothballs and cumin, and he could see the perfectly centered part in her braided hair, which was shaded with crushed vermilion and therefore appeared to be blushing. At first Eliot had wondered if she had cut her scalp, or if something had bitten her there. But then one day he saw her standing before the bathroom mirror, solemnly applying, with the head of a thumbtack, a fresh stroke of scarlet powder, which she stored in a small jam jar. A few grains of the powder fell onto the bridge of her nose as she used the thumbtack to stamp a dot above her eyebrows.
> 'I must wear the powder every day, "she explained when Eliot asked her what it was for," for the rest of the days that I am married.'
> 'Like a wedding ring, you mean?'
> 'Exactly, Eliot, exactly like a wedding ring. Only with no fear of losing it in the dishwater.'[24]

Now can anything be worse, more fake than this! The facade of seriousness that the scene demands cannot be met by the pathetically fallacious explanation of the last line of sindoor being equal to a wedding ring, nay superior to it as the sindoor cannot be lost in the dishwater. The weak attempt at privileging the Hindu cultural tradition over the Western is definitely not for an adult reader. To observe the failure of a cultural symbol is fascinating, but to see the failure of a literary discourse is frustrating.

Literary criticism has increasingly become self-conscious and critical in defining multiethnic identity and authenticating multicultural experience in literary works. Recent critical anthologies have not only singled out writers who do not conform to this standard but also mounted a vicious attack on thier writing. The critical anthology *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*[25] includes distinguished theorists such as Sau-Ling, Cynthia Wong, Stephen Sumida, Elaine H. Kim, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and King-Kok Cheung. The book highlights literary, sociological and historical debates in the past two decades and deals with issues of ethnic identity, class status, gender, generation conflict and community responsibility. The book includes a discussion of postcolonial theory, immigration, Diaspora, Asian American masculinity, Asian American literary theory and media representation.

Karen Chow and Wei Ming Dariotis's "Introduction" to the second issue of *Asian America*[26] present multiethnic identities of Hawaiian writers of Korean and Chinese descent within the trope of Asian American writers but realize the "limitation of these borders." Asian American writers are grappling with issues of multi-nationality, cultural binaries and "diasporic multicultural sensibilities." Chow and Dariotis realize the "problematics of monolithic construction of ethnicity and nationalism" but believe that "common ethnic experiences can and do connect seemingly discrete clusters of communities" for example Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans. Ethnic writers are increasingly concerned with finding "physically and ideologically safe spaces" to speak from. Theorists are debating about the writer's responsibility to represent multiethnic reality accurately and positively and the canonistic exclusion of writers who veer towards valorizing mainstream prejudices.

There seems a reversal of an earlier ethnic distancing in American-born

Asian writers. Peter Bacho's protagonist in *Cebu*[27] balances his imagination by shuttling between Philippines and the U.S. though his experiences are not wholly pleasant. David Mura in *Turning Japanese*[28] grapples with practical and psychological issues of Japanese ethnicity. Mura analyses the mercurial aspect of his ethnicity and assimilation in an article "A Shift in Power, A Sea Change in the Arts" in some detail. He confesses that till his late twenties he saw himself as "a middle class white person" and avoided his "sansei identity." However this left him feeling "self-hatred and self-abuse." He admits that: "If I had not become self-conscious about my identity, I might have destroyed myself."[29]

The question of identity has become more complicated since Mura's time. An increase in diasporic discourses preoccupies both writer and critic in the U.S. and abroad. The founding of the AALA Japan (1989), activities of scholars in Europe especially Germany and Asia (especially India) and publication of journals such as *Muae: A Journal of Transcultural Production, Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique in the U.S.*, have expanded the borders of Asian American Studies. Cheung and Wong believe that the shift from American nativity to Diasporic ethnicity is more to do with a demographic shift than a "teleological" development.[30] Critical theory no longer sees American nativity as central to its understanding of Asian American writing; but has gone beyond to Asian influences seminal in shaping of Asian American sensibility.

Opinion of Asian American scholars is divided on this issue. The first group, foremost amongst them is Sau-ling Wong, believes that political struggle must center around a specific area or nation; while the second group, foremost amongst them is Shirley Lim, argues that appropriating America leads to assimilation and bolsters American national pride. However Cheung

believes a middle way could prove more beneficial where a transnational identity is harnessed to "critique the polity, whether of an Asian country, Canada, the United States, or Asian America."[31] A transnational consciousness alternating between two different comminutes, sometimes alienating itself from its own and at others claiming ethnic marginality in American society, but staying clear of separatism, can create a hybridized consciousness directed towards social reconstruction.

Race and gender have largely defined stereotypes, fueled by Hollywood, in Asian American cultural ethos. Emasculation of the Asian American male and hyper-feminization of the female are both demeaning and humiliating images that have strengthened the white man's virility and sense of racial superiority. American culture and language denies the Asian American to express his manhood — either he is menacing or mortifying.

The preoccupation of *The Big Aiiieeeee!* (1991) with defining Asian American manhood, in spite of feminist attacks, has resulted in the directive to Asian American writers to explore their heroic epics and early immigrant history, in this case Chinese and Japanese.[32] This incidentally signals the rise of cultural nationalism. Simultaneously the editors of the magazine denounce writer such as Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang and Amy Tan for feeding American publishers with distorted and "fake" images of Asian Americans. In his essay "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," Frank Chin makes a scathing attack at literary fakery in Chinese American writing:

> Ducks in the barnyard are not the subject of Chinese fairy tales, except as food. Swans are not the symbols of physical female beauty, vanity,

and promiscuity that they are in the West. Chinese admire the fact that swans mate for life; they represent romantic love and familial bliss. There is nothing in the Chinese fairly tales to justify characterizing the Chinese as measuring a woman's worth by the loudness of her husband's belch.

Kingston, Hwang and Tan are the first writers of any race, and certainly the first writers of Asian ancestry, to so boldly fake the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history. And, to legitimize their faking, they have to fake all of Asian American history and literature, and argue that the immigrants who settled and established Chinese America lost touch with Chinese culture, and that a faulty memory combined with new experience produced new versions of these traditional stories. This version of history is their contribution to the stereotype.

The lie of their version of history is easily proven by one simple fact: Chinese America was never illiterate. Losing touch with China did not result in Chinese Americans losing touch with "The Ballad of Mulan". It was and is still chanted by children in Chinatowns around the Western hemisphere. Losing touch with England did not result in English whites losing touch with the texts of the Magna Carta or Shakespeare.[33]

It is becoming difficult for literary critics and the public at large to valorize writers who manufacture fake brands of ethnicity and surreptitiously introduce them for consumption in the Euro-American literary market, a market fuelled by the greed of savvy publishing houses and print capitalism. It is no longer possible to distort popular national cultural myths under the pretext of writing imaginative literature. The shift in literary theory to see a literary

text as another ideological discourse, which negotiates meaning with other social and political discourses, is both post-Bakhtinian and post-Foucauldian. Writers cannot circumvent the social reference of literature and its cultural authenticity anymore. The language of the literary text cannot be seen as neutral. Intentions and agendas of the writer are always inscripted in it. The trajectories of literary language engage our political and ethical sympathies, and thus the writing of a literary text is not just a literary act but also a political and ethical one. The ideological hegemony of writers, their hidden political and personal agendas and their attempts to fake cultural and personal experiences can now be exposed through the archaeology of literary and social theories.

Reading cultural nationalism and realigning their sympathies with the Third World some Asian American writers attempt to regain their lost pride in themselves. The Chinese American protagonist of Chin's *Donald Duk* regains his lost pride by acquainting himself with Chinese classics and immigrant Chinese railroad builders. Janice Mirikitani aggressively builds a difficult but proud picture of the Japanese American immigrant identity especially in such poems as "For My Father" (1978):

He came over the ocean
Carrying Mt. Fuji
on his back/ Tule lake on his chest
hacked through the brush
of deserts
and made them grow
strawberries.

Mirikitani believes that it is impossible for Third World writers to separate themselves from "the ongoing struggles of their people" or their national "history."

This tendency is gaining ground in the works of Filipino American writers such as Rosca and Hagedorn. Both the writers engage our political attention just like Jose Rizal did decades ago. Both *State of War* and *Dogeaters* imagine the Third World metropolis Manila. Exposing the physical and psychological markings of American imperialism on the colonized Filipino psyche, both the novels reconstruct the city and its symbolic national past and present. Rosca traces the history of the nation by providing a genealogical account of three families. Towards the end of the novel the female protagonist, Anna the widow of the rebel activist, listens to the Magellan song of drunken revelers. This prompts her like Mariam Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses* to conduct an interior monologue. Anna follows the "mangled history" of the nation still preserved in the lyrics of the "four hundred year old song," and like Magellan the Portuguese explorer who once discovered Philippines, Anna too discovers the nation by discovering herself.[34] Her search for the physical body of her missing husband not only replicates the narration of the dictatorial history of the present but also intersects the present with the colonial exploitation of the past. And in this endeavor she receives some kind of divine grace as her name suggests.

Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* also narrates the history of Philippines as a nation through the lives of marginalized people, prostitutes, slum dwellers, criminals, gossip mongers, politicians, army generals and socialites. The last chapter of the novel is suggestively titled "Kundiman", a Taglog word for a love song which imitates the prayer of "Our Father". And in doing so it transcends

the carnality of the world and enters the spirituality of the other world.[35] The protagonist Rio can only imagine his homeland and can become one with it through the language of prayer. The act of writing is a form of prayer, which imagines the nation; the ethical-religious nature of the act constructs the political edifice of the nation. Memory, language, history and narration all come together in the novel, making the literary engagement a historical reality.

Feminist critics take issue with the revival of state or cultural nationalism that only tightens Asian or American patriarchal stranglehold on women. Women writers, such as Theresa Cha in *Dictee* and Sara Suleri in *Meatless Days* see nationalism in Korea, India and America using women as fodder for their cultural factory. However writers such as Bharati Mukherjee inadvertently strengthen white liberal feminism in a novel like *Jasmine* by attributing to the protagonist qualities of self-determination that are oblivious of class differences both in America and India.[36] Cultural nationalism gets a further beating at the hands of ethnic studies and gay-lesbian studies who see in it not only patriarchy but also coercive heterosexuality. Furthermore feminism, cultural and gender studies also question Eurocentric constructions of femaleness and maleness; and as mentioned earlier feminist studies have focussed attention on black studies as well.

Somewhere in the early 1980s gender studies boldly focussed attention on the theme of sexual orientation both through creative writing and anthologies. Kitty Tsui's *The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire* (1983), Barbara Noda's *Strawberries* (1986) and *Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians* edited by C. Chung et. al. (1987) were published and circulated within a limited audience. However in the 1990s gay and lesbian writings

found a clear direction and were no longer a closeted affair. Writings of gay or lesbian persuasion include Ginu Kamani's *Junglee Girl* (1995), Anchee Min's *Red Azalea* (1994), Norman Wong's *Cultural Revolution*, Russell Leong's *The Country of Dreams and Dust* (1993), David Wong Louie's story in *Pangs of Love* (1991) and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990), anthologies such as *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* edited by Sharon Lim-Hing (1994), *A Lotus of Another Color: The Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience* edited by Rakesh Ratti (1993) and *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Color Anthology* edited by Makeda Silvera (1993).

Few literary critics have discussed the influence of class on Asian American writings except E. San Juan, Jr., in his book *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle*.[37] It is impossible to detect uniformity in class as different nationalities and varying income groups fall under the rubric of Asian American. Therefore it is difficult to see Asian Americans as model minority since there are large economic differences within its various communities and ethnic groupings. Cheung believes that as Asian American literary criticism matures it will increasingly confront hybridity and Diaspora. She writes:

> Bilingual and biliterate writers and academics may thrive on hybridity, whereas those who are less fluent and less privileged may find their biculturalism to be a handicap that marginalizes them in both dominant and ethnic cultures. Similarly, diasporic experience may be enabling for both metropolitan intellectuals who can afford to travel back and forth across the Pacific but debilitating for migrant workers and those who suffer drastic occupational 'demotion' in the transition

from Asia to America. At the same time, a transnational class analysis can unveil analogous or interrelated structures of class and gender oppression in Asia and America ...."[38]

Writers such as Meena Alexander, Le Ly Hayslip and Bulosan show an increasing awareness of class and its associated tropes in their writings.

Asian American literature from the 1930s to the 1980s reflects sub-themes of class privilege, exploitation, economic degradation and class-combined-with-ethnicity. H. T. Tsiang's *And China Has Hands* (1937) reveals the harassment of an immigrant Chinese laundry-man in New York's Chinatown at the hands of city officers. As a reaction to the repressive and racist city laws the laundry-man begins to actively participate in labor movement to bring reform. Later, a novel by Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (1943) exposes the harsh working conditions of Filipino farm-workers and their uncomfortable relations with their white counterparts in California. In 1977 Surjeet Kalsey's story "Siddharth Does Penance Once Again" remembers the travails of immigrant Punjabi workers. Kim Ronyoung's *Clay Walls* (1987) traces the problems faced by a Korean family, especially by the mother who belongs to the aristocratic Yangbang class. She works as a domestic servant and then as a sweatshop worker in California to survive. Wendy Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree* (1987) narrates the story of two Burmese siblings suffering the pain of poverty and turning schizophrenic in the United States. Gary Pak's "The Trail of Goro Fukushima" (1992) analyses the merciless lynching of a Japanese gardener that grows out of the prejudice of class and race. Within Asian American writing a further conflict has developed between early working class immigrants and those who come later; this is best exemplified in two works by Bienvenido Santos: "The Day the Dancers Came" (1979) and *What*

the Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco (1987).

Asian American writing presenting a distinctive ethnic communal identity and yet wanting to express a private individual vision feels ideologically and aesthetically trapped. Central to the predicament of the Asian American writer is the question: Should writing express a social bias or be free from it? Minority sensibility, not by choice but by historical design, has been invariably caught up with social history. As such courses in Asian American literature are designed primarily around the theme of ethnic biography. The rise of postmodernism has questioned both, the concept of a stable identity and historical truth thereby critiquing the concept of literature-as-a-mirror-of-society. Many Asian American writers like Mirikitani and Merle Woo, though constructing tribal identities in their works now realize that language can neither represent reality effectively nor function as an effective weapon of social change. New anthologies on Asian American literature such as Jessica Hagedorn's *Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction* (1993) and Garrett Hongo's *The Open Boat: Poems from Asian America* (1993) introduce writers of different shades difficult to place under the umbrella of Asian American anymore. In other words the boundaries of Asian American literature needs to be constantly redrawn and extended.

The conflicting conceptions of literary, cultural and political identities may be seen as attempts to categorize and contain white/ nonwhite interactions in a predominately white society but new issues are making this understanding complex. The hybridization of knowledge, rise of meta-narratives, transculturalism, erasure of concepts, splitting of subjects, discursive discourses, performing social agency, and various homogenizing cultural forces such as the entertainment and advertising institutions have not only impacted on the

boundaries of Asian American writing but redefined the ethical-political framework of othering. What wider significance could this possibly have for postfoundational literary theory, for epistemological and institutional authority, for constructing ethnic and non-ethnic identities, for locating historical narratives and specifying national or ethnic events?

Cultural pluralism stands at a point in time when it is attempting to negotiate ethnic separatism with the need to create human fellowship and strength, where an individual can construct his/ her identity together with significant others without malice and animosity. But Anglo-American philosophy and social sciences are so riddled with ideological preconceptions that they cannot construct social reality free from social and political biases.[39] If all the posts, from postmodernism to postfoundationalism, have vanquished all critical theories, allowing only literary theory to triumph then it is time that once more the "literary" aspect returns to the domains of literature which perennially questions what it asserts.[40] The ongoing controversies that rage upon and around culturally plural traditions, at times threatening to drown American literature itself, will only come to a rest when American national values are redefined and national purpose clearly understood and more importantly agreed upon. Only then can cultural pluralism, as literary theory, mature and work towards human solidarity.

Notes and References

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[2] Martin F. Manalansan, *Cultural Compass: Ethnographic Explorations of AsianAmerica* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

[3] Cultural and literary critics such as Todd Gitlin and Kwame Anthony Appiah

agree that the category of race is constructed upon culture and not biology and that there is only one race, the human race. Also see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995), p. 107n-8n.

[4] In the U.S. v. Balshara, 1910, Akhay Kumar Mozumdar, 1913 cases the Supreme Court decreed that the Asian Indians were white and therefore eligible for U.S. citizenship under the 1790 naturalization act. But in U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind case of 1923 the Supreme Court reversed its decision claiming that the Founding Fathers would not have considered Indians white and as such Asian Indians were ineligible for naturalization. Also see Lawrence Wright, "One Drop of Blood," *The New Yorker* (July 1994) pp. 46-55.

[5] Gitlin, p. 162.

[6] Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth eds., *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asian in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

[7] Sucheng Chan, David Palumbo-Liu, and Michael Omi eds., *Asian American History and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

[8] The term South Asian is being increasingly applied to peoples from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives underlining shared common goals and significant religious and cultural differences. See Evelyn Hu-DeHart ed., *Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); and *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asian in Asian America*.

[9] Sucheng Chan ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

[10] Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

[11] Michelle Locke, "Japanese-American 'traitors' finally get apology," *The Japan Times*, Monday May 13, 2002, p.2. "'What we are saying is we shouldn't be condemning or trashing people who took a stand for our community's civil rights,' said Andy Noguchi, co-chairman of the Recognition and Reconciliation Ceremony.'" The Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team were the bravest in U.S. military history winning over 18,000 decorations.

[12] Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience* (New

Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, *Teaching Asian America: Diversity and the Problem of Community*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 1998); Shirley Hune et al, eds., *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1991); Harry H. L. Kitano, *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1994); Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995); David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian /American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999); Sonia Shah, *Dragon Ladies: Asian AmericanFeminists Breathe Fire* (Boston: South End, 1997); Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[13] Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao, Inada and Shawn Wong, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington DC.: Howard University Press, 1974). pp. vii and xi.

[14] Shirley Geok-Lin Lim and Amy Ling, Eds. *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, ibid.

[15] Lim and Ling eds., *Reading the Literatures of Asian Americans*, Introduction, pp. xi-xii

[16] Naheed Islam, "In the Belly of the Multicultural Beast I Am South Asian," In Women of the South Asian Descent Collective, pp.. 242-44.

[17] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[18] Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 14.

[19] Karen Isaken Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

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[22] Meena Alexander, *Fault Lines: A Memoir* (New York: Feminist Press, 1993), pp.2-3.

[23] Bharati Mukherjee, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Pvt., Ltd., 1989).

[24] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), p. 117.

[25] King-Kok Cheung ed., *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997).

[26] Shirley Geok-lin Lim ed., *Asia America: Journal of Culture and the Arts*, No. 2. Winter 1993, p. 7-8.

[27] Peter Bacho, *Cebu* (Seattle: Univ., of Washington Press, 1991).

[28] David Mura, *Turning Japanese* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991).

[29] David Mura, "A Shift in Power, A Sea Change in the Arts," in *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan, 183-204. (Boston: Southend Press, 1994) p. 187.

[30] Cheung, Reviewing Asian American Literary Studies," in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, pp. 8-9.

[31] Cheung, p. 9.

[32] Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, Shawn Wong eds., *The Big Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese-American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1991).

[33] Frank Chan, Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and The Fake," *The Big Aiiieeeee!* Ibid., p. 3.

[34] Rosca Ninotchka, *State of War* (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 336.

[35] Jessica Hangedorn, *Dogeaters* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 250.

[36] Inderpal Grewal, "Reading and Writing the South Asian Diaspora," in *Women of the South Asian Descent Collective*, 1993, pp. 226-36. Also see Susan Koshy, "The Geography of Female Subjectivity: Ethnicity, Gender, and Diaspora," *Diaspora* 3.1: 3: pp. 69-84.

[37] E. San Juan, Jr., *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle* (Quezon City: University of Philippines Press, 1975).

[38] Cheung ed., *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature,* p.14.

[39] Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1999). In an Afterward to the book Hayden White questions the ability of Western academic social sciences to be ideologically free. He writes: "The lesson to be learnt from such considerations is that Western academic social science is as shot through with ideological preconceptions about the nature of social reality and the proper ways study it as any Marxian version thereof. The kind of cultural relativism that is supposed to characterize postmodern culturalism may not be the solution to the problem of constituting a social science adequate to the task of curing the ills of modern or any other kind of society" (p. 324). Jameson believes that only literary criticism may save the day. He argues that, "It therefore falls to literary criticism to continue to compare the inside and the outside, existence and history, to continue to pass judgement on the abstract quality in the present, and to keep alive the idea of a concrete future. May it prove equal to the task!" Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 416.

[40] Jonathan Culler, "The Literary in Theory," in Judith Butler, John Guillory and Kendall Thomas eds., *What's Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge Press, 2000). Culler states," If the literary has triumphed, as Simpson claims (and for him the postmodern is the name of the triumph of the literary), then perhaps it is time to regroup the literary in literature, to go back to actual literary works to see whether the postmodern condition is indeed what should be inferred from the operations of literature. It seems to me quire possible that a return to ground the literary in literature might have a critical edge, since one of the things we know about literary works is that they have the ability to resist or to outplay what they are supposed to be saying" (p. 290). Also see David Simpson, *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 38.