

From the Editor

By Lyn Miller-Lachmann



In the past year, a number of articles in *MultiCultural Review* have addressed the dilemma of outsiders writing about culture. The spring 2009 issue featured a critical symposium on Beth Kanell's young adult novel *The Darkness Under the Water*, about the eugenics movement in Vermont and its impact on an Abenaki teenager and her family. In the summer issue, Sandhya Nankani offered recently published alternatives by authors of South Asian heritage to the historical fiction about South Asia written by outsiders that have regularly appeared on middle and high school reading lists since the early 1990s. Finally, in the winter issue, debut author Matthew Aaron Goodman discussed the common threads in his Jewish background and the life of his African-American protagonist in *Hold Love Strong*, a modern-day retelling of the biblical story of Abraham. Throughout the year, I added my own observations as the author of a young adult novel published in 2009, *Gringolandia*, which includes a teenage girl who attempts to enter into and write about a culture not her own.

Some of the issues faced by outsiders that we discussed in these pages include the ethics of the research process, emotional as well as factual authenticity, the problem of stereotyping, the temptation to be reverential to avoid offending members of the group, the extent to which facts can be changed to fit the needs of the story, and the loss of particulars in the quest for the universal. But what about cultural insiders? Are they free of challenges and dilemmas because the culture they depict happens to be their own?

These would appear to be rhetorical questions, except for the fact that many White authors don't consider themselves as having a culture or writing about a culture. But writing from the inside with no awareness that there is an "outside"—and that readers with other experiences and perspectives may pass judgment—does not excuse the writer from these dilemmas. Anyone who writes with publication as a goal has a reader in mind. And for the insider, this is the first dilemma. Does the writer produce work primarily for his or her own community, or for a broader readership?

In an article for *The Writers Chronicle* in fall 2008, Lisa Madsen Rubilar described how a number of authors, from Jon Krakauer to Percival Everett, perceived their readership. Knowing that I had several articles scheduled on outsiders' perspectives, I asked Rubilar—a devout Mormon who expressed many concerns about Krakauer's outsider perspective in *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* and who herself writes fiction about characters struggling with their faith—to focus on the challenges faced by cultural insiders.

Some cultures appear to be more tolerant of their members hanging out dirty laundry for all to see, but even the most open-minded have their limits. And while outsiders may feel the pressure to be reverential, as Hazel Rochman observed in an interview with Nankani, insiders are not immune from those pressures as they face scrutiny from both outsiders and community leaders intent on policing the group's image. In "The Challenges of Writing from the Inside," Rubilar asks two questions from her writer's perspective: "What do I owe myself" and "What do I owe my people?" She offers examples of writers who seek to protect their communities, who pander to their communities' leaders, who exploit their communities, and who grapple with the perception of themselves as "representatives" of their communities.

Rubilar considers the writer as representative to be a myth—defined as a popularly held belief with limited connection to the truth—for writers have complex identities and

Editor-in-Chief
Lyn Miller-Lachmann
mcreview@aol.com

Managing Editor
Deb Goldman

Creative Director
Ed Luiso

Copy Editor
Jane Lerner

Advertising Director
The Goldman Group, Inc.
Deb Goldman
deb@ggpubs.com
813-949-0054

Publisher
The Goldman Group, Inc.
Todd Goldman
todd@ggpubs.com
PO Box 270
Lutz, FL 33559
813-949-0054

African/African-American
Studies Editor
Itibari M. Zulu

Asian/Asian-American Editor
Jennifer L. Wu

Editor's Shelf Editor
Kathryn Mora

Education Editor
Dennis E. Showalter

Fiction Editor
Himilce Novas

Film/Video Editor
Christine McDonald

Internet/Electronic
Products Editor
Frank Alan Bruno

Juvenile Editors
Oralia Garza de Cortés
Ginny Lee
Beverly Slapin

Latina/o Studies Editor
Danilo H. Figueredo

Serials Editor
Pamela M. Salela

belong to multiple communities. The dual concept of myth, as “unfolding part of the world view of a people or explaining a practice or belief” like the mythology of the Greeks, or “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone,” is the subject of Patricia Goldblatt’s essay, “Stories of Longing and Remembrance: The Role of Myth in Making Meaning.” Goldblatt examines two recently published literary novels, *Orpheus Lost* by Janette Turner Hospital and *The Gathering* by Anne Enright. She examines Turner Hospital’s parallel of the Greek myth of Orpheus with the journey of two modern-day lovers who explore their love of music and their families’ roots in violent religious fundamentalism. For *The Gathering*, she examines the other meaning of myth—the idyllic popular view of religion and family that contrasts with her Irish characters’ experience of these institutions as sources of alienation, dysfunction, and abuse.

Teachers and librarians seeking resources for young readers will find much that is useful in “Laissez les Bon Temps Roulez! Recommended Children’s Picture Books on Southern Louisiana and the Gulf Coast Regional Cultures” by Gail Singleton Taylor, Kamala Williams, and Daniel P. Kamienski. The authors offer a basic introduction to Cajun and Creole cultures, distinguishing between the two as well as between the rural and urban manifestations of Cajun life. Following the introduction are nearly three dozen recommended picture books, arranged by topics that include Mardi Gras, African-American stories, and traditional tales. Many of the annotated titles are published by small regional presses and until now have received little attention outside their region. Finally, Taylor, Williams, and Kamienski provide a chart with curriculum tie-ins for each book, additional resources on literature-based activities, and an annotated list of web sites.

Our “Parting Words” for this issue is the first of a two-part series by James C. Jupp, who critiques the field of Critical White Studies from a Mexican and broader international perspective. He argues that Critical White Studies has focused too much on the United States and ignored other forms of privilege and oppression that are not based on race, using Mexico, where he lived for many years, as an example. The second of the series will appear in the summer issue.

This issue features an expanded edition of the *EMIE Bulletin* that consists entirely of the annotated bibliography “Perspectives on Islam.” The impetus for the bibliography grew out of a session by the same name, scheduled during the 2009 American Library Association’s Annual Conference in Chicago. Due to circumstances explained in the introduction to the *EMIE Bulletin*, the session was cancelled at the last minute. EMIERT members and other attendees used the time and the nearly empty room to discuss responses to the cancellation, and a consensus settled on creating an annotated resource list for those who wished to gain a more balanced and nuanced understanding of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim Americans. To

that end, the contributors to the bibliography annotated works by scheduled speakers Marcia Hermansen and Robert Spencer, a selection of other nonfiction for general adult readers, and books for children and teenagers. The “Perspectives on Islam” discussion will continue in the summer issue of the *EMIE Bulletin* with an annotated list of web sites. 🌐



Lyn’s Blog and Web Site

Editor-in-Chief Lyn Miller-Lachmann has a new web site and blog! Please stop by for a visit at <http://web.mac.com/lynml>.

ad index

Curbstone Books	94
Hyperion Books	Back Cover
Random House	16
Raven Tree Press	Inside Back Cover
Rethinking Schools	32
Scholastic	Inside Front Cover
TennisLife Magazine.....	36
VOYA	20