

The Power of the Spoken Word:
Literature in the American Mass Media of the 1990s

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Dedication

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ABSTRACT

The 1990s saw a climax of literature representations in what Ong called the *secondary orality*, particularly in film, television, and radio; for instance, the film industry produced a number of adaptations of novels that had been accepted into the American literary canon, while television and radio marketed literature through book clubs and literary shows. All these literary productions mediated through film, radio, and television are referred to in this study as *mediatized literature*.

The argument of this dissertation is that 1990s U.S. mediatized literature constitutes a post-modern re-enactment of the traditional oral literature that initially emerged on U.S. territory with pre-literate populations. In support of this thesis, chapter 1 presents the features of the oral traditions of four ethnic groups, while subsequent chapters feature an application of these characteristics, or variations thereof, to literary discourses from film, television, and radio. There is a structural correlation between the oral tradition of the four ethnic groups presented in chapter 1 -- Native-American, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian -- and some of the movie adaptations discussed in chapters 2 and 3 that are based on fiction representing the same ethnic groups (*Beloved* for the African-American mediatized literature, *The Mambo Kings* for the Hispanic one, etc.).

While analyzing the features common to both the oral tradition and the mediatized literature, this study makes use of four variables (authorship, audience, literary product, and literary aesthetics) and of a complex critical apparatus that includes theories of the linguistic sign, the Bakhtinian dialogic system, the Jungian concept of the collective unconsciousness, Bolter's concept of remediation, etc.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that, in spite of the Ongian condescension vis-à-vis oral cultural messages as inferior to the written ones, and contrary to Postmanian media apprehensions and Franzenian inertia toward mediatized literature, both oral and mediatized literary messages can be classified as literature, although they may not always follow traditional aesthetic parameters embraced by canonical written literature. Chapter 5 of this dissertation presents some of the major points of the current conversation related to the acceptance of mediatized literature and of the oral tradition into the category of literature and to the complex socio-economic and literary implications of the dissemination of literature through mass media.

Introduction

Traditional Orality and Broadcast Media

After an unprecedented expansion of frontiers, whether they be geographical, scientific, or cultural, the end of the twentieth-century witnessed a resurgence of the concept of village, namely that of a global village. The term has often been used in conjunction with notions of international trade and banking, monetary systems, cross-cultural studies, the need for multi-lingual translators versus the internationalizing of English, and perhaps mostly important, in relation with the reality of a compact media network that facilitates a paramount communication system across nations and continents. The global village notion emerged at the end of an era of building urban centers imbued with a Babel-type of individualistic divisions, of pushing the Western frontier further than California and Alaska into the cosmic space, at the end of an era that saw the anxieties and repressions of Freud and the militantism of Martin Luther King. Mankind, exhausted by the competition-dominated city, yearned for a return to a close-knit community, but for the post-modern society, this type of community could not be but global, a global village.

Stories have been told in this global village, stories meant to dishevel the chronic loneliness of postmodern individuals and to create the illusion, at least, of a compact community, stories that sometimes manipulated the masses to serve the goals of the global village leaders, stories that defended the communal traditions and values and that kept culture alive. As expected in a village, even a global one, a significant part of these stories were told, re-told, and marketed via oral means. In Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a group of

people escape the 1348 Black Death epidemic by taking refuge in the Italian countryside and telling stories. Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury spend their journey through life telling stories in *The Canterbury Tales*. Generations of women gathered in sewing circles and quilting bees to invent and reinvent stories since Colonial times up to Modernity. But at the peak of the twentieth-century civilization, five hundred years after Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, orality comes back, not to replace Gutenberg's legacy, but certainly to play a decisive role in the dissemination of culture and art. As Ruth Finnegan asserts, "The idea that the use of writing automatically deals a death blow to oral literary forms has nothing to support it" (*Oral Poetry* 160).

Walter J. Ong makes a clear distinction between what he calls *primary orality*, the traditional orality of non-literate communities, and *secondary orality*, the modern technological culture built around oral media such as telephone, radio, and television (11). The 1990s saw a climax of literature representations in what Ong called the *secondary orality*, particularly in film, television, and radio; for instance, the film industry produced a number of adaptations of novels that had been accepted into the American literary canon, while television and radio marketed literature through book clubs and literary shows. In this study, I will call all these literary productions mediated through film, radio, and television, *mediatized literature*.

The argument of this dissertation is that mediatized literature in the United States in the 1990s constitutes a post-modern re-enactment of the traditional oral literature that initially emerged on U.S. territory with pre-literate populations. To prove this, I will present the features of the oral traditions of four ethnic groups in chapter 1, and I will apply these features, or variations thereof, to literary discourses featured in film (chapters 2 and 3) and

television and radio (chapter 4). There is a structural correlation between the oral tradition of the four ethnic groups presented in chapter 1 -- Native-American, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian -- and some of the movie adaptations discussed in chapters 2 and 3 that are based on fiction representing the same ethnic groups (*Beloved* for the African-American mediatized literature, *The Mambo Kings* for the Hispanic one, etc.).

I will discuss the features that are common to both the oral tradition and the mediatized literature based on four variables: authorship, audience, literary product, and aesthetic implications. To summarize these shared characteristics, I would like to briefly mention here that both types of literature (oral and mediatized)

- involve multiple authors who are deeply involved with community standards;
- target mass audiences;
- share common inherent features of the literary product – simplified (linear) and subjective narrative patterns, subjective multiple narrators, characters that fit social conventions, recurrent tropes such as the “talking book,” similar components of the linguistic sign, and an affirmation of dialect and bilingualism;
- display production similarities -- they are both performative, enhance dramatic effects, make use of multimedia, and place special emphasis on the setting;
- exhibit transmission affinities, with a complex play on immediacy and manipulation;
- feature similar social functions: sacral, ritualistic, didactic, political, and of cultural preservation and affirmation;
- and lastly, the oral and mediatized literary traditions exercise a strong impact on written literature

These common characteristics of the oral and mediatized literature will be analyzed through the lenses of a complex critical apparatus that includes theories of the linguistic sign, text, and speech-act, the Bakhtinian dialogic system, the Jungian concept of the collective unconsciousness, Bolter's concept of remediation and others, all of which will be presented in this introduction.

Chapter 2 will link film adaptations of the 1990s to the oral tradition in terms of authorship, audience, narrative, and language, whereas chapter 3 will discuss the connection between screen fiction and the oral literature based on elements of plot, character, and socio-political functions. Issues of cultural leadership (authorship), social functions, and transmission modes will resurge in Chapter 4, in which I will present literature mediated through television and radio literary shows, not only as a didactic enterprise, but also as a phenomenon that has a significant economic impact on the literature marketing industry.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that, in spite of the Ongian condescension vis-à-vis oral cultural messages as inferior to the written ones, and contrary to Postmanian media apprehensions and Franzenian inertia toward mediatized literature, both oral and mediatized literary messages can be classified as literature, although they may not always follow traditional aesthetic parameters embraced by canonical written literature. In chapter 5 of my dissertation, I will present some of the major points of the current conversation related to the acceptance of mediatized literature and of the oral tradition into the category of literature, and I will discuss the complex socio-economic and literary implications of the dissemination of literature through mass media.

While existing scholarship acknowledges the impact of the oral tradition on written literature (Brown, Krupat, etc.) and discusses the technical and aesthetic translations of

fiction into film discourse (McLuhan, Seger, Chatman, Tibbetts, etc.), my study attempts to demonstrate that there is a connection between the oral pre-literate tradition and the post-literate mediatized literature. The orality base of the two traditions has been recognized briefly in terms of their transmission vehicle (Ong, McLuhan), but not in relation to the content and structure of literary products as I am proposing in this dissertation. Furthermore, the prior scholarly conversation on this topic has signaled sporadically affinities between the oral tradition and one of the mass media at a time (for instance, McLuhan links radio to tribal rituals, and Diawara talks about the link orality-film in African productions), but this dissertation constitutes the first compact study to incorporate oral tradition features with literature mediated through three mass media (film, television, and radio), operating with tools of critical theories and with applications on literary texts.

The 1990s marked the end of a literary century that was powerfully impacted by the camera, and in which literature became visibly politicized and oriented toward mass audiences more than ever before. In this context, my showing that mediatized literature shares, with impunity, common characteristics with the oral literature, signals a phase in the cultural evolution of mankind in which literature aligns itself to the concept of global village (and thus to an inherent resurgence of orality) and cannot shun anymore its interconnectedness with sophisticated oral means such as film, television, and radio. Mediatized literature, as a twentieth-century form of oral tradition, represents its community in terms of politics, finances, social mores, education, but can and will, undoubtedly, co-exist with printed literature. Therefore, as my study establishes, it is important to accept the mediatized literature as a complement of printed literature (and not as a threat to its existence or value) and as a development that carries cultural potential. If written literature evolved

from the oral tradition, I am looking forward to what mediatized literature might engender in the twenty-first century.

From an Ongian perspective, such anticipation sounds futile. While highlighting the supremacy of literate over oral cultures, Ong seems to hold in low esteem the value of orality: “Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. Nevertheless, without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing” (14-15). However, in the 1990s, the media that Ong would classify as *secondary orality* comes full circle to meet and recreate a new kind of primary orality. Writing stems out of secondary orality productions (for example, novelizations of movies), reversing Ong’s pre-conceived sequence of orality yielding to writing. “Beautiful” verbal performances/creations also emerge during postmodernism as movie adaptations of quality Nobel-Prize writings, such as *Beloved*.

Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez also challenges Ong’s theories: “It is crucial,” she says, “that we do not interpret the orality of American Indian literatures solely in terms of a linear chronological narrative that posits orality as a prior, simpler form that then evolves into a more recent, more developed, and higher form of literature. That was the sort of error made by scholars such as Walter J. Ong (*Orality*) and Albert B. Lord (*Singer*), who privileged the written form by virtue of the textual primacy of our times—a primacy that Ong and Lord very helpfully discuss, but which they do not then use to critique their own preconceptions” (2-3).

Contrary to Ong's position that emphasizes the primacy of writing versus orality, Fahamisha P. Brown shows that with the African-American literary tradition, it is the orality that still impacts the written productions, and not vice-versa:

Negotiating the space between the written page and the oral performance, the African American poet engages the written language in oral terms. Through the use of superallusive mascons and performance modes drawn from vernacular culture, the poet achieves a kind of written orality. Writing in the presence of an implicit community/congregation, the poet writes responses to both oral and written cultural calls; the call-and-response structures are written into the poems themselves. In its language practice and in its performative nature, African American poetry and its making extend vernacular cultural practice. The poetry performs the word. (26)

F. P. Brown further expounds on the judgments of value that scholars and critics shed on orality and written literature. "Orality is not more authentic because it comes first. In fact, we cannot say that orality is more authentic than literacy," writes Brown. "But neither can we say that writing—and its technology, print—is of greater intellectual value because it is an organized system of recording language. [. . .] Yet modern electronic methods of recording the spoken word also lend permanence to language and literature. The complicated relationship between orality and the written/recorded word must be teased out to clarify the nature of orality itself" (27). Brown resolves the oral-written ambivalence by postulating that in fact, African-American cultural productions have an intrinsic dichotomous texture and are prone to both written and oral expressions, hence the term she coins to identify it as "orature" (28).

Writing is a process of objectifying the cultural message, both physically by limiting it to the surface on which the letters are carved or printed, and content-wise, since its transmission becomes less vulnerable to arbitrary variations and thus more reliable and objective. Orality, on the other hand, remains a subjective “event,” as Ong calls it, prone to the subjectivity of its transmitters and performers. “An oral culture has no texts,” says Ong in 1982 (33). But ten years earlier, Fish had gone even further to deny the very existence of text for written productions alike: “The objectivity of the text is an illusion,” postulated Fish in 1972. To the other pole, Bakhtin, along the lines of Saussurian significations and signs, does not seem to be afraid to admit the possibility of defining text even as an utterance with specific components – natural (linguistic, philological) and technical (pronunciation), which is the boldest objectification of oral text attempted by Structuralist critics (“The Problem of the Text” 104-105). Following Saussure’s theories, Bakhtin defines the text as “any coherent complex of signs,” but what reinforces the reality of the oral cultural text is his definition of text as “the unmediated reality (reality of thought and experience)” (“The Problem of the Text” 103). The problematics of text, central to post-structuralism, evolves from the Saussurian “differential relations” to what Krupat defines as a category that encompasses “all systems of signification, properly understood, in the world as well as on the page, spoken as well as written” (“Post-Structuralism” 115), a definition based on Derrida’s theories:

Whether in written or in spoken discourse, no element can function as a sign without relating to another element which itself is not simply present. This linkage means that each “element”—phoneme or grapheme—is constituted with reference to the trace in it of other elements of the sequence or system. This linkage, this weaving, is the *text*, which is produced only through the

transformation of another text. Nothing, either in the elements or in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (qtd. in Culler 99)

But, as Bakhtin argues, the very nature of the word requires that it be “*heard*, always seeks responsive understanding, and does not stop at *immediate* understanding but presses on further and further (indefinitely),” for an understanding which, as he observes, “is always dialogic to some degree” (“The Problem of the Text” 127, 111). If Bakhtin implies the aural organ (the ears) as indispensable in the oral process of language production, Derrida, in his 1981 essay, “Economimesis,” makes references to the human articulation organ (the mouth) as he invokes Kant’s inferences that “the highest form of expression is the spoken, that it says what it expresses, and that it passes through the mouth, a mouth that is self-affecting, since it takes nothing from the outside and takes pleasure in what it puts out” (17).

In addition to the anatomical mechanisms and structures involved in the oral production of language, certain linguistic approaches also dwell on more abstract notions designed to dissect the constitution of the primary unit of language, the linguistic sign. Ferdinand de Saussure, for example, defines the linguistic sign as “a combination of a concept and a sound pattern” (67). However, he warns that this contact between an abstract concept and a material sound “gives rise to a form, not a substance” (111). In 1946, Ludwig Wittgenstein poses a new problem to defining the components of the linguistic sign. Referring to the “disgust” produced by the utterance of “an invented word” like “Esperanto,” he muses that “the word is cold, lacking in associations, and yet it plays at being ‘language.’ A system of purely written signs,” concludes Wittgenstein, “would not disgust us so much” (52e). Hence, the possibility of presuming that an emotional element also adds to the

structure of the Saussurian sign as an almost chemical ingredient that welds the sender-receiver connection during any linguistic act. In fact, Morazé goes so far as to blatantly admit that “signs belonging to the aesthetic universe are, however, directly charged with emotion” (29). To the components of concept (mental image), sound, and emotion, Derrida attaches another mechanical constituent of the linguistic sign, that of the shape of the written letter(s) as he postulates that “there is no linguistic sign before writing” (14). Extrapolating from these definitions of the linguistic sign, we can move toward Jay David Bolter’s daunting contention that “all media are at one level a ‘play of signs,’ which is a lesson we take from poststructuralist literary theory” (19). If all media are a play of signs, then it becomes evident that the linguistic sign transpires into film, television and radio, even as these media operate with mechanical means different from the mere process of uttering or writing. Film and television produce linguistic signs with each image captured in a frame (the conceptual component mentioned by Saussure) but, sometimes, when these media use written text along with images, the mechanical side of the linguistic sign Derrida talks about is also present, such as it is the case with titles in movies that indicate the location and time of action. Radio does the same with every wave vibration perceived as what Saussure calls a “material sound.” Moreover, variations of tone, pitch and volume as well as voice inflections on air carry the emotional load of the linguistic sign that Wittgenstein and Morazé mention.

Now that I have shown that broadcast media operate with linguistic signs (or rather with predominantly the oral component of linguistic signs) as much as oral traditions do, the next step is to explore the criteria that would place complex systems of oral linguistic signs into the category of literature. I will construct a validation of the oral tradition as literature

based on its linguistic richness, its pervasiveness into canon literature, and its social/performative functions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Saussure appears to be more aware of the multifaceted cultural and linguistic interdependences and of the distinctions between writing and a literary phase of orality than Ong is at the end of the same century. “Linguistic unity may disintegrate,” writes Saussure, “when a spoken language undergoes the influence of a literary language. That happens without fail whenever a community reaches a certain level of civilization. By ‘literary language’ is here to be understood not only the language of literature but also in a more general sense every variety of cultivated language, whether official or not, which is at the service of the entire community” (193-4). It is important to note that unlike Ong, when explaining linguistic evolution, Saussure acknowledges the value of oral civilized cultures while clarifying the difference between vernacular and literary language:

The Greeks had their *koinè* or common language, based on Attic and Ionic, with local dialects continuing alongside it. Even in ancient Babylon it is thought to be demonstrable that there was an official language as well as regional dialects.

Does a general language of this kind necessarily presuppose writing? The Homeric poems appear to prove the contrary: for although they emerged at a period when there was little or no writing, their language is conventional and exhibits all the characteristics of a literary language. (194).

It is therefore the language that should determine the quality of discourse, not the medium (oral or written) that carries it. “We are struggling with language,” said Ludwig

Wittgenstein in 1931. “We are engaged in a struggle with language” (11e). But scholars also engage in debates over what they should call particular manifestations of language. On the one hand, Ong, for instance, challenges the term *oral literature* as a clumsy scholarly oxymoron since *literature* implies *writing*, originating in the Latin *literatura* from *littera*, letter of the alphabet (11). “Thinking of oral tradition or a heritage of oral performance, genres and styles as ‘oral literature’ is rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels,” writes Ong (12). On the other hand, Arnold Krupat analyzes the signification of the term “literature” in the context of the ambivalence between the Euramerican men of letters who produced a culture of letters (literature), which justifies Ong’s argument, and the Native American “children of nature” who perpetuated an oral culture without letters (*Voice* 97). On the same line, when Tzvetan Todorov¹ supports Valéry’s theory that “literature is, and can be nothing other than, a kind of extension and application of certain properties of Language” (125), he leaves open endless avenues of defining literature, including through acts of oral language. In fact, Todorov’s defines a literary work as “a verbal work of art” (125).

Language, whether in oral or written form, bears an inherent aesthetic significance. Given the infinite possibilities of words combinations and the individual and ethnic variations of linguistic productions, it becomes obvious that “language arises from man’s need to express himself, to objectify himself,” as Mikhail Bakhtin affirms. As a linguist and aesthetician, Bakhtin contends that “the essence of any form of language is somehow reduced to the spiritual creativity of the individuum” (“The Problem of Speech” 67). Ralph Waldo Emerson in “The Poet” best expresses the ancestral creative potential of language when he says that “Language is fossil poetry” (qtd. in Brown, Fahamisha 7). Fahamisha Brown goes

further to argue that “poetry is oral in its origins, originally composed to be sung or chanted to musical accompaniment” (7).

For Walt Whitman, the initiator of American Romanticism, the definition of poet and American was weaved on the texture of orality; in his “Song of Myself,” his numerous references to *tongues, songs, chant*, and to himself as a “singer” and “bard,” stand as evidence of his acknowledgement of orality as a source of his genius (Portelli 129). The value of orally transmitted culture has been acknowledged in recent scholarly works, such as Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez’s 1999 monograph, *Contemporary American Indian Literatures & the Oral Tradition*, in which the author clearly asserts that “storytelling is foundational to [. . .] all literatures” (1); Gretchen Bataille, who remarks that “contemporary writers, although writing in English and in western genres—the novel and the poem—derive much of their power from the oral literary tradition” (17); and Rodney Simard, a Cherokee, who points out that oral literature “still is the basis for *all* literatures, and it is no less distinguished because of its orality” (247).

One consideration, which will further support the argument of this study, is that the more oral elements a literary work comprises, the more prone it becomes to film or stage adaptations and to radio readings. (For illustrations, see the comparisons between novels and their screen adaptation in chapters 2 and 3.) Imagist poetry, for instance, indicates on the one hand a conceptual borrowing from oral traditions, as Andrew Wiget suggests that “the Imagist poets of the twenties were quick to embrace what they viewed as the poetically compressed and fundamentally metaphorical nature of American Indian oral literature” (“Native American” 13), while on the other hand, the snapshot quality of the Imagist poems stands under the impact of cinematic brevity and collage.

Oral practices and techniques have obviously penetrated classic literature. Gayl Jones confirms the indebtedness of written literature to orality when she asserts that “imaginative literature [. . .] deliberately derives its themes, language, design, and vision from oral literature” (2). “By the time he sat down to write *Typee*,” writes Kevin J. Hayes about Melville, “he had rehearsed the story of his adventures orally so many times that it hardly seems unusual that the written version frequently gives the impression of an oral tale” (53). Melville’s sea voyages offered him ample opportunities to audit and practice storytelling as well as numerous versions of ballads, sea shanties (working songs for sailors), and whaling songs. Richard Tobias Greene mentions such experiences in a letter to Melville: “My mind often reverts to the many pleasant moonlight watches we passed together on the deck of the ‘Acushnet’ as we whiled away the hours with yarn and song till ‘eight bells’” (qtd. in Hayes 13). Insertions of these contacts with oral folklore abound in Melville’s writings from Tommo’s performance of a stanza from “The Bavarian Broomseller” in *Typee*, to *Julia*’s crew singing windlass songs in *Omoo*, White Jacket’s interest in the *Negro Singers Own Song Book*, and from the French song that changes into a funeral dirge when Hunilla becomes widowed in “Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow” (a sketch of “The Encantadas”) to the “Nantucket Song” in *Moby Dick*. Melville’s gusto to incorporate oral literature samples into his prose allowed him to diversify his narrative voices, but also revealed his deep appreciation for folklore. Kevin J. Hayes thinks that “linking a work of oral literature [“Nantucket Song”] to the literary classics [Bacon, Montaigne, Milton, Pope, Rabelais, Shakespeare]” in *Moby Dick* was not accidental, but “a way of stressing the importance of the sailor’s voice,” and thus a recognition of the value of collective, anonymous literary productions often transmitted orally such as it is the case with sailors’ folklore (20).

Furthermore, Hayes detects elements of the typical oral tall tale in White Jacket's discourse, such as the reinforcement of "the identity of a folk group" but also the initiation of outsiders (51).

Marc Chénétier sees ramifications of the oral literature into the end-of-the-century American literature. "Of the American oral tradition," he says, "and particularly of the tall tale, from the incredible stories that weave their popular canvas with exaggerations and larger-than-life inventions, the bragging of Davy Crockett and Sut Lovingood, to the testimony of Mark Twain, contemporary writers have retained more than the thematic distancing from the real" (248). In Larry Brown's post-modern novel, *Dirty Work*, Braiden, the black Vietnam survivor who spends his last days on a hospital bed, deprived of both arms and legs, "takes trips in his mind" that catapult him back to a prehistoric time, "about three hundred years ago," and allow him to assume another identity: "If I'd lived in Africa and had me a son and was a king in my own country" (1). The initiation dialogue he makes up with his presumed son echoes incantatory rhythms and places him in a cultural system which equates the first hunting success with sexual coming of age and respectively hunting failure with castration:

You listen to me now. When I was your age I went out and killed me a lion.

[. . .] You gonna have to stick you one before you ever get you any of these maidens.

[. . .] Well what if I don't?

[. . .] They gonna take you out yonder and put you in that little kraal and make a woman out of you. (2-3)

Brown intermingles pieces of Braiden's projections of tribal life with his recollections of his hunting time with his father and his coming of age when he had to fight a bully to defend his family's honor. Braiden resorts to "mind trips" not only to escape his unbearable condition, but also to construct a future with a son and a community where there are no racial differences and he is respected. "Well y'all come on over about dark, then," he tells the people of his tribe. "We'll build us up a big fire and do some dancing around it and all. My son gonna kill him his first lion in a few days and we gonna have a few manhood rites for him" (56).

It is precisely the enactment of such rites and implicitly the social functions of oral texts that qualify them as literature according to some of the existing scholarship. To the question "How can that which is unwritten, that is without letters, be called literature?" (Wiget, "Native American" 3), Simon J. Ortiz, in his *Woven Stone*, offers an answer, or rather a definition of oral tradition that includes social functions:

The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people. (7)

Paula Gunn Allen takes the social implications of the oral tradition to a higher level when she associates the presence of archetypes with the concept of literature:

Literature reflects the deepest meanings of a community. It does this by carrying forward archetypes through the agency of familiar symbols arranged within a meaningful structure. It is the sequence in which the archetypes

occur which allows the depth we customarily associate with literature, just as it is the accretion of meaning created by this structuring which gives a sense of wholeness and immediacy to the work” (565).

Along the same lines, it is interesting to note that Ong acknowledges the social and sacral functions of the oral productions and asserts that based on the *dynamics* of “all sound, and especially oral utterance, which comes from inside living organisms,” the oral communities “consider words to have magical potency” (32). The arguments Ong uses to support this point all stem from religious traditions: the power conferred to Adam in the garden of Eden to name the animals (Genesis 2:20), the very act of Divine creation that set things into existence through the utterance of commands (Genesis, chapter 1), the incarnation of God through His Son, the Word (John 1:1, etc.). The sacral load of language in a mythical context surges in Native American legends with Wesucechak, a mythical figure in oral Cree tradition, who has the ability to turn into various animals and humans, whose fate is to endlessly wander, and who functions on a paradigm that seems to exclude memory. In the summer of 1977, during his travels through the Sipiwesk Lake region of Manitoba, Howard Norman hears an original version of a Wesucechak story from his guide, John Rains, a forty-seven-year-old Cree man: “This is about Wesucechack. He was out thieving things. He was thieving words this time. He’d been doing this for a long time, since long ago. People have to work hard to get the words back” (403). Does this make Wesucechak a prototype of the Anglo colonizer or of the Indian who turned white and denied his linguistic heritage? Closely linked to this story there are others, like “Wesucechak Learns About Double-Shout Lake,” in which Wesucechak “forces on someone a linguistic amnesia, makes that person forget an animal’s name” (Norman 404), or “Wesucechak Steals Who-Crawls-Through-Dusk,” in

which he can “make a person stutter, or confuse and frustrate a speaker with obnoxious interruptions, or make a person mute” (Norman 405). To place these legends into the appropriate literary and historical context, it is useful to consider Ernst Cassirer’s contentions:

The original bond between the linguistic and the mytho-religious consciousness is primarily expressed in the fact that all verbal structures appear as also mythical entities, endowed with certain mythical powers, that the Word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force, in which all being and doing originate. (44)

The trauma of losing the “words” of the oral tradition dialects to the language of the colonizers will be purged through the orality of the mediatized literature, especially movie adaptations, that foster, in the 1990s, a revival of old dialects and promote bilingualism (see chapter 2).

Charles Morazé brings this discussion of the power of the spoken word into the realm of twentieth-century political power games: “Mathematical, literary, poetic, or aesthetic invention is situated in a wider framework: the entire universe of action. When the President of the United States or the President of France wishes to launch a new policy, he uses words. Men of action like men of the business world begin with words” (31). At the other pole, Alessandro Portelli, although appreciative of the impact of orality on classic American literature, explains that oral traditions in North America belonged mainly to Native Americans and other minorities who did not have literacy readily available; the Founding Fathers, however, came to the New World already literate, and built this nation on written texts: the Scriptures, the Mayflower Compact, and later the Declaration of Independence and

the Constitution (27-29). In fact, Paula Gunn Allen proposes that the credibility and recognition associated with written works (as opposed to oral ones) is due to the fact that the Western civilization, built on the Judeo-Christian religion, holds in high esteem the Written Word, the Bible, who happens to be one of the first manuscripts that found their way in print, an argument that seems rather far-fetched since it generalizes the preeminence of written over oral texts to the whole Western culture (569).

Aside from assessments of the primacy of utterances, actions, or written words, there remains the contention that language will always trigger action. Fahamisha Patricia Brown points out that “in the sense of a speech act, the word itself has power. The word makes action possible, even necessary” (16). In 1937, Wittgenstein postulated that “the origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop” (31e). In the same context, quoting from Goethe’s *Faust*, Part I, he defined language as a natural product of action: “Language – I want to say – is a refinement, ‘in the beginning was the deed’” (31e). Or it is precisely “the deed” that both the oral tradition and the screen adaptations of the 1990s emphasize.

Action often ensues as an effect of oral cultural texts through an emotional manipulation of the audience. To understand the connection between the oral tradition and the mediatized literature of the nineties, it is useful to consider the speech-act theory, promulgated by J. L. Austin, John R. Searle, and H. P. Grice, a system that classifies the speech acts into three main categories: *locutionary acts*, which produce an utterance; *illocutionary acts* that establish an interactive setting between speaker and listener; and *perlocutionary acts*, intended to produce certain effects in the hearer, such as fear, courage, etc. (Ong 170). As far as locutionary acts go, there is evidence that they exist in the oral

tradition in the form of unintelligible utterances, that have, nonetheless, encoded meanings. While assuring that ritual utterances perform a function of “reaffirmation of social cohesion,” Hayakawa explains that such oral expressions may be made up of “words that have symbolic significance” or of “meaningless syllables” or noises, which, nonetheless, are understood by the members of the group who produces and perpetuates them (83). Illocutionary and perlocutionary acts engage the audience’s emotions and their involvement with the setting both in theatrical and broadcasting performances as much as they do in the oral tradition. In this context, I cannot but agree with the structuralist discourse which “presumes that the circulation of a work of a particular kind is sustained because the work reflects the interests of the audience which sanctions the circulation” (Wiget “Native American” 9).

In the oral tradition, the deed or action refers not only to the effects of the text on the community, but also to the very process of enacting the message, of performing it. Since oral productions involve more media than the written ones—they are a combination of choreography, music, images, objects, text--, I can affirm that orality is more complex than the written tradition, but it is also structurally and methodologically closer to our contemporary radio, television, and movie productions since it involves extensive use of multimedia.

As Sam D. Gill suggests in his 1982 monograph, *Native American Religions: An Introduction*, all “stories have performative significance” (qtd. in Morrison, Kenneth 125). Dance and song, for instance, “become meaningful text” (Morrison, Kenneth 127). But in a study conducted by Alan P. Merriam among the Flathead Indians in 1967, of the 226 songs he recorded during one field session, “216 songs had texts of non-translatable nonsense

syllables” (32). In this case, it is the ritualistic and not the connotative function of language that these cultural discourses emphasize.

Ritualistic performances were not limited to oral cultures in Colonial America, but took place, in often disguised forms of manifestations, also within the Puritan communities. Portelli’s argument that the American Founding Fathers stressed the primacy of the written text develops not only on the religious and the political significance of texts such as the Bible and the Declaration of Independence, but also on the historical records of the Maypole incident, a defining Puritan rejection of theater or performance as pagan, idolatrous practices. However, Anthony Kubiak launches the theory of “interiorized theaters of American Puritanism” (53), and he suggests that through their diaries, the Puritans constructed a system of self-surveillance, and thus enacted “a theater of the mind” (29). Moreover, with a rigorous system of self-observation and self-correction, Kubiak demonstrates, “the Puritans staged an interiorized surveillance and later enacted that script in the exteriorized performances of salvation, making visible and visual what had been seemingly hidden, creating an excess (in sanctimonious behavior, possession by the Spirit, etc.) or ‘surplus value’ through theater” (55). Even John’s Winthrop’s address in which he warned the Pilgrims that “the eyes of all people are upon us” (qtd. in Kubiak 37) indicates an engagement in a global performance, an engagement that has grown to super-power proportions for the United States in the era of the post-modern global village. Kubiak, similarly to Morazé, translates the active power of Colonial utterances and performances into a twentieth-century socio-political catalyst. “It is not hard to imagine the Puritan penchant for observation and orchestration eventually mutating in other arenas of American society into an obsession for the spectacle,” writes Kubiak (49).

It would be interesting to link Kubiak's theory of the Puritanical theater as "a condition of consciousness" (32) and "the unconscious as mis-en-scène" (43) to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. If "words are the only material of the unconscious"² (Lacan 187) and the literary invention is a process controlled by the unconscious³ (Morazé 23), a "sudden illumination" that takes place as a result of brain activity (Morazé 26), then I can conclude that the imagination, as residence of both the consciousness and the unconsciousness, should be credited for the birth of oral performative productions. Scott N. Momaday correlates the identity-preserving function of oral productions with the tantamount creative force of imagination when he asserts that "We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined" (103).

Going back to the consciousness and unconsciousness as elements of the imagination, and inherently of oral literary productions, it is noteworthy to remark that while Freud limited the concept of unconscious to "denoting the state of repressed or forgotten contents" of an individual, Jung took the concept of the unconscious to a larger scale, that of the individual as repository of a collective unconscious made up of archetypes (such as the shadow, the anima, and the wise old man) and materialized in myths, fairytales, and other folkloric productions (Jung "Archetypes" 3-5). Jung explains the birth of collective (and mainly oral) stories as a processing of the outer natural phenomena by the unconscious psyche of any representative of a given community ("Archetypes" 6). Here is how Jung sees the hereditary transmission of such a collective psyche: "In so far as no man is born totally new," writes Jung, "but continually repeats the stage of development last reached by the

species, he contains unconsciously, as an *a priori* datum, the entire psychic structure developed both upwards and downwards by his ancestors in the course of the ages. That is what gives the unconscious its characteristic ‘historical’ aspect, but it is at the same time the sine qua non for shaping the future” (“Conscious” 279-80). Thus, it becomes clear that “the psyche contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths” and that “inner drama” always precedes oral performances (“Archetypes” 7). Since Jung maintains that it is always “necessary to integrate the unconscious into consciousness” through what he calls “the individuation process,” I can extrapolate to assert that a process of individuation always takes place in the performance and transmission of oral culture. What came from a remote mythical unconscious source, through what Jung calls the “heredity” of the psyche (“Concept” 42), becomes part of the consciousness of the performer who individuates or appropriates the cultural text and then transmits it to the community thus perpetuating its collective individuation into the consciousness of the members of his/her audience.

What most New Critics would have obviously rejected in Jung’s theories of the authorial unconscious is the philosopher’s contention that “the autonomy of the unconscious therefore begins where emotions are generated” (“Conscious” 278). An autonomous unconscious that is fueled by emotional vehicles to create art seems to be what modernists and post-modernists alike have been, unsuccessfully, attempting to do away with. But if I hold true the Jungian statement that “the unconscious produces dreams, visions, fantasies, emotions, grotesque ideas” (“Conscious” 283), then it is easy to recognize all these products of the unconscious in the folkloric heritage and even in the Modernists’ fascination with the grotesque and in the post-modern magical realism. Moreover, the twentieth-century writers’ neurotic experiences, materialized in their mediatized (or not) works, come to confirm

Freud's theory that once people try to suppress the unconscious, as the modern artists have striven to strip their creations of emotion which is, as shown above, a key ingredient of the unconscious, this unconscious, which is "life," will explode or implode in neurosis ("Conscious" 288). An extensive analysis of 1990s representative fiction works mediated through film will elaborate in Chapter 3, especially in the section "Psychological Issues," on this connection between the repression of the unconscious and intense post-traumatic effects.

In the context of memory selectiveness and of the means through which the unconscious deals with trauma, it is debatable to what extent the oral productions are homeostatic, as Ong argues. Homeostasis represents, according to the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, "a relatively stable state of equilibrium or a tendency toward such a state between the different but interdependent elements or groups of elements of an organism, population, or group" (555). Ong contends that this homeostatic feature builds on the oral societies' preference to "live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium [. . .] by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance" (46). As it will be shown in chapter 3, oral traditions that spilled into post-modern ethnic fiction still feature retellings of traumatic events that happened in the course of history, sometimes as part of a tendency to recreate the past, which indicates, contrary to homeostasis, a focus, indeed very unpragmatic, on the past, and a strong drive to escape the present (see the characters in Sherman's Alexie's novel *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*). With the advent of mass media, which closes the circle of orality in the history of cultural development, the consciousness functions "as the interiorized reflection of the current standards of technical media" (Kittler 61). For instance, tape or electronic text become the memory/consciousness from which new productions (movies, TV and radio shows) grow.

Oral literature emerged at the confluence of traditional forms and innovations and remained a blender of social, cultural, and political values. If “consciousness is power,” as Judith Fetterley remarks (995), then oral literature, a container of collective consciousness, irradiates a power of cultural survival and enrichment. “Native Americans told stories to empower survival,” writes K. Morrison (128). Changes in the choreography and the commercialization of Indian dances stand as evidence of the strong Indian cultural vein which struggles to preserve its identity flowing through an ocean of socio-cultural colonial pressures. As Alan Merriam notes, the Flathead Indians acknowledged the fact that many marriage and war rituals and dances ceased to serve communal purposes for twentieth-century Native Americans, but to keep these traditions alive as part of their cultural identity, they allowed choreographic and ethnographic innovations and additions to these traditions so that they can market them for a mainly white audience (156). While asserting that the Flathead Indians remain so in spite of the historical changes, Merriam points out that their music serves solid identity functions: to relive the past, to relieve psychological tension, and to reinforce the social integration of the group (158).

Reenacting the psycho-social patrimony of the community constitutes another major function of oral productions. Toelken points out that “a large part of the live meaning of folklore (as opposed to its theoretical – for example, its structural – dimensions) lies in the specific circumstances in which a folk expression or event actually takes place” (33). He identifies several contexts which may combine in the creation and (re)production of a folkloric piece: the immediate *human* context of performance, the *social* context (ethnic, religious, familial), the *cultural-psychological* context (linguistic codes and traditional

assumptions), the *physical* context (geographical location), and the *time* context, the *occasion* on which the folk event takes place (36).

The roles of oral literature entail not only the preservation, but also the reaffirmation of a developing historical and cultural identity. “Written history thinks at the world; myth provides a way of experiencing,” and thus recreating the world and the history (Morrison, Kenneth 126). Native American spiritual leaders, such as the Iroquois Hiawatha—who persuaded his people to abolish the law of revenge and invented a healing ritual for the grieving families—and Handsome Lake, who delivered a message of hope for the growingly dysfunctional Iroquois families forced to adapt to an American lifestyle, replaced the old traditions and “produced a new cultural text” (Morrison, Kenneth 126). The literature of the 1990s and inherently the movies it inspired will take over all these social functions of oral tradition. Chapter 3 will elaborate on the socio-political, psychological and erotic rituals enacted in several representative screen adaptations produced in the 1990s in the United States, while chapter 4 will re-define hosts of literary shows as cultural leaders (prescribers and preservers of literature).

One last theoretical frame would be instrumental in understanding the characteristics of oral culture and their similarity to twentieth-century literary media productions, and that would be the Bakhtinian system of dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony, carnivalization, and hybridization. Although tailored for the novelistic discourse, these concepts perfectly fit oral literature as much as camera-mediated and radio-broadcast literary discourse. The Russian critic places particular emphasis on what he calls “the internal dialogization,” which, he holds as capable of “becom[ing] such a crucial force for creating form only where individual differences and contradictions are enriched by social heteroglossia” (“Discourse” 284).

Bakhtin's dialogic discourse concept, which involves the language of the Other, illustrates processes of cultural dialogue or a clash present in both the oral tradition and the media-constructed fiction of the 1990s. Arnold Krupat points out that "Indian autobiographies are quite literally dialogic" in that they foster cross-cultural influences--Indian oral authors and white writers and audiences intermingle their cultural systems (133). Moreover, in oral literature, the author/performer represents the incarnation of what I may call "the collective consciousness," and implicitly both a reservoir and catalyst of an ethnic heteroglossia as he emerges as a link between generations, and engages in a creative dialogue with past, present, and future audiences. With the flourishing of ethnic literature in the 1990s in the United States and with the opening of the profession of writing to professionals from other fields (medicine, law), an increasing number of diverse voices have engaged in a cultural and political dialogue (see Chapter 2 for an in-depth analysis of authorial voices involved in a heteroglossic literary discourse).

Heteroglossia (*raznorecie* in Russian, literally meaning "the word of another") refers to the variation of meaning of the same word or linguistic unit based on social or historical contexts and implies that the meaning of language is socially determined. "Literary language—both spoken and written," remarks Bakhtin, "is itself stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system, that is in the forms that carry its meaning" ("Discourse 288). While discussing heteroglossia in the context of the novel, Bakhtin exemplifies it with the incorporation into the literary work of "verbal-ideological belief systems," "socio-ideological belief systems," various types of character's speech predicated on individual belief and social systems, and "incorporated genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra-artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly,

religious genres and others)” (“Discourse” 311, 315, 316, 320). Krupat notes that “For Bakhtin, human language is, as he calls it, heteroglossic and polyvocal, the speech of each individual enabled and circumscribed not so much by language as a *system* (hence Bakhtin’s difference from Saussurian structural linguistics and its fascination with *langue*), as by the actual speech of other individuals” (135-36).

Deriving from a pre-existing heteroglossic context, the quality of polyphony reflects the extent to which the community sanctions certain voices to participate in the socio-political or religious discourse. Polyphony may be restricted by social roles in oral societies, in which certain rituals are assigned to select members, and by ethical, moral, or legal standards in the United States at the end of the twentieth century. For instance, for personal security or political correctness reasons, the Vietnamese-American writer Le Ly Hayslip and later director Oliver Stone render the story of her life within parameters that would not be liable to accusations from either Vietnamese or American governments. What happens in this case, as much as in other U.S. ethnic literature pieces of the 1990s, constitutes largely a process that Bakhtin calls hybridization, namely “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor” (“Discourse” 358). Active in twentieth-century reenactments of oral traditions (such as Sherman Alexie’s stories in *The Lone Ranger*), hybridization implies in literature not only a merger of two languages but also of two ethnicities. The daughters generation in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, Lieutenant Dunbar in Michael Blake’s *Dances With Wolves* and a whole other host of characters display features of cultural hybridization.

Carnivalization, another Bakhtinian concept, implies a mixing of voices and parody, and traces its roots back to pre-Christian Greece and Rome and then to the Middle Ages Lenten celebrations as a way of endorsing Dionysian manifestations (Kaufmann 13). While in the oral tradition, carnivalization occurs with the trope of the trickster and other mythical characters who assume human features, in the mediatized literature of the 1990s, characters often disclose various masks of their traumas or forbidden desires in several in progressive, repetitious, often circular, and unchronological phases (see chapter 3, the section “Psychological Issues”).

As “a vehicle of cultural expressivity and expression” (F. P. Brown 28), the literature of oral societies is what is “worthy of sufficient repetition” (Krupat 39). But repetition with oral texts always involves a process of recreation. James Ruppert observes that “the multiple encoding that exists in oral transmission is almost impossible to duplicate” (107). Duplication, impossible to achieve in oral literature, is also unfeasible in broadcast media. In both cases, there is a translation from one medium to another during the performance--memory to voice in oral tradition, and print to screen or radio waves in broadcasting and film--a process hinted at by Marshall McLuhan who remarks that “the ‘content of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph” (23-24). In 1999, Bolter calls such a “representation of one medium in another” *remediation* (45), a term that implies a means of repeating or recreating the medium into another, but also a process of correction, revising and eventually betterment. Remediation, or this process of translation of the text from one medium to another, is also responsible for differences in the presentation and approaches of the oral and respectively mediated literature.

Chapter One

An Overview of the Oral Literature of Ethnic Groups in the United States

1. 1. The Native American Oral Tradition

Although North American tribes had a history of making “pictographic accounts of rituals and important events,” and the Maya of Mesoamerica “preserved their sacred literature in books,” most Native American tribes on today’s U.S. territory transmitted their literature orally (LaVonne 145). It is interesting to note that multimedia use was an established fact among the Delawares, for instance, particularly in the Wallamolum chronicle. As Alexander Vaschenko notes, “the Wallamolum tradition is preserved in two media, consisting of 183 pictographs, originally painted in red on wooden sticks [. . .], each accompanied by a verse in the Delaware language which textualized the traditional interpretation of the pictograph” (92). This combination of text and graphics present with the Wallamolum tradition constitutes a striking anticipation of the same multimedia usage with end-of-the-century movie adaptations and television literary shows.

In terms of production, as Wiget emphasizes in his studies, Native Americans produced oral literature in various forms: performance, ceremonial rituals, poetry, song, dances, stories of creation, myths sometimes extended to epic proportions, genealogies and migration records, recitations – verbatim incantations with didactic role, parables (metasocial commentary), elders conferences (oratory and political speeches)⁴. While the performative aspects of such oral productions will be re-enacted in the mediatized literature, the 1990

literature in mass media will also play on the didactics, and political rhetorics mentioned by Wiget.

Some of the conventional narrative structures that Wiget identifies for the Native American oral literature can be easily recognized throughout other ethnic oral traditions in the United States: verbal framing (opening and closing formulas), songs, initial particles that mark sections breaks, vocalization (changes in pitch, tone, etc.), special vocabulary (that suits specific characters or genres), repetition, and formulaic expressions (“Native American” 12). Berry also indicates that most Native American oral productions feature “a linear chronological narrative” (Berry 2).

In terms of genres, a great number of Native American autobiographies were either written by literate Native Americans or dictated, the so-called “as-told-to” autobiographies, like that of Black Hawk. However, authorship became collective when the writer and the translator pitched in, such as it was the case with Black Hawk’s autobiography, written by John Patterson, a newspaper editor who heard the story through the translator Antoine LeClair (Wiget “Chapter 3: The Beginnings”). Surprisingly, the number of “as-told-to” Native American autobiographies peaked in the 1930s (Wiget “Chapter 3: The Beginnings”), a time when other oral media (television, radio, film) were also gaining momentum.

Poetry, as much as autobiographies and sermons or speeches, found oral expression means even when writing was an available tool for Native American artists. For instance, at the end of the nineteenth century, the poet E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) born in Canada as the daughter of the chief of the Mohawk nation toured Canada, England, and the United States, reading her poetry. Aimed for oral performance, her writings display melodramatic narrative features and abound in dialogues and rhythmic action (Wiget

“Chapter 3: The Beginnings”). Lyrical prose, such as *Beloved*, will translate into a movie adaptation, in the 1990s, that will gain performative strength, in the way of Johnson’s poetry performances, but will also swing on the melodramatic to appeal to a wider category of viewers.

In addition to the genres elaborated above, it is worth mentioning a motif in Native American oral tradition that closely relates to the Jungian theories presented earlier in the Introduction of this study, namely the figure of the trickster in Native American oral tradition, also “translated” into *coyote* in the Anglo imagination, “and which assumes a variety of masks and personae,” trespassing the human/animal boundaries, evolving or regressing between fool and hero, and negotiating change and survival (Babcock 99-100). The trickster’s shape-shifting abilities inspired Jung to compare it to the tradition of the European tradition of the carnival in the medieval Church and to other European literary heroes like Tom Thumb, Stupid Hans, Hanswurst, or “Spirit Mercurius,” a character created by the Grimm brothers (“On the Psychology” 255). What is mostly notable in Jung’s analysis of the trickster is this character’s universality that claims its collective identity and perpetuation in the Jungian context of the archetypes of the collective unconscious:

The trickster is a collective shadow figure, a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually. Not always, of course, as a mythological figure, but, in consequence of the increasing repression and neglect of the original mythologems, as a corresponding projection on other social groups and nations. (“On the Psychology” 270)

The social and linguistic versatility of the trickster may very well be applied to characters that negotiate across multilingual and multicultural environments in movie adaptations such as *Heaven and Earth* or *The Joy Luck Club* that will be discussed in chapter 3, but it also becomes a trope highly attributable to the hosts of literary radio and television shows (see chapter 4).

Oral literature was not only produced through repeated performance variants by the whole Native American community, but it was also a shared and therefore common property of all its members. Authorship rights (or copyright!) became an issue only when certain songs, “articulating personal sources of spirit power acquired in dreams,” could be sold and bought as personal property (Wiget “Native American” 13). While also assuming authorship of the oral literature, the community reserved the right to regulate the selection of performers based on gender, age, social status and to establish the criteria of credibility and veracity and the means of creating and sustaining audience rapport (Wiget “Native American” 14). As shown in chapters 2 and 4, the performance of literature in mass media will also be entrusted to multiple authors (directors, actors, shows hosts) whose competence is socially and financially validated.

As with other ethnic oral traditions, socio-political goals characterize the Native American oral productions. The texts are not evaluated based on their aesthetic quality, but on their efficiency in enacting their social role. For example, the Flathead Indians do not “conceptualize their music in such a way as to allow for technical discussions of formal structure” (Merriam 41). However, the presence of a coda in the last phrase of some songs indicates that such songs were borrowed, which signals evidence of the community’s relations with other tribes (Merriam 41). On the same line, Joseph Bruchac notes that “many

oral traditions of Native America—such as the Iroquois story of the founding of the Great League of Peace—are deeply political. [. . .] American Indian writers maintain that traditional respect for the power of the word and the ‘political’ role of the artist” (315). In the 1990s, most writers exercise their political role when their fiction entails struggles of civil rights (Paul Matthiessen, Toni Morrison), but the directors who adapt for the screen highly political novels during this decade maintain a neutral tone, so the orality of the cinema often presents a diluted political message (see chapter 3, the section “Socio-Political Aspects”).

Colonial tensions constitute one of the major political issues that develop within the oral and written Native American literature. Under colonization pressure, the Native American artists either exacerbate their identity preservation drives into a complete rejection of the white culture or, on the contrary, fall into a denial of their ethnic affiliation. To illustrate the first category, it is useful to take a look at representations of the whites in Native American oral tradition. According to Jarold Ramsey, “the imaging of whites in traditional stories is [. . .] full of a sense of Anglo otherness” (139). The representation of the white in oral Native American stories ranges from the prototype of “the long-lost brother” (139) to “villains and fools” (141). Attempts to trace back common genealogies, and thus affirm a natural brotherhood with the Other White, surfaced in myths such as the one related by Sara Winnemucca:

So the light girl and boy disappeared, and their parents saw them no more...And by and by, the dark children grew into a large nation, and we believe it is the one we belong to, and that the nation that sprang from the white children will some time send someone to meet us and heal all the old trouble. (6-7)

On the other hand, aversion toward the malice of the whites reflects in reversed Genesis myths—such as it was the version of a Northern Paiute, who held that “Eden was made for the Indians, but a white man in the form of a rattlesnake got into the apple tree and has kept Indians out of Paradise ever since” (Ramsey 141)—and in the failure to find any ways of artistic expression in the language of the colonizers. As Andrew Wiget observes, some poets, as early as the end of the nineteenth century, “like the Creek poet Alex Posey, must certainly have experienced a tension deriving from the attempt to accommodate native conceptions to an alien language and verse forms” (“Chapter 3: The Beginnings”). Posey went so far as to assert that “the Indian talks in poetry...but in attempting to write in English he is handicapped” (qtd. in Connelley 62). In some cases, bilingualism seemed to be a colonial tension reliever. As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first native and bilingual newspaper, *Phoenix*, founded and edited by Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee, featured elements of Native American traditions and literature while abiding by a nineteenth-century tradition of Native American non-fiction writings such as political protests, autobiographies, and ethno-biographies (Wiget “Chapter 3: The Beginnings”). The fact that *Phoenix* emerged as a bilingual publication indicates that Boudinot envisioned the Indian identity as linked to the culture and language of the Anglo colonizers, or at least that he intended to initiate a cross-cultural dialogue.

Another colonial phenomenon was that Native American writers who were literate like William Apes, a Pequot nineteenth-century autobiography author, alienated themselves from their native culture through the very education that enabled them to represent it in writing (Wiget, “Chapter 3: The Beginnings”). For oral aboriginal cultures colonized by European nations, creating a written literature in the language of the colonizers became

inevitable. However, Joseph Bruchac asserts the singular distinctiveness of Native American literature as one of the world literatures written in English, but carrying its own separate identity, as much as it is the case with Native Indian literatures in other colonizing languages (Spanish, Portuguese) which did not dent their cultural identity (322).

Since “the dramatic immediacy of Native American discourse” remains rooted “in a consciousness very different from that of the West” (Krupat *Voice* 98), and because of the ethnic individuality that Native American productions maintained even when they appeared in English, Native American literature or compilations thereof were for a long time appreciated for their anthropological value, but “not as an important part of American literature” (Bruchac 312). Arnold Krupat’s monograph, *The Voice in the Margin* is one of the most succinct and informative overviews of the ways in which the WASP populations of America perceived Native American oral manifestations:

The first invader-settlers of America responded to the verbal productions of Native orality as a satanic or bestial gibberish that, unmarked in letters nor bound in books, could never be thought to constitute a littera-*ture*. John Elliot translated the Bible into Algonquian language in the seventeenth century, but the Puritans did not inscribe the wicked or animal noise of Native song or story. The scientist-revolutionaries of the eighteenth century were more interested in Indian cultural activity than were their Puritan forbears and made efforts to describe, catalogue, and subdue its various manifestations—just as they did with other natural phenomena like lightning or steam pressure. [. . .] In the Romantic nineteenth century, littera-*ture* came to mean not simply the written culture generally but a selection form it of imaginative and expressive

utterance—in writing, to be sure, but also in the speech and song of common men and the “folk” who might themselves be unable to write. “Nature” became the “keyword” of culture, and “oral literature,” something other than a contradiction in terms. Once these ideas crossed the ocean to the American east, it was but a short step to hear Native expression as “naturally” poetic and as constituting a literature in need of no more than textualization and formal—“civilized”—supplementation. (99-100)

Although the Native Americans remained until the end of the twentieth-century a “muted group,”⁵ and their shrinking frontier continued for centuries to be assessed by the dominant social group as “a region marked by a double otherness,” “an embodiment of blankness,” and a “subculture” (Cunningham 42-44), efforts to preserve the orality of the Native American languages have increased during the second half of the twentieth century with bilingual school programs and with native-language radio stations that “exist in many parts of North America now, from the lands of the Dene in Canada to the Mohawk along the St. Lawrence River” (Bruchac 323). Moreover, some of the Native American literature is now being published in bilingual volumes like *The South Corner of Time*, an anthology published in 1980 by the University of Arizona as part of the Sun Tracks series (Bruchac 323).

The selection of Native American fiction produced and adapted for the screen in the 1990s, and which will be discussed in the following two chapters, will carry the seeds of these racial tensions as they are indicative of the manner in which cultural differences are resolved or exacerbated in the postmodern society. The colonial paradigms of America shifted from the nineteenth-century Jeffersonian humanitarians who insisted that Christian

teachers, doctors, and ministers should persuade the Indians into acculturation (Wiget, “Chapter 3: The Beginnings”) to the twentieth-century emergence of printed Native American fiction (racial issues, cultural displacement) and publications (newspapers, magazines, journals). What is more important, in the twentieth century, Native American writings have made their way into the academe both in the form of tribal literature anthologies and of scholarship (Bruchac 321), perhaps as a ripple effect of the globalization trends that have pushed for more cultural openness, inclusion, and pride in diversity. A number of screen adaptations of ethnic fiction discussed in the following chapter revive the native dialects (see *Beloved*, *The Joy Luck Club*, etc.) and carry on the bilingualism trends presented above.

1. 2. The African-American Oral Tradition

Fahamisha Brown postulates that the “New World peoples of African descent, in the manner of their African forbears, developed a mode of creative verbal expression that was primarily oral,” a reality that emerged primarily because in the pre-Civil War United States it was illegal for African slaves to become literate (7). It is a fact that the African slaves created cultural productions on the American continent, using, initially, their pidgin language in their songs, poetry, and dances, long before 1774 (Katz viii).⁶ The African tonal languages seem to be the originators of the “speech rhythms, voice inflections and tonal patterns” that abound in oral African-American productions (Smitherman, *Black Language* 39). Another aspect of linguistic versatility in oral productions is a technique called *playing the dozens*, a “ritualized kind of verbal game that involves talking disparagingly about someone’s mother” and also involving other relatives and forefathers, whose objective is “to better your opposition with more caustic humorous ‘insults’ [through] a competitive test of linguistic ingenuity and verbal fluency in which the winner, determined by the audience’s responses, becomes a culture hero” (Smitherman *Black Talk* 24).

Although remnants of African work and linguistic patterns, social manners, and religious concepts persist in African-American oral traditions, Harold Courlander underlines the existence of other British, French and Spanish influences, but maintains that in fact, the end product represents an original blend that emerged as a result of cultural, linguistic, and

historical circumstances in the New World (255-56). In some instances, African-American work songs like this late nineteenth-century plantation song,

De old bee make de honeycomb,
De young bee make de honey,
De niggers make de cotton an' corn
An' de white folks gits de money,

evolved from old English folk songs, such as this one:

The Lord made the bees,
The bees made the honey,
The Lord made men
And man made money. (Courlander 383).

In other cases, work songs were inspired by the orally transmitted stories of black heroes who escaped from state farms or road gangs or who were subjected to inhuman work conditions on ships, plantations or railroad construction sites. A maintained rhythm characterizes some songs, like “Don’t You Hear My Hammer Ringing” – “I says I’m ringing in the bottom, (x2)/I says I’m ringing for the captain,/I says I’m ringing for the sergeant,” etc. – while other songs like “Lost John” evoke classic prison camp escapes in a colorful narrative form: “One day, one day/I were walking along/And I heard a little voice/Didn’t see no one./It was old Lost John./He said he was long gone/Like a turkey through the corn/With his long clothes on” (Courlander 406-407).

The work tale “Old Boss and George” is representative for the African-American storytelling traditions as it contains elements of oral continuity (“I got another one to tell you,” starts the narrator) and creates archetypes of nameless slaves who distinguish

themselves through physical strength and work skills, but remain inarticulate when it comes to judgmental choices:

Don't recall if George was before John or after John, Old Boss had so many
[. . .] When he was *tryin'*, well, man, you never saw nothin' like it. Cotton
bolls moved through the air so fast folks thought it was snowin' [. . .] this
trying to make up my mind is too much for me. (Courlander 422-23)

Such issues related to racial preconceptions that identified the black slaves as less than human and suited exclusively for work in the service of the white masters will resurge in the movie adaptation of *Beloved* discussed in chapter 3.

Similarly to the Native American myth of a shared origin with the whites, "The Origin of the Races, According to Uncle Remus," an oral African-American tale, humorously explains the emergence of the whites and mulattos from the initial black one:

[. . .] dey wuz a time w'en all de w'ite folks 'uz black [. . .]. But atter 'w'ile
de news come dat dere wuz a pon' er water some'rs in de naberhood, w'ich ef
dey'd git inter dey'd be wash off nice en w'ite, en den one un um, he fine de
place en make er splunge inter de pon', en come out w'ite ez a town gal. En
den, bless grashus! w'en de fokes seed it, dey make a break fer de pon', en
dem w'at wuz de soopless, dey got in fu' en dey come out w'ite; [. . .] dey got
in nex', en dey come out merlatters. (Courlander 497-8)

The primacy of the black race surfaces also in the technique of the toast, defined by Smitherman in *Black Language* as "a narrative folk tale, complete with rhymed lines and poetic imagery—gutsy and sexual [. . .] a tribute to the hero, who is usually a fearless defiant Black man—what Black folk approvingly call a 'bad niggah' [. . .]. Told in epic fashion, the

movement of the Toast proceeds episodically with the overriding theme being the omnipotence of Black folk as symbolized in the lone figure of the Black hero” (25).

Morrison’s and implicitly Demme’s message propose another type of racial blending foreshadowed in the oral tradition: Denver, as a representative of the first post-Civil War black generation will become part of a new social order in which blacks and whites can share education and career opportunities, and she is ready to show (as she states in her conversation with Paul D) that she has the potential to compete with the white race.

The Talking Book, which Henry L. Gates Jr. calls “the ur-trope” of African-American oral traditions (xxv), appeared for the first time in James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’s 1770 slave narrative entitled *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, As Related by Himself*. Born indeed as the son of a tribal chief in Africa, Gronniosaw went from his native prominent status to a state of bewildering and humiliating slavery, followed by a rise in social status that came with his education, proficiency in English and Dutch, liberation from slavery, and marriage to an English lady (Gates 139). The account of his first exposure to the printed word emphasizes the orality of his native culture, but also racial prejudices that will afflict both master and slave in the institution of black slavery and thus will create a literacy racial divide:

[My master] used to read prayers in public to the ship’s crew every Sabbath day; and when I first saw him read, I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw the book talk to my master, for I thought it did, as I observed him to look upon it, and move his lips. I wished it would do so with me. As soon as my master had done reading, I followed him to the place where he put the

book, being mightily delighted with it, and when nobody saw me, I opened it, and put my ear down close upon it, in great hopes that it would say something to me; but I was very sorry, and greatly disappointed, when I found that it would not speak. This thought immediately presented itself to me, that every body and every thing despised me because I was black. (qtd. in Gates 136)

The trickster element abounds in Gullah stories, authored by African-Americans in Georgia and South Carolina, such as “Buh Rabbit and Buh Wolf Go Hunting” and “Playing Dead in the Road.” In “Buh Deer and Buh Snail Have a Race,” the trickster proves the preeminence of the power of the mind (wisdom) over physical strength:

Buh Deah been a-boas’ dat he de fastes’ runnah een de worl’. Buh Snail say, “Buh Deah, I t’ink I run a race wid you.” Dey all laugh at Buh Snail, but he say he want to try to beat Buh Deah, so dey ’p’inted de day fo’ de race. Buh Deah come to de place weh dey gwine staart, but he not see Buh Snail. But Buh Snail, he deh, an’ he crawl up easy-like undah Buh Deah tail. Fin’ly Buh Deah say, “Well, I wondah weh is dat Snail. I guess he don’ wan’ a-run no race.” Buh Snail speak up an’ say, “I’m hyuh, let de race staart.” So Buh Deah went sailin’ off down de road, an’ soon he come to de finish place. Big crowd deh. Buh Deah say, “Hab anybody seen dat Snail?” Dey all laugh an’ say dey ain’ shum [see him]. So Buh Deah staart to set down, an’ Buh Snail cry out, “Man git up off-a me. I been hyuh long befo’ you.” So dey give de race to Buh Snail. (qtd. in Courlander 297)

Unlike the Native American cultures in which a matriarchal structure was not always rejected, most of the African-American traditions record a patriarchal social hierarchy, which

is oftentimes supported through Biblical references and which transpires throughout sermons, a dominant genre of oral and written African-American culture. However, a lyrical, rhythmic sermon, “Behold the Rib,” reproduced in Courlander’s anthology, *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore*, positions the woman on partnership terms with the man as part of the grandiose Divine creation.⁷ This sermon engages the audience through repetitions of interjections like *hah! ah hah!*, recurrences of the refrain *Behold de Rib!*, pauses that enhance the dramatic oratory, and visual images created by accumulation of short action-driven sentences. The tonalities in this orally transmitted sermon find their echo in Baby Suggs’ sermons in the clearing, except that Toni Morrison’s character preaches in *Beloved* another type of partnership, a unity among freed but still oppressed ex-slaves.

Some black sermons, especially the ones in prose like “The Poor-Rich and the Rich-Poor” also part of Courlander’s anthology, maintain a call/response traditionally African-American pattern, but become white in their organized structure that numbers their evidence points and clearly delineates the introduction, body of text, and conclusion, but also in their adoption of Standard English as a vehicle of transmission.⁸ The adherents to a Black Aesthetic embraced an “art for people’s sake” principle, and regarded the poet as a performer, a role on which Donald B. Gibson elaborates: “The poet in his reading or performance assumes a role not unlike that of the black preacher, and the audience becomes its congregation” (12). Poets like Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez who made a career out of performing their writings, best illustrate the role of the poet as “exhorter, interpreter of things, namer and definer” (Gibson 12).

In assessing the oral history of African-American culture, connections can always be made between the verbal phases of African myth and ritualistic texts and the twentieth-

century orality of the African-American writings. If the folk character aroused strong feelings of aversion during the pre-Harlem Renaissance, his dialect remained an attraction as James Weldon Johnson's narrator explains in his 1912 *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*: "The unkempt appearance, the shambling, slouching gait and loud talk and laughter of these people aroused in me a feeling of almost repulsion. Only one thing about them awoke a feeling of interest: that was their dialect" (56). It is important to note in this context that for the turn-of-the-century fiction produced by black writers, it was presumed that the majority of the readership was white (Jones 99). Marxist social-justice proletarian heroes, which in the 1930s populated the writings of modernist writers like James T. Farrell, Erskine Caldwell, and John Steinbeck, initiated a revival of appreciation for the traditional black and Native American cultures in America (Jones 29). This celebration of the ethnic heritage amplified with the African American writers' contact with the Beats in early 1950s and grew into a vivacious literary affirmation of identity within the American culture based on European models of revolt against the old aristocratic order, which à propos, held to a literary tradition of condescension toward the peasant classes often portrayed in literature as "folk comedians" (Jones 30, 32). As Gayl Jones notes, attempts to work elements of folklore into literary productions generated new genres in African American poetry, such as Sterling Brown's lyrical-dramatic poem "Uncle Joe" (33), and reinforced theme, character, composition, and dramatic movement in Ralph Ellison's short story "Flying Home" (99). Zora Neal Hurston breaks a long tradition of black writers whose characters speak Standard English. She perpetuates minstrel humor and engages her narrative in what Gates calls "a play of 'voices'" intermingled with "free indirect discourse" (xxv). In her widely acclaimed novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston renders Janie's thoughts in third-person narrative and

paraphrases dialogues, using African-American dialect. Moreover, as Jones notes, Hurston “also brings oratory from the African American folk sermon into Janie’s and the narrative’s vocabulary, amplifying and ornamenting the folk voice and interior revelation” (137).

In passages such as the following one which renders Joe Starks’ first conversation with Janie, Hurston’s combination of indirect dialogue and narration pulsates with the rhythms of fresh dialect:

Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in an through Georgy. Been working for white folks all his life. Saved up some money—round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in his pocket. Kept hearin’ ’bout them buildin’ a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. But he was makin’ money where he was. But when he heard all about ’em makin’ a town all outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be. He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all do sayso where he come from and every where else, exceptin’ dis place dat colored folks was buildin’ theirselves. Dat was right too. De man dat built things oughta boss it. Let colored folks build things too if dey wants to crow over somethin’. He was glad he had his money all saved up. He meant to git dere whilst de town wuz yet a baby. He meant to buy in big. It had always been his wish and desire to be a big voice and he had to live nearly thirty years to find a chance. Where was Janie’s papa and mama? (35-36)

In fact, African-American dialect had been used before in poetry, starting with Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), who, according to James Weldon Johnson, was the first “to use [dialect] as a medium for the true interpretation of Negro character and psychology”

(Preface First 35). Johnson praises the originality of other African-American poets like Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown, whose language is not the “dialect of the comic minstrel tradition,” but the “common, racy, living, authentic speech of the Negro in certain phases of real life” (Preface Revised 4).

To many scholars, James Baldwin’s use of dialectal and oratorical vernacular, a technique he shares with white Southern writers, appears as unusual. James R. Bennett belongs to this category of scholars who have not yet assimilated the mixture of black and white orality in American literature: “Although Southern writing can be as laconic as other American colloquial prose,” writes Bennett in his *Prose Style*, “it also indulges in that public oratory we habitually associate with the Southern politician, and which we often hear in the prose of Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner, of Robert Penn Warren and William Styron, and even, ironically, of James Baldwin [. . .] the oratorical mode shares the characteristics of the colloquial” (174). What actually makes Bennett’s comments worthwhile for my argument is that he acknowledges the link between oral traditions and the production of great literature by both white and black accomplished writers who dare to intermingle literary discourse with “exclamations, repetitions, uncertain backings and fillings, accumulation of synonyms, and rhetorical emphases [which] all originate in the extemporaneousness of speech, the spontaneous jetting of language that maintains its equilibrium by constant movement forward” (Bennett 174).

Toni Morrison describes her connections with the freshness and vigor of language and her appreciation of oral traditions in a 1981 interview with Mel Watkins for *The New York Times Book Review*:

And sometimes when the language is right...I begin to react to the characters who say certain things...When the language fits and it's graceful and powerful and like I've always remembered black people's language to be, I am ecstatic. It always seemed to me that black people's grace has been what they do with language. In Lorrain, Ohio, when I was a child, I went to school with and heard stories of Mexicans, Italians and Greeks, and I listened. I remember their language and a lot of it was marvelous. But when I think of things my mother or father or aunts used to say, it seems the most absolutely striking thing in the world. That's what I try to get into my fiction. (qtd. in Jones 170)

Morrison feeds a vigorous vein of orality in her fiction with the integration of nursery rhymes in *The Bluest Eyes*, the legend of the flying African in *Song of Solomon*, and multiple narrator and spectator techniques in *Beloved*. Of these, the narrator-spectator patterns woven among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved can be traced back to the plays and fiction of the African (Ghanaian) writer Efua Sutherland, who in her *Anansegoro*, for instance, attributes to the same character the functions of narrator, spectator, and on-stage audience (Brown, Lloyd 80). Moreover, in Demme's adaptation of Morrison's *Beloved*, the orality will be enhanced with the use of the original patois dialect, which is only mentioned, but not quoted in the novel (see chapter 2). So in this sense, the mediatized literature revives dialect in a bilingual context (Demme uses English subtitles for that specific scene) more intensely than the fiction authors.

As with Native American oral traditions, some of the African-American orally transmitted productions deal with the healing of the soul and others with the healing of the

body. In a tale collected by Harold Courlander, the legendary raconteur Richard Creeks explains the difference between *conjuring and doctoring*, the former being an ingenious (if not fraudulent) way of “fooling” the patient into recovery, while the latter proceeds out of a mixture of superstitions and scientific observation. Creeks doctoring acknowledges the power of “a black chicken, cut in half with the feathers still on” to draw the poison out of a snake bite as well as the power of the moon not only to raise the tides, but also to pull out the fence posts (Courlander 533). Similar pseudo-scientific practices will be taken over by Morrison’s characters in *Beloved* when Paul D finds his way to the North by following the tree flowers as recommended by a Cherokee (112), and when Baby Suggs “doctors” Sethe after her escape with the new-born Denver (93).

Signifying, one of the major features of African-American literary tradition clearly stems from oral practices. Kochman defines signifying as “provocation, goading and taunting” (257). Gates judges Hurston’s *Their Eyes* as

a paradigmatic Signifyin(g) text because of its representations, through several subtexts or embedded narratives presented as the characters’ discourse, of traditional black rhetorical games or rituals. It is the text’s imitation of these examples of traditionally black rhetorical rituals and modes of storytelling that allows us to think of it as a speakerly text. For in a speakerly text certain rhetorical structures seem to exist primarily as representations of oral narration, rather than as integral aspects of plot or character development. (193-94)

One of the most relevant examples thereof are the stories and jokes the people of the town gather to tell on the porch on Saturday nights such as the dialogues of two alleged suitors, Jim and Dave who dispute their love for Daisy:

Dave: “Well all right, less prove dis thing right now. We’ll prove right now who love dis gal de best. How much time is you willin’ tuh make fuh Daisy?”

Jim: “Twenty yeahs!”

Dave: “See? Ah told yuh dat nigger didn’t love yuh. Me, Ah’ll beg de Judge tuh hang me, and wouldn’t take nothin’ less than life.” (83)

None of the involved characters are fully developed in the novel, but their weekend entertainment evokes the language and the spirit of the African-American community with all the ritualistic significations attached to such an event.

In his study of African-American literature, *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates proposes the following formula for Standard English:

$$\textit{signification} = \frac{\textit{signified}}{\textit{signifier}} = \frac{\textit{concept}}{\textit{sound-image}}$$

while for the African-American vernacular, he derives a new equation:

$$\textit{Signification} = \frac{\textit{rhetorical figures}}{\textit{signifier}} \quad (48).$$

Based on Gates’ equations, the Western Saussurian paradigm of signification derives meaning from the two clear-cut components of the linguistic sign, whereas in the African-American oral tradition, meaning emerges from multi-layered rhetorical figures and a signifier, which is most likely aural (since pictographic expression is not as frequent in African-American oral communities as it was with the Native Americans). The orality of

signification and its richness of meaning reveal not only the versatility of African-American dialect, but also its adaptability to media, i.e. film *re-telling*.

1. 3. The Hispanic-American Oral History

Within oral communities, history was limited to recording feats of individual heroes and singular events. Emerging historical scholarship shifted the focus toward the diachronic identity of select groups and minorities. Current oral history follows both tendencies, but the emphasis still falls on the individual as a representative of his community and culture of origin.

As Devra Anne Weber observes, the Hispanic oral histories feed on memory and dialogues and are shaped to a great extent by the interaction between teller and interviewer (175). The account of a simple Mexican woman, Mrs. Rosaura Valdez, about the Mexican revolution focuses not on the “opposing ideologies,” but on “hunger, fear, and death” (Weber 177), as much as Le Ly Hayslip’s account of the Vietnam war dealt primarily with the devastation of families and only laterally with politics. Valdez’s story of the 1933 cotton strike impersonates a “collective voice” while also rendering the vibrations and the inflections in the voices of the hungry, of the desperate, and of the rebels. As she pitches and lowers her voice to recount the words of other characters, Valdez assumes roles and acts out her story as if performing an one-actor drama. Valdez’s account also carries collective values and attitudes, such as the antagonism against the Anglo colonizers and the multiple internal factions and differences between the strikers (so similar to the platform of the American Indian Movement). The conscience of the conquered that transpires through this story reverberates with acts of oppression and symbols of revolt; the Corcoran camp at the

1933 cotton strikes becomes another Wounded Knee. As Weber observes, in this particular case, this individual story-teller leaves out essential historical data in her attempt to present clear-cut moral dichotomies of cruel bosses and oppressed workers, which makes her a limited and inaccurate source.

Doña Teodora, the old Mexican woman whom Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith interviews “never kept a diary,” but she opens up in an interview as a valuable repository of stories and family genealogies (161). Rubio-Goldsmith makes the point that with a sheer lack of “census reports, church records, directories, and other such statistical information,” oral accounts of Mexican matriarchs make the history, even if only an oral one, of a conquered nation who comes back to colonize its colonizers (162). Thus, memorization and the modern means of tape-recorded interviews remain the major vehicles of orally transmitted Hispanic literature/history. In the context of the traditionally male-oriented Hispanic societies and of the Anglo-Saxon dominance as part of the colonial interactions at work, the oral traditions of the Latin Americans on United States territory encapsulate particular socio-linguistic features such as machismo and bilingualism. As Rubio-Goldsmith contends, “Mexicanas have lived in worlds of two (sometimes three) languages. Our Spanish vocabulary has increased with new technology and different relationships. At times the lexicon has implied political and collective assertion, at times it has been the vehicle to assert individual existence” (171).

If nothing else, such oral reports do render a kind of history, an individualized one, filtered through the cultural, economic, and intellectual perspective of the individual story-teller. But they also set the tone for performative *historias*, a term that means both *history* and *story* in Spanish. Weber acknowledges that “oral traditions are often also an art form, drama and literature” (179). At the end of the twentieth-century, hispanic *telenovelas* (soap-

operas) and screen adaptations of Hispanic fiction produced in the United States (i.e. Oscar Hijuelos's novel and its movie adaptation *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*) re-enact the voluptuous rhythms and the upbeat pace of the oral telling of stories while maintaining the sense of tragedy, honor, revenge, and quixotic idealism so characteristic of the Latin American culture.

1. 4. The Asian-American Oral Traditions

Chinese-American oral traditions follow patterns similar to Afro- and Native American storytelling. In Mary Slowik's words, "A story is told and remembered only in relation to the immediate demands of life. A story is a moral tale intended to teach a lesson not only with ethical content, but with practical content about family and livelihood crucial to physical and cultural survival" (250). Moreover, orality can assume expiatory functions and even comes to replace textual material meaning with locus signification. Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, very much in the spirit of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (discussed in chapters 2 and 3) poses issues of failed emigration and immigration. In Kingston's story "On Fathers," the China men in Hawaii plow a huge hole in the ground and yell into it their confessions of sin with Polynesian women in an attempt to communicate with their wives in China. It is their belief that the green shoots springing from their confessional ground will tell and retell their stories to future generations. One of the characters in the story, Bak Goong, explains this act: "That wasn't a custom... We made it up. We can make up customs because we're the founding ancestors of this place" (117-118). At that specific location, the generations will meet again and again and re-enact and re-live the story. With an eye on the Oriental karmic cycles, Slowik interprets this transmission of oral literature as a process in which "the ancestral spirits come very close, the generations again overlap, the ancestral home is created and renewed" (259). The Asian traditional family kneels at a shrine and worships their ancestors, whom they elevate to the rank of gods, and whose spirits are believed to accompany and guide the living members of the family.

The inherently oral character of the cultural discourse becomes evident in Maxine Hong Kingston's story "On Discovery," in which, as Mary Slowik notes, the author strives to "find the ground where oral and written traditions meet, where pre-literate and post-literate stories can question and ultimately free each other" (247). The narrative voice in Kingston's *China Men* speaks with the authority of myth, historicism, and scholarship (Slowik 247). As Slowik notes, "there's an acknowledged agreement between narrator and audience. Everyone accepts without question the story to be told. The heroes and victims are unchanging in an unchangeable world. Their lives are fated as the story drives them unerringly to their pre-conceived ends" (247). Kingston makes her stories "the possession and invention of the audience," makes them "audience-generated tales," and thus "opens the post-modern story's dilemmas to the pre-modern methods of storytelling" (Slowik 248).

Jarold Ramsey's postulations thoroughly apply to the histrionic character of Asian oral traditions: the pre-literate audience understands story as theater, and as oral performances that encourage 're-acting' in daily life (Ramsey xvii-xxxiii). As with any oral texts, the narrator plays the role of a "supreme plagiarist" who disappears immediately after the performance and thus entrusts the text back to its public authorship. The re-telling of the story does not "displace the narrator," nor does it assert the primacy of text or its multiple layers of meaning (Slowik 249).

* *
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As demonstrated in this chapter, orality does not necessarily label a culture as inferior, nor have oral dissemination patterns always proved inefficient. If in the pre-writing times, primary orality was the only means to perpetuate cultural identity, the twentieth century sees an affluence of oral forms intermingled in literary writings, and in the 1990s, secondary orality mediated through television, film, and radio will produce a dramatic revival of the taste for reading and for culture assimilation in the post-printing era of a literate global village. After establishing the main features of oral traditional literature both in general terms and diachronically with a review of oral traditions of ethnic groups (African-American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian), the task lies ahead in the following chapters to apply this theoretical background to literary broadcast productions of the 1990s and to answer in the last chapter, a question initially posed by Wiget about oral literature, “How can that which is unwritten, that is without letters, be called literature?” (“Native American” 3), in other words, “How can that which is broadcast be called literature”?

Chapter Two

Literature in Film: A Postmodern Spectacle

2. 1. Orality, the Subject of Film

Literature, starting with the Modernist writings, has made a mission of reflecting not only the oral tradition rites, but also the ever-increasing influence of the camera. “I got some popcorn,” Nancy tells her audience in Faulkner’s short story “That Evening Sun” (304). The image of the white master’s children gathered around Nancy, their black nanny, expecting popcorn and a story, is the nineteenth-century counterpart of twentieth-century spoiled brats swapping in the VCR their *Lion King* video while inadvertently dropping popcorn all over the sofa. It is an anticipation of laid back teenagers buying overpriced popcorn at the concession stand of the movie theater in their small town USA where nothing happens, and precisely because nothing extraordinary happens in their world, they are ambling toward a dark room where they slouch on a seat and wait for the big screen (which has replaced Nancy) to tell them about a time and a place where *the action* is. And perhaps Tennessee Williams was right when he voiced through his character, Tom, in “The Glass Menagerie,” a major psycho-social anxiety of the Modernity: “People go to the *movies* instead of *moving*! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them!” (1055)

“Tell us a story,” Caddy says. “Can you tell us a story?” (Faulkner 302). And Nancy tells the children a story, Nancy, the repository of centuries of African orality and American hybridization, Nancy, the archetypal black storyteller, sets in motion a complex performance that can easily compete with that of twentieth-century Hollywoodian Oscar-winners:

She told a story. She talked like her eyes looked, like her eyes watching us and her voice talking to us did not belong to her. Like she was living somewhere else, waiting somewhere else. She was outside the cabin. Her voice was inside and the shape of her, the Nancy that could stoop under a barbed wired fence with a bundle of clothes balanced on her head as though without weight, like a balloon, was there. (Faulkner 302)

In his extensive anthology of black folklore, Harold Courlander ponders: “In the American rural south the role of the storyteller of distinction slowly gave ground in this century to radio, television, and other mass media of communication” (501). Courlander is right, but although storytelling changed media, much of the twentieth-century audience shares the same ageless boredom and curiosity implied in Faulkner’s story and in Tennessee Williams’s play. The thirst for new gratifying sensations and new epistemological experiences becomes part of the drama of the twentieth-century entertainment consumer who more often than not fails to find pleasure even in the variety and the glamour of Hollywood productions, as Nathaniel West writes in his novel, *The Day of the Locust*:

Nothing happens. They don’t know what to do with their time. [. . .] Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. [. . .] Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings,

murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, wars. This daily diet made sophisticates of them.

[. . .] Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. (192-3)

Thus, in a century marked by the emergence of television, radio, and escalating Hollywoodian film art, the masses turn to the orality of mass media and absorb its stories, not necessarily out of a sense of cultural identity and not to perpetuate the survival of their tribe, as the oral communities did in the past, but out of despair, in a frantic attempt to acquire personal fulfillment, chasing a chimerical happiness and in a perpetual search for the meaning of their existence. Most of twentieth-century fiction characters realize the futility of their spiritual quest through the Hollywoodian culture, but, although debunking the reality and the fake fulfillment in cinema, they experience abortive attempts to make their own story, to write the script of their life, as Tom Wingfield does in Tennessee Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie" when he shares with Jim O'Connor his decision to divorce a life of watching movies for a life of personal fulfillment: "But I'm not patient. I don't want to wait until then. I'm tired of the *movies* and I am *about to move!*" (1055) Oprah Winfrey herself felt the tremendous impact of the movies when as a child she went through a phase of measuring her self-image by the racial beauty standards set by someone like the white child-star, Shirley Temple: "I used to sleep with a clothespin on my nose, and two cotton balls," confesses Oprah about her endeavors to become like her idol actress. "And I couldn't breathe and all I would do is wake up with two clothespin prints on the side of my nose, trying to get it to turn up. I wanted Shirley Temple curls; that's what I prayed for all the time" (Adler 3). There's a yearning in Oprah's words that reminds of Pecola Breedlove's

prayers for blue eyes and of the fascination her mother, Pauline, had with the hairdo of actress Jean Harlow in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye* (123).

Spoken or written, the words that make up human cultural discourse maintain a magic quality. If Ong reminds us that oral societies held the words as having "magical potency" (32), Neil Postman has it that the electronic technology, which is also involved in film-making, has its magic as well. As Neil Postman acknowledges, the end of the twentieth century saw a "shift from the magic of writing to the magic of electronics" (13), but the magic stays nevertheless and continues to trigger action and work transformations in the audiences as much as the oral traditional performances did.

In 1951, in his book *Überlieferung und Persönlichkeit*, Gottfried Henssen

stressed the effect of human personality and background in the development of popular tradition. Toward the end of his career Henssen began to employ sound film to capture the magic of storytelling sessions and to highlight the interaction between tale-tellers and their audiences. With all the nuances of word, sight, sound, and gesture portrayed in simultaneous response and interaction, folktales could at last be captured in their full dimension and richness. This was the true Märchenbiologie envisioned by Henssen and his fellow workers. In the Wossidlo *Festschrift*, [. . .], Henssen went so far as to say, "Nicht die Erforschung des Erzählgutes an sich, sondern die Erforschung des Volkscharakters durch das Erzählgut ist das Endziel" – "Not the study of folk narrative per se, but the study of folk character through folk narrative – that is the goal"⁹ (Hand ix).

Henssen's experiment shows film technology at work when it comes to enhancing the performative qualities of highly oral folktales, but also as a medium that facilitates the scholarly endeavors to analyze the characters of such stories; thus, film plays not only a role of re-enacting orality, but also of re-teaching it.

Similar findings appear in Manthia Diawara's article, "Oral Literature and African Film," which reproduces the views of several African film-makers who participated at the Ninth Ouagadougou Film Festival held in Fespaco in 1985. Diawara asserts that oral literature in native dialects and African theatre represent a better source for films than African literatures written in the languages of the colonizers, and mostly important that orality becomes "the *subject* of the film" while film itself emerges as oral literature (200-201). However, in this process, "the presence of the film-maker as auteur takes precedence over the narrator of the literary text," and the off-screen narrator who performs voiceovers replaces the griot or the storyteller (201-2). Another phenomenon that Diawara points to is the film-maker's mission of creating "contemporary forms and contents out of oral literature" (205). In this context, Diawara explains that the director uses the functions from oral literature "to enunciate a new narrative posing the conditions of resistance to traditional order and the creation of a new one" (206). In other words, "the narrator of the oral story is interested in restoring the status quo where there is chaos, while the film-maker rejects the existing order and proposes an alternative system" (Diawara 208).

The interdependence and similarities of media employed in film, and also in primitive oral productions, for that matter, becomes enlightened by Bruce Morrissette's observations. "Almost in the same fashion as automatic writing, the film was considered to be the cinematography of thought, even of the unconscious," writes Morrissette, treading on

Jungian paths that explain the collective and thus unconsciousness-grounded oral literature. “Poetry is metaphoric; the film is, or can be, metaphoric,” continues Morrissette, only to conclude that “therefore film was poetry, and the aesthetic response to it was substantially the same as that evoked by verbal poetry, though perhaps more immediate or intense, since the verbal path was short-circuited, as in the pure poetic state recognized by the surrealists in dreams” (13). On the same line, Leland Poague argues that films and literature share the same medium, namely “neither language or celluloid, but rather the stream of human consciousness, the human imagination which includes the artist’s recollection (both conscious and unconscious)” (89).

Timothy Corrigan supports the thesis of this study, namely that film emerged and developed as an extension of oral dissemination of stories, when he writes that Griffith’s transition from one-reel shorts to narratives of ninety to one hundred minutes “came from the desire to tell stories” (*Film* 21). And if the desire to tell stories is as old as mankind, and as ancient as oral traditions, no wonder that André Bazin argues that the concept of cinema existed “fully armed” in the minds of people of Greece and of the Renaissance times (17).

2. 2. Authorship

The participation of the unconscious and of the consciousness in the process of oral production complicates the definition of authorship (largely viewed as collective), among which are copyright rules, style, and the content of oral cultural messages. Referring to the property laws of songs as cultural oral texts with the Flathead Indians, Merriam Alan verifies that “personal songs obtained from a guardian spirit are individually owned and clearly fall into the category of intangible goods. Transferability of ownership to another individual is questionable today, although such transfer seems clearly to have been practiced in the past” (30). It is the sacral function of such spirit-inspired songs that conditions their individual ownership. Discussing sacred oral texts, Jung mentions the multiple roles played by “the medicine man” as authorial voice of primitive societies. “He is, like the anima, an immortal daemon that pierces the chaotic darkness of brute life with the light of meaning,” writes Jung. “He is the enlightener, the master and teacher” (“Archetypes” 37). Social songs, on the other hand, such as those meant for War Dances, “are not individually owned but are rather the ‘property’ of anyone who wishes to use them.” Merriam remarks that there is evidence that such songs were actually individually owned in the past (30).

Along the same lines, for established twentieth-century fiction writers, the text of their novels constitutes “sacred” property in our society, and the authors benefit from certain

copyright rights comparable to those ascribed to the spiritual leaders in oral societies.

However, when such novels are remediated into film, the reality is that the authorship of the new cinema text becomes collective. A movie represents a product produced through the convergent efforts of a multitude of participants in the same way that an oral text at a certain point in time constitutes the essence of all its previous performers, authors, and transmitters.

Extrapolating on the French cliché “Le style c’est l’homme,” Wittgenstein contributes an addition to it, changing it to “Le style c’est l’homme même,” and explains that this “second correct version opens up quite a different perspective. It says that a man’s style is a *picture* of him” (78e). In the light of Wittgenstein’s 1948 remark, it would be interesting to pose some rhetoric questions about the materializations of style(s) in 1990s movie adaptations: To what extent the movie pictures mirror anymore a picture of the novelist’s style, or of him for that matter? Or do they hold up a picture of the director’s style only? A perfect coordination between the writer and the director often becomes impossible if nothing else because of generational differences or due to the death of the writer at the time the movie is produced¹⁰.

The authors involved in the production of a screen adaptation face, more often than not, decision-making processes that will eventually lead to the alteration of the original fiction piece. “The difference between author and *auteur* is so great that one wonders whether or not it is better to consider them apart rather than together,” exclaims Deborah Carmell in her Introduction to *Adaptations*. In the case of adaptations, she argues that the author “plays less than second fiddle to the *auteur*; the literary text is far from sacred” (26). The literary text will obviously be tampered with in the process of a screen adaptation. Nowadays, we do not expect film adaptations to accurately and entirely follow the original

novel. The film industry realized the impossibility of accurate adaptations when Erich Von Stroheim, hired by MGM in the mid-1920s, transcribed Frank Norris's *McTeague* into a 10-hour super-expensive production that not only was a financial flop, but also failed to earn any artistic credits (Tibbetts Introduction xvi). Wise also justifies a director's curtailing of the original literary work as follows: "the novelist can provide such density of detail and a multiplicity of episode that is quite impossible for the filmmaker to include it all. You have to condense and boil things down" (vii).

As for the author's secondary role in the script mentioned by Carmell, that is not always the case. In some instances, as Tibbetts shows, "once the rights are sold, the artist has relinquished control and has no legitimate basis for complaint" (Introduction xviii). In other cases, the writer of the fiction on which the movie is based becomes part of the scriptwriting team. For instance, the fact that the director of *The Joy Luck Club* adaptation, Wayne Wang, shares an Asian ancestry (he was born in Hong Kong) and that Amy Tan was allowed to contribute to the screenplay together with Ronald Bass made all the difference in preserving an authentic authorial discourse in the movie. For other adaptations, the input of the director (and/or scriptwriters) produces a better narrative than the original fiction work. *Dances with Wolves* remains one of the few postmodern adaptations that not only displays a higher artistic quality than Blake's at times clumsy narrative, but also illustrates that the talent of a director (Costner) combined with the drive of a writer (Blake is allowed in this case to author the script) can result in the production of a classic. Yet other times, the scriptwriters strive to preserve as much as possible of the dramatic content of the novel as it was the case of *Beloved*. The overwhelming value of a Pulitzer-winning manuscript compelled the three scriptwriters of the movie *Beloved*, Akosua Busia, Richard LaGravenese, and Adam Brooks,

to maintain most of the script for the movie *Beloved* within the boundaries of Morrison's dialogues and descriptions.

As much as the community leaders in the oral societies who had control of over the production and the transmission of cultural texts (literature), the authors of fiction and fiction-based movies in the 1990s are strongly involved in the life of the community. The directors seem to abide even more than the writers by community standards, which enhances their similarity to oral literature authors. An important part of the literature of the 1990s, especially the novels that carry a significant socio-political message, was authored by writers who had a career in the field they tackle in their fiction. Michael Crichton, a doctor, uses his genetics background to present the possibility of a potential bio-engineering catastrophic development in Jurassic Park, whereas John Grisham's novel *The Firm* clearly evinces the author's background as former defense attorney. Himself a participant in the Vietnam war as an Air Guard pilot and an experienced writer, Jay Wurts shows his closeness to the horror of this war in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. James Hayslip, on the other hand, a child at the time he experienced war, imparts his American matter-of-factness to the narrative of the sequel, *Child of War*. Although the authorial voice of Le Ly Hayslip evolves from a struggling victim in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* to an independent woman in its sequel *Child of War, Woman of Peace*, Oliver Stone maintains a coherent, unchanged, tender-strong and compassionate narrative voice for Le Ly throughout his movie. Le Ly Hayslip never monopolized the authorial function since she resorted to co-authors for both of her novels, but in Stone's adaptation, she remains a first-person narrative voice manipulated by Stone's input both as a director and screenplay writer.

For Paul Matthiessen, the task of writing *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* involved a humongous amount of research spread over several years, but also the risk of legal or lethal repercussions from either the governmental authorities or the AIM leaders. This is why the author covers his bases from all sides: on the one hand, he repeatedly states his support of the Indians, but on the other hand, he presents the other side's perspective as objectively as possible. His novel offers fair representation for both the FBI abuses and wrongdoings, as much as Wilson's, and the AIM's vulnerabilities: the sheer facts that AIM had weapons and that some of its members led disorganized lives and were potentially in touch with the Communists. Nor does Matthiessen leave out any subversive statements or details that show the Indians' rebellion against the government of the U.S. Because of the way his book presents the facts within the access to documents he could get, the reader is offered fair chances to side with either party. After the publication of his book, Matthiessen was sued by the FBI Special Agent David Price and by the Dakota governor, William Janklow. Judge Murphy, and respectively Judge Kean, favored the author, arguing that his right to express his biased opinion in favor of the Indians is protected by the First Amendment, and that whatever he wrote against the FBI and the government could not be proved to have been done with "actual malice," as established by the precedent in the NY Times vs. Sullivan trial. Perhaps with this experience in mind, when Michael Apted adapted Matthiessen's book, nine years after its 1983 publication, he avoided any contentious political content¹¹.

One of the most complex authorial patterns in a 1990s novel can be found in Robert James Waller's novel, *The Bridges of Madison County*. In "*The Beginning*" section of the book, Waller describes his experience of meeting Francesca's children and of hearing the story from them:

[. . .] As they talk, I begin to see the images. First you must have the images, then come the words. And I begin to hear the words, begin to see them on pages of writing. (viii)

Aside from affirming the precedence of orality and images (cinematic media) over the written word in the birth of a story, Waller's statement acknowledges the children as storytellers, and thus as authors of the story before him. Although Waller assumes an authorial function throughout the pulp of the book, at the end, in the documents he attaches to the novel after his own storytelling comes to a halt, he yields the authorial/narrative voices to Robert Kincaid with his attached essay entitled "*Falling from Dimension Z*," to Francesca by inserting the letter she wrote to her children in "*A Letter from Francesca*," and ultimately to "Nighthawk" Cummings with whom Waller carried on an interview transcribed in the last "appendix" to the novel, "Postscript: The Tacoma Nighthawk." The narrative will be sustained through the "talking book" trope in the movie as readings from Francesca's journal and letter, by her children, initiate and carry on the storytelling.

By the same token, Ellroy, in *L.A. Confidential*, diminishes his authorial role to that of an investigator that only places his findings on the table for the reader since crucial events, like the suicide of P. Exley, Dieterling, and Inez, as well as Loew's resignation, are pasted in as extracts of newspaper articles. Thus, the public voices of mass information means (newspapers in this case) become in Ellroy's novel, and similarly in its movie adaptation, the collective authorial voice.

The issue of authorship becomes so much more complex in movies than in fiction, since all the persons involved in their production--actors, director, scriptwriter, and the rest of the crew--form an authorial body, a replica of the collective author in the oral tradition¹².

Oftentimes, the authorship will be implied in a movie through narrative devices, whether they be voiceovers or camera discourse. In Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*, for instance, the protagonist, Le Ly, often intervenes to voiceover¹³ the story, suggesting that the film is *told* by the writer of the book, as well¹⁴.

Another consideration in discussing film authorship is that both film and the oral tradition operate on subjective narratorial patterns. Gérard Genette best explains the narrator/author roles as described in Book 3 of Plato's *Republic*:

Plato contrasts two narrative modes, according to whether the poet 'himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking' (this is what Plato calls *pure narrative* [*diegesis*]), or whether, on the other hand, the poet 'delivers a speech as if he were someone else' (as if he were such-and-such a character), if we are dealing with spoken words (this is what Plato properly calls imitation, or *mimesis*). (162)

Although some scholarship, Genette and Chatman's works included, identifies "narrative with diegesis and drama with mimesis" (Chatman 110), no clear-cut distinctions exist between the two genres and authorial approaches. What is clear is that "simply putting a camera in front of a scene [. . .] changes the most realistic situation into a kind of theatrical setting" (Corrigan *Short Guide* 47). In the case of *Heaven and Earth*, the voiceover remains under the mimesis category, since the actual narration in the movie does not belong to Mrs. Hayslip, but to Hiep Thi Le, the actress who interprets Le Ly's role, or in Chatman's terms, the presenter or the show-er.¹⁵ Of course, "the cinematic narrator is not to be identified with the voice-over narrator" (Chatman 134), but neither can I accept the concept of "impersonal agent as cinematic narrator" (Chatman 137).

The only impersonal (but persons-operated) agent in cinematic narration is the camera. The use of “focalization” in movies as a counterpart of literary “point of view,” as Chatman suggests (139), becomes problematic because of potential confusions with the technical processes of camera discourse. In movies, the technical term “point of view” usually refers to camera movements that entail pan shots, crane shots, shot/reverse shots, crane shots, tracking shots, and to camera angle (low, high, tilted), while focus determines the closeness of camera to the object being filmed, hence close-ups, medium shots, long shots, 3/4s, and the camera treatment of the object as in *shallow focus* or *rack focus*. However, Corrigan explains the term “point of view” in film also from a narratorial perspective as the perspective from which the story is being shown or told, a perspective that he deems objective since it represents a composite of various characters’ voices (*Short Guide* 43). Thus, if I combine the two definitions, I can conclude that the camera discourse is indeed dictated by directing choices that include not only technical focalization, but also a certain focus on the construction of characters. The fact that the director makes such decisions together with his crew does not necessarily make them objective, but rather inclusive at the most.

Several voices in current scholarship have come to agree in the conversation on the objectivity of film discourse. Seger points out that “The narrator in the novel tells us about a subjective experience, but the film, through its visuals, shows us an objective experience” (25). And along the same lines, James Monaco explains that the complexity of authorial voices in a film production contributes to the objective slant of the camera discourse:

[. . .] novels are told by the author. We see and hear only what he wants us to see and hear. Films are, in a sense, told by their authors too, but we see and

hear a great deal more than a director necessarily intends. . . . More important, whatever the novelist describes is filtered through his language, his prejudices, and his point of view. With films we have a certain amount of freedom to choose, to select one detail or another. (29-30)

Nothing could be more imprecise. In art, nothing is objective, regardless of how much the Modernists yearned for the “objective correlative.”¹⁶ A subjectivism “encouraged by impersonal techniques” such as “indiscriminate sympathy or compassion” and “indiscriminate irony” can in Wayne C. Booth’s opinion, “ruin a novel” (83-86). Based on Booth’s criteria, a large number of acclaimed literary works are not subjective in the sentimentalist manner. But an art work is subjective through the mere fact that it emerges as the product of one or more subjects, or subjective individuals called authors or auteurs who bring to the act of creation their own conscious and the collective unconscious. The camera is far from ever being objective if we can only think of all the camera manipulations that have become possible with today’s technology. The camera shows us exactly what the director’s subjective intentions want us to see. The fact that viewers have more freedom to focus on one detail or another, as Monaco stresses, does not prove in the least that camera discourse is objective, but rather that film has the capability to present more simultaneous texts than fiction (movement, language, color, etc.) in a frame as opposed to a book page.

2. 3. The Audience of Oral Literary Products

In terms of the audience's involvement with the production of linguistic signs, it is important to note that the simultaneous presence of the speaker and hearer at the moment of the creation, transmission, and reception of the oral cultural message challenges traditional parameters of the reader-response theory, which implies the absence of the direct contact between author and reader at the moment of transmission and reception of a literary text. However, oral tradition texts, as much as film, television, and radio, prompt immediate, intense reactions from the audience although these hearer/viewer responses may be shallower and shorter-lived than those of a reader. Oral tradition carriers and performers always manifest concern with appealing to their audiences. Andrew Wiget observes that "in performative terms, then, the representational aim of verbal art is to create a sense of verisimilitude appropriate to the nature of the communication which engrosses the audience sufficiently to preclude serious questions of credibility that threaten to destroy the frame of the communication" ("Native American" 8). "Within American Indian traditions of oral storytelling," explains Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez, "there is a power that actually transforms the listener through her or his engagement with the story" (6). According to Wiget, the insertion and constant repetition of reportatives ("they said," "he said," etc.) constitute one of the means of enhancing the credibility of the narrator. By the same token,

film, television and radio develop the appeal of their linguistic signs through sophisticated contexts of computerized graphic manipulations and sound special effects (combinations of music, voice, and diegetic/nondiegetic sounds).

In the context of the social impact of oral utterances as opposed to written text, “writing,” declares Jacques Derrida, “in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death because it signifies the absence of the speaker” (Derrida qtd. in Spivak, xl)¹⁷. Twentieth-century audiences display a necessity for the presence of the speaker very similar to that of the oral populations. Given the long work hours and the humongous number of available entertainments options among which the twentieth-century audiences have to negotiate their time, more and more people prefer oral, abbreviated literary products. Ong provides an evident premise for my argument: “Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists,” he writes in the 1980s. And he continues, “Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality” (11). Marshall McLuhan had already signaled one of the features of such a mind-set in his seminal study *Understanding Media*: “Man the food-gatherer reappears incongruously as information-gatherer,” writes McLuhan. “In this role, the electronic man is no less a nomad than his Paleolithic ancestors” (248). Although we may agree that the American literature consumer in the 1990s trades and assimilates information with a metaphoric hunger and necessity similar to that of his food-gathering ancestors, it is important to discuss the transmission modes through which literary discourse circulates.

Ultimately, both fiction and film aim at stimulating the audience’s perceptions of

ideas, events, and people. In his 1897 preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*, Joseph Conrad expresses an artistic creed too bold for his time when art's agenda was geared toward exclusively pleasing its audience: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see" (83). In 1913, Griffith makes a strikingly similar profession: "The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see" (Jacobs 119). With fiction, readers mentally construct a complex of images and situations, whereas watching a movie offers the images ready for consumption. Whether reading a novel or watching a movie, the audience does have to process images. In the case of *written literature*, the readers create for themselves *mental images* with the help of the information provided in the printed medium. In the case of *mediated literature* (film), the viewers process *visual images* already created by the producers/actors.

However, a well-done movie, as much as oral performances, will always stimulate the mental vision of its viewers. Chatman argues that the viewer or consumer of cinema "reconstructs the film's narrative (along with other features) from the set of cues encoded in the film" (127). George Bluestone points out that the film medium presents a disadvantage in rendering states of mind, inner thoughts, and the like, as opposed to the fiction's descriptions versatility. "The film, by arranging external signs for our visual perception, or by presenting us with dialogue, can lead us to *infer* thought," writes Bluestone. "But it cannot show us thought directly. It can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking, but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings. A film is not thought, it is perceived" (*Novels* 48). An educated consumer would react to a complex text, regardless of the media that transmits it. With Seymour Chatman's comprehensive definition of text that includes

“any communication that *temporally* controls its reception by the audience” (7), I can extrapolate to affirm that music, *mis-en-scène*, acting, framing, and all the other elements that compose what Aristotle called *opsis* (spectacle) are all texts. As Chatman shows, “texts can be written, drawn, mimed, acted, sung, danced, painted on canvas, projected as shadows on movie screens, illuminated by pixels on television sets” (38). Along these lines, I can also argue that the film’s multi-textual capabilities mirror the complexity of the multi-media and multi-textual oral performances.

To place orality concepts of consciousness and mental activity into the context of the cinema consumption, it is useful to consider Henri Bergson’s rationalization of the processes of the intellect:

[. . .] preoccupied before everything with the necessities of action, the intellect, like the senses, is limited to taking, at intervals, views that are instantaneous and by that very fact immobile of the becoming of matter. Consciousness, being in its turn formed on the intellect, sees clearly of the inner life what is already made, and only feels confusedly the making. Thus, we pluck out of duration those moments that interest us, and that we have gathered along its course. These alone we retain. And we are right in so doing, while action only is in question. (297)

Further, Bergson equalizes the mental perception of reality with the cinematographic mechanism of fragmented intake:

Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, we have only to string them

on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in this becoming itself. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whether we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us. We may therefore sum up what we have been saying in the conclusion that *the mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind*. (332)

The Bergsonian theories persuade us to view cinema not as a twentieth-century technological advancement, but as an extension of the human psycho-mental system, a reality or a mode of perceiving reality as old as mankind, as old as orality, and implicitly as polyphonic as orality. In terms of polyphony and heteroglossia, cinema, as much as fiction, entails a potential of infinite significations, but also the capability of fostering illusory constructs. “The polysemantic nature of the text and the illusion-making of the reader are opposed factors,” observes W. Iser. “If the illusion were complete, the polysemantic nature would vanish; if the polysemantic nature were all-powerful, the illusion would be totally destroyed” (962). Further, Laura Mulvey analyzes the illusion function of cinema as a result of the physical separation between the viewer and the screen, as “the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation” (9). Nevertheless, psychologically, the viewer has “the illusion of looking in on a private world” (Mulvey 7). With oral tradition, the audience experienced a live performance within reasonable physical proximity, but because of tribal

taboos, the staging did not always offer the audience the privilege of peeking into the privacy of the characters. (For more on this subject, see the “Eroticism” section of chapter 3).

Thus, it is a combination of magic (illusion) and polysemy that makes cinema unexhaustable, as much as fiction is, according to John Barth. “I agree with Borges,” writes Barth in 1980, “that literature can never be exhausted, if only because no single literary text can ever be exhausted—its ‘meaning’ residing as it does in its transactions with individual readers over time, space, and language” (“The Literature of Replenishment” 71). The meaning, whether it be the Saussurian “signified” or the African-American signifying oral technique, only requires a more complex and more rapid decodification when remediated through cinema.

2. 4. Narrative and Language in the Camera Oral Discourse

As shown in the Introduction of this study, the oral traditions strongly impacted the written literature. The oral cinema tradition plays a similar role on Modern and Contemporary American literature. And as with the oral tradition, the influence of cinema orality on canonical literature remains controversial.

If Charlie Chaplin anticipated that the radio, television, and cinema would be “responsible for the dissolution of empires” (qtd. in Danchin 1), Laurent Danchin announced in 1975 that it would be the death of true literature, not of political empires, that would occur with the coronation of cinema as “une osmose entre le texte et l’image dont tous les créateurs, peintres ou écrivains, vont sentir le contrecoup” (6-7) – “an osmosis between the text and the image whose counteraction will be felt by all the artists, painters or writers.”

In 1934, Erwin Panofsky made a statement that still rings true today:

If all the serious lyrical poets, composers, painters and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would become aware of the fact and a still smaller fraction would seriously regret it. If the same thing were to happen with the movies, the social consequences would be catastrophic. (234)

“As an art form,” shows Timothy Corrigan in his *Short Guide to Writing About Film*, “the movies involve literature, the pictorial and plastic arts, music, dance, theater, and even architecture” (17). If we consider movies a quintessence of all the other arts, as Corrigan implies, then, indeed their banning or extinction would be catastrophic as Panofsky said, not only because of their immense public success, but also because it would stunt the cinematic expression of all the other arts.

The Modernists were the generation that witnessed unprecedented developments in photography and film and the first to become preoccupied with imitating camera functions in their writing. In their 1999 Introduction to *Novels into Film*, Tibbetts and Welsh recognize that “the modern novel actually anticipated many effects and storytelling techniques, like temporal, causal, and spatial directions, that we are all too accustomed—sometimes erroneously—to regard as essentially ‘cinematic’” (xv). Alfred Kazin observes this phenomenon with Scott F. Fitzgerald, whose books, he says, “were ‘prose movies,’” a product of the writer’s obsession with Hollywood (*Native* 320). Again, in Dos Passos’s *USA*, two of the four levels of American experience, are directly linked to the obsessive presence of the camera—the “Camera Eye,” and the “Newsreel” (Kazin *Native* 353). In Kazin’s words, “for Dos Passos there is nothing else, save the integrity of the camera eye that must see this truth and report it, the integrity and the sanctity of the individual locked up in the machine world of modern society” (*Native* 358). Kazin explains even the realism and the journalistic drives of the Modernists in terms of camera imitation. The “real significance of the literary use of the camera,” says Kazin, “is that many serious writers were so affected by its use—or symbolism—that they seemed interested only in photographing the country on the run, in giving to the accumulated weight of a thousand different details and impressions of

the national texture the solid testimony of their 'education.' [. . .] What the fascination of the camera represented [. . .] was a kind of sick pride in its fiercely objective 'realism.' The camera did not fake or gloss over; it told 'the truth of the times'; it was at once so aggressive and uncertain that it highlighted an awakened, ironic, militant, yet fundamentally baffled self-consciousness. Most important, the camera reproduced endless *fractions* of reality. [. . .] Was not *that* discontinuity, that havoc of pictorial sensations, just the truth of what the documentary mind saw before it in the thirties?" (*Native* 495-96) Tennessee Williams's production notes to his play "The Glass Menagerie" resonate with the same photographic concern for the truth as part of an expressionistic plastic theater that he pushes forth (395). It becomes obvious from Williams's play that photography infiltrates in theater with the presence of a screen device "on which were projected magic-lantern slides bearing images or titles" throughout each scene (395).

Graphics also become part of literature with Ezra Pound's *Cantos* in which he inserts drawings of a sign (in Canto XXII) that reads

NO MEMBER OF THE MILITARY
OF WHATEVER RANK
IS PERMITTED WITHIN THE WALLS
OF THIS CLUB (103),

a triangle in Canto XXXIV with the inscription

"CITY
OF
ARRARAT
FOUNDED BY

MORDECAI NOAH" (171),
“[a cross in the margin], ✖ (210), a simplistic drawing of a mountain in Canto XLII (214),
and pictographic Japanese and Chinese characters all throughout his poems.
Moreover, Pound expands toward an audio dimension of poetry when he intercalates musical
lines in his Canto LXXV (470-71). Even Faulkner risked losing a fight with his editor when
he asked that “the ink of *The Sound and the Fury* be printed in several different colors on the
page” (Chénétier 178).

In fact, Faulkner as well as Nathaniel West and F. Scott Fitzgerald were among the
modernist writers who did their share of scriptwriting at Hollywood. Idealists like F. Scott
Fitzgerald, voiced an acid criticism of the dehumanization and deaesthetization of the movies
industry. One of Fitzgerald’s letter to Alice Richardson on July 29, 1940, breathes sheer
repulsion toward the movie colony: “Isn’t Hollywood a dump—in the human sense of the
word? A hideous town, pointed up by the insulting gardens of its rich, full of the human spirit
at a new low of debasement?” (qtd. in Tibbetts Appendix A 483)

On the other hand, Faulkner’s realization that “a movie picture is by its nature a
collaboration; and any collaboration is compromise” pleads for a reconciliation of modern
writers with the cinema (qtd. in Tibbetts Appendix A 481) while also evoking the collective
authorship of the movies, which is an oral tradition feature. Faulkner’s narrative techniques
(dense fragmentation, multiple point-of-view, etc.) brought him closer to the camera
discourse, and so did his 1994 participation as a scriptwriter in the adaptation of
Hemingway’s novel *To Have and Have Not*. Don DeLillo acknowledges that cinema
continues to influence literature even to the last decades of post-modernism: “Movies in
general may be the not-so-hidden influence on a lot of modern writing, although the

attraction has waned, I think. The strong image, the short ambiguous scene, the dream sense of some movies, the artificiality, the arbitrary choices of some directors, the cutting and editing. The power of images” (qtd. in LeClair 84-5).

The impact of the movie-making techniques lay heavy even on post-modern theater, in which “the design of space, the passage of time, the rhythms of speech and movement: these ‘invisibles’ of theater, once meant to disappear when stories or characters are compelling enough, instead emerge from the background to tell their own stories. It is as if we’re being reeducated in the technique of seeing, mastering lessons we skipped over long ago because we mistakenly thought they would diminish the rapture of spectatorship,” observes Marc Robinson in his Introduction to an excellent anthology of post-modern drama (12). Helene Keyssar could not be more right when she asserts her “conviction that many of the limits as well as the possibilities of modern drama are rooted in ancient conceptions of drama and theatre” (91). For one, the polyphony of the postmodern narratives, and implicitly of camera discourses, replicates alternate visions in some ancient Greek tragedies, which according to Jean-Pierre Vernant¹⁸, function by presenting a “dichotomy [dédoublement] of the chorus and the protagonists, the two types of language, the play between the community which officially represents the City as a magistracy, and a professional actor who is the incarnation of a hero from another age [. . .].” Such a duplicity of voices and perspectives is present in the Greek tragedies, as Vernant further argues, “both to call the City into question within a well-defined context, and also [. . .] to call into question a certain image of man, and I would even say to indicate a change in man” (284). For the American postmodern culture, ambivalence and a constant clash of the hero with the City translates in racial and linguistic tensions. In fact, as Timothy Corrigan explains, film and literature merge on the grounds of

the nineteenth-century “demands for realism and a class-oriented fascination with spectacle” (*Film* 16), a fascination as old as the ancient Greece.

Although Aristotle certainly did not speak of movies, but of dramatic works, his words obviously match perfectly the Hollywoodian parameters:

And superior tragedy is, because it has all the epic elements . . . with music and scenic effects as important accessories; and these produce the most vivid pictures . . . Moreover, the art attains its end within narrower limits; for the concentrated effect is more pleasurable than one which is spread over a long time and so diluted. (*Poetics* XXVI:4-5, in Bate 38)

In the American cinema adaptations of the 1990s, music and scenic effects combined with epic elements have reached a climax of sophistication, and so has the concentration of the narrative into a short time, as Aristotle recommends for “superior tragedies.” However, unlike the ancient Greek histrionic events, the epic quality of the selected cinematic productions under discussion here widely relies on the fiction works from which their script stems.

Bordwell’s definition of narrative as “a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” fits both fiction and film (69). “One of the potential sources of complexity in Hollywood films—as indeed in any type of filmmaking—is the medium’s ability to move about freely in time and space,” writes Kristin Thompson (17). Nevertheless, followers of Bluestone¹⁹ still insist that films only function on one tense, the present of action, while fiction operates with fluid transpositions of characters and reader into past, present, and future. Supporters of present as the only tense of the movies argue that viewers watch the movie’s actions (whether they be chronological or past/future flashbacks) only in

the present. By the same token, I can say that a novel is only read in the present, as well²⁰, even if it certainly takes more hours to read a novel than to watch a movie. Therefore, present is indeed the tense of perception for both filmed and printed stories, but the lines of the plot in both cases may travel back and forth in time. In terms of space, the orality of both fiction and cinema has strayed away from the immediacy (read ephemeral character) of the tribal spectacles or of the traditional theatrical performances. Printed fiction stages its stories on the pages of a book, whereas movies use a visible frame space and an implied off-screen, nondiegetic background. But for both media, there is also the performative space of the readers'/viewers' mind and psyche, a system composed of their consciousness that perceives, filters, and assimilates the stories, and of what Jung would call their "collective unconscious," their heritage of values and beliefs that makes for their tribal affiliations.

The selection of novels and their screen adaptations that make the subject of this study represent a wide range of ethnicities and literary styles, from Native American to Asian, and from autobiographical (Hayslip) to Western (Blake) and futuristic (Crichton), which entails complex perception interdependencies when it comes to the viewers' perceptions. The oral cinematic versions offer sometimes another story altogether, such as it is the case with Paul Matthiessen's *In The Spirit of Crazy Horse* which becomes *Thunderheart*, or enhance the orality of the novels through redesigning the narrative, accentuating the performative elements, or assuming social roles. Since a movie is made up of *narrative* elements--the story--and *stylistic* features--technical production--(Bordwell 49), cinema language implies elements of *mis-en-scène* and camera and editing manipulations, as well as linguistic signs, whether they be written or spoken, which clearly points to the cinema similarities to oral tradition productions.

The usage of written text within the cinematic discourse ranges from titles that frame the time and location (*Mambo Kings*, *Thunderheart*) to elaborate legends that provide political background and epilogues that announce the current status and achievements of the protagonist (*Heaven and Earth*). Clearly superior to *Child of War*, from the standpoint of linguistic and rhetoric sophistication, Hayslip's first novel *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* dictates the profound lyrical tones that abound in Stone's cinematic discourse. Stone takes over the linearity of the sequel's plot, but takes great pains in weaving a pastoral Vietnamese landscape infused with chromatic plays of orange (dances by the fire, war explosions), blue (camera tilting to the sky as a cry for freedom) and green (high grass in which Le Ly works and plays as a child, symbolizing innocence, but also strong juices of life, her inner strength to survive and make a difference in the world); this iconic scheme fully renders the poetical inflections of *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*.

The linguistic issues seem to have been solved in a clumsy way by Stone. In her novels, Hayslip clearly uses English, but she sometimes inserts Vietnamese words and phrases, which she explains, in order to render concepts that are difficult to express or non-existent in English or in the American cultural codes. Stone makes the Vietnamese characters use English throughout the movie, but situational differences turn out as a linguistic bluff. For instance, the Vietnamese talking to Vietnamese speak correct English, but with an accent; when Vietnamese interact with Americans during the war (Le Ly with American GI's, her father to her sister's American boyfriend), the former speak broken English and use gestures to complement their low English proficiency. It becomes hilarious to see the same characters who were speaking fluent English in previous scenes lose their English abilities when talking to Americans, but this is a manner of indicating a lack of

communication between the two nations. The only scene in which Vietnamese is spoken and English subtitles are used is Le Ly's negotiation with her friend over Steve, who was looking for a clean Vietnamese lover, perhaps a way of saying that in terms of soulmating and commitment (Steve would be Le Ly's only love and husband in the movie), a translation is necessary, although a translation can never be complete or fully accurate. However, the presence of both languages spoken in the movie version, more than disparate Vietnamese words and phrases in the novels, testifies for oral features of pride in the dialect and a trend of bilingualism.

In *The Joy Luck Club* adaptations, Wayne Wang translates the highly lyrical narrative voices from Amy Tan's novel through image manipulations combined with voiceovers and musical beds. For instance, the movie opens with June's voiceover telling the story of the swan feather while the feather image on the screen dissolves into sketches of "clouds of sorrow" and American shores to match the lines about immigration. The storytelling in the movie does not flow from dialogues as it does in the novel, but from the individual consciousness streams of the narrators. In Wayne Wang's production, the characters mentally pull themselves from the crowd at the *mah jong* party and reminisce their past. Thus Wang's camera discourse assumes features of inner orality while Amy Tan's written story always presupposes the presence and performance of the narrator.

Since both the novel and the movie *The Joy Luck Club* operate with multiple layers of narration, the story or rather the stories told by both media challenge the audience's concentration abilities in following a complex interweaving of generational events across time and across American and Chinese traditions. To the lyrically loaded narration in the novel correspond expressionistic movie frames of a pastoral rural China that opens through

the memories of Lindo or through June's voiceovers about her mother's having to abandon her baby daughters during the war. The Chinese locations are assorted with a dim light to depict the farmers' poverty, oriental music beds, and vivid orange and red chromatic patterns for wealthy Chinese environments such as the house of Lindo's in-laws or the luxurious parties that Ying-Ying and her first husband attended. The lush camera descriptions of settings in this adaptation indicate a preoccupation with setting as strong as the one employed in oral productions, in which elaborate depictions of settings became part of staging the story.

Linguistically, the authenticity of Chinese dialogues prevails in the movie where Chinese is spoken throughout the scenes that take place in China and English subtitles are used. In the novel, to the contrary, to maintain a high level of accessibility for American readers and to avoid overburdening the narration with translations, the writer only inserts sporadic Chinese words or phrases or simply signals that a character tells a story in Chinese while the storytelling is laid out in English. Accent operates as another element of authenticity in the story told in the movie: the mothers speak English with a Chinese accent while the daughters have an obvious American accent and display a charming mixture of predominantly American gestures and Chinese politeness. Thus, racial blending assumes throughout this film, another form of oral expression.

If Sherman Alexie employs shifting point-of-views in his stories bound together under the title *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, throughout which Victor, James, and a third-person narrator take turns at storytelling, the movie based on this collection of stories, *Smoke Signals*, reduces narrative voiceovers to Thomas's 4th of July fire event in which Arnold had saved his life and to the voice of the DJ, which reminds us that although the action takes place in the 1970s and 1990s, on the Coeur D'Alene Indian

Reservation it is always “Indian time” and the Indian weatherman remains concerned with reporting the shapes of the clouds (*Smoke Signals*). In fact, Thomas remains a storyteller in the movie as much as Thomas-Builds-the-Fire is in Alexie’s short stories. Although Thomas’s rather appears in the movie as a nerd who wears suits and glasses, his Indian accent combined with his affected tone and social ineptness seem to portray him as a version of the disabled James in the story “Jesus Christ’s Half Brother,” an orphan child who had not been able to talk and walk until the age of five. In Eyre’s adaptation, it is interesting to see a 1998 stage of Native American orality, mostly sustained by Thomas’s stories. One of the most relevant moments in the movie is the scene in which Thomas and Victor are walking to the bus station and are caught from behind by a car driven backwards by an old Indian lady. When the two boys ask for a ride, the younger woman in the car asks for a story in return, reminding him that “we are Indians, we have to barter” (*Smoke Signals*). The same young woman later labels Thomas’s story about Victor’s father participation in an anti-Vietnam war demonstration as “a fine example of the oral tradition” (*Smoke Signals*).

Michael Blake writes an Indian Western, called *Dances With Wolves*, with a postmodern economy of words, and even with a twentieth-century vocabulary. As the omniscient third-person narrator, the writer shocks the readers by expressing Lieutenant Dunbar’s thoughts through words like “superficial,” “psychotic,” “lethal,” “adrenaline,” “subconscious,” “celebrity,” etc. Director Kevin Costner avoids such linguistic misfits, but he still keeps a 1990s perspective when he makes costume and make-up choices: the Indian kids who steal Dunbar’s horse seem cool and nonchalant like some twentieth-century reservation boys (almost as impersonations of Victor and Thomas from Sherman Alexie’s novel) and the hairstyle of Stands-with-a-Fist (interpreted by Mary McDonnell) resembles

the audacity of a rock star rather than the wildness of an Indian-raised Irish woman. The director's choices show a type of orality deeply subservient to its audience and the need for an immediate, direct, and audio-visual appeal to the twentieth-century viewers, which again, constitutes a preoccupation of the oral tradition authors.

As for the brevity of the narrative in Blake's novel, it suffices to mention that one of his subchapters runs for two lines and contains only one sentence - "They crammed as much as they could into the half-carved-in supply house and stacked the rest in Cargill's former quarters" (19)--, a sentence meant to translate into a couple of frames showing Dunbar and his guide moving around the supplies in the movie. As much as the oral tradition, film takes greater pains in showing visually the elements of action, instead of only inferring them as prose may sometimes choose to do. Along the same lines, the landscape frames and their lush tones of red, orange, blue, and green in Costner's screen adaptation fully compensate for the descriptive scarcity of the novel. If Blake's writing is fragmentally postmodern, the chromatic structure makes Costner's a classic, impressionistic masterpiece, while also enhancing the importance of the setting, a remnant of the oral tradition.

Paul Matthiessen's novel *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* may fall under at least two genres: reportage and traveling journal. The author employs a journalistic type of narrative, a mixture of interviews, observations collected during his trips on the reservations, and court transcripts; he offers a time frame for each chapter and a motto from a past or current Indian chief; sometimes, he quotes from his own interviews or from court records, and although he offers an extensive bibliography at the end of book, he does not mention his sources in the text. Matthiessen's book deals with multiple characters, family tragedies, fraudulent activities at all levels (AIM, BIA, FBI), historical land claims, such as the invocation of the

1868 Treaty, but also with subversive AIM attitudes like the claim to sovereignty and the upside down American flag as a symbol of AIM. *Thunderheart*, based on this novel, and directed by Michael Apted, tells a different story of smaller proportions, with considerably less characters involved in a local conflict which remains resolved in the end. Apted's screen adaptation is a detective as well as law and order discourse intertwined with an aborted love story between FBI agent Levoi and ARM leader, Maggie, on the background of Levoi's reconversion to his Indian origins. If Matthiessen's narrative remains objective, although slightly biased in favor of the Native Americans, Apted follows a tradition of idealizing the Native American heroes throughout the movie and leaves the audience with a yearning to return to tribal (read oral) lifestyle in which post-modern stressing schedules are replaced with a "holy pipe" spirituality that measures times in natural cycles (see the exchange of the Rollex watch with a pipe at the end of the movie).

Another journalistic novel produced in the 1990s is the love story Robert James Waller constructs in *The Bridges of Madison County* as a puzzle picture whose pieces represent the author's encounter with Francesca's children accounted for in the introduction and also in a chapter called "A Letter From Francesca," Robert Kincaid's essay, "Falling from Dimension Z," the author's "Postscript: The Tacoma Nighthawk" about his meeting the black jazz musician, and "Interview with 'Nighthawk' Cummings," which renders the musician's memories of his talks with Kincaid. These collage techniques of the novel disappear in Eastwood's adaptation, the latter preserving only the motif of the story being told, post-mortem, by Francesca to her children, through a letter and her journal. Thus, the journals become, after the oral tradition, the *talking book*, and the voiceovers defy death and bring the past into a bereft present. Surprisingly enough, Tibbetts assesses the movie

adaptation of Robert J. Waller's *Bridges of Madison County* as superior to the book. In the film, says Tibbetts, "the story is effectively dramatized, clarified, and intensified, and stripped of the novel's often foolish and embarrassing dialogue. This adaptation is a very good demonstration of what Hollywood could achieve in treating the obscenely popular effusions of a third-rate writer" (Introduction xvii).

To the alternation of first person narrative by Eugenio Castillo (a narrator at the beginning and at the end of the novel) with third person narrative through the perspective of Cesar Castillo in two Hotel Splendour episodes in the middle of the Hijuelos's novel *The Mambo Kings*, the movie opposes a linear chronological plot that eliminates Cesar's and Eugenio's flashbacks while enhancing some of the recurrent elements of the novel: the song *Beautiful María of my Soul*, the motivational book *Forward America!* by D. D. Vanderbilt, the image of María "in a cinch-waisted suit, [. . .] rising out of the foamy tides of a Havana sea," a photographic detail in the novel which becomes a black-and-white mental image with Nestor in the movie (43). Linguistically, the scarce Spanish insertions in the novel sometimes leave room for entirely Spanish dialogues (especially at the beginning in the setting of Havana) in the movie. After their arrival in the States, the Hispanic characters speak predominantly English with a Cuban accent, although one or two lines in Spanish are sometimes interspersed.²¹

As a version of the novel, the movie *Beloved* does not eclipse the power and the beauty of Morrison's language, nor does it trivialize its poetry as Richard Blake argues in his 1998 review of the movie *Beloved* (25). Jonathan Demme's production involves Morrison's literature, but also invents another way of telling the story, one that is closer to the oral tradition since it enhances lyrical tones and a melodramatic content.

Beloved, as Morrison told it, “is not a story to pass on” (275). No other artist could ever produce a perfect copy of this novel whether it be in words, sounds, colors, plaster, marble, stone, or digital images. When a movie version of a novel of this caliber is produced, it is trivial to pose the question whether or not the movie is “worse” or “better” than the novel. The two versions of the story should not be regarded as two art discourses in competition, but as two equally precious gems in the patrimony of American culture. The story of Margaret Garner, a run-away slave mother who resorts to killing her children when confronted with the threat of returning to slavery, was originally transmitted orally, then taken over by various newspapers until it found its way on the pages of a newspaper that Morrison happened to come across. As Yvonne Atkinson states,

Stories in the oral tradition are not owned; they are stories without beginnings or endings...Morrison does not own the story of *Beloved*; she is simply one teller of a tale that has been told and will be retold. The storytellers in *Beloved* do not own their stories, but tell their versions of the tales in their own way. The multiple tellings give a rich complexity to the individual stories and to the meaning of the overall story. (248-9)

Following on Atkinson, it can be argued that the movie version of *Beloved* is simply another telling of the story not only of Margaret Garner, but of the whole African race in America. It is a story not only of one haunted house, 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati, Ohio, but of a present haunted by the traumas of the past.

But at the same time, Morrison’s Afrocentrism also impacts her writing style, which dwells heavily on elements of ritualistic orality such as call and response patterns, witness/testify, and signifyin. As she confesses in one of her interviews, a great part of her

research for the novel *Beloved* was rooted in African oral culture (*Profile*). In fact, if we consider Maggie Sale's definition of the call/response technique, we can see why this is one of the novel's features that lends it so perfectly to a cinematic adaptation: "Call and response patterns, developed in spirituals and play and work songs, are related to the group or communal nature of art," argues Sale. "These patterns both value improvisation and demand that new meanings be created for each particular moment" (178).

Jonathan Demme's production follows the call/response patterns of the novel although it slightly modifies the scenes that evoke the past. Also, in the improvising spirit characteristic to the call/response technique, the movie *Beloved* employs additional narrative tools in creating new versions of Morrison's text. For one thing, the movie accentuates the role of the character Beloved in "calling" or triggering memories about past events. Morrison indeed had Beloved call for the narrative about the hanging of Sethe's mother and for Sethe's story of the "diamonds." The movie toys with the novel's narrative text in both instances, clipping out for instance the wedding details that accompany the "earrings story" in the novel. But to add to the powerful historical voice of the scene of Sethe's mother hanging, the movie creates an overlap of images in which the past horrifying scenes float over Sethe's face while she is narrating the story. This technical device obviously enhances the effect of the story, but it also translates into an identity message by keeping the present and the past images simultaneously together. It is a way of affirming the identity of ex-slaves as intrinsically made up of the horrors of the past. Two other scenes that are rather indirectly triggered by Beloved in the novel are clearly called forth exclusively by her in the movie. Paul D's rememory of the collective traumas of the Reconstruction period appears in the novel as a third-person narrative meant to photograph his inner stream of thoughts while

he is contemplating on what might be the origins or the traumatic past of Beloved. The movie shifts the narrative to first person in a dialogue between Paul D and Beloved at the dinner table, but it is Beloved who “calls” (i.e. asks) and Paul D who responds. The story of Denver’s birth, like many of the stories in the novel, comes together in Morrison’s text, jigsaw-like, from three passages scattered through the novel: one ensuing from Denver’s thoughts as she is watching her mother pray on her knees; the other from a call/response type of dialogue between Denver (caller) and Sethe (respondent); and a third, with Beloved as caller and Denver as respondent. The movie chooses the last one as an one-time complete story called by Beloved and told by Denver. Images of the run-away pregnant Sethe fade in from Denver’s narration, and Denver voices over at times the past scenes of her mother’s journey to freedom and her own journey to life. Again the simultaneity of images of past and Denver’s voice suggests that the past also represents an intrinsic part of Denver’s identity, as it is the case with Sethe.

To remain on a call/response pattern, I would like to move now toward the need for action in oral productions and the role of the spoken word and of performance in triggering action. In postmodern history-making, the fictional and cinematic narratives suffer from an acute syndrome called speed obsession. Hence, the need for postmodern literature and cinema to share what Derrida calls the technique of *bricolage* (“Sign” 885). To match Grisham’s sustained narrative in *The Firm*, for instance, Sydney Pollack’s 1993 adaptation starts off and then maintains a rapid rhythm thorough various techniques: collage of fast fragments of job interviews; car traveling matte; tracking frames of Mitch talking with Avery; and high suspense chase scenes that have Mitch now in a warehouse, breaking

windows with his legs, hanging on ceiling pipes, his sweat dripping near the briefcase, then confronting the Moroldo family in a shot/reverse-shot brief dialogue.

A crime noir fiction exemplar, James Ellroy's *L.A. Confidential* incorporates elements of a detective story, intricate political and psychological conflicts, and narrative traits attuned to a media-dominated literature. The text of the novel comprises extracts from articles published in *Hush-Hush*, *L.A. Mirror-News*, *L.A. Times*, *L.A. Examiner*, but also weaves thoroughly into a journalistic style, with half-truths revealed progressively and complex intrigues. Articles such as the *L.A. Mirror-News*, *March 19* excerpt on the Christmas police beatings scandal (75) and the *Hush-Hush* article on the district attorney's taste for "long and leggy, zesty and chesty" (92) reflect strong tendencies of yellow journalism in the 1950s. Pasting LAPD fitness reports on Bud, Jack, and others and starting paragraphs with time titles--6:10 PM (142) or locations correspond to the technique of using titles in movies and having voiceovers reading parts of official reports. When citing from major newspapers which pressure LAPD to reopen the Night Owl case after the murder of the Englekling brothers, Ellroy only mentions the titles of the articles with the names of the newspaper and the dates only, a device very similar to the newspaper reels sometimes used in movies to indicate time lapses. The novel also features multiple instances of action-movie type of narrative: Jack survives miraculously a confrontation with the "H"-men in a rapid sequence of reality and comatose states similar to the television show *Touched by an Angel* (37); similar scenes of cop action show Jack Vincennes busting and chasing some robbers in a lunch house (297); leading words, such as "cut to:" followed by flashes of links to characters and actions introduce new levels of action. All these elements will appear in Curtis Hanson's 1997 movie adaptation, but their initial presence in Ellroy's novel indicates

a deep preoccupation of the postmodern writer to construct narrative in a manner that would be translatable to film and to bricolage fiction elements in a highly performative, dramatic, and inherently orality-infused composition.

Chapter Three

Film Adaptations and the Rites of Oral Literature

The formal structure of any work of art (or object of imitation), according to Aristotle, comprised three parts: plot, character, and thought (Griffith 63). As a token of appreciation for the classic wisdom, but also because they offer an efficient system of organizing research, I have included in this study comparative sections on the plot, character-treatment, and thought as socio-political content of the novels and their adaptations under discussion here. These three elements of analysis will also outline the connection between film and the oral tradition. A sophisticated dramatic genre, centuries away from the Greek theatrical performances, the film expands beyond the Aristotelian histrionic model, in that it builds unity or disunity through amalgamating the visions of the scriptwriter, director, actors, cameramen, etc. However, this multiplicity of voices in the film discourse, its polyphony, as Bakhtin would call it, has its roots in the Aristotelian qualitative parts of the tragedy: plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle (Aristotle 46).

3.1. Plot

With the cinematic discourse, the concepts of story and plot assume new values, different from the traditional literary plot definition. When defining the elements of narrative for film, Timothy Corrigan distinguishes between the *story*, comprising all events included or inferred in the performance, and the *plot* that refers to the arrangement of these events in a certain directorial order (*Short Guide* 37). Bordwell presents us with a simpler structure, in which the story consists of presumed and inferred events and explicitly presented events, and the plot represents explicitly presented events plus added nondiegetic material (71).

Not only are the unities of action, place, and time disregarded, but even the essential structural elements of *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* (reversal of fortune and discovery) scatter cryptically in and out of the postmodern fiction discourse. Further, the Aristotelian distinct parts -- beginning, middle, and end -- evolved into what the classics would call anomalous patterns of time shifts, reverse chronologies, mental incursions into the past and future, and circular, convergent, or divergent acts of memory, all interspersed randomly through the plot thread. To Aristotle, such abnormal plot construction would have been indicative of mediocrity, as he contends in his *Poetics*:

Of the simple plots and actions the episodic are the worst: and I mean by episodic a plot in which the episodes follow each other without regard for the laws of probability or necessity. Such plots are constructed by the inferior poets because of their own inadequacies, and by the good poets because of the actors. For since they are writing plays that are to be entered in contests (and so stretch the plot beyond its capacity) they are frequently forced to distort the sequence of action. (49)

To the postmodern audience, plot fragmentation and convoluted episodes do fit the laws of necessity since they mirror an acute sense of dissolution and imbalance that has marked the end of the twentieth century. In our time, literary circles crown a writer like Toni Morrison, who excels in circular narrative patterns, with the highest recognition of artistic merit (the Nobel prize); nevertheless, the scriptwriters see themselves compelled by directing considerations to simplify the elaborate patterns of the novel narrative, as it was the case with the movie *Beloved*. Such plot simplifications parallel the linearity of oral productions.

Jonathan Demme's *Beloved* represents a version of Morrison's novel, another kind of literature, as Clyde Taylor would call it. Both the novel (in a meandering narrative) and the movie (in more of a linear chronology interrupted by flashbacks) grow out of incessant resurgences of the past that question the identity of relatively recently freed, but not yet free people. Morrison's characters struggle with being captives of the past traumas and with grasping, now, in the present, the possibility of affirming their human identity and building a future for themselves. This constant interplay of past and present is achieved, both in the novel and the movie, through several major ingredients such as the all-encompassing theme of identity, bridge characters who share or trigger the rememory of past experiences, and

narrative techniques of collate past events overlapping present emotions and actions. To some extent, the movie makes up for eliminating the interior monologue²² by introducing another technique, which was not employed by Morrison in the novel: a collage of nightmarish flashbacks attributed to Sethe and Paul D on their first night together. A very timely and economic way to dramatize the traumatic effects of the past, this compensates, to a certain degree, the numerous repetitions of painful events present in Morrison's narrative. But it also adds to dramatic insertions that called forth some reviewers of the movie *Beloved*, like John C. Tibbetts, to argue that,

the filmmakers unnecessarily complicate the already fractured storyline with an overindulgent use of slow-motion effects, sudden flashbacks, a barrage of persistently recurring image motifs (a blaze of fire, slaves wearing crowns of iron, a body hanging from a tree, etc.), a succession of starkly contrasting mood changes, and numerous irritatingly contrived special effects.

Superimposed images come and go, colors flow and change. (77)

The complex combination of past and present insertions in the movie does not in any way complicate the plot line of the novel. In fact, the movie producers made choices that reduce the novel's circular narrative to a linear storyline.

But most of the times, flashbacks and special effects act as drama enhancers. For instance, in the novel, Morrison places the complete infanticide scene in a narrative piece, which is a separate chapter, in the very middle of the novel, following the newspaper clipping revelation. In the movie, the same scene occurs after Stamp Paid's confession, but the producers employ more than just narration: Sethe's voice leads into Babby Suggs' highly emotional sermons, then the images and sounds dissolve back into Sethe's narration of the

infanticide, only to be followed by another dissolve into the scene of the infanticide, and then back to Sethe's talking to Paul D. Morrison moves the reader by creating word-images, Demme has more than that at his disposal. The histrionic transitions from scene to scene are achieved through rapid fades in and out and flashbacks, and the dramatism is enhanced through voiceovers. Thus, while in the novel the moment of Denver's stepping out of the house results after a mental dialogue between Denver and Baby Suggs, the movie leads in Baby Suggs' voice while Denver is alone in her bedroom, and then shifts the camera toward the bed on which there is an immediate presence of Denver's loving and embracing grandmother. Even the final scene of the movie that ends in successive dissolves between Sethe and Paul D, Baby Suggs' preaching, and back to the 124 Bluestone Road house, overlaps present and past as two vivid realities that grow on and out of each other, a technique that amplifies the sense of immediacy, also shared by the oral tradition.

A similar time overlapping takes place in Amy Tan's novel adaptation. Tan organizes her novel *The Joy Luck Club* into four major parts that open with an italicized (read internalized) scene relevant for the stories in that respective part. Each of the four parts contains in its turn four stories that cover the lives of four different characters. The novel can be said to have a dramatic structure with four acts and with a histrionic list of characters at the beginning—the names of the mothers and of the daughters arranged on two columns. Except for the friendship that binds together the four Chinese immigrant mothers--Suyuan Woo, An-Mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-Ying St. Claire—the sixteen vignettes that depict their lives in China and their daughters' lives in America could stand alone as independent stories. Wayne Wang, who directs the adaptation of Amy Tan's novel, chooses a stronger dramatic locus unit to bind the narrators together, a mah jong party where all the mothers,

except for June's mother who is dead, and their daughters are present. It is from this party that the stories of all of them diverge through flashbacks in the movie. As in tribal performances, the director gathers all the performers in front of the audience at one location.

To conserve a sense of unity, but also to simplify the circularity of recurrent separate plots in Tan's novel, in which various stories come back at different times to the same characters, the director chooses to create linear threads of stories that cover a daughter and a mother at a time. For instance, the stories of Suyuan Woo and her daughter June, which appear fragmented in different parts of the novel, come to life in one flashback track in the movie: June remembers the piano experiences in her childhood, from June's conflict with her mother over the piano emerges another flashback to her mother's dragging along her baby daughters during the war. The stories take shape in the movie as a linkage of daughters' and mothers' flashbacks interspersed with their dialogues at different times in America, and interrupted or linked by voiceovers. At all times, there is a constant shift between the voiceovers and the flashbacks of the mother and daughter as they take turns in the storytelling. This technique clearly re-enacts tribal traditions of multiple-storytellers.

The same orality-based linearity occurs with the movie adaptations of Hayslip's autobiographical novels. Jay Wurts, co-author of Le Ly Hayslip's first novel, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, displays considerably more sophistication in constructing the plot on two parallel narrative tracks: Le Ly's growing up as a farmer's child in a war-torn Vietnam and her departure for the States juxtaposing her 1986 return to Vietnam as an American citizen. For the sequel *Child of War, Woman of Peace*, Hayslip choice of her son, James Hayslip, as the co-author did have an impact on the plot construction: it turned it into a linear factual account, which oftentimes slipped into melodramatism and didacticism, turning

out to be more of a commercial “inspiring story of success.” Not surprisingly, Oliver Stone chose the latter novel’s linearity for his 1993 adaptation *Heaven and Earth* while compressing all the long list of male figures in Hayslip’s life into one husband, Major Steve Butler.

Moving to the Native American fiction and film adaptations, it would be worth mentioning that in *Smoke Signals*, director Chris Eyre does away with a plethora of characters and happenings from Sherman Alexie’s short stories, but keeps instead a main track of narration built on the trip Victor and Thomas take to Phoenix, AZ, to grab the ashes of the former’s father. The trip occasions flashbacks of snippets of childhood scenes tormented by domestic violence and drinking, but also playing basketball, watching a waterfall, etc.

Dances with Wolves builds up on what Seger calls a three-act scenario, with act one that presents the beginning of Lieutenant Dunbar’s journey to “set up the situation,” act two that “develops the situation and relationship” through Dunbar’s friendship to the Indians, and act three, which “shows consequences of decisions made in act two” (Seger 83), an classical drama plot scheme that both the novel and the movie, with slight exceptions, follow. If Kevin Costner closely follows the plot thread of Michael Blake’s novel, his adaptation of *Dances with Wolves* clearly features a faster rhythm than Blake’s narration and a clearer and more telling ending; the book leaves us with the foreboding of an immanent extinction of the Indians through the anticipated advancement of the white military forces, but Dunbar and his wife remain with the tribe. In the movie, the couple starts off away from the tribe, on the background of images of a deserted Indian camp and of noises of approaching riding soldiers. The howling of another wolf insinuates that the call of the wild or the Indian spirit

will find a way to survive even if only with this white couple who manages to escape their white pursuers²³. To add to the Hollywoodian recipe, Costner operates with additional clues such as the Indian who finds Dunbar's journal in the fight they have at the river to rescue him from the soldiers; the fact that the Indian returns the journal to Dances with Wolves resolves an identity issue and implies at the same time that the soldiers will not have any written evidence of Dunbar's presence at the fort and implicitly of his treason, all being a thread that had remained open-ended in the novel.

The enhancement of orality in the cinematic translations becomes evident in the distinct story that a screen adaptation presents in some cases. As in the oral tradition, a story re-told by another teller often becomes a completely new story. Paul Matthiessen, author of *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, and John Fusco, the screenplay writer of *Thunderheart*, the movie based on Matthiessen's novel, construct two different stories. Although we can see some similarities in the struggle of AIM (novel) and ARM (movie) organizations, in the corrupt local Indian police (led by Dick Wilson in the novel and by Milton in the movie), in the danger posed by the uranium exploitation (both in the novel and movie), and in the implication of some FBI agents into fraudulent activities (both in the novel and movie), the characters follow a distinct plot arrangement in Michael Apted's adaptation. In the movie, an FBI investigation initially launched for the death of an Indian, Leo, involves two FBI agents, Ray Levoi and Frank Coutelle. Two FBI agents are indeed killed in this action, but this seems to have less significance than it has in the book. Ray's research will reveal that his FBI colleague, Coutelle, was implicated all the time in uranium operations that pose a serious threat to the lives of the Indians on the reservation, and moreover, appears to have paid Richard Hawk to kill Leo. Jimmy, the original FBI suspect, comes across as a dim prototype

of Leonard Peltier, the Indian accused of aiding and abetting the killers of two FBI agents in Matthiessen's book. Jimmy certainly does not appear to have Peltier's prestige as an AIM leader, nor does he have his diplomacy and sophistication. Although he rather seems to be a cunning man who manages to dodge arrest once--he tells the FBI agents to look for a key in a hole from which a badger emerges and bites them--, Jimmy impersonates the type of nonchalant Indian, ignorant about politics, and concerned exclusively with saving his skin.

Apted's movie follows Hollywoodian patterns of debunking the bad guys in the end with Ray's statement that Coutelle will face charges; it also plays on a revival of community strength and unity against evil as the Indians led by the old man Yellow Hawk climb the rocks and surround Coutelle and his people to save Levoi. The novel offers no resolution of the conflict in the end, except for the allegation that the killer of the two FBI agents has revealed his identity to the author, but for political reasons, he will never be able to turn himself in to the authorities. Matthiessen implies that he probably killed the FBI agents in self-defense, but since that could not be proven in court, and since that will not lead to Peltier's acquittal or to the betterment of AIM, the real culprit will remain under a veil and with an X identity.

The second half of Hijuelos's novel, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, suffers from a dragging narrative of Cesar's physical, professional, and moral degeneration after his brother's death. The rhetoric loses the initial vitality and the events seem interminable, heavy with boredom, vanity, shallowness, emptiness like Cesar's tormented existence. Perhaps for this reason, as well as to serve the Hollywoodian happy ending, Glimcher opts to eliminate this part completely, leaving Cesar in his prime with the potential of marrying his brother's widow with which he had built chemistry all along (as much as in the novel). Thus,

in the way of the oral tradition, the film plot perpetuates family values and portrays Cesar as a strong, model individual.

In 1997, seven years after the publication of James Ellroy's novel *L.A. Confidential*, director Curtis Hanson simplified this crime noir piece into an action, law-and-order movie. Curtis removes a major subplot of the novel, namely the involvement of Preston Exley (Ed's father) and of his friend and business partner, Raymond Dieterling, in the 1934 Atherton children murder and mutilation case, a precedent, in the novel, of the Night Owl case. This screenplay choice does away with Ed's conflict between his professional ethics and family ties and with his remorse over the suicidal of his father together with Dieterling and their secretary Inez. Within the movie's plot, Inez remains a feeble victim of a gang rape, and never gets involved with Ed, Bud, nor does she ever work at Preston Exley's business. As Seger observes, "Material that is dependent on a great deal of backstory information can cause a number of translation problems" (55). This is why it is the director's and screenwriters' choice to sometimes eliminate altogether subplots or secondary characters when working on the adaptation of a branchy novel like *L.A. Confidential* or Le Ly Hayslip's autobiographical novels.

In terms of geographical context and time frames, which are key factor in oral literature, movies operate with financial constraints, but do possess the technical devices to mask location and time inconsistencies²⁴. For instance, the characters' arrival and their departure from the Isla Nublada in Spielberg's adaptation of Jurassic Park, were filmed both at the beginning of production in Hawaii (Bordwell 25). If in oral literature and in ancient Greek drama, the setting of the plot was customarily limited to one location, the movie adaptations of the 1990s often operate with multiple sites, following the dynamics of travel

and communication rendered in the fiction on which they are based. However, the concept of continuity in film homogenizes the various sites (and sometimes temporal frames) around the crux of the story, thus creating a postmodern mobile unity of place and time. Going back to the example of *Jurassic Park*, the locations announced in the film using titles like “Isla Nublar – 120 miles West of Costa Rica,” “Dominican Republic,” “Badlands,” all represent operation sites related to Hammond’s project.

As far as the treatment of time is concerned, the postmodern fiction and film depart from the often unrealistic concentrations of plot in a 24-hour frame in Green tragedies, but resemble oral literature in their use of simultaneous synchronic and diachronic perspectives as they usually strive to show the evolution of a character in a larger historical context (see Amy Tan, Oscar Hijuelos, etc.). What remains different from the oral tradition in terms of postmodern fiction and film plot time is the preoccupation with the Bergsonian temporal dichotomy of chronological time and psychological (consciousness) time. If oral literature dwelled exclusively on chronological time (that when actions took place), postmodernity combines historical and psychological temporalities, and in this process, current action (chronology) sometimes yields to inner time re-enactments as it is the case in Morrison’s *Beloved*, a novel and a movie that abound in the re-memory of past traumas achieved through storytelling and flashbacks²⁵.

3. 2. Character Treatment

The play of character's *peitho* (persuasion) and chorus's *kratos* (power, dominance) so obvious in the Greek tragedy, as Vernant insightfully remarks (275), assumes a new set of rules and tools in the Hollywoodian staging where, oftentimes, characters lose their obvious and traditional roles to serve the dramatic economy of the movie. As Gayl Jones observes, "in films especially, unless they are comedians or villains, even white Southerners do not speak like Southerners, perhaps because this would trigger too much laughter when the intent is dramatic" (128). And there is always the reverse side of the coin: not only do literary characters become movie protagonists in film adaptations, but they are sometimes constructed to oppose deceitful movie models. Gayl Jones offers a brief history of this phenomenon in African-American works: "This depiction of 'dreaming selves' in media metaphors is the standard movie image ideal which other black writers have employed to complicate character, from Richard Wright's *Native Son* to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* to the poetic themes of Amiri Baraka, Michael S. Harper, and others" (152). And the list could go on and on with other consecrated titles: Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust*, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. The narrative voice of the characters in these works ranges from displaying a certain awareness of the existence of the

movie medium to straightforwardly crying out against the vanity and destructive power of the Hollywood hypnosis.

It is precisely this magical potency of the camera that confers a certain sacral function to screen adaptations. In her article, “Bringing Home the Fact: Tradition and Continuity in the Imagination,” Paula Gunn Allen explains the texture of tragedy and comedy on a Biblical ethico-religious paradigm:

One can trace this archetypal pattern from Genesis forward. The central motif of the Bible is the distance between God and Man; its primal thrust is reunification of the shattered, alienated psyche.

Nor is the motif confined to the Bible. It is a basic premise of literary criticism: The tragedy is that imaginative construct which chronicles the separation of the hero from the source of his being; his flaw is preeminently that of perceiving himself as more than, or different from, his own being in its godly and/or human components. The comedy, on the other hand, is an imaginative construct that chronicles the reunification of the hero/heroine with society, God, and self. And what is the story of the Fall and the Redemption, if not the tale of separation/fragmentation and its obverse, reunification/integration? Deeply embedded in the consciousness of Western peoples as these primal motifs are, there is an underlying motif implicit in these: an assumption of wholeness as essentially good, and of separation as essentially evil. (569)

Allen’s paradigm reinforces the sacral, ritualistic functions of performance that existed not only within the Western Christian culture, but also as part of oral non-Christian traditions.

Characters in ancient Greek dramas aimed at making peace with the gods and with the community. The pride of belonging or being reunited with one's racial and cultural community, as a way of resolving the dramatic conflict through an spiritual and/or religious evolution, pervaded Native American and African-American orality, as well. In *Dances With Wolves*, for instance, Michael Blake takes over this motif when presenting Lieutenant Dunbar's celebrating his conversion to the Indian tribe as a way of reunification with his natural self.

“Traditions and values may accumulate, and histories may be written—but none of these guarantees an individual sense of home,” remarks Robinson (18). There is an obvious similarity between the migration patterns of oral societies and the Anglo-European westering that culminated with the post-modern heroes' alienation and instabilities. Late twentieth-century heroes still move through life with a strong Aristotelian *hamartia* – tragic flaw, but the character distinctions of “either noble or base” (Aristotle 43) have become infinitely more intricate. More often than not, there is an overlapping among the roles of protagonists (positive, heroic figures), antagonists (the villains), and what Seger defines as “catalyst characters,” heroes who “make decisions, add information, or create conflicts with the protagonists” (123). If we were to consider only the crime thriller, a very popular genre in contemporary cinema (*L.A. Confidential*, *The Firm*, etc.), the three typical sorts of characters, lawbreakers, law enforcement, and bystanders/victims (Bordwell 112), do not appear always as pure representatives of their clique; lawbreakers sometimes come across as sympathetic (see the three black young men unjustly shot in *L.A. Confidential* by Ed Exley) whereas the law enforcement characters might impersonate asocial, nerdy heroes (Exley).

And yet in other instances, the director produces a simplified version of the fiction heroes, which brings such characters closer to the oral tradition. In *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg's Hammond appears as more human, more of a grandfather figure who wants to offer an unforgettable weekend at an original theme park to his grandchildren, a businessman enthusiastic about a ground-breaking idea, but also a man who accepts in the end the error of his enterprise and works earnestly on rescuing the people involved. At no time does Hammond worry in the movie about what is going to happen to his animals as the character does in the novel. To soften Hammond's features, Spielberg leaves out several dialogues from the novel that demonize the character and justify Crichton's choice to have him killed by his own monstrous creations at the end. For instance, Hammond's whole plea against science in the service of medical progress and his resolute contention that "From a business standpoint, that makes helping mankind a very risky business. Personally, I would *never* help mankind" (200) does not exist in the movie.

A radically modified character is also Stone's protagonist in his adaptation of Hayslip's novels. The viewers of Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* will perceive Le Ly as an angelic victim of the Vietnam war who takes up a mission of peace and healing, while those who have read Hayslip's autobiographical novels certainly remain with the impression of a versatile woman who manages to negotiate between two cultures and emerges as a successful, well-off philanthropist. Oliver Stone cuts Hayslip's long list of boyfriends and two husbands into one character, Major Steve, who combines the chemistry Hayslip had with Dan, but also Dan's weapon brokerage intentions, Dennis's hobby of collecting guns, and Cliff's stories about the atrocities he had to commit during the war, and who eventually ends up committing suicide in his car as Dennis Hayslip did in *Child of War*. Stone plays

exclusively on victimizing Le Ly and her spiritual growth and deliberately removes from the script details, present in the book, that could have shed doubts on the integrity of her character, such as her stubbornness in adopting Vietnamese orphans which substantially contributed to the failure of her marriage to Dennis, her business flair in administering the social welfare and respectively the life insurance of her two deceased American husbands, her negotiation with cons and members of the high class to establish her charity foundation, etc. Hayslip's victimization in the movie makes her into an oral tradition type of character, who displays one dominant trait of character.

In the case of *The Joy Luck Club* adaptation, the mis-en-scène plays a crucial role in the build-up of the characters. The director makes choices that at times outweigh the descriptive powers of Tan's narration: an almost non-existent make-up and simple traditional costumes for poor Chinese characters such as Lindo's mother as opposed to sophisticated hairdos, make-up, and fine clothes for well-to-do Chinese (Ying-Ying and her first husband) and for the accomplished Chinese American daughters like Waverly and Rose. Given the vignette structure of the novel, the movie does not add any other details to the stories, although they seem more vivid in the movie as they come across through a triple discourse: narrative voiceovers, dialogues, and images. Nevertheless, the movie builds the characters through snippets of scenes from various points in time, as much as the novel does, but perhaps due to a clearly shorter viewing time as opposed to a longer time needed to complete the reading of the novel, it appears that the characterization means of the movie suffer from an inevitable cinematic shallowness. However, the film character-building techniques enhance the immediacy and reinforce the involvement of the audience as it also occurred in the oral tradition. The time the viewers spend with the characters in Wayne Wang's

adaptation only incites their taste for the exoticism of Chinese traditions, culture, and language, arouses sympathy for the generational and cultural clashes between Chinese mothers and American-born daughters, and feeds a Hollywoodian desire for classical balance within strong familial structures. At the end of the movie, the viewers might as well have a hard time remembering details from all the characters' lives (which mother or daughter did what), nor can they feel that they know enough about all the characters. What the viewers are left with are a strong sense of family values and immigration struggles and perhaps a feminist touch of confidence in the power of women to accomplish their dreams and overcome dire circumstances. In reading the novel, the empathy of the readers and their familiarity with the characters accumulate gradually but more substantially than in the movie in the circular workings of a narration that snowballs layers of profound emotions, cultural coding, and a constant negotiation with a double ethnicity.

From the prototypes of the "noble savage" and the "bloodthirsty redskins" encountered in Fenimore Cooper's classic, *The Last of the Mohicans*, the Native American characters have evolved into more realistic, although still fate-struck, heroes. Sherman Alexie's short stories characters struggle with poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, professional failure, cancer (James who has a brain tumor), suicide (Samuel Builds-the-Fire), fighting, all of which are downplayed in the screen version, *Smoke Signals*. Alexie's screenplay focus remains on two characters only, two orphan teenagers, Thomas and Victor, who undertake a journey of maturity, are faced with financial and familiar decisions, take responsibility for an accident they commit, and find their identity, one in telling stories and the other one in making peace with his father and finding a voice to shout out in pain and maybe revolt against social injustice (see the dramatic end of the movie in

which Victor throws his father's ashes into the river and screams away his anguish). Thus the movie adaptation re-enacts patterns of character integration and initiation into one's cultural community.

Primitivism, as a celebration of the nature in the universe and in the human being, saturates both the novel and the movie *Dances with Wolves*. In the novel, Lieutenant Dunbar appears as an Adamic figure or a marooned Robinson Crusoe at the Sedgewick fort, a man capable of communicating with animals and of feeling the pulse of nature, and one who certainly struggles with an emerging acculturation to the Indian customs and language to the point of being "shamed of the white race" and of the atrocities they commit against nature and against Indians (285). Costner emphasizes Dunbar's awe of nature following Blake's scenes of Dunbar working naked at the fort and choosing slow motion close-ups to show the buffaloes killed by whites not because of hunger but in a reckless hunt. Further, to show the complete acculturation of *Dances with Wolves* to the Indian tribe, Costner manipulates Indian dialogues and subtitles in two ways: when Dunbar is captured and interrogated by the white soldiers at the fort, he replies in Indian dialect, but there are no subtitles in English, which reinforces the lack of communication or rather his refusal to communicate with a race whose actions he disapproves of. To the contrary, the last part of the movie, after *Dances with Wolves* is rescued from the soldiers and back with the tribe and with his wife, he is engaged in dialogues exclusively in the Indian dialect, but this time, the viewers have the privilege of English subtitles, perhaps because of the aphoristic content of Indian teachings that come across in these final scenes. Again, as in the oral tradition, the movie follows the hero's acculturation into the tribal community.

Another way of shaping Dunbar's character in the movie is using him in narrative voiceovers. It is interesting to note that Dunbar's voice starts to narrate only after his heroic feat in the battle in which he fights already wounded in the leg, as if only such an act of supreme sacrifice could have given him a voice and made him into a man, a reiteration of oral rites of initiation.

If Oscar Hijuelos's novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* exudes the rich aromas of lyrical poetry, Hispanic culture, musical rhythms, infused with Oedipal episodes and Greek tragedy traces, Arne Glimcher's screen adaptation *The Mambo Kings / Reyes del Mambo* outweighs the fictional rhetoric with a sustained pace, glamorous, classical crisp images, and with characters that are equally tragic and intense as they appear in the book, but less vulgar and elevated to a complex and contradictory noblesse. As with the other adaptations discussed here, this simplification of character parallels the oral tradition.

Cesar's vulgarity and sexual dissipation are some of the debasing character traits, present in the novel, that Glimcher does away with in his *Mambo Kings* adaptation. Perhaps because he pondered that he would not have enough space and time to justify or redeem Cesar from too an acute moral nadir, the *Mambo Kings* director overplays Cesar's tumultuous passion dancing on a deep layer of humanity, brotherly love, and helplessness in the face of destiny. In the movie, we do not see Cesar "devour[ing] everything hungrily, talking with his mouth full, and on not just one occasion indelicately belching in the midst of a laugh that enlarged his eyeballs and brought tears to his eyes: a man dedicated to himself, always taking more than his share: five pork chops, two plates of rice and beans, a plate of *yuca*, all drowned in salt and lemon and garlic" (86). Nor do we see him in any instance so downfallen after the death of his brother Nestor, that he takes a dirty handyman position,

which strongly symbolizes his inner filth, and haunts his sick nightmares: “When he’d finally find the loose joint, dirty water would drip down on his face and often into his mouth” (247). Since Glimcher features Cesar sleeping only with Lana Lake, the cigarette girl at the Palladium, and then in the company of some girls at a hotel in Hollywood, after which the end of the movie implies the redemption of Nestor through Dolores, his brother’s widow, Cesar does not appear, as it does in Hijuelos’s novel, a sex addict or desperado which engages in sexual activity with a new female every night. Choosing to end the movie with Cesar and Dolores shortly after Nestor’s death, Glimcher eliminates Cesar’s struggles with old age decrepitude and his apologetic mental escapism into sex to avoid mortality on the night of his suicide at Hotel Splendour, as the novel has it:

[. . .] But always the sky grew dark and in the water he’d smell blood, like the blood that sometimes appeared in his urine. And then he would look down the river and see that there were hundreds of naked women, bursting with youth and femininity, bodies damp and beautiful in the sun: and some would hold their arms out to him imploringly and some would lie back on the ground with their legs spread wide and he’d want them so bad, daydreaming about making love to one hundred women at a time, as if that would make him immortal. But then he’d hear click-clock, click-clock, click-clock in the trees, and when he looked up he saw hanging from the branches skeletons everywhere, like wind chimes, hanging off every branch on every tree, the sounds they’d make frightening him. (373)

The inborn, tragically human fear of death, the awareness of the flightiness of human life that makes Cesar tell his brother Nestor “whenever they passed a cemetery,” in a jocular tone,

“Look, brother, there goes the future” (155), remains ingrained, as a deep sadness, on the recurrent images of Cesar’s photographs with Nestor in the photo booth, as images of humans who part of a natural cycle, an ideological slant characteristic of the oral tradition.

The first generation of African American novelists that immediately followed the Civil War²⁶ displayed two major black character typologies when dealing with slaves narratives: the forgiving Christ figure and the violent warrior (Bryant 54). The warrior model offered a means of denying the animal condition of the ex-slaves and proving their human valor and ethics, but posed the danger of escalating the racial tensions already heightened in the Reconstruction process. On the other hand, the forgiving Christ figure, while also enhancing the blacks’ human ability to absorb and practice Christianity, presented the risk of lack of self-affirmation, complete abandonment to an inferior social status, and, in some ways, confirmed “Uncle Tom” stereotypes. Morrison clearly departs from these tendencies of the black novel. The characters in *Beloved* are neither forgiving (Sethe is ready to kill the Schoolteacher in her blurred perception of Mr. Bodwin), nor are Morrison’s people Nat Turner figures. Instead, Morrison seems more preoccupied with the cultural and religious affiliation polarities tackled by nineteenth-century black writers who oscillated between honoring the African heritage and embracing and enriching Anglo-Saxon Christianity on American land. Christianity becomes the pride of liberated slaves (Baby Suggs), but it is not an eager participation into the white system of values, as George Washington Williams, for instance, claimed in 1883 in *The History of the Negro Race in America* (273). Rather, more in the way of William T. Alexander, Morrison celebrates the African heritage of the American enslaved race and subtly suggests that their genetic

intelligence makes them competitive on the educational and professional fields dominated by the white Anglo-Saxons:

The builders of the Pyramids and Obelisks sat at the feet of the Ethiopians to learn Architecture, Philosophy, Letters and Religion. From the Colored Race, Egypt obtained its civilization, and a visit to the twenty-two Universities and Colleges in our land that are educating young colored men and women for the highest walks of life, will convince the most skeptical that in an educational sense there are no impossibilities in the way of their receiving the highest education, of which they are truly susceptible. (Alexander 15)

Nineteenth-century “Ethiopianism” or the modern Afrocentrism is manifest in *Beloved* in the pride Sethe takes in the African dialect spoken by her mother and further in Denver, who materializes Alexander’s trust in the capability of the African Americans to excel in school. Nada Elia interprets Sethe’s adversity against the white schoolteacher in *Beloved* as “mistrust of ‘white schooling’” and on a larger scale as an African American feminist trend to denunciate “White English as oppressive” (4, 5). But for Denver’s generation, education, provided by whites, of course, since they hold the monopoly of education in the country, is not oppressive or anti-racial, but it is a means to racial equality and self-affirmation. In the last Denver-Paul D scene, the movie maintains most of the dialogue content rendered by the novel, and re-enacts the figure of the toast in terms of affirming the potential of blacks in a white-dominated world. Denver expresses her joy at the fact that Miss Bodwin is teaching her “book stuff” for the purpose of going to college. It is her confidence built on education that gives her the stature to reject Paul D’s opinion and claim “I have my own” (Morrison

267). Thus Denver's generation takes full advantage of white education as a way of building their identity, which given its cross-cultural versatility, reincarnates the trope of the trickster.

In the face of Denver's excitement about the future, Paul D abstains from saying "Watch out. Watch out. Nothing in the world more dangerous than a white schoolteacher" (Morrison 266). The education factor, as a new lease on the future, wins the battle against the past traumas. Morrison's optimism that past errors should not take possession of the present (256) transpires in Miss Bodwin's act of counterbalancing the experiments of the white schoolteacher at Sweet Home. Thus, Morrison's Afrocentrism does not exclude Anglo-Saxon culture. It preaches mutual exchanges that honor both cultures and put forth the vision of a fulfilled future in which ex-slaves and their descendants will have found their identity and will have affirmed their value, and it pleads for a bi-racial community that honors both cultural heritages.

The character Beloved, although instrumental in reviving the past, predominantly displays a child-like mind and psyche. Of all the characters, she who triggers others' memories has the most fragmented and unarticulated memories of past. Denver's final statement that Beloved "was more" than her reincarnated sister (Morrison 266) opens the possibility of reading Beloved as an archetype of the enslaved traumatized black race who voluntarily or involuntarily represses, rejects, and does away with memory baggage²⁷.

3. 3. The Cultural Substance of Adaptations

3.3.1. Socio-Political Aspects

Acknowledging the collective authorship of oral tradition, Sherman Alexie observes in his short story “Family Portrait” that “often the stories contain people who never existed before our collective imaginations created them” (193). When the collective imagination creates heroes, it is usually to fulfill present social needs within the community, which illustrates but one of the social functions of orality. During the translation from the print medium to the camera medium, or rather during what Bolter would call the remediation of fiction into film, the novels preserve their status of authoritative discourse in Bakhtinian terms:

Authoritative discourse may organize around itself great masses of other types of discourses (which interpret it, praise it, apply it in various ways), but the authoritative discourse itself does not merge with these (by means of, say, gradual transitions) [. . .] Therefore, authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible

transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. (533)

The authoritative word, according to Bakhtin, is “religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers” (532), but it is also the word of novelists and film producers. At the end of a tumultuous twentieth-century, American writers and directors appropriate the social functions of the Native American medicine man, of the Asian shaman, and of the African-American preacher from the oral traditions, and produce legal, political, and scientific discourse, far-flung from the exclusive preoccupation (of a nineteenth-century Henry James, for instance) for social mannerism of a select community and for mental and psychological developments of highly self-conscious characters.

Very much in an Aristotelian fashion, postmodern writers exceed mimetic art, in that even if their plot stems from a real story (thus imitating reality), their heroes, the cultural richness and the life philosophy that transpires from their novels rise to universal significance. And so do their screen adaptations, except that the movies’ universalism reaches out even further into global political and economical levels. “I must admit that the mid-1990s have witnessed a dearth of really good American films,” writes Thompson. “Hollywood is making enormous amounts of money and expanding its hold on world markets following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the strong trend toward multiplexing in Europe and Asia. The growing urge on the part of the studio executives to make films that can appeal to virtually any person on the planet has apparently reduced some of the flexibility in the classical system. This bid for universal appeal is often cited as evidence of a ‘post-classical’ approach” (336). Thompson further describes Hollywoodian post-classicism

as a mixture of “the breakdown of coherent plot development and character traits by the increasing dominance of spectacular action and special effects” on the one hand, and “an assumed ‘fragmentation’ of audiences” (344).

The cathartic function of the postmodern tragic discourse, whether it be mediated through print or camera, often seeks to purge the audience of emotions far more complex than fear and pity. “For pity is aroused by someone who undeservedly falls into misfortune,” avers Aristotle, “and fear is evoked by our recognizing that it is someone like ourselves who encounters this misfortune” (50). Stories like Stone’s adaptation *Heaven and Earth* awake the viewers’ horror for the helpless victims of war and incite the identification sympathies of immigrants. “When we watch a film or a television broadcast,” argues Bolter, “we become the changing point of view of the camera. [. . .] This is not to say that our identity is fully determined by media, but rather that we employ media as vehicles for defining both personal and cultural identity. [. . .] When we watch the filmed adaptation of a novel, we bring to the film a notion of self appropriate to voiced prose.” (231-232).

So powerful has the dominion of the camera become, that it holds the authority to validate human identity. In her 1990 play *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, Suzan Lori-Parks has some characters (the Saxons) repeatedly take their photographs to prove their existence (Robinson 16). The element of Indians being photographed constitutes one cultural and economic detail that director Apted fails to take over from Matthiessen’s novel. From the tribal perspective, leaders who accepted to have their photograph taken-- “which Crazy Horse, throughout his life, refused to do”—“let their spirit be captured in a box” and thus lost their authority and efficiency (Matthiessen 8). On the other hand, “photographic portraits of ‘The Vanishing Redman’,” often commodified on white markets,

turn the Indians into victims of racial display, creating an image of the Indian as an anthropological rarity. The same desacralization of Indian culture happened, according to Matthiessen, with the use of Indians in Western movie features (18).

Barthes offers a definition of photography based on two terms he coins: the *punctum*, a “sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice [. . .] that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me) [. . .] this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26, 27) and the *studium*, which comprises all the historical, cultural message of an image (26). As much as oral traditions might argue against the camera’s *punctum* (or the commercial function of the image), they will always share the *studium* content with the art of cinema since the intentions of both oral and cinematic traditions are geared toward social change. Indeed, as Keyssar points out, “drama offers another possibility, that of presenting and urging the transformation of persons and our images of each other,” but as she goes further to postulate, “it is becoming other, not finding oneself, that is the crux of the drama” (93). As Keyssar concludes, “drama, especially in its contemporary, televised form, may lure us to see and shape others as identical to ourselves, but that is not what its best work is ever about.” Postmodern drama, resonating with the militancy of the ’60s, “enable[s] us to acknowledge the otherness of others” (Keyssar 106).

Along these lines, stories like Crichton’s *Jurassic Park* and James Ellroy’s *L.A. Confidential* warn against an imminent destruction of the city (in Aristotelian terms) either through unethical scientific endeavors or by inner corruption and proliferation of crime. These information assemblages turn the message of the fiction into social manifests in the 1990s.²⁸ There is no doubt that “Literature is political,” as Judy Fetterley remarks (991). But it is “the ideological slant of cinematic narrators” (Chatman 154) that dictates the political

color. And since the main ideology of producers is that of marketing their products with a minimum risk of being sued, their political color remains, more often than not, neutral.

Le Ly Hayslip's story stems from a predominantly oral culture in which education and literacy were scarce and often impeded by war conditions. "At night, my family would sit around the fire and tell stories about the dead—both distant ancestors and people recently killed," recalls Hayslip in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. "Such stories all followed a common pattern, like acts of a play or the rules of a poem" (15). In a central scene, which director Oliver Stone also takes over in the movie, Le Ly's father lays before her the mission of her life: "Your job is to stay alive—to keep an eye on things and keep the village safe. To find a husband and have babies and tell the story of what you've seen to your children and anyone else who'll listen" (32). Thus, the movie perpetuates an enactment of the community values that used to be transmitted orally to the next generation as Hayslip records it in her novels.

If Le Ly Hayslip comes across as a diplomat in depicting the Communist and American influences in pre- and post-war Vietnam, Oliver Stone patently shuns any political innuendos that would imply favoritism toward any of the two sides. His diluted version of Hayslip's story paints an intensely desolate, melodramatic, and at times bucolic image of Vietnam, in which the population wallows in poverty, helpless, a victim of political conflicts they certainly do not understand. "The more sophisticated films become," observes Chatman, "the less often do characters or voice-over narrators explicitly argue a film's thesis" (57). But neither do Hollywood studios intend to provide "explicit and formal argumentation" since it would be detrimental to their profits (Chatman 58). The producers' preoccupation with social issues combined with a reluctance to present a clear-cut "message"

often results in productions that sacrifice principles for the sake of pleasing as large an audience as possible.²⁹ Stone is true to Hayslip's explanation of the Republicans' failure to appeal to the masses (since they were Catholics like the oppressive French), something he renders through Le Ly's voiceover, and to the Viet Cong's propaganda that relied heavily on the farmers' interest in preserving their traditions and land. Nevertheless, the director intentionally leaves out details of bribing the Vietnamese officials both when Le Ly immigrated to the States and when she came back to Vietnam to visit. In fact, Stone minimizes the details of her visit to Vietnam without mentioning Hayslip's long red tape experiences and media exposure before her trip, the logistics of her humanitarian projects, and especially her political perceptions and views.

“The Hollywood tycoons were not wrong in acting on the assumption that movies gave the American immigrant a means of self-fulfillment without delay,” wrote McLuhan in 1964 (254). In the 1990s, the cinematic discourse ceases to depict such an idealism. The immigrants (Le Ly Hayslip, the four mothers and daughters in Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*) do attain financial prosperity in America, but that happens often to the detriment of their spiritual development, and this is what these movie adaptations show. Stone catches some of Le Ly's bewilderment at the “American magic” technology and consumerist society (*Child of War* 32) as he briefly has her struggle with the sink's garbage disposal and renders with fidelity to the novel the Uncle Ben rice episode. While the racially loaded scene in which Le Ly is scorned by her husband's family over dinner (it is Ed's family in Hayslip's *Child of War*) stays with Stone's version, the director never reveals her sometimes outright rejection or misunderstanding of American culture. Some things never find any room in Stone's movie such as Le Ly's mental revolt voiced as “Sex, guns, and Christ! Was that all

Americans cared about?” or her thoughts following a violent reaction to her press declarations before her post-war trip to Vietnam, as she writes that the Vietnam veterans had “admitted they knew next to nothing about the people, land, and culture they had gone so far to destroy” (*Child of War* 226).

Throughout the two novels, but especially in *Child of War*, Hayslip repeatedly professes her political neutrality. “I didn’t care about politics. I didn’t know anything about communism or democracy and never had. I felt sorry for everyone who had been harmed by the war, on either side,” writes Hayslip (*Child* 220). And again, she makes it clear that she intends her mission to remain exclusively humanitarian and devoid of any political tint when she confronts an FBI agent after her first 1986 trip to Vietnam: “I just want you to know that I will not spy for anybody, okay? Not for the Vietnamese, not for the American government, not for anybody. You see, I’m thinking about doing humanitarian work for my people—not for the Communist government, but for the people, like the Red Cross” (*Child* 248). In a realistic world, it is obvious that one can never be politically neutral. What Oliver Stone picks up from *Child of War* is Hayslip’s universalistic attitude that constructs her persona as citizen of the world, representing one of the American races:

I could not speak for all Americans, but as a U.S. citizen of Asian descent I was as entitled to my spot in the U.S. melting pot as any Caucasian, Hispanic, or black woman, or any other race that made up the American soul. Peel away our colorful skins and we are all children of one planet. Our creed of choice—freedom and independence, responsibility and compassion—is the core of our humanity. We can no more reject it than we can reject the spark of life which fate or luck or god has given us. Many people may be better suited

by education or talent to bring this message to East and West, but one handhold on that burden has fallen to me. (*Child* 330)

Built on these novel lines, Stone's script puts similar words into Le Ly's voiceover as she walks, angelically dressed in white, through the high, green grass of her country's fields at the end of the movie, mentally affirming her mission to "be in-between East and West, Vietnam and American, Heaven and Earth" (*Heaven and Earth*).

Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* becomes a vehicle of cultural preservation and transmission as much as any production of the oral tradition. "Before I wrote *The Joy Luck Club*, my mother told me, 'I might die soon. And if I die, what will you remember'," said Amy Tan in an interview (qtd. in Rozakis 387).³⁰ *The Joy Luck Club* explores issues of cultural Chinese-American and generational differences while avoiding direct criticism of either country. In one of the stories narrated by Lindo Jong in the novel, "Double Face," Lindo explains her dream of inculcating in her daughter the best in the two worlds, but also her disappointment that the American identity ended up displacing the Chinese traditions:

I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?

I taught her how American circumstances work. If you are born poor here, it's not lasting shame. You are first in line for a scholarship. If the roof crashes on your head, no need to cry over this bad luck. You can sue anybody, make the landlord fix it. You do not have to sit like a Buddha under a tree letting pigeons drop their dirty business on your head. You can buy an

umbrella. Or go inside a Catholic church. In America, nobody says you have to keep the circumstances somebody else gives you.

She learned these things, but I couldn't teach her about Chinese character.

How to obey parents and listen to your mother's mind. How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities. Why easy things are not worth pursuing. How to know your own worth and polish it, never flashing it around like a cheap ring.

Why Chinese thinking is best. (289)

The movie emphasizes the linguistic and cultural tension between Lindo and her daughter Waverly as they spend time together at the beauty salon and over the blunders of Rich, Waverly's fiancé, at dinner. Again, Rose's feminist awakening to confront her husband when dealing with an imminent divorce, both in the novel and movie, show that the daughters of the Chinese mothers have inherited a Chinese strength, which translated into American terms, results into challenging the male authority as much as it had led to challenging the parental authority during their American childhood (June revolts against her mother's pressures to master the piano and Waverly does the same with her mother's ambition to see her a chess champion).

After Richardson Morse's floppy adaptation of Scott Momaday's *The House Made of Dawn* in 1987, and a deep blend of activism and poetry in David Seals' *Powwow Highway*'s adaptation directed by Jonathan Wacks, the only adaptation of fiction written by a Native American about Native Americans in the 1990s remains the humorous, charming *Smoking Signals* (1998) directed by Chris Eyre and based on a script by the Native American Sherman Alexie who used here materials from his short-stories. In one of his short stories,

“Imagining the Reservation,” S. Alexie makes a mathematic and at the same time socio-philosophic statement: “Survival = Anger x Imagination. Imagination is the only weapon on the reservations” (150). And further, he launches a rhetorical question: “Does every Indian depend on Hollywood for a twentieth-century vision?” (150). The screen adaptation *The Smoke Signals* operates on the above equation factoring in Victor as a prototype of anger and Thomas as a repository of imagination, both of whom re-enact the oral type of survival of the Native American spirit at the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, there is a salient scene in the movie, discussed below, that debunks the Hollywood vision and indirectly answers Alexie’s question.

The movie follows the pattern of the maturity journey motif and does so in a racial context. A journey of coming of age for the two young men, Victor and Thomas, the Greyhound ride to Phoenix teaches them to deal with cons like the young lady who pretends to have been part of the Olympic games and with racists like the driver who stares at them in a discriminatory way and the two whites who had appropriated their seats and refuse to move. Victor’s irony when teaching Thomas to pose and act as a stoic Indian matches that in Alexie’s story of historical social injustice, “The Trial of Thomas-Builds-the Fire,” in which Thomas-Builds-the-Fire impersonates various Indian heroes. As a screenplay writer, Alexie seems to prefer a reference to another Indian literary work of the 1990s, which portrays a stereotypical image of the classic noble savage: “How many times have you watched *Dances with Wolves*?” Victor asks Thomas on the bus while teaching him how to be a real Indian (*Smoke Signals*). Later when their stoic faces could not move the whites from their seats, Thomas observes that “stoic faces don’t always work” and “you know, Victor, cowboys always win,” pointing to the invincibility of the Anglo-Saxons and mentioning John

Wayne as a white prototype (*Smoke Signals*). Victor's spontaneous orality manifestation is a mockery of the whites' superficiality and hidden weaknesses and a subtle demystification of the white cowboy myths: "John Wayne's teeth, hey-ya, hey-ya, are they false or are they real/ John Wayne's teeth are they plastic, are they steel," sing the two boys and their song assumes studio quality while a crane image pans away along with their bus (*Smoke Signals*). Thus, the two characters resort to incantatory singing, an oral ritualistic manifestation that challenges the superiority of the colonizing archetypes.

Blake's *Dances with Wolves* shows with impartiality the Indian noblesse (Comanche) and the Indian cruelty (Pawnees), the whites' baseness (new soldiers at the fort), but also the white's potential for redemption (Dunbar). The novel, as much as the movie, depicts a world in turmoil, in which neither races were completely in the right. The sense that both Blake and Costner make of the racial and political tensions takes the social discourse to a universalistic level. Kicking Bird, gives a last piece of advice to Dances: "There are many trails in this life, but the one that matters most, few men are able to walk...even Comanche men. It is the trail of a true human being. I think you are on this trail. It is a good thing for me to see. It is good for my heart" (281-2).

A law and order movie, *Thunderheart*, softens its plot with Levoi's rediscovery and acceptance of his Indian blood and his re-affirmed connection with Thunderheart, a Wounded Knee hero. Apted chooses to insert grayish frames of poverty³¹ on the reservation (as Levoi and Coutelle first drive through) and a drunken fight in a bar to signal alcoholism, but other than that, the movie overtly shuns any political implications that abound in Matthiessen's novel, such as the AIM internal conflicts related to drug abuse, mishandling of funds, illegal weapon traffic, and dubious connections to Communist governments. As

ragged and ignorant as they appear in *Thunderheart*, Apted's Indians never go so far as to refuse to swear in court by the Bible and to deny their U.S. citizenship as some of the witnesses do in the trials presented by Matthiessen in his novel. One of the Indian accounts of the Pine Ridge natives' confrontation with the feds hints at the merging realities of cinema and of making history on an isolated Indian reservation. "One fed car started to come up the hill, you know, something straight out of the movies. They were shooting at us, so people were shooting back [. . .]," accounts an eye witness in Matthiessen's novel (164). The lines of shooting in Apted's adaptation were reduced to a few fire exchanges over Jimmy's attempted arrest and lacked the dramatic tones voiced in the book. This remediation in the movie of the confrontation between the FBI and the Indians on the reservation fully confirms Seger's argument that "A novel may be reflective—emphasizing meaning, context, or response to an event—but a film puts the emphasis on the event itself" (24). What both the novel and the movie in this case fail to explain is why AIM or ARM (in the movie) makes use of guns and dubious funds to authenticate the Indian traditions, culture, and property rights. Again, this avoidance of controversial details, limits the political discourse in film to one that would not offend any member of the community; in other words, film follows patterns of communal standards observed in the oral tradition.

A statement in Matthiessen's novel, attributed to Russel Means -- an Indian leader who says "Our concept of time, which makes up part of our reason for being Indian, is that we have no concept of time" (131) -- becomes a recurrent motif on which Apted constructs a cross-cultural interaction in the movie between FBI agent Ray Levoi and Indian medicine man Yellow Hawk. Able to understand the Indian concept of time on the reservation as opposed to the frantic stress of the time constraints in urban American areas, Levoi

voluntarily exchanges his Rollex watch with Yellow Hawk's pipe at the end of the movie (*Thunderheart*). As much as film re-enacts orality, it also shows the yearning of post-modern heroes to return to a tribal, stress-free community.

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When Baby Suggs, in Morrison's *Beloved*, withdraws from the still turbulent Reconstruction world into trauma-induced insanity to meditate on colors, she does more than leaving behind "a legacy of survival through her quest for color that placed trust and choice squarely in God's nature" (Bracks 69). The racial connotation of color(s) occasions Baby to contemplate the divine scheme in which people of different colors, just like any other colorful elements of the creation, contribute their own value and beauty. Morrison's novel is all about the beauty and value of the black race. Very much like the novel, Demme's production is all about an identity built on hope, struggles, both inner and external, and self-affirmation. It is a production that re-enacts community ideals and values as much as the oral tradition did.

Both Sethe³² and Paul D. have to deal with nightmarish memories of events that basically identified them under slavery as non-humans, animals, even inferior to animals: Paul D. was given less consideration than "Mister," a rooster; Sethe was deprived of a human wedding ceremony and later accused of being an animal when she killed her daughter to avoid a return to slavery. The novel meticulously depicts their struggle with accepting, rejecting, and fearing their animal status, but the movie only superficially catches the schoolteacher's "study" of the behavior of an abused black woman and his calling her

“Animal!” at the crime scene, while completely doing away with Paul D.’s narrative about “Mister” and his present fear that he might indeed be an animal since he could not resist his sexual attraction to Beloved. Morrison puts forth Sethe’s story, but also builds a solid background of collective trauma that did not end after the Civil War. Two of her characters, Paul D. and Stamp Paid occasion in the novel evocations of the hopeless condition of ex-slaves during the Reconstruction period. Caroline Rody sees Paul D. as “a voice of tribal griot-cum-historical eyewitness” who offers “cinematic visions of an entire struggling people” (Rody 92). Her characterization is based on Morrison’s account of Paul D’s memories of his wanderings:

During, before, and after the war he had seen Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said anything. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls for food...stole from pigs...slept in trees in the day and walked by night...Once he met a Negro about fourteen years old who lived by himself in the woods and said he couldn’t remember living anywhere else. He saw a witless colored woman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies. (66)

Another identity element in this scene is the old African dialect spoken by Sethe’s mom, but only made manifest in Nan’s words at the death of Sethe’s mother. Morrison, using the rememory from the perspective of Sethe as a child at the time, can afford to be rather evasive in identifying this language. She only refers to “different words,” a “language” that Sethe “understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now...the same language her ma’am spoke, and which would never come back” (62). The movie, although significantly cutting on Nan’s speech, is obviously more specific than the novel, as it

presents Alerte Belance (Nan) speaking a particular version of patois French, and so defines a probable linguistic transition phase, which the Africans imported from Africa experienced when being handled by various colonizing cultures (Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Anglo). In terms of language as an expression of social relations and ethnic identity, the African American experience was different from colonial experiences. The colonized, in most cases, were able to maintain a bilingual status while the African American slaves lost their native languages/dialects in America. The movie version of *Beloved* honors a possible lost dialect, but at the same time it offers simultaneous captioning in English which is nothing else but edited snippets of Morrison's text. Of course, the English translation credits Morrison's writing, but it also sends a message of linguistic domination: the now lost dialects of first generations of slaves could not operate as valid linguistic currency in the New World, so they had to be translated (read "gradually transformed and assimilated") into dominant, colonizing English. It is interesting that when remembering the death of her mother combined with the story of her conception, all told by Nan in an old forgotten language, Sethe also acknowledges her vivid memories of "singing and dancing," thus completing the portrait of a ritualistic African culture. This is what makes language part of a ritual, and perhaps this is what makes *Beloved* "less a novel than a ritual enacted in language" (Marks 145). In this context, it is worth considering Lean'tin Bracks' observation that "Morrison's keen attention to the importance of memory or rememory stems from the historical reality that slave culture was based on an oral society, further reinforced by laws forbidding literacy to slaves" (62). The orality of the African-American generations of slaves and the struggle for literacy in the post-Civil-War era constitute dominant themes in both the movie and the novel *Beloved*, themes that shape the cultural identity of the liberated slaves.

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The dictates of community morals, the tribal standards, if you will, as they would be in an oral society, rule out the possibility of Francesca abandoning her routine to follow Kincaid in Waller's novel and Eastwood's movie *The Bridges of Madison County*. In the movie, her deliberations over her choice at the last dinner with Kincaid include both "the talk" of the town, but also the needs of her children and her mother-role. To show the emotional conflict that tears Francesca between passion and duty, between the histrionic dichotomy of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, Eastwood further manipulates close ups on the cross she gave Kincaid, as he hangs it in his car while waiting for the traffic light to change, and on Francesca's hand clutching the car handle, ready to flee to join him. But these symbols have reversed connotations: Kincaid seems to use the cross as a beckoning invitation, but it is precisely the cross that reminds Francesca of duty and morals and her place in the community, whereas the handle to the car door signifies a freedom that her own hand refuses to grant her.

Detective stories such as James Ellroy's *L.A. Confidential* and John Grisham's *The Firm* appropriate roles of social manifests that warn against the corruption within political and law-enforcement circles, but also tackle compromising and controversial conflicts of the "righteous hero" between his commitment to professional integrity and his desire to protect his own family. Such fiction works and their cinema counterparts re-enact the Greek tragedy's "system of popular justice, a system of tribunals" of the City (Vernant 278). While Edmund Exley remains in *L.A. Confidential* the only incorruptible cop who goes so far as to warn his own father that he will reveal his criminal involvement and thus loses both his

father and Inez, the woman he loves, Mitchell McDeere in *The Firm* succeeds to work his way out of a mafia-operated law firm with a satisfactory \$10 million that he transfers from mafia accounts to his own account and leaving behind a hotel room full of incriminatory evidence (printed and recorded) which the justice system used to prosecute the firm's clients and lawyers. If compromise turned out to serve both his family's safety and the law with Mitch, both in the movie and the novel, Exley's intransigence leaves him bereft of family in the novel and without a female partner in the movie as Lynn rides off with Bud. In both movies, justice is served and the conflict is appeased to a state of normality. Regardless of the characters' status at the end of the story, it is implied that because of their perseverance, intelligence, and dedication, the culprits were brought to justice and the community became a better place to live.

3.3.2. Eroticism

In Mulvey's opinion, the erotic objectification of woman in cinema remains indicative of the nature of our still patriarchal society:

The image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form – illusionistic narrative film. (17)

Our selection of movies based on 1990s novels features a patriarchal society in which men still hold power positions, but the women cease to be passive and rebel against their objectification. As oral tradition had anticipated (see for instance the sermon “Behold the Rib” presented in Chapter 1 and quoted from Courlander 359-361), women continue at the end of the twentieth century to conquer territories of equality to men. However, elements of rape, prostitution, male promiscuity or voluntary adultery that populate the movies based on these novels produced in the 1990s, would have remained taboo subjects in most of the oral tradition pieces. However, some of the movie adaptations under discussion here, if nothing else for the sake of decency standards and for political correctness reasons, observe moral taboos, even if, to do so, directors endorse a story version radically different from the original novel. Such is the case of Stone's adaptation *Heaven and Earth*.

Hayslip avoided explicit erotic descriptions in her novels, but her honesty in listing most of her boyfriends and two husbands adds to the realism of her novels, given the war context and the survival choices most Vietnamese women had to make at the time. Some of the writer's accounts of cultural differences between Vietnamese traditional sexual male dominance and the female-objectifying habits of American GI's who preferred “acrobatics” as part of sexual encounters never come across in the movie. Elaborate novel accounts of

prostitution in Vietnam and the tragic fate of mutilated and murdered prostitutes diminish to a very graphic image of mutilated female corpses with Le Ly's voiceover identifying them in Stone's adaptation. Again, as part of Stone's sanctification of Le Ly, the four-hundred-dollar prostitution act she commits--one described in detail in the book *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* as an experience of "[taking] seed from the invaders" (259)—does not graphically appear in the movie that cuts the scene with her acceptance of the job. Parallel cutaways to her son naked and crying in the dust while she is persuaded to prostitute her body and an after lead to her washing her body in disgust work in the movie toward softening the ethical implications of the act she was forced by circumstances to accept. Other erotic scenes, such as Le Ly's making love to Ahn and later to Steve, her only husband in Stone's version, reduce nudity to the minimum in the movie while the emphasis remains on creating an intimate atmosphere with obscure light and soft musical beds. To the contrary, Oliver Stone constructs the rape scene with a higher degree of violence and explicit anatomical images, but even in that context, he alleviates some of the horror associated with the rape by parallel cutaways to slow-motion images of Le Ly as an innocent child enjoying nature and to love-exuding close-ups of her father.

But if for Le Ly, having sex with the "other" race (American) usually carries negative connotations (a certain deletion of her identity), except for her genuine love story with Dan, for other characters in the literature of the 1990s, miscegenation erases racial differences. Such is the case of Stands With A Fist in Blake's novel, *Dances With Wolves*. An Irish girl, whose family had been decimated by Pawnees, a violent Indian tribe, Stands-With-A-Fist was rescued and raised by the Comanche Indians. Her first sexual encounter with her Indian

husband on the wedding night has a powerful effect of wiping away her double racial identity:

And she remembered the unconsciousness of the love they made, so free of movement and words and energy. It was like being borne aloft to float endlessly in some unseen, heavenly stream. It was their longest night. When they would reach the edge of sleep they would somehow begin again. And again. And again. Two people of one flesh. [. . .] When sleep finally did find them, it was simultaneous, and Stands With A Fist remembered drifting off with the feeling that the burden of being two people was suddenly so light that it ceased to matter. She remembered feeling no longer Indian or white. She felt herself as a single being, one person, undivided. (80)

Robert James Waller's novel *The Bridges of Madison County* revolves around an illegitimate, and therefore, the more exhilarating relationship between the married Francesca Johnson and the single itinerant photographer Robert Kincaid. Both the novel and Clint Eastwood's 1995 screen adaptation play on the strong contrast between the brevity of the affair and its intensity. For the sake of four days of sharing and connecting, both lovers stipulate in their wills that their ashes be scattered at the Roseman Bridge. In Waller's novel, eroticism, maintained well within the limits of decency, overflows with elements of primitivism and remains raw, primeval, a powerful, cosmic union:

[. . .] She remembered how he held himself just above her and moved his chest slowly against her belly and across her breasts. How he did this again and again, like some animal courting rite in an old zoology text. As he moved

over her, he alternately kissed her lips or ears or ran his tongue along her neck, licking her as some fine leopard might do in long grass out on the veld. He was an animal. A graceful, hard, male animal who did nothing overtly to dominate her yet dominated her completely, in the exact way she wanted that to happen at this moment.

But it was far beyond the physical, though the fact that he could make love for a long time without tiring was part of it. Loving him was—it sounded almost trite to her now, given the attention paid to such matters over the last two decades—spiritual. It was spiritual, but it wasn't trite. (105)

The sexual preludes, such as Robert kissing Francesca in the kitchen, lose their tension in the movie as they alternate with cut-aways to Francesca's children's reading her journal. But Eastwood's chromatic choices for the intimate scenes--a flickering light implying a fire place, orange tinting--enhance the romantic, spiritual union depicted by Waller. Moreover, to fill in some of the book's emphasis on sharing, and at the same time, to stand for the novel's insert of the story told by Cummings, the jazz musician, Eastwood places the two lovers in a club setting where jazz is played and has them talk about their lives and slow dance in a reddish light. The movie's club scene, aside from serving the erotic purposes of the story, carries other effects: for one, it suggests that their love transgressed the domestic limits of Francesca's house and the professional space of Kincaid's photographic sessions, and moved into a social realm where they became vulnerable to the public eye. Although the case of the woman ostracized by the community for her adultery remains salient in the movie (Kincaid's encounters the adulterous woman at the café and later Francesca will bring her a cake), at the club Robert and Francesca seem to be out of the focus of any known people.

After this episode, the light loses its red passion tint and becomes depressingly blue in subsequent love-making scenes or dim candlelight at the last dinner. Again, the dominant color is blue for the last time Francesca sees Kincaid in the rain before he leaves the town. This chromatic scheme carries profound significations in the manifestation of psychological and societal conflicts. Francesca chooses to abide by morals endorsed by the community, a choice that remains within oral tradition taboos, but her unfulfilling marriage will confine her to a “blue” life.

Giles Mayné’s definition of eroticism fits the best Oscar Hijuelos’s build of his *Mambo Kings* character, Cesar Castillo:

Sans doute la caractéristique première de l’erotisme est-elle de nous propulser irrésistiblement hors de la calme ordonnance de notre réalité quotidienne pour nous maintenir éveillé à une expérience d’un autre type, d’une autre intensité [. . .]. L’erotisme laisse peu de place aux tergiversations, encore moins à la tricherie ou au calcul. Contrairement à la pornographie, généralement définie comme l’éveil calculé du désir sexuel, le mouvement de l’erotisme défie tout calcul. (149)

Without doubt, the primary characteristic of eroticism is to propel us irresistibly beyond the calm order of our daily reality in order to keep us awake to a different type of experience, of another intensity [. . .]. Eroticism leaves little room for procrastinations, and even less for cheating or calculations. Unlike pornography, generally defined as the calculated awakening of sexual desire, the movement of eroticism defies all calculations.

Cesar's promiscuity does stem from an unquenchable desire to experience life at various intensities, and of course, as Mayné notes, there is no calculation in Cesar's affairs, which follow patterns of spontaneity and extreme brevity. The Mambo King remains a man in love with life and who hopes up until his last night of life that his sexual drives will keep him alive, but there is more to it than that. After the death of his brother and the failure of his own career, he clings to casual sexual encounters with desperation, to purge his anxiety, to grab a sense of fulfillment. In the movie adaptation, Cesar appears more erotic than promiscuous, and his virility effuses in his singing and performing, in dancing to Dolores, flirting with the cigarette girl, etc. Cesar remains the macho man of the Hispanic oral tradition, but as a character in the novel, he lacks the traditional erotic purposes of breeding and raising a family. The movie "corrects" this postmodern deviation by leaving Cesar with the perspective of marrying Dolores and thus in a role of carrying on the family traditions. In this respect, the movie comes closer to the propriety of the oral tradition.

3. 3. 3. Psychological Issues

Before exploring the treatment of psychological issues in some of the fiction works and movies selected, I would like to establish a few theoretical premises with regard to violence, trauma, and the mechanisms of the psyche. If oral tradition, especially Native American, saw war (read violence) as an action indispensable to the survival of the tribe and to territorial and cultural preservation, in the 1990s, fiction and movie characters engage in self-preservation and self-affirmation wars. Unlike the oral war songs, the fiction of the 1990s shows complex battles fought on psychological and mental fields and from which the heroes do not always emerge successful, although they strive for self-affirmation. Mayné rightfully remarks that in late '80s and throughout the '90s there appeared “des tendances à la réémergence ou à la recomposition d'un sujet « plein », individualiste, sûr de soi et hédoniste”--“tendencies to resurge or to reconstruct a ‘fulfilled,’ individualistic, self-confident, hedonistic subject” (159-60).

Valérie Sanchou affirms that science defines and explains the Truth in our society, and that what she calls “le discours à vocation scientifique” (the discourse of scientific vocation) functions as a manipulative discourse (163). In a scientific context, it would be useful to analyze violent drives in our twentieth-century stories from the perspective of a theory described by Roger Cavaillès in his article “Philosophie de la violence” (“The Philosophy of Violence”). Cavaillès offers a scientific alternative to the Freudian id-ego-superego paradigm, one which upholds the simultaneous existence and operating functions of

three brains in one with each individual: the primitive or reptilian brain,³³ which is responsible for triggering the *Jurassic Park* in us, as Cavailles puts it; the limbic brain dealing with affection; and the neo-cortex, which regulates reason (8-9). Another theory worth mentioning is the “single-neuron consciousness” presented by Steven Sevush at the conference "Toward a Science of Consciousness" held in Tucson, in April 2002. Sevush contends that

a single brain at any given moment harbors many separate conscious minds, each one assumed to be associated with the activity of a different individual neuron [. . .] that is, that what is usually regarded as a person’s single conscious experience correlates not with an integrated neuronal network, but individually with single neurons that separately and redundantly encode the entire conscious content. Consequently, at any given time, a multitude of conscious beings are assumed to be associated with a single person’s brain, all having identical or at least similar experiences.

Sevush’s postulation, that could easily work into explaining the multiple personality syndrome, reinforces Cavailles’s three-part brain theory that assigns violence drives to a specific part of our psyche or brain.

Another premise I would like to point out is that violence closely follows or precedes trauma, again a process that develops in the human brain. James McGaugh, director of the Center for Neurobiology of Learning and Memory at the University of California at Irvine, explains the emergence of trauma: “An event becomes a strong memory, a traumatic memory, when emotions are high. Those emotions trigger a release of stress hormones like adrenaline, which act on a region of the brain called the amygdale – and the memory is stored

or ‘consolidated’” (Lerche). He further clarifies the effect of drugs on regulating traumatic emotions:

If we give a drug that blocks the action of one stress hormone, adrenaline, the memory of trauma is blunted [. . .] The drug *does not* remove the memory – it just makes the memory more normal. It prevents the excessively strong memory from developing, the memory that keeps you awake at night. The drug does something that our hormonal system does all the time – regulating memory through the actions of hormones. We’re removing the excess hormones. (Lerche)

Subsequently, the PTSD patients will be able to remember the event, but they will have forgotten the trauma associated with it, as McGaugh implies. Baby Suggs’s voluntary forgetting through the denial of her own children in *Beloved* replicates a procedure psychiatrists have developed recently called “therapeutic forgetting” (Lerche). The question that Jeanie Lerche Davis poses is, “But by erasing traumatic memories, are we changing the person? Are we erasing capacity for empathy?” Baby’s mental disintegration in *Beloved* (shunned by Demme in his adaptation) proves that indeed the forced wiping out of traumatic memories may also erase or debilitate some of the psychic functions of the individual.³⁴

In 1991, Daniel C. Dennett goes so far as to completely refute the idea of the existence of such a thing as the stream of consciousness, thus replacing one of the modernists’ structural pillars with a technological network image of circuits and multiple drafts:

There is no single, definitive “stream of consciousness,” because there is no central headquarters, no Cartesian Theater where “it all comes together” for

the perusal of a Central Meaner. Instead of such a single stream (however wide), there are multiple channels in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating Multiple Drafts as they go. Most of these fragmentary drafts of “narrative” play short-lived roles in the modulation of current activity but some get promoted to further functional roles, in swift succession, by the activity of a virtual machine in the brain.

(253-4)

But it is precisely this fragmentation, so pervasive in post-modern literature both on the character-building and on the narrative levels, that ensues from traumatic events. Jon Shaw, MD, director of child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of Miami School of Medicine, and a PTSD expert, associates the fragmentation of thought, speech, and memory with trauma. “The more intense the emotion is, the more fragmentation there is in the memory,” says Dr. Shaw. Patients who experienced trauma “don’t have a realistic, coherent narrative of what happened. Some aspects are heightened, others are diminished. They’re left with an overwhelming sense of the event, yet they can’t really piece it together, so they can’t really achieve mastery over it. They lose their rational ability to understand it” (Lerche).

For characters like Stands With A Fist in Blake’s novel *Dances with Wolves*, the purging of the traumatic memories comes naturally when the promise of a better future surfaces during transition periods. Recently widowed by the same tribe that had murdered her family, Stands is asked to try to remember “her white language” so she can interpret for her tribe in their discussions with Dunbar, an American soldier. If the encounter with Dunbar, and the chemistry therein entailed, triggers her linguistic memory and challenges her

atrophied articulation abilities, her retreat to a lonely spot outdoors turns on an unstoppable flow of memories about her family and her childhood. Like Morrison's character Baby Suggs, Stands had built her toughness as a means of psychological survival on "shutting out of her mind" the horrific images of her parents' decapitation. In Blake's novel, healing can only happen for Stands through complete remembering and through the acceptance of her new, rejuvenating love for Dunbar.

But the crucial defining element of the characters' identity is their past. Farrell's conclusion that Morrison's goal is to show that "self-identification comes from the past, but that one's history must be recalled in such a way that it is not destructive" oversimplifies an extremely complex post-traumatic healing process (29). But every time the issue of human/animal identity resurges, whether it be in the novel or the movie, it cannot be a non-destructive process, as Farrell claims that Morrison intends. Nor is rememory a way of understanding the past as Kathleen Marks states. Her definition of memory as "not merely the past recalled, but the imaginative faculty through which the past is understood" (123) does not hold water in Morrison's *Beloved* or in Jonathan Demme's movie. The characters do not rememory their past to understand slavery. Historians, Christians, economists, and politicians still find it incomprehensible that black slavery happened in the United States in spite of Jefferson's statement that "all men were created equal," against Jesus' command "love your neighbor as you love yourself," and despite the fact that it devastated the economy of the South. Morrison's characters fear, reject, and abhor the past. But they have learned to cherish the best things they had (love, courage, sacrifice) while standing against the humiliations and fighting for their freedom and dignity. In this sense, Marks is right to assert that "*Beloved* shows memory's work as cultural renewal" (23), a feature that oral tradition

certainly shares. Both Morrison and Demme tell the story of people who are not remembering simply to show how sorry they are for themselves, but to affirm their strength and their determination to stand their ground and fight for what belongs to them: the right to love, to work, to education, and the right to be accepted as part of the American culture, which confirms Mayné's theory shown above.

Perhaps for reasons that have to do with the economy of a major cinema production, the only scene that includes a collective trauma (as well as a collective cultural legacy) is Sethe's account about her mother's hanging. It is indeed an excellent production choice because more than Paul D's and Stamp Paid's post-war mini-chronicles, this hanging scene holds a wider array of connotations. For one, this scene holds the recurrent motif of the engraving or the mark. Given the lack of written records for enslaved African families, Sethe's mother reveals to her a distinctive mark, most likely slavery-related, that will serve as the only way to identify her in case of extreme face mutilation. Slaves had no written ID's except for the torture engravings/marks.

Given Beloved's role in "calling" the past, a few pertinent questions emerge: Does Beloved transmit trauma, as Ramadanovic inquires (99)? Does she do it in a way of remembering and reinventing it as opposed to repeating the trauma? And if Beloved incarnates the horrors of the past, is "Beloved" or "be-loved" the only name the traumatized characters want to give the past? Is love the only thing they really want to remember from the past? Defendants of a reincarnation interpretation might argue that Morrison brings the past alive through Beloved's scarred, monstrous body and her irrational mind. Morrison indeed confirms this as a possible in-set allusion in one of her interviews (*Profile*). But textual evidence from the novel shows that Denver, Sethe, and Paul D, all have various, and

often contradictory interpretations of Beloved's identity, which range between a belief in the reincarnation of Sethe's murdered baby to a very pragmatic version of a girl who had been probably confined to a dark cabin and sexually exploited (Morrison 119). If Beloved has any effect on the handling of the past, it is a purging, cathartic function. She gives Sethe a chance to ask for forgiveness and to start living at peace with her guilt, even if this involves neurotic phases like giving up her job and chronic depression. The various traumatic past episodes that Beloved triggers, both in the novel and the movie, do in fact link the traumas of the past to the present through rememory, but in no way do they repeat it. The fragmentation of the stories in Morrison's text and the linear simplifications in the movie demonstrate that characters reinvent traumatic flashbacks every time they allow these memories to enter their present. But the mere presence of fragmentation in the process of remembering confirms Dennett's new definition of the stream of consciousness and Dr. Shaw's trauma theories presented above. Again, aside from the racial implications of Sethe being called an "Animal" at the scene of her murdering her baby girl, her relegation to an inferior species may be justified in the light of Cavailles's theory, in that Sethe yielded to the violent impulses of her reptilian brain and committed an atrocious crime.

The multifaceted personalities of the heroes in the fiction and the movies of the 1990s as well as their double ethnicity point to Bakhtinian elements of polyphony, hybridization, and carnivalization, which as shown in Chapter 1, also permeated oral traditions. Morrison's Sethe in *Beloved*, the eight female characters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and Stands With a Fist in Blake's novel *Dances with Wolves*, all these characters negotiate their traumas in the context of racial and cultural dualities, and their identities develop as hybrids born in an ethnicity impacted by the colonizing Anglo-Saxon pressures; they all rise as

representatives of a polyphonic, multiethnic consciousness, and sometimes resort to masking their intentions and thoughts, a carnivalization process that secures their self-preservation.

Chapter Four

The Postmodern Orality Functions of Television and Radio

4.1. Television: An Oral Enactment in the Twentieth-Century Global Village

As E. Stone explains in *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins*, oral literature remains an ongoing phenomenon in which we all participate, consciously or not:

All of us, long after we've left our original families, keep at least some of those stories with us, and they continue to matter but sometimes in new ways. At moments of major life transitions, we may claim certain of our stories, take them over, make them part of us instead of making ourselves part of them. We are always in conversation with them one way or another. (8)

Television is one such way to stay in touch with the stories of our society. "Television. It seems just impossible to exclude it from any discussion of late-twentieth-century American culture as to include it neatly in that discussion," remarked Alan Nadel in his review essay "American Fiction and Televisual Consciousness." And he further notes, "Television is both the most pervasive mode of American mass culture and the most effective conduit for most other chief modes, especially those represented through film and advertising" (303). While remediating our oral and written culture, television both uses and produces hybrid vehicles of transmission, re-enacts the Bakhtinian carnivalization (a device shared by the oral tradition) through advertising manipulations, and engages in dialogism with a highly polyphonic content since its products represent and target the masses. Moreover, as James Anderson

writes, television, in a fashion similar to oral tradition and to the late twentieth-century fiction and film, voices socio-political issues of the community:

In the cultural understanding model,” writes James A. Anderson, “one studies television (or any popular art) as an index of the culture from which it springs. It presumes that the members of a culture are in a continual process of negotiating that culture. That negotiation gets done in the meeting rooms of the clubs, in the halls of churches, in the living rooms of homes, and in the expressions of the media. The contemporary content of the media provides the panoply of issues, conflicts, offers and counteroffers that the current negotiations involve. The content of the media, then, is not trivial but composed of the shared values, ideas, and symbols by which individuals are joined as a people. (303)

Ong’s concept of “magical potency” (32) that he attributed to the spoken word in the oral tradition resurges in television, but with this medium, it is a combination of words and images that renders the magic. Television discourse operates with what Jean Peytard calls “une sémiotique iconologique” – “an iconographic semiotics” (“La médiacritique” 111); in other words, the Saussurian paradigm of the linguistic sign ceases to rely exclusively on aural signifiers, as it does with the oral tradition, and incorporates both visual and audio signifiers within the television text. Given the major role of the iconographic semiotics in reaching the audience, it is important to note that televised publicity carries out what Jean-Pierre Besiat describes as the appropriation of the visual, temporal, and private space.

Controversial perspectives also developed around the role of television in education, as shown in the following section. For the purposes of this study, I will show that television

constitutes a postmodern oral medium, as instrumental in teaching the members of the community as the oral tradition was.

4. 2. The Television's Didactic Role: Approaches to Literature-Based Teaching

In the twentieth century, television literary shows and educational programs appropriate the didactic functions of the oral tradition. The epistemological function of television has been fueling heated debates among scholars, educators, and politicians alike. On the one side, there are those who support the aiding role of television in the processes of teaching and learning. McLuhan could not evade a generalized awareness of broadcast education as he coins a daring definition of “the movie, radio, and TV” as “classroom without walls” (248). On the same lines, Phillip Simmons writes in his study *Deep Surfaces* that “Together with popular film and advertising in all media, television is one of the primary means by which the postmodern conditions of knowledge are established within everyday life” (1). The oral medium of television proves to be efficient in so far as oral learning strategies become validated by this pedagogical Bakhtinian theory:

When verbal disciplines are taught in school, two basic modes are recognized for the appropriation and transmission – simultaneously – of another's words (a text, a rule, a model): ‘reciting by heart’ and ‘retelling in one's own words.’ The latter mode poses on a small scale the task implicit in all prose stylistics: retelling a text in one's own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another's words, for indeed ‘one's own words must not completely dilute the quality that makes another's words unique; a retelling in one's own words should have a mixed character, able when necessary to

reproduce the style of and expressions of the transmitted text. It is this second mode used in schools for transmitting another's discourse, "retelling in one's own words," that includes within it a series of forms for the appropriation while transmitting of another's words, depending upon the character of the text being appropriated and the pedagogical environment in which it is understood and evaluated. (532)

Telling and re-telling stories not only perpetuates oral tradition practices, but also sets the premise that orality serves as a dependable and flexible device of epistemological transmission, a premise that a number of educational experiments and scholarship confirm. Hence, Judy Freeman presents several features of literature that can be orally read/performed by teachers and students as part of the education process. In her view, the book selections should be entertaining, involving audience through language, arousing empathy, triggering memories, surprising, feeding the imagination, impersonating "a sense of history and connections to times past," including a *mélange* of cultures, developing social conscience and personal ethics (7-23), all of which constitute elements that television educational programs usually include.

In addition to illustrations mentioned in Freeman's findings (reminding of the oral tradition's pictographic materials with a didactic role), oral enactments of literature in classrooms also include performance, another orality ingredient. The selected essays in *Children's Voices* are a great source of welding material for the oral literature performances and their educational function. In his 1987 study *Creative Drama in the Classroom*, Cottrell points out the benefits of employing dramatic activities in the learning process:

Creative drama is an art for children in which they involve their whole selves in experiential learning that requires imaginative thinking and creative expression. Through movement and pantomime, improvisation, role-playing and characterization, and more, children explore what it means to be a human being. Whether the content of the drama is based in reality or pure fantasy, children engaged in drama make discoveries about themselves and the world.

(1)

It is on these oral features that television programs have shaped their content and presentation. Since the incipient phases of radio and film usage in the classrooms in the 1940s and the introduction of televised education in the 1950s, (Anderson 298-299), it has become true that “A young person goes to two schools,” as T. Himmelweit shows in her “Experimental Study of Taste Development in Children,” “the ordinary school and ‘the television school.’ From the age of 8 until 15, he devotes about equal time to each; both influence his taste and outlook and help to shape his view of the world and of human relationships; both, in fact, educate.”

A number of scholars, including Gropper, favor televised educational programs. “Educational television has the capability of presenting direct and supplementary instruction to vast numbers of schoolchildren,” he writes in his “Experimental Evaluation of Procedures for ‘Individualizing’ Televised Instruction.” Perhaps because he was writing in 1963, Gropper displayed none of Postman’s criticism against the television’s involvement in education: “There has rarely been any doubt that the quality of the lesson content which educational television has to offer these children can meet the highest standards. Indeed, one of the most often cited advantages of educational television is its potential for maintaining

standards for lesson content not often possible in many schools,” states Gropper (248). The only drawbacks of televised educational programs mentioned both by Gropper and by James Mitchell, Jr. is that these programs lead to “passivity in learning” and lack of interaction and feedback between students and TV teacher (260). But this shortcoming seems to be denied by R. P. Abelson’s 1981 study that addresses the issue of retention with television education by arguing that such programs do include heuristic components of the type “now think” in their scripts (qtd. in Salomon 188).

Even with the presence of cognitive stimuli, the level of difficulty remains low to average for television educational programs. Gavriel Salomon’s study confirms a largely accepted opinion that “television is perceived to be a much ‘easier’ and a more lifelike medium, demanding far less effort for comprehension than printed material of the same content,” but this type of accessibility also guarantees positive results since “children also expressed more self-efficacy with television than with print” (189).

On the other side there are those who shed harsh criticism on the didactic uses of television. Perceptions of the television’s impact as a negative or at least artificial exchange abound in the scholarly publications of the last two decades. Deleuze and Guattari offer such a television reading³⁵, asserting that

one is enslaved by a TV as a human machine insofar as the television viewers are no longer consumers or users, nor even subjects who supposedly “make” it, but intrinsic component pieces, “input” and “output,” feedback or recurrences that are no longer connected to the machine in such a way as to produce or use it. In machinic enslavement, there is nothing but

transformations and exchanges of information, some of which are mechanical, others human. (458)

Neil Postman, who fervently opposes the entertaining slant of television educational programs, argues that “under the governance of the printing press, discourse in America was different from what it is now—generally coherent, serious, and rational; [. . .] under the governance of television, it has become shriveled and absurd” (16). Furthermore, referring to television images, Postman states that “in a print-culture, we are apt to say of people who are not intelligent that we must ‘draw them pictures’ so that they may understand. Intelligence implies that one can dwell comfortably without pictures, in a field of concepts and generalizations” (26). Postman’s definition of intelligence remains limited and biased. It is a scientifically proven fact that certain age groups react more efficiently to learning through images rather than assimilating abstract concepts.

Postman’s virulent attack on television does not spare the Children’s Television Workshop’s production “Sesame Street” (94), and blatantly opposes television education. Among the several shortcomings of television educational programs, Postman mentions the entertaining ingredient as a low-retention factor, the elimination of a hierarchical learning system by allowing students to tune in at any time, and the lax requirements that relieve the students into thinking that “nothing has to be remembered, studied, applied, or, worst of all, endured” (147). Further, Postman writes, “Television clearly does impair the student’s freedom to read, and it does so with innocent hands, so to speak. Television does not ban books, it simply displaces them” (141). Postman’s concerns that an overabundance of entertainment actually dilutes the educational content is also shared by Hannah Arendt, who writes:

The state of affairs, which indeed is equaled nowhere else in the world, can properly be called mass culture; its promoters are neither the masses nor their entertainers, but are those who try to entertain the masses with what once was an authentic object of culture, or to persuade them that *Hamlet* can be as entertaining as *My Fair Lady*, and educational as well. The danger of mass education is precisely that it may become very entertaining indeed; there are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of oblivion and neglect, but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say. (352)

But pedagogical research has indicated, in some instances, that it is precisely the entertainment factor that increases the accessibility and stimulates the interest of the students, thus contributing to a more efficient learning process. Bryant's study shows that television educational programs use entertainment "because of necessity" (222) since children may be attracted to other television programs unless the educational one entices them with humor and music. "Recent evidence indicates, however, that entertainment features are excellent attractors of attention and typically facilitate attention to educational messages," concludes Bryant. To those who oppose television education on the grounds that education should be delivered in a serious discourse, Bryant responds that "humor that is well integrated in the educational message [. . .] might have beneficial effects" and that if we consider Freudian theories according to which humor alleviates tensions and anxieties, entertaining education "should relax students who are nervous about exams and improve their performance" (230).

Postman's solution lies in "*how we watch*" (160). And he has a word of advice for teachers who are enthusiastic about the inclusion of technologies in the learning process:

Educators are not aware of the effects of television on their students.

Stimulated by the arrival of the computer, they discuss it a great deal—which is to say, they have become somewhat “media conscious.” It is true enough that much of their consciousness centers on the question, How can we use television (or the computer, or word processor) to control education? They have not yet got to the question, How can we use education to control television (or the computer, or word processor)? (162-3)

In 1980, the WNET project set off to accomplish precisely what Postman envisions for more educated television consumers as this project defines a critical viewer as “one who plans television viewing in advance and who evaluates the programs while watching” (Anderson 313). Ideally, we should all become critical viewers in the sense opened by the WNET project and by Postman. As Anderson advises, we need to “stop trying to save children from television” because television consumption remains “part of normal membership in this culture” (326); what we must do, instead, is educate children how to filter and process the television educational input.

“Babette had made it a rule,” writes Don DeLillo in *White Noise*. “She seemed to think that if kids watched television one night a week with parents or stepparents, the effect would be to de-glamorize the medium in their eyes, make it wholesome domestic sport. Its narcotic undertow and eerie diseased brain-sucking power would be gradually reduced” (16). Scholars and educators have been attempting the same things: to demythologize the power of television, to find the right dose of television consumption that would only vaccinate children against it, and that would keep them safe from becoming television addicts. One way to do so would be to choose the appropriate timing for the use of the television set or of a VCR. In

his Introduction to Tibbetts' and Welsh's *Encyclopedia of Movies Adapted from Books*, Robert Wise raises several issues that pertain to incorporating movie adaptations into the academic literature teaching. "I understand that there are a few educators who sometimes use a movie as a substitute in the classroom for the book itself," writes Wise. But he warns against this approach:

This can be very dangerous. A lazy educator might be tempted to do this. It's so much better to compare the book and film and see how each has its own 'spin' on the central concept or story. It can be fascinating to know what was kept and what was rejected in the adaptation process, and why. But the tricky question is, which should come first? Read the book, then see the movie? See the film, then read the book? Or is it *see* the book and *read* the film? Maybe that's not as silly as it sounds! Changes from book to film can occur for all kinds of reasons (ix).

To Postman's negative perception of television shallowness, McLuhan actually opposed, two decades before Postman, a belief in the profoundness of television: "The cool TV medium promotes depth structures in art and entertainment alike," wrote McLuhan, "and creates audience involvement in depth as well" (272). Moreover, McLuhan remains under the cultural spell of television teaching, which he elevates to sacral proportions: "Even teachers on TV seem to be endowed by the student audiences with a charismatic or mystic character that much exceeds the feelings developed in the classroom or lecture hall," says McLuhan. "In the course of many studies of audience reactions to TV teaching, there recurs this puzzling fact. The viewers feel that the teacher has a dimension almost of sacredness"

(293). McLuhan's statement implies a ritualistic, sacral function of television as a teaching medium, an element which oral tradition certainly shared.

Returning to the more pragmatic realm of research, it is worth noting that statistics are often misleading in evaluating the efficacy of television education. Meringoff's study "How Is Children's Learning from Television Distinctive?" indicates that precisely because there are so many variables that must be taken into consideration when assessing the efficiency of television educational programs (such as the audience's ages, previous knowledge, mental abilities, psychological particularities, social context, and all the other technicalities related to production such as goals, choice of discourse, etc.), this plethora of factors that influence children's digestion of televised education cannot be measured and evaluated to lead to exact conclusions. In his analysis of the educational program "3-2-1 CONTACT," Keith W. Mielke shares the same conclusion as Meringoff:

[. . .] the enormous complexity of a television program makes it difficult for formative research to infer generalizations from possibly idiosyncratic programming or to pull out detailed guidance from general principles. A seemingly endless supply of variables can be imposed on programming and its relationship to the audience and still fall far short of a predictive recipe for a new program. (261)

For example, Meringoff's study shows that "when television and picture-book presentations were compared, preschoolers' memory for figurative language was increased dramatically by having a picture book read to them, as opposed to their language recall after watching the televised story" (176). In this particular instance, I cannot hold this result against the efficacy of television because it is a known fact that camera discourse places emphasis on

action and not on language as the print medium does. Jennings Bryant raises the same issue of the multitude of learning and viewing styles of children as consumers of televised education. According to Bryant's findings, the research on "Sesame Street" indicated that there are at least three types of viewers: "zombie viewers" who devote their whole attention to the program, "dual attention viewers" who divide their attention between television and other external stimuli, and "modeling viewers" who actively participate in the television action (221). We can easily infer that the latter category is the one that best benefits from this type of education, but then, active participants also perform best in classroom settings as well.

Aside from the educational debate on the results of television education, the fact remains that television has taken over the functions of oral tradition didactic enactments and its uses of multimedia, but as with film and radio, television does not (and should not) exclude the written (printed) word. In the following section, I will take a look at another major socio-cultural role of television, that of fostering the formation of reading communities, traditionally called book clubs, through oral tellings and re-tellings of stories, and sometimes of stories about stories. Thus, the television's connection with book clubs not only promotes and strengthens readership, but also perpetuates the cultural patrimony of the community, as much as the oral tradition did.

4. 3. Book Clubs: From Sewing Bees to the “Oprah-Factor”

Susan McMahon and Taffy E. Raphael mention four Bakhtinian social factors that “make written and oral speech possible,” and which they take over from Clark and Holquist’s book *Mikhail Bakhtin*: (1) words materialize within experience, (2) the experience occurs within a social context, (3) word meanings are thus constructed within discourse, and (4) any study of language must consider the social context (“Book Club Program” 11-12). In the light of these epistemological factors, any cultural event becomes a social function, as much as the case was with the oral tradition. The interpretation, assimilation, and subsequent re-creation, re-enactment, and transmission of literature involve the whole community, which leads to the premise, also based in the oral tradition, that literature (or the cultural text) is the property of the tribe, not of a single author, interpreter, or performer. The literary shows hosts re-enact functions of versatility, manipulation, and immediacy, and emerge as “the tricksters” of the oral television tradition. In this sense, book clubs and their television/radio counterparts or literary shows revive the orality-based rituals of creating, transmitting, and preserving cultural messages.

Scholarly evidence proves that in Europe existed, as early as the twelfth century, what Brian Stock calls “textual communities” of readers who shared their reading tastes and habits and that “helped to create community, sustain collective memory, generate knowledge, and challenge tradition” (Long 32). These features of pristine European book clubs blatantly resemble the characteristics of oral literature discussed in Chapter 1. In the United States,

Philadelphia marked the beginning of literary groups with Benjamin Franklin's 1726 *Junto*, the first "literary society" in the United States, but and the first book club for which records exist, was founded in 1854 by Edward D. Ingraham (Growoll 4, 28). Ingraham's book club started out with a full organizational structure (president, secretary, locale, etc.), but failed three years later, after the death of Ingraham (Growoll 28). Even before Ingraham's book club, there were other forms of reading and discussion gatherings that created cohesive cultural communities. On his 1852 tour through America, Alfred Bunn excitedly noted in his journal that people were excited to attend lecture halls: "It is a matter of wonderment [. . .] to witness the youthful workmen, the overtired artisan, the worn-out factory girl [. . .] rushing [. . .] after the toil of the day is over, into the hot atmosphere of a crowded lecture room" (qtd. in Berger 158).

Writing about the history of book clubs in the United States, Moore and Stevens emphasize the existence of two definitive streaks: the "Puritan urge for consensus" and the "Emersonian urge for self-improvement," the fear that books might corrupt the nature of women and lower-status people (slaves, etc.) and the movements that supported the love of books as a liberating tool (28). "After the Civil War, white women's book clubs spread from the urban centers of the Northeast across the American continent to the West almost as fast as did the frontier," remarks Long. The New England Women's Club and the New York Sorosis, both founded in 1868, were among the most prominent white women's book clubs (Long 35). The role of women's book clubs in the nineteenth century differed from the functions of such clubs in the twentieth century. Long points out in her study that book clubs assumed a more militant feminist character in the nineteenth century when women were struggling for socio-political recognition and professional self-affirmation, or "self-culture"

(38), but at the same time, most of such organizations avoided at the time religion and politics (69). Nowadays, Long remarks, most women members of book clubs are educated and indulge in informal discussions; their goal is not to enact social reform anymore because “other organizations have taken up that mission” (70), but to “provide a forum for self-reflection [that] involves learning through literature—both fiction and nonfiction—about the most important objective and subjective developments of the contemporary world” (72). Following on Long’s observations, it becomes evident that the strong individualistic trends of the modern and post-modern times have impacted the goals of book clubs, or rather have pushed these organizations on the track of what Moore and Stevens call the “Emersonian urge for self-improvement” (28). In this sense, the purpose of the book clubs of late twentieth century tends to lose the social functions of oral communities practices. Nevertheless, some of the twentieth-century book clubs, such as Oprah’s televised Book Club, feature book selections that reinforce contemporary or historical socio-political issues, such as racism or women rights, a thematic feature which confers to such book clubs a function of raising social awareness in the way of the oral tradition.

Twentieth-century book clubs rely heavily on sophisticated organizational patterns and function as small businesses. A leader of over twenty reading groups in Chicago, Rachel Jacobsohn offers in her 1994 *Reading Group Handbook* practical advice about “what constitutes a book group, how to get one started, what organizational decisions need to be made, how to lead or participate in valuable in-depth discussions, whether to have member-led or professionally led discussions, how to use group dynamics to benefit the group, and how to choose an appropriate syllabus” (xiii); her book includes everything from a glossary of literary terms and a proposed list of readings and one of critical sources, to tips about food,

recipes, services of caregiver/babysitter, notifications, leader fees, rental fees, transportation, and how to network with other organizations and with local mass media.

Audience and thematic specialization constitute another feature of contemporary book clubs. A large number of book clubs have emerged in connection with educational programs, another argument in favor of the didactic functions of twentieth-century orality enactments. Elizabeth Knowles and Martha Smith show that “a book club may take many forms” depending on location, various age groups of members, inclusion of family and friends, book selections and goal-oriented activities aimed at “cooperative learning, independent reading, and group discussions” (vii). But they underline that the major purpose of any book club is “helping students become life-long students” (vii). Knowles and Smith suggest the creation of a book club around Carl Deuker’s sports novel *Night Hoops*. “This book club will have the most meaning if it is done in the spring when the NBA team schedules are winding down and excitement is heating up for the playoffs,” they write. And they don’t forget to mention a strong connection with media and entertainment: “Basketball will be featured in the news, in magazines, and in stores. *Night Hoops* is the perfect title to read and discuss” (1).

“The explicit goal of every book club is reading fluency and deep comprehension,” writes Donna Marriott. But her purpose includes performative training in addition to comprehension: “If the children cannot read their book club selection masterfully, with voice, and with a clear sense of meaning, then I have failed them through insufficient support or inappropriate book selection” (11). The way Marriott conceives a book club for young students involves the development of reading skills like skimming and scanning, writing through focused literature logs, and oral expression applied through literary discussions (22-

30). These oral performative features of this educational book club also re-enact the performative and the didactic characteristics of the oral tradition.

Other school book clubs also share multimedia transmission and social functions that remind of the oral tradition. Susan McMahon's study of the oral and written texts of fifth-graders involved in a book-club type of literature-based reading program confirms her pre-established assumptions that the "ability to elaborate story ideas is facilitated by using multiple representations" that help with "word identification and decoding" ("Book Club: Studying" 3, 7). The discussions in the book club were precluded by drawings that illustrated the readings and were thus constructed around those drawings. McMahon also points out that, according to a social constructivist perspective, meaning builds up on the interaction among reader, text, and the social context ("Book Club: Studying" 9). McMahon invokes Bakhtin's theory that "words are defined in social settings" ("Book Club: Studying" 36). This particular Book Club reading program centered around reading, writing/representation, instruction, and discussion and incorporated reading silently, orally, student-led discussion groups, predicting, summarizing and sequencing ("Book Club: Studying" 11). All these activities created an oral pattern for the assimilation and analysis of literature that entailed an active audience³⁶.

From the literary societies and book groups that grew at the turn of the twentieth century from women's reform groups, church groups, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the American Association of University Women to Oprah's Book Club, reading groups have been mostly established by women and have targeted a female audience. Bob Lamm, quoted in Ellen Moore, brings to the open this major trend in American book clubs:

The prevalence of women's reading groups is an equal-opportunity world

underscores several controversial clichés that carpet either side of the gender divide. Namely, that men read “how-to” manuals and speak in grunts of less than two syllables, while women love literature and discourse. (5)

Jacobsohn confesses to have developed in 1989 a newsletter entitled *Reading Women* as part of her efforts to start mini-book clubs in her Chicago area. Why not *Reading Men*? Like most such organizations, hers targets mainly women. In 2003, Elizabeth Long remarks, in her comprehensive study of American book clubs in a regional- (Houston, TX) and gender-related context, that “reading for pleasure still lingers, in connotation, at least, in a realm of leisured bourgeois private time that is female and domestic” (13). Perhaps that is why traditional women reading clubs apparently were and still are of little interest for literature academic departments, sociologists, or political scientists, since these organizations rarely make a difference in these areas (Long ix).

Oprah’s Book Club, another women’s reading club, has met the same reservations from the academic world although its connection with television entails a redemptive educational quality. In the face of a general academic skepticism toward, if not outward rejection of the Oprah’s book selections, some voices argue for an integration of the televisual potential into teaching. Mark Hall writes that “rather than denigrate the most pervasive form of communication in our culture, we ought to examine the literate behaviors associated with Oprah’s Book Club more closely, seeking ways to join television and print literacies” (664). Bronwyn Williams goes even further in attributing to broadcasting a cultural tradition that educators should not ignore:

For teachers of writing, mass popular culture in general and television in particular are often the enemy against which we battle in the name of writing,

rhetoric, literature and the essay. We see our jobs as enticing students back to the one true faith of print literacy. We rarely think about the nature of the visual and cultural literacies they possess as a result of their long viewing histories [. . .]. (2-3)

From a historical perspective, social changes, in particular feminism, have often been associated with the developments in mass media, especially television. Virginia Valentine's contention that feminism and television play a major role in the emergence of book clubs throughout the country sheds a new light on the cultural impact of television:

My feeling is that the current movement [of founding numerous book clubs] gained momentum from the generation of people now in their thirties and forties. This was the first generation to grow up with television as their primary stimulus and the first generation in which women took working for granted. These young women were working very hard and didn't really have the chance to read. They wanted companionship, intellectual stimulation. They wanted to go back and repattern themselves, and they found they could do this by sitting down and reading a book.

Oprah has taken this tradition of the television's involvement with self-empowerment to a whole new level. "Television is the greatest medium in the world," says Oprah Winfrey, and she goes on to articulate the mission of television people: "I think those of us who work in it are in a blessed position. We have a responsibility to enlighten, to inform, and entertain, if we can" (Adler 63). But what Oprah underlines always is the power of television "to empower people and to affect lives" (Adler 103).

Initiated on September 17, 1996, Oprah's Book Club embodied Oprah Winfrey's dream to "get America reading again," and featured books such as Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean*, Sheri Reynolds' *Rapture of Canaan*, *She's Come Undone* by Wally Lamb, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Oprah's Book Club was discontinued in 2000 after the last selection, Toni Morrison's *Sula*, and was launched again in 2003 on a new format called "Traveling with the Classics." Her show inspired other television networks, like C-SPAN and A&E, to devote airtime to live book discussions, and fomented the creation of similar book clubs across America³⁷. Elizabeth Long thinks that Oprah's "mass-oriented yet extremely intimate relationship with her audience" (199) produced not only huge sale boosts, but also cemented her impact on national culture, an impact which becomes controversial if we consider that Oprah's book selections follow her own idiosyncratic criteria and taste and show "as little regard for academic literary analysis as for traditional literary authority" (200). Gavin McNett's comments on Oprah's cultural influence voice the skepticism of many scholars and professors, who similarly believe that the Oprah's Book Club selections were meant "to play on base sentiment, to reaffirm popular wisdom, to tell readers what they expect to hear [. . .] to help them learn what they already know [. . .] and to reinforce what they think is right and wrong in the world."

The format of the show included discussions with the author, viewers on the show who testified about the impact of the book on their lives, which made critics call it "confessional TV" (Moore 19). Oprah creates empathy through her own shared experiences, but also through the testimonies of her club participants, but she also works on building immediacy through incorporating in the show interviews with the author's friends or relatives who inspired some of the characters (for Clarke's *River, Cross My Heart*) and snapshots of

plot locations in the case of Lalita Tademy's *Cane River* (Striphas 207). In her 1990s Book Club format, Oprah organized get-togethers with the author and selected viewers, sometimes over dinners—as was the case with Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, whose debate took place in Oprah's home—, sometimes in club pajamas (for Maya Angelou's *The Heart of a Woman*), an American cozy, home setting that appeals to the American public as much as the choice of the castle of Bordelais appealed to the French public for their literary television show, “La Boîte aux Lettres” (Peytard, “La médiacritique littéraire” 165).

In a 1997 *Time* retrospective of the twenty-five most influential people of 1996, Richard Lacayo highlights Oprah's tremendous financial impact on the publishing market. “Oprah selects a title for the book-discussion club [. . .]. Then everyone in America buys it. This gives her the market clout of a Pentagon procurement officer” (70). Oprah's publicity boosted the sales of Jacquelyn Mitchard's *Deep End of the Ocean* from 100,000 to 915,000 copies and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* from 300,000 to 1,390,000 copies (Maryles 18). Given Oprah's dual cultural and financial influence, Mark Hall bestows on her the title of “literacy sponsor” taking over a term coined by Deborah Brandt who shows that literacy sponsors “are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at a minimum, contact with existing trade routes” (167). According to Hall, Oprah constructs her authority as a literacy sponsor through cultivating an intimacy with her audience with whom she shares details of her private life as part of a “para-social interaction” that is all too common between the medium of television and its consumers (650-51).

As she perpetuates on TV a didacticism and an audience-centeredness rooted in the oral tradition, Oprah becomes in fact a post-modern version of the Native-American

medicine man, the African-American preacher, the Asian shaman, a prescriber and a preserver of literature. Oprah's show functions on any television show's major advertising laws of empathy (identification with the need to consume the product presented) and of betterment (promising that its consumption will have a quick positive effect on the consumer's life quality), but it also combines the empathical powers of fiction with the empathy of television viewing. "When people watch television," states Oprah, "they are looking to see themselves. I think the reason why I work so well as I do on the air is the people sense the *realness*" (Adler 63). Elsewhere, she reinforces this empathetical quality of television: "Television is a reflection of who we are and who we say we want to be. It's time to offer new choices, new possibilities. It's time to elevate our potential" (Adler 104). Oprah's Book Club emerged as a result of her strivings to elevate this potential of television, and especially as an attempt to join television empathy with reading empathy: "You read about someone else's life, but it makes you think about your own. That's the beauty of it," confesses Oprah. "That's why I love books. . . . Reading is like everything else. You're drawn to people who are like yourself" (qtd. in Moore 19). Her reading philosophy highlights aesthetic standards that pull literature out of the academic analytical laboratories into a purely pleasurable, consumer's response-oriented realm. As Malcolm Bradbury writes, "A reader is not like a critic, who reads for professional judgment. The reader seeks pleasure, enlightenment, self-identification, seduction" (qtd. in Moore 23).

Oprah's ingredients for a successful television show have been spontaneity and her naturalness of being human on the camera (Adler 64). It was in fact, her "I-am-Everywoman" approach that won her the interest of her audience. In the tradition of oral communities, Oprah becomes a leader who represents and identifies with individuals in her

community. Consequently, every woman in America with whom Oprah identifies becomes sensitive to Oprah's recommendations as to what books could enrich her mind and soul. Surprisingly, Oprah acknowledges the uniqueness of the books' impact on the consumers' minds and hearts: "I feel strongly," she states that "no matter who you are, reading opens doors and provides, in your personal sanctuary, an opportunity to explore and feel things, the way other forms of media cannot. I want books to become part of my audience's lifestyle, for reading to become a natural phenomenon to them" (qtd. in Moore 18). With all her aversion for French culture (especially of French hairstyling and cuisine), Oprah, as a literature promoting journalist, does fit into a three-angle paradigm established by Jean Peytard with regard to literary television shows aired in France:

- la littérature est située dans un contexte événementiel. Le journaliste est un promoteur de produit soumis à la surenchère du sensationnel.
- les auteurs eux-mêmes, et surtout à la TV, sont présents comme personnages, conduits à faire valoir leurs oeuvres
- le journaliste par sa fonction de "pré-lecteur" influence le lecteur; il devient prescripteur d'opinion. (120)
- literature is placed in an event-type of context. The journalist is a promoter of a product subjected to the higher bid of the sensational.
- the authors themselves, and especially the television, are present as characters, and led to enhance the value of their works
- the journalists, through their function of "pre-readers," influence the readers and become professional advisors

Oprah's Book Club became "the phenomenon that changed the face of book clubs forever, saved a struggling publishing industry, established its own 'canon' of literary works, created millions of new active members" and peaked over thirteen million viewers and a distribution to one hundred and thirty countries in 1999 (Moore 18). Acknowledged as "the most influential force in publishing," Oprah was awarded the 50th Anniversary gold medal at the 1999 National Book Awards (Moore 19). "Oprah is to be credited for encouraging human-scale literary activity," writes Jerry S. Herron. "Most people are reading more books than at any time in the history of American society, without contact with the so-called authorities. Oprah has done a brilliant job of encouraging people to do that. Who needs literature professors? We've become absolutely irrelevant" (qtd. in Hall 646). Herron's concerns will make the subject of other scholarly studies that have attempted to categorize "the Oprah factor" in a hybrid genre of literary, business, or motivational endeavor. In his article, "A Dialectic With the Everyday," Ted Striphas points out that women between the ages of 18 and 54 "constitute both the primary Oprah television audience and the largest United States book buying public" (295-7). His further comments justify some of the negative perceptions of the quality or efficiency of televised educational programs, Oprah's included:

Critical responses to daytime television talk shows further confirm the rule that mass cultural texts intended for and consumed primarily by women tend to attract condemnation. Popular, scholarly, and lay critics alike routinely impugn these shows for specularizing the profane and/or for offering a surfeit of popular psychological quick-fixes to recalcitrant social problems. (299)

On the other hand, Striplas shows that Oprah tunes her selections to both sophisticated readers and neophytes since her book club covers easy reads like Mannette Ansay's 1994 *Vinegar Hill* and Alice Hoffman's 1997 *Here on Earth*, but also complex works such as Toni Morrison's and Bernhard Schlink's (303). Testimonies of women like Siebert who states on the show that Wally Lamb's *She's Come Undone* was the first book she read at the age of 40 ("Oprah's Book Club Anniversary Party" 4) demonstrate not only how acute the reading crisis became in the 1990s for some social segments, but also how powerful Oprah's impact was. Nevertheless, her elitist choices remained inaccessible to untrained readers such as the unidentified woman #7 who expresses her struggles with the text of Melinda Haynes' *Mother of Pearl* – "Half of the time I'm not sure what the characters are talking about" – or unidentified woman #12 who genuinely confesses about the same novel, "It was a great book to read before going to bed because I always fell asleep quickly" ("Oprah's Book Club" 9).

The Book Club has turned Oprah into an authority in the American community, a version of the oral tradition medicine man or preacher in our global village society, who dictates reading tastes and book marketing strategies. But the motivation behind her reading ministry springs from her own convictions in the power of books to change people and societies. Her insistence on reading stems from her own struggles for education and self-affirmation. Born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, in 1954, to an unmarried mother, Oprah received her first reading and writing lessons from her grandmother, and intermittently benefited from her father's encouragements to continue her education. "Getting my library card was like citizenship, it was like American citizenship," remembers Oprah about her childhood reading experiences (Krohn 18), a statement which confers to reading an indispensable role in the identity formation of any individual. Oprah's public speech career

started with her childhood and teenage years' church recitations that earned her nicknames like "the Speaker" and "the Preacher Woman" and ascended with her first newscast job at WVOL, a radio station in Nashville, Tennessee, later with her reporter position with WTVF-TV, a CBS television station also in Nashville, which propelled her to WJZ-TV in Baltimore where she failed at news, but found her strengths in the daytime show, *People Are Talking*. Oprah's next major move was to WLS-TV in Chicago where she hosted a talk show called *A.M. Chicago* (Krohn 8-54).

From her first educational experience in an all-white school in the Milwaukee High School to her pageant beauty contests successes and her jobs as an anchor and daytime shows host, Oprah broke racial barriers and made a stand for both whites and blacks.³⁸ A teenager who did not think much of her physical beauty, Oprah participated in a local Miss Fire Prevention contest and made a statement that not only made her a winner, but also prophetically announced her vocation: "I want to be a broadcast journalist because I believe in the truth," said Oprah. "I am interested in proclaiming the truth to the world" (qtd. in Krohn 37). However, on Oprah's show--(as much as in some of the screen adaptations discussed in chapters two and three)--political correctness takes precedence over the social, racial, or political tensions of the original literary works. To mention only one example, John Young remarks that Oprah's Book Club discussion of Morrison's *Song of Solomon* "ignores the critique of American racial history" (182).

Native American spiritual leaders, such as the Iroquois Hiawatha—who persuaded his people to abolish the law of revenge and invented a healing ritual for the grieving families—and Handsome Lake, who delivered a message of hope for the growingly dysfunctional Iroquois families forced to adapt to an American lifestyle, replaced the old traditions and

“produced a new cultural text” (Morrison, Kenneth 126). In a manner very similar to oral tradition leaders like Hiawatha, Oprah produces a new literary/cultural text within the acceptable political correctness parameters of her community. The literature mediated on Oprah’s Book Club serves orality-based social functions of cultural preservation and educating the masses, while also incorporating strong post-modern trends of focusing on the individual; Oprah attempted to change the American community of readers by winning one reader at a time.

4. 4. Radio Waves and the Tribal Voices of Postmodern Literature

McLuhan attributes to the radio a “tribal magic” (259). “The subliminal depths of radio are charged with the resonating echoes of tribal horns and antique drums,” he writes. “This is inherent in the very nature of this medium, with its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber. The resonating dimension of radio is unheeded by the script writers, with few exceptions” (261). In this context, radio becomes a vehicle for the voices of the community as much as film and television in our global village. More often than not, when disseminating literature, since most literary texts at the end of the twentieth century incorporate political and social messages, radio also assumes oral tradition roles of inculcating political ideas and of dictating the politics of culture. McLuhan emphasizes the political role of the radio when he compares Platonian ideas with the possibilities of the radio medium:

Plato, who had old-fashioned tribal ideas of political structure, said that the proper size of a city was indicated by the number of people who could hear the voice of a public speaker. Even the printed book, let alone radio, renders the political assumptions of Plato quite irrelevant for practical purposes. Yet radio, because of its ease of decentralized intimate relation with both private and small communities, could easily implement the Platonic political dream on a world scale. (268)

In support of the oral tradition elements in radio, Fahamisha P. Brown goes so far as to define contemporary African-American sermons as extended manifestations of oral traditional spiritual culture and specifically refers to their radio broadcastings as yet another enactment of black orality:

The living legacy of African American sacred vernacular culture can be heard by anyone who has a radio or a compact disc or cassette player. The tradition is alive in African American church services, which are often broadcast on the radio, and on recordings of famous African American preachers, such as the Reverends C. L. Franklin and Martin Luther King Jr. Poets continue to replicate in print the sound, language, and style of the traditional sermon. (21)

Along Brown's argument of radio orality, we must acknowledge that although radio does not share with television and film the pictographic or iconographic elements of the oral tradition, it comes very close to traditional orality in linguistic terms. In the case of radio, the linguistic sign, placed in a Saussurian paradigm, lacks a visual signifier, but the combinations of sound variations and special effects, along with musical beds, often modify the signification or signifying of the sign and make it as meaningful as a complete sign that would contain image and sound. Given the multitude of voices, genres, and formats that characterize the radio literary programs, the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, carnivalization, and hybridization also function within the messages of this medium.

Further, McLuhan connects the language element in radio to the Jungian concept of collective unconsciousness, and thus, defines the medium of radio as an extension of the human consciousness or unconsciousness, a repository of and a stage for the enactment of the

epistemological legacy of mankind, a feature that again, radio shares with the oral tradition. “Even more than telephone or telegraph, radio is that extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself,” opines McLuhan. “Is it not worthy of our meditation that radio should be specially attuned to that primitive extension of our central nervous system, that aboriginal mass medium, the vernacular tongue?” (264)

As critical as Postman is of television, he shows a genuine sympathy for radio, which, he writes, “is the least likely medium to join in the descent into a Huxleyan world of technological narcotics. It is, after all, particularly well suited to the transmission of rational, complex language” (112). Indeed, the lack of the iconographic element makes for a greater concern with the quality of the language employed in radio messages. On the 1998 “Radio: Imaginary Images” show, one of the commentators, Thomas Whitaker, points out that the lack of images forces the audience to focus more on the words. Elissa Guralnick, a University professor invited on the same show, states that the audience “creates the images” of a radio play, and the summative perception of a radio show or play depends on the listener’s ability to “imagine what he/she hears.” Writing about literary radio shows, Jean Peytard observes that “*l’absence d’images confère aux éléments sonores additionnés une présence particulièrement forte* et que le travail du ‘metteur en ondes de la littérature’ se situe dans ce ‘*preque plus rien*’ à dire qu’éprouve l’écrivain, une fois le livre achevé” – “*the absence of images confers to the added sound elements a particularly powerful presence* and that the job of the one who sets literature on waves lies in an area where there is ‘*almost nothing else*’ to say that would distress the writer, once the book is accomplished” (Préface 8).

Indeed, the radio moderator remains in an area where “there is almost nothing else to say,” as Peytard argues, but a deep knowledge of literary trends and political issues is a must-have for the interviewer, so that the writer’s work can be contextualized. As much as Oprah and the oral tradition performers, radio hosts of literary shows carry on functions of cultural preservation and assume the role of cultural leaders in the community. Their versatility in literary and cultural studies and their ability to negotiate financial and political discourses turns them into post-modern “tricksters.” A good example in this sense is a radio interview with Mary Gordon. When Tom Smith interviews writer Mary Gordon in 1991 on the Public Radio *Book Show* of the New York State Writers Institute affiliated with SUNY at Albany, New York, the academic context in which this radio show functioned imposed not only higher topics standards, but also a formal dialogue. Smith does start on a relatively familiar tone when introducing Mary Gordon and can even afford simplistic, naïve bridges of empathy. “And the fascinating title essay, Mary, blew my mind because it’s strong stuff, and I think it’s strong stuff because I think it’s true,” Smith gropes his way into a discussion of Gordon’s collection of essays, *Good Boys and Dead Girls and Other Essays* (73). However, Smith’s literary eloquence picks up when discussing an impressive array of American writers that deal with gender issues from Melville to Faulkner and Philip Roth and while eliciting Gordon’s views on contemporary gender-related traits in American literature. What is interesting in this interview is that Smith gracefully leads the discussion in a way that allows Gordon to maximize her sharing at a very high literary level, which leaves very little room for empathy-based or emotion-driven contextualizations. The only social reference that Smith affords is a final question “on the future of legal abortion in the light of recent soundings and rulings of the Supreme Court,” an issue on which Mary Gordon had touched

in one of her essays under discussion (80). As with film and television, we see here a politically correct message that forcefully remains within a didactic sphere.

In his extensive study of post-modern American literature, *Beyond Suspicion*, Marc Chénétier points to the importance of radio waves for the propagation of literature in the United States:

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this medium [radio] for the writers of a recent generation whose first flights of imagination and first desires to write ‘stories’ occurred while listening to the ‘wireless.’ Along with the illustrated books from the thirties and forties and popular literature, from Jules Verne to Dickens, radio has played for Charyn, for example, the role held by almanacs and chromos for an earlier generation. The voice of the ‘set’ was mysterious and fascinating before it became overwhelming, laden with indoctrination, with advertising ‘messages,’ musical assaults, long-distance therapies, and propaganda as is now the case of the time in the United States. (185)

Henderson shows that book discussions can be traced back to the commercial radio programs of the 1920s to the 1950s, and that in fact, art propagation always went hand in hand with commercial advertising (330). However, what she calls “cultural programming” (331) could also be read as a machinic programming of the audiences to embrace certain types of books featured on such cultural programs, hence the manipulatory aspect of radio literary transmission. Regardless of the commercial³⁹ context or lack thereof, it is obvious that literature made it into radio since the early days of this medium. In 1937, out of 200 radio stations polled by the Publisher’s Advertising Club, 146 broadcast some type of literary

comment or show (Lazarsfeld 280). Again, the *Radio Guide* listed 161 book programs for the week ending March 18, 1939 (Lazarsfeld 281).

Some of the 1990s' concerns of radio impact on literature were voiced as early as 1936 in the February 15 issue of *The Saturday Review of Literature*:

What the radio will do to fiction as an art leaves no room for doubt. What it will do to the taste of the public is scarcely less uncertain. For by forcing the novelist to shear away description and extraneous happenings, leaving only outstanding incident and dialogue in high relief, it will accustom the public palate to fiction stripped of every vestige of psychological content and so barren of subtleties and psychological interpretations as the fiction of the screen. (qtd. in Lazarsfeld 293)

On the other hand, the same editorials expressed a contradictory optimism in the radio's potential to increase not only readership, but also the quality of literary productions:

In the editorial opinion, *it is all nonsense that radio puts an end to good reading. . . .* When print took over the telling of popular stories, oral telling declined. But to suppose that the book is to be supplemented by the radio is to assume that we are going to be content with story-telling [. . .]. Indeed, *the radio may do a great deal to restore good reading, which suffers now more from diffusion than from lack of material. . . .* In all probability the radio will eventually take over much, though by no means all, so-called light fiction of the rental-library variety, leaving the better books a freer field to attract good readers. . . . What would be left would be real books. (qtd. in Lazarsfeld 294)

In 1971, Paul Lazarsfeld conducted an extensive study on the interdependence between radio and reading habits and compiled his research results in his book, *Radio and the Printed Page*. Among his conclusions, it would be worth mentioning that he found most of the radio audiences to have been already “reached by print” and that educators usually did not consider educational the book shows broadcast on radio stations (xiii). Another finding of Lazarsfeld’s comparative case studies indicates that since “radio and print have what might be called a different *valence* [. . .], people feel that reading is more difficult, more worthwhile, more educational and cultural than radio listening” (177). If Lazarsfeld’s research proved that “the greater the formal education of a group, the more likely they are to do some reading in consequence of having listened to a radio program” (308), then the question still remains to what extent did and does radio stimulate reading with less educated audiences. Lazarsfeld proposed establishing radio programs that would work closely with libraries, and he also suggested building audience appeal through the “entertainment quality” of the literary shows, an idea that came to life in *StoryLines* and other radio shows of the 1990s (325).

Widely recognized as a defining literature radio program of the 1990s, *StoryLines America: A Radio/Library Partnership Exploring Our Regional Literature* was founded in September 1996 by a \$350,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and launched in October 1997 on 21 public radio stations and 141 different radio outlets in the Northwest and Southwest of the United States. *StoryLines* involved over 130 participating public and school libraries that “received sets of the 13 series books [and tapes of all broadcasts] through the NEH grant, displayed colorful posters [. . .], and distributed attractive bookmarks and discussion guides to readers” (Lomax “StoryLines” 88). Inspired by a 1993-

1995 call-in radio show about books called *Big Sky Radio*, also an NEH-founded program broadcast on two Montana public radio stations (which had emerged as a materialization of the vision of a Montana library director, Georgia Lomax), *StoryLines America* featured discussions with authors such as Sherman Alexie, Denise Chávez, and Patricia Limerick and readers from all walks of life, including tribal leaders, mountain men, and storytellers (Lomax “Bringing Book Talks” 27), people from reservations, ranches and universities (Paminfuan 24), a way of paying tribute to the oral tradition. Among their book selections were Sherman Alexie’s *The Business of Fancydancing*, John Okada’s *No-No Boy*, Ivan Doig’s *This House of Sky*, and Mourning Dove’s *Coyote Stories* for the Northwest Series and classics such as N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Willa Cather’s *Death Comes from the Archbishop* in the Southwest Series (Lomax 88-89); other classics selected include Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Toni Morrison (Paminfuan 25). Executive *StoryLines* producer and Northwest on-air host Paul Zalis makes an obvious connection between radio and the oral tradition when he describes the book discussion format as “sort of swapping stories around the campfire, only we use radio instead” (qtd. in Lomax “StoryLines” 90). “Radio has an intimacy, imagination, and informality that TV doesn’t have and perhaps it still has more of a sense of extended community than the Internet,” says Zalis (qtd. in Paminfuan 25). Lomax’s description of the main objective of *StoryLines* also echoes similarities with the oral storytelling. “One of the reasons for creating ‘StoryLines,’” she writes, “was to take the library out to the readers—and nonreaders—and to engage more people in discussion of books” (“Bringing Book Talks” 27). Thus, radio becomes a medium that oralizes the printed system of the library and engages the community into tribal-like enactments of call/response rituals.

Writing about the limitations of *StoryLines*, Henderson points out that while seeking a wide range of listeners, the producers attempted “an effacement of both feminist politics and racial, ethnic and national difference” (334). For instance, *StoryLines* took pride in creating a balance between a feminist presence through selecting books written by female authors and a 54% male presence on the call-ins (Henderson 335-336). The *StoryLines* proposal to NEH reinforced the opening to a diverse audience pertaining to different socio-economic and ethnic groups:

[W]hile we are confident in our ability to win the devotion of regular public radio listeners, we have made program decisions and developed a promotional campaign to broaden and deepen the series’ appeal. To reach new listeners, we will offer one program each month on short fiction and one on novels. The program on short fiction is designed for those (including listeners in lower socio-economic brackets) who lack the leisure time to read an entire novel. Both programs will feature writers of diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds whose work reflects the concerns of the audiences we seek to engage. (*Storyline* 11)

On the other hand, Henderson shows the producers’ subtleties and hesitance in identifying the ethnic or social status of their callers:

The producers were reluctant, however, to introduce studio guests in terms of their ethnicity or race. Their solution was often to do so implicitly, for example identifying the Latin American nationalities and year of immigration to the U.S. of two guests during the program *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, a story of immigration from the Dominican Republic to the United

States. Another example is an African-American studio guest invited to participate in the *Beloved* pilot, who was introduced as a professor of African-American literature at the University of Pennsylvania. Producers (all of whom are European-American) know that not all teachers of African-American literature are black, but they also know that such an introduction will signal that possibility for listeners, in a white-dominant world where the simpler designation, “literature professor,” is likely to produce (perhaps among white audiences) an assumption of white elites. (338-339)

Thus, *StoryLines* voices directly and indirectly racial and economic tensions present in the American society of the 1990s, while remaining, in Platonian terms, a public speaker who transmits the community values and assumptions as part of an oral tribal tradition re-enacted in postmodern times.

Indeed, in a society controlled by monetary levers and in which speech is at times suppressed by political correctness considerations, cultural programs on public radio must negotiate their content and audience treatment accordingly. Henderson explains these economic and social interdependencies in her conclusion to a thorough feminist analysis of the *StoryLines*' design:

The democratic possibilities of public radio are thus restricted not only by the debilitating bite of funding cuts (leaving stations additionally dependent on corporate “underwriting”), but also by the ambivalent (if no less determining) practices of its professional-managerial producers. In their contemporary institutional setting, old anxieties about culture and commerce resurface,

coupled to a newer and no less insistent opposition—between cultural pleasure and political significance. (348)

As the descriptions of the following radio shows will show, literature radio transmission follows oral-based patterns of audience manipulation, immediacy (targeting specialized audiences like students, children, scholars), and emerges as a discourse that represents and serves the community in a didactic, but also in an economic manner (since it stimulates book sales). *Loose Leaf Book Company*, the fruit of early 1990s efforts of radio personality Tom Bodett and producer Ben Manilla, debuted in January 2000 as a weekly radio program for adults but advertising children books, but within a year it grew to cover 227 stations and 250,000 listeners, and it also came on the verge of bankruptcy. *Loose Leaf* featured authors like Lois Lowry, Gary Paulsen, Beverly Cleary, Katherine Paterson and Tomie dePaola, and attracted sponsorship from prestigious publishing houses, among which Random House, Harcourt, Little Brown, Houghton Mifflin, Winslow Press, Scholastic, Hyperion, Simon & Schuster, etc. In an effort to save the financial future of the program, the producers established the *Loose Leaf Foundation* which launched the *Partners in Reading* project with chapters in Wichita, San Francisco, Seattle and Abilene, TX (Lodge 26). Bodett sees this program “by far the most exciting potential I see for our future” and he further describes it: “These locally run chapters are organized with our assistance and involve community schools, school and public libraries, universities and booksellers, who harmonize their existing reading programs with the *Loose Leaf* broadcast” (qtd. in Lodge 26).

A similar children books enterprise has been taken over by author-illustrator Daniel Pinkwater who, since 1996, has begun to present and discuss his book selections once a month on the National Public Radio’s Weekend Edition Saturday hosted by Scott Simon. “I

like to find books that are obscure, not top-of-the-list. And it's always a treat to discover a new author or something I just really like. It's very random, but they [NPR] allow me to be the eccentric I am," says Pinkwater (qtd. Maughan 30). The effects of Pinkwater's recommendations on the market visibly manifested in dramatic increases of sales, i.e. *Insectopedia* went from 15,000 before to 60,000 after it was presented on NPR (Maughan 31). Although sales figures proved that exposure to 2.3 million listeners of the NPR Weekend Edition Saturday turned many listeners into buyers, it is hard to determine what the intellectual impact on the readers actually was.

Publishers Weekly's Between the Covers with Mort Sahl was launched in January 1995, on Sunday evenings, 9-11 p.m. ET from the ABC Radio Network studios in New York City. Political humorist Mort Sahl worked with the PW staff, among which editor-in-chief Nora Rawlinson, associate news editor Maureen O'Brien, and associate children's editor Shannon Maughan, to produce interviews with authors of fiction and nonfiction and to field phone calls from the listening audience (Reid 20). Fred Ciporen, one of the creators of the concept, defined the goal of the program as "to serve and expand the book publishing industry using any media available to us" (qtd. in Reid 20).

The MLA radio program "What's the Word?" emerged as another major literary radio enterprise of the 1990s. Launched in April 1997, the program reached a coverage of 30 states and 140 stations in 2004, has also become available through the In Touch Network, and is now carried overseas by Armed Forces Radio and Radio New Zealand (*MLA*). "What's the Word" follows a topical structure that ranges from specific themes in literature (the 1997 humor topics that covered anything from Russian to African-American hilarity patterns; the 1998 food in literature show, which made extensive references to the writing of

Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Virginia Woolf, and Emily Post; the 1999 “Literature and Science” show; etc.) to pedagogical editions – the 1998 “Teaching Then and Now” with a stellar participation (Alison Booth, Wayne Booth, Jean Ferguson Carr, Margaret Ferguson, Mary Anne Ferguson) and the 1999 “Improving Your Writing.” “What’s the Word” also tackles metaliterary topics such as the 1999 “Rereading and Discovery” focusing on the experience of finding new meanings in familiar literary works; issues related to the mechanics of translations – “Literary Translations” (1998)—and to “Learning a New Language” (1998); discussions on the diffusion of literature through “Radio Drama” (1998) and the “Preservation of the Book and Public Libraries” (1997). The participants, selected from among writers, critics, professors, and students maintain an academic verbal level, and usually avoid overemphasizing empathy elements as it is the case with other public radio literary shows. A perfect coordination with the musical bed (often in tone with the topic of the show, and most of the time chosen from orchestral pieces) adds to the classical, elitist texture of the “What’s the Word” program. Of all the literary radio shows of the 1990s, “What’s the Word?” remains the most specialized, although the texts of the discussions and lectures are made accessible to both students and scholars of literature alike. The mission of this type of literary radio show remains the cultural preservation of a conversation that engages an elite segment of the community’s audience.

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In the 1990s, television and radio breed a postmodern orality that revives, in a different manner and through different media, the sacral and didactic rituals and performances of the oral tradition; they inform, transmit values, and attempt to preserve the cultural and spiritual legacy of the community. Educational television, Oprah's Book Club, and the literary radio programs on air at the end of the twentieth century serve the cultural needs of the community, boost readership and literacy, but also operate in a society ruled by monetary interests and by mass media ethical laws. As much as the industry of film, television and radio face political and financial limitations that oftentimes influence not only the dissemination, but also the production of literature. The last chapter of this study will tackle in detail these constraints of broadcast media and their impact on aesthetic literary standards.

Chapter Five

The Mediatized Literature of the Nineties: Art and Dollars

In the nineteenth century, the dime novel was a brand name that designated “a short novel, with a sensational and melodramatic plot, that sold for ten cents” and told stories of “the frontier and the West” (Cox xiii, xv). The heroes of dime novels were “frontiersmen, American Indians, bandits, detectives, fire fighters, inventors, and school boys and girls” and their authors were doctors, lawyers, and journalists (Cox xvi, xvii). All these features obviously characterize the commercial, but also the scholarly acknowledged American fiction of the 1990s if we consider the Western frame of *Dances With Wolves* or the good-vs.-evil patterns in *L.A. Confidential* and *The Firm*. As Cox notes, the importance of the dime novels resides not so much in their aesthetic quality as literature, but rather in their function as historical and commercial commodities:

The significance of the dime novel for today’s reader or scholar is not as literature but as social history. It is a record of attitudes that prevailed from 1860 to 1915 in the United States. Examples of racial stereotypes, political opinions, and issues of gender are all there in these once popular books. One can trace the development of the myth of the American West as well as the changes in marketing a product to a mass audience. (xxv)

The American literature of the 1990s recreates the myth of the American dream or disillusionment and crosses the border to popular culture through its screen adaptations and

social manifest content; it also tells the story of marketing quality art in a predominantly mercantile society. But is this all there is to the literary discourse of the 1990s? Are these novels (especially the ones under discussion in this study) doomed to be remembered in the twenty-first century with the same “indulgence” with which we regard the dime novels today? Or are they to be classified as rare museum items, tinted with the orality of the broadcasting media, as we hold today the pieces of oral literature? The question is, what damages the reputation of a fiction work to a greater extent, its orality (or oral means of transmission) or its “accessible” (read “mediocre”) content, made so by the financial pressures that demand the author to target a wider, and thus less sophisticated, audience?

The diagnosis that a French scholar, Marc Chénétier,⁴⁰ offers for postmodern American literature is as real as it is shocking:

American fiction is without doubt one of the richest of our time. It is the most powerful literary form in the United States today: theater has moved toward an aesthetics of ‘performance’ in which the text is of secondary importance; and the isolated examples of good poetry are crushed beneath an avalanche of confessionalism that is more lax than unrestrained. Perhaps the failure of ‘postmodernism’ to unify literary production under one descriptive, generative vision is due to the fact that, in a certain way, we have in fact left modernism, since the profound truths of our society can no longer be grasped through the metaphors of art. (58)

If art fails to grasp the truths of our society, literature remains certainly under the spectrum of the societal trends that marked the end of the twentieth century. However, the performative characteristics and the confessionalism that permeate the mediatized literature

of the 1990s do not lower its aesthetic quality. The preoccupation with the mental and psychic struggles of the individual, as Chénétier observes, pervades confessional poetry and also the fiction of the nineties; Toni Morrison, Sherman Alexie, Amy Tan, Le Ly Hayslip construct avenues of spiritual and racial restoration in their novels, while others, like Oscar Hijuelos and Robert James Waller show the tragedy of unfulfilled dreams. But there is also another type of fragmentation of the fictional discourse, or what Chénétier calls a lack of vision unity, occasioned by the writers' often unsuccessful search for the ethical values of society, a quest illustrated with the writings of John Grisham, James Ellroy, and Michael Crichton.

The American society of the 1990s stands under the sign of global democratization trends, Wall Street, genetic breakthroughs, and the power of mass media, and all these elements place a powerful impact on literature. If in Kantian formulation, "the aesthetic experience is distinguished by its disinterestedness, its purity from contamination by moral and political considerations" (Taylor 91), the end of the twentieth century saw a highly politicized art condoned by New Historicism and fueled by socio-financial pressures. Taylor admittedly states that in fact, "the discourse of aesthetics is being exposed as a product of ideology" (92).

In a political world in which the concept of democracy prioritizes the leading role of the masses, while paradoxically claiming the precedence of individual rights, literature, as political as it can be, tackles individual crises while addressing mass audiences. Inevitably, "Politics and political economy, to be sure, are implicated in every discourse on art and on the beautiful," as Derrida writes in 1981 ("Economimesis" 3). The acute subordination of literature to the tribal ties of the community, which reminds of the role of the oral tradition

texts, poses issues of mass consumption and financial viability. Although oral texts were targeting mass consumption as well, that feature did not imply any commercialization process. As Phillip Simmons postulates, the postmodernist “mass consumer culture is not simply a rerun of the shadows flickering on the walls of Plato’s cave, but a historically distinct phenomenon that defines the postmodern period” (10).

Simmons further indicates that “within postmodern fiction the tension between the positive and negative values of mass culture typically results in a historical double vision in which mass culture is both the cutting edge of progress and the decline of civilization; it can be both the means by which the masses achieve democratic participation in culture and the means by which a power elite manipulates the masses into consumerist passion and political quietism; it both educates and indoctrinates, stimulates and enervates, pleases and bores” (17-18). As Simmons points out, an analogy can be traced between the United States’ possible cultural downfall and Rome’s decay caused by the empire’s fall into defining their existence on material parameters – *panes et circenses* (bread and circus). Patrick Brantlinger supports this theory: “As Rome was both the zenith and the burying ground of ancient civilization,” writes Brantlinger, “so modern mass society with its mass culture is both zenith and nadir of modern progress, acme and end of the line for the ‘dual revolutions’ of industrialization and democratization. Or so negative classicists either fear or hope” (35).

In this context, can we attribute aesthetic value to a type of art that has been diluted or perverted, as some would have it, in order to be accessible for the masses? Frank Norris certainly thought this possible and even desirable when he stated that “a literature that cannot be vulgarized is no literature at all” (qtd. in Kazin *Native* 99). And Elizabeth Long reminds us that the printed book was “the first mass medium of communication” (189). Hence, we

cannot necessarily label as inferior any production that targets a mass audience. Not all popular literature represents an art-demeaning act, nor should we categorize as true art only that which does not share a wide public appeal. Further, Bakhtin writes that “Every conversation is full of transmissions and interpretations of other people’s words,” and he contends that “[. . .] everyday speech is not concerned with forms of representation, but only with means of transmission” (530-531). Does that make broadcast literature everyday speech? In other words does this preoccupation for the means of transmission demote literary discourse to everyday speech, made accessible for the masses? In some instances, it is precisely this everyday speech that carries deep meanings and high aesthetic value.

Clyde Taylor observes that, during what many call the *post-aesthetic era*, “the magnetic direction of aesthetic discourse orients toward passive consumption, toward competitive, hierarchical recognition [. . .], and therefore toward the social system that has provided it” (91). If the postmodern audiences appear to consume art more passively than those of the oral societies, their perception is not always deprived of aesthetic awareness. The audience factor has always been part of the picture, even with what Taylor calls a “strict constructionist interpretation of aesthetics [that] refers to the pleasurable appeal to the senses” (91). Different audiences will expect various senses to be titillated. As Wiget notes, “in some Native American song traditions, for instance, pleasure derived from fitting innovative lyrics to ‘traditional’ melodies” (Wiget, “Native American” 14). The major difference would be that, unlike the audiences of the oral tradition, the art consumers of the 1990s are more aware of the existence of aesthetic parameters, or perhaps more prone to aesthetic manipulation by broadcast media. In 1973, H. Zetl described a process of aesthetic manipulation by the media that still rings true during the last decade of the twentieth-century:

There are, of course, subtle aesthetic variables that we can use to produce a specific aesthetic response in the recipient, even if he is not consciously aware of these variables. In short, we can manipulate a person's perception, and ultimately his behavior, by a precise, calculated application of aesthetic variables and variable complexes. (1-2)

Such a manipulation of aesthetic values with mass audiences becomes possible due to the lack of professional training in literature of mass viewers/readers. If we shall consider Rabinowitz's four rules of reading that include notice, signification, configuration, and coherence (1011-1012), we may wonder if readers at the end of the twentieth century have what Jonathan Culler calls "literary competence" (*Structuralist* 113). "To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for," writes Culler in his *Structuralist Poetics* (113-114). This type of interpretative sophistication remains a monopoly of elitist audience circles, with a membership limited to graduate students and scholars. Broadcasting media that air literature in the 1990s in America attempt to reconcile the purist art theories with Georges Poulet's statement that "books only take their full existence in the reader" (qtd. in Iser 966), or rather in a massive number of readers, which justifies their goal of reaching mass audiences. To follow a simple illustration, let us consider the stunning conclusion that Striplhas reaches in his in-depth analysis of Oprah's impact on female readership, namely that traditional book distributors and promoters have failed to reach an audience at the proportions television does it through Oprah, simply because the audiences would not be equipped to react to aesthetic or literary specialized promotions:

Thus, critics who attribute an apparent disinterest in books and book reading to an intellectual downturn in the United States culture or to putatively deleterious effects of electronic media may overlook a far more mundane explanation for these phenomena. The communicative strategies employed on Oprah's Book Club throw into relief the global book publishing industry's general ineffectiveness at communicating the relevance of books and book reading to specific social groups using anything other than the most traditional of aesthetic/literary labels. (311)

With oral societies, it was not as much an absence of aesthetic standards, but a lack of awareness of textual aesthetic functions. Andrew Wiget wonders why scholars like Alan Merriam, a well-known ethnomusicologist, criticize the Indians for not having "a lexicon of aesthetic and critical terms" ("Native American" 5). As Wiget argues, the main form of aesthetics in Native American oral literature is the function of genre, and particularly of "ethnic genre" ("Native American" 11). In fact Merriam does not deny, in his 1967 Ethnomusicology study, the existence of an aesthetic system with the Flathead Indians who constitute the subject of his study. He rather points out that whatever aesthetic standards these Indians have, they do not fit the Western aesthetic principles:

We seem not to be clear in our own culture about what is meant by the aesthetic, and yet ours is the logical, if not the only, yardstick which can be used. If we find that the Western concept is not applicable in other cultures, we are not sure what this means. While it seems to indicate simply that such and such a culture does not have an aesthetic, it may also mean that the investigator has missed it, or that the Western concept is but one variation on

a wider theme, the details of which are not understood clearly for other cultures. At this point, then, we can only indicate what we think is meant by the Western aesthetic and attempt to discover whether this set of principles is applicable cross-culturally. (43)

Merriam proceeds to expose the Native American lack of Western aesthetic principles. He makes it clear that since the Indians hold music as a “practical” expression designed for specific occasions, they do not regard it as “abstractable,” and therefore do not expose it to what Western aesthetic calls “psychical distance,” the audience’s detachment from a work of art that is to be analyzed. The Flathead Indians, for one, would not take their songs out of their social context and examine them for their own intrinsic value as objects of art (Merriam 43-44). Further, Merriam shows that the Indian concept of song as serving a community function also does away with the Western aesthetic function of manipulating the form for its own sake and with the emotional function of a work of art. (Although Indian songs are emotional, it is debatable whether the emotions arise from the circumstances the songs evoke or from the songs themselves.) It becomes evident from Merriam’s analysis that the Indians not only do not “verbalize about music,” since they do not even have words to denominate “beauty” that could be applied to art, but they also lack a “purposeful intent to create something aesthetic” (45). Even the shamans’ songs, which are “songs of personal power” possibly implying a degree of individual creativeness, serve with the Indians specific ritualistic purposes geared toward tribal events such as gambling, hunting, war, love, etc. (Merriam 55). Thus, I can conclude, that given the socio-religious functions of art with oral tradition, in this case Native American, the tribal audiences neither expect aesthetic sophistication, nor value their cultural texts based on aesthetic standards. However, tribal

consumers, as much as postmodern audiences remain involved in the acts of creating, performing, and transmitting cultural messages.

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Wiget identifies three types of audience that would evaluate the work of a writer: first, the author himself who assumes the role of audience in predicting the readers' response; secondly, the reviewers involved in the publication process, and thirdly, the actual reading public. All these audiences are present, according to Wiget, in the performing of the oral literature acts, with the difference that the writer is there replaced by the performer, who incorporates the reactions of the immediate audience into his work during the performing act. But the active participation of the audience in the reinvention and delivery of oral literature makes the latter "an emergent form" of art while textual literature remains a "fixed form" (Wiget "Native American" 15-16). Further, it would be worth mentioning that in 1947, Wittgenstein constructed a paradigm of the triangular relation of audience perception, the value of a work of art, and its intrinsic emotional load:

There is a lot to be learned from Tolstoy's bad theorizing about how a work of art conveys "a feeling". – You really could call it, not exactly the expression of a feeling, but at least an expression of feeling, or a felt expression. And you could say too that in so far as people understand it, they 'resonate' in harmony with it, respond to it. You might say: the work of art does not aim to convey *something else*, just itself. Just as, when I pay someone a visit, I don't

just want to make him have feelings of such and such sort; what I mainly want is to visit him, though of course I should like to be well received too.

And it does not start to get quite absurd if you say that an artist wants the feelings he had when writing to be experienced by someone else who reads his work. Presumably I can think I understand a poem (e.g.), understand it as its author would wish me to – but what *he* may have felt in writing it doesn't concern me *at all*. (58e-59e)

By Western aesthetic standards, the work of art should be aimed at conveying “just itself,” as Wittgenstein pleads. But the oral tradition, abounding with sacral and social functions, evidently registers frequent productions designed to transmit particular emotions of their authors/performers (such a grieving Native American ritual might do). By the same token, film versions of post-modern novels resemble the oral tradition in that they place more emphasis on “the message” (whether political or emotional) than on the aesthetic merits of the work itself.

“Even the *most refined* taste,” remarks Wittgenstein in 1947, “has *nothing* to do with creative power” (60e). Oftentimes, the taste of the readership does not concomitantly coincide with the creative powers of their generation of artists, which explains why so many geniuses were “rediscovered” and appreciated about a century at least after their death. On the other hand, when applying Wittgenstein's maxim to the three-angle connection of film producer, novel writer and movie-viewer, it is frequently the case that the producer's taste and financial power has nothing to do with the writer's creative power, but the intentions of both may meet in attempting to please their viewers, and respectively readers. Audience reception and participation in shaping the trends in cinema can be analyzed in the context of

the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, as Martin Flanagan does when he starts with the premise of considering film as a “a form of textual ‘utterance’” and thus, a text and he expounds that

the formulation of reception suggested by dialogic theory raises the spectator to a position of active participation in the textual process, and we can see how this kind of relationship underwrites marketing strategies such as the test screening. The screening is a microcosmic version of the way that commercial cinema functions in relation to its audience; films that fail to convey their message in a way that is narratively comprehensible and pleasing to a general audience invariably underperform at the box office. (157)

As Corrigan explains, the availability of movies on home video tapes has transformed the activity of watching a movie into a very personal, and customizable act, very similar to reading. We can now pause, rewind, replay, fast-forward a movie, which gives us the same mobility we have with the pages of a book, which we can flip back and forth. (*Film* 70) The problem with the time necessary for “consuming” a novel as opposed to a film has also altered with the advance of technology. A novel’s length can be measured in pages and hours needed to read them, while a movie consists of frames and usually less hours to view it that it would be necessary to read the novel. With all the possibilities of manipulating VHS tapes at this time, scholars might take as long to watch a movie adaptation as they would take to actually read the book. And several questions rise: Are postmodern audiences simply changing post-modern narrative “explosions of words” for “explosions of images” as Bluestone puts it (“Limits” 212)? Are viewers and readers alike “surrounded by simulations—what might be called ‘Dysneyfication’” as Linda Kaufmann puts it? (11)

Are these virtual products “strategies that subvert cultural amnesia and saturation”?

(Kaufmann 11). And therefore, has a new criticism become necessary, maybe of one of the anti-aesthetic, to match this new art (Kaufmann 11)?

Given the subjectivity of art, several answers might be appropriate for the simplistic way in which John Chamberlain asked the essential question for us, “What in hell is art, anyway?” (qtd. in Kazin *Native* 384). Taylor argues that to be able to evaluate emerging art forms, such as minority literatures, we have to “pass through a hypothetical zero aesthetic point” and define the parameters of a “post-aesthetic” system (97), in terms of the major determinants of traditional Western aesthetics, which are, according to Taylor, beauty, transcendence, order, perception/reception, the creative principle, criticism, authorship, taste, historicism (98). Thus, we can safely affirm that aesthetic standards change with the cultural context, and that along these lines, we can even acknowledge the existence of a concept such as “ethno-aesthetics” (Taylor 108).

“Post modernism,” predicted Clyde Taylor in 1989, “will attempt to colonise [*sic*] human creativity through a campaign of art-propaganda” (108). But the concept of “art-propaganda” involves more than marketing and an equitable share of monetary profits. As Taylor shows, “the Middle Ages produced one phase of objectification accompanied by a theological Absolutism; in the current crisis, the Absolutism is furnished by technological rationality” (95). In this context, I can argue, along with Harold Bloom, that “a writer is more apt to transgress than imitate” (Wiget “Native American” 11). The writer will choose, as I have shown in Chapters 2 and 3, to write a type of fiction that can transgress the print media into film, television, and radio, in other words, a narrative discourse more prone to

being oralized. In Herbert Read's words, the extent to which a book or a film lends itself to visual remediation determines their aesthetic value:

If I were asked to give the most distinctive quality of good writing, I should express it in this one word: VISUAL. . . . To project onto an inner screen of the brain a moving picture of objects and events, events and objects moving toward a balance and reconciliation of a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order. That is a definition of good literature. . . . It is also a definition of a good film. (231)

Some ethnic portions of American literature derive this oral feature from their own ethnic oral tradition. Referring to African-American literature, Gayl Jones remarks a "more manifest and deliberate use of oral tradition and folklore to achieve and assert a distinctive aesthetic and literary voice" (41). And in the words of Taylor, the postmodern writers, with few exceptions, will follow patterns of compatibility with art-propaganda, that is with the mediatization of their work.

One way for the writers to do so is to commercialize their perspective and their fiction. With regard to the profession of writing, it is worth mentioning that on the one hand, the second half of the twentieth century saw a dramatic tendency to professionalize amateur writers. From only two writing seminars in the early sixties, one at Stanford University and the other at the University of Iowa, the academic curriculum of writing expanded in the United States to several dozens, which now provide training by writers and job placement for their graduates (Chénétier 52). The writers at the end of the twentieth century lived in a publishing reality that included the Library of Congress' Copyright Office and professional organizations such as the Writers Guild of America, but also in which they often resort to the

services of a lawyer to negotiate a writing contract (Witte 8); it was a world in which writing had ceased to be the leisurely activity of the nineteenth-century novelists or the privilege of the gifted. “It takes more than talent to be a writer,” says an advertisement in *Writer’s Digest*, “but with two exciting new workshops from Writer’s Digest School, you’ll develop your natural ability and learn the fundamental skills you need to make the most of your innate talent” (“Fundamentals” 13). With so many creative programs within the academe and a host of workshops like the one advertised above, writing becomes an accessible enterprise. But the caliber of the writers schooled in such writing programs remains questionable. “Is there enough information on the page for the reader to know how many people are present, what gender they are and what they’re doing?” asks Nancy Kress in her sample writing lesson (“Fundamentals” 15). This question reflects a constant preoccupation of commercial publishers, namely that of providing sufficient information to make the writing accessible for the average reader, and when the writer produces under that pressure, there is little room left for genuine aesthetic value. Wayne C. Booth in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* reviews canonical theories on issues of popularity vs. the quality of art, acknowledging that it is “only in handbooks about how to write best sellers that we find very much open advice to the author to think of his reader and write accordingly” (90). Booth’s statement indicates that gearing one’s writing to the readers’ expectations does not necessarily imply a lowering of aesthetic standards, but that it is unfortunate that only “commercialized” outlets would raise the writers’ awareness of public appeal. However, writers who still abide, intellectually, to art-for-art’s-sake credos, maintain, like Mark Harris, a solid artistic integrity. “I write. Let the reader learn to read,” declares Harris. “There is easy reading. And there is literature. There are easy writers, and there are writers. [. . .] The novelist depends upon that relatively small

audience which brings to reading a frame of reference, a sophistication, a level of understanding not lower than the novelist's own [. . .]. I resist, as true novelists do, the injunction (usually a worried editor's) to be clearer, to be easier, to explain, if I feel that the request is for the convenience of the reader at the expense of craft" (113-116).

On the other hand, while writing becomes more and more an acknowledged profession, the notion of traditional writer with no other skills is now obsolete. Successful published contemporary writers like Michael Crichton, James Ellroy, and John Grisham, come from diverse professional fields like medicine, law enforcement, and law practice, and their novels constitute specialized discourse about their collateral careers. In some instances, it is precisely this direct reference of fiction to issues from the "real," outside world (see *Jurassic Park*, *L.A Confidential*, etc.) that ensures the commercialization, or the mass appeal of the book. Foucault himself acknowledges that the authorial attunement to the societal trends becomes not only a necessity, but constitutes an involuntary, intrinsic feature of literature. "The author-function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society," writes Foucault (894). Precisely this attunement of the author's voice to the societal discourses constitutes a solid convergence point of postmodern literature with the community-oriented oral tradition.

But perhaps, this renewal of the writer's preoccupation with society and with his audience, sometimes to the detriment of his focus on traditional aesthetics, is what made Derrida proclaim an "absence of a center," but also the "absence of a subject and the absence of an author" in post-modern literature ("Sign" 885). Following on the modernists' authorial impersonality, Foucault deplores along with Derrida the extinction of the writer:

The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer [. . .]. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of this particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing. (891)

Moreover, Foucault comes to regard the twentieth-century author as a recipient and at some times a retainer of oral literature, a form of culture in which the free circulation of fiction was not restricted by complex copyright laws, but by ancestral rituals. Here is how Foucault redefines the postmodern writer: “[. . .] the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works,” writes Foucault, thus reminding of the writer's indebtedness to the Jungian collective unconscious, “he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction” (899).

On a larger scale, the changes in the functions of the individual writer and his/her close integration with socio-political trends have produced alterations in the literary canon altogether. The selection of novels discussed in this study proves that the canon of American literature enlarged in the 1990s with the inclusion of women and ethnic writers. At the end of the twentieth century, American literature has ceased to be male.⁴¹ The issues of gender trigger a plethora of interdependencies in the field of literature production, including political and economical power. Here is how Judith Fetterley explains some of the negative repercussions of gender biases with women:

Power is the issue in the politics of literature as it is in the politics of anything else. To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness—not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male—to be universal, to be American—is to be *not female*. Not only does powerlessness characterize woman's experience of reading, it also describes the content of what is read. (992)

While discussing the emergence of a contemporary literary canon in the academe, Barbara Herrnstein Smith poses the question of several categories of literature: highly innovative works and “such culturally exotic works as oral or tribal literature, popular literature, and ‘ethnic’ literature” (1558). Smith's conclusions show that the evaluation of literature remains a constantly changing process in which writers, scholars, and readers must always reconstruct the aesthetic equation:

The prevailing structure of tastes and preferences (and the consequent illusion of a consensus based on an objective value) will always be implicitly threatened or directly challenged by the divergent tastes and preferences of some subjects within the community (for example, those not yet adequately acculturated, such as the young, and others with “uncultivated” tastes, such as provincials and social upstarts) as well as by most subjects outside it or, more significantly, on its *periphery* and who thus have occasion to interact with its

members (for example, exotic visitors, immigrants, colonials, and members of various minority or marginalized groups). Consequently, institutions of evaluative authority will be called upon repeatedly to devise arguments and procedures that validate the community's established tastes and preferences, thereby warding off barbarism and the constant apparition of an imminent collapse of standards and also justifying the exercise of their own normative authority. (1565)

While Smith's argument that the challenge of constant changes exist stands true, her condescension for the assumed inferior education level of immigrants and minority members reveals a racist bias that has no place in establishing aesthetic standards of literature or of its consumption. As shown in this study, minority writers have made a tremendous impact on the American literature of the 1990s and a great proportion of educated immigrants (especially from Europe) usually come from very rich cultural backgrounds which clearly qualifies them to participate in the aesthetic conversations on American literature.

In Barth's *LETTERS*, Tod Andrews poses the question of the writing profession as a quixotic enterprise. "Nowadays the genre [of the novel] is so fallen into obscure pretension on the one hand and cynical commercialism on the other, and so undermined at its popular base by television" Andrews says, "that to hear a young person declare his or her ambition to be a capital *W* Writer strikes me as anachronistical, quixotic, as who should aspire in 1969 to be a Barnum & Bailey acrobat, a dirigible pilot, or the Rembrandt of the stereopticon" (84). Along these lines, Bowerman explains how freelance commercial writing fits in the scheme of corporate America:

For the last decade, downsizing and outsourcing have sculpted the corporate American landscape. Corporations everywhere are doing more with less. Consequently, many organizations rely heavily on well-paid freelancers to write their marketing brochures, ad copy, newsletters, direct mail campaigns, video scripts and Web content. (22)

And he also urges potential writers to get their share in the “commercial writing market” (23). Hence the spectrum of an aesthetically challenging polarity between commercial (read censored, profit-oriented) writing and quality literature. Or as Derrida has it, the Kantian dichotomy of free (*freie*) or liberal art and mercenary art (*Lohnkunst*). Operating with these Kantian concepts, Derrida defines mercenary art as being characterized by “lack of freedom, a determined purpose or finality, utility, finitude of the code, fixity of the program without reason and without the play of the imagination (“Economimesis” 4-5). The element of pleasure in the aesthetic sense becomes key in Derrida’s definition of liberal art as “an occupation that is agreeable in itself” and in his distinction between the liberal artist, “the one who does not work for a salary [and] enjoys and gives enjoyment immediately” and the mercenary who “in so far as he is practicing his art, does not enjoy” (“Economimesis” 6).

Michael Wolff observes that we live in an “investment-banking culture” since “many investment bankers have become media owners”⁴² (22), and warns against an artistic and social phenomenon that he calls “identity crisis” (23) or what Laurent Danchin calls “une crise interne de la littérature,” “an internal crisis of literature” (3). But is it a crisis or a need? The 1990s saw a plethora of literary organizations (academic and publishing institutions, reading centers and groups, but also social bodies such as churches, prisons, hospitals, museums, etc.) that plunged into establishing and carrying on reading sessions, writing

workshops, “multimedia events and performance pieces [with] a strong literary component” (“Author & Audience” 1). A reading becomes in the twentieth century “a promotional event,” closely dependent on a sponsor and a specific targeted audience, and involving a project director, advertising functions both with printing and media bodies, determining fees for the event’s expenses and for the writer scheduled to read (“Author & Audience” 2-19). Above all, such a postmodern oral event⁴³ has everything to do with networking to attract “an audience, a sponsor, and a reader (“Author & Audience” 20).

With the writer enmeshed in a competitive financial network, the question remains how should scholars and literature consumers react to issues such as conglomerates in the publishing industry, federal government cuts in art allocated funds, and cases of censorship of literary works throughout the country, issues that were raised as early as 1981 at the October Congress of American writers at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York (Chénétier 55). In 1972, Hayakawa offered a historical perspective on the need for monetary injections into art, which, in his scholarly opinion do not necessarily lower the aesthetic quality of sponsored literature:

To say that poetry is sponsored, however, is not to say that it is necessarily bad. Poets have been sponsored in times past, although the conditions of their sponsorship were different. The court poet, or poet laureate, is a typical example of the sponsored poet of a previous age. Such a poet, a paid retainer in the court of an emperor, king, or nobleman, had the task of saying, in odes and epics on suitable occasions, how great and powerful was the ruler who employed him, and how happy the people were under the ruler’s benign and just government. Good poet laureates rose above the level of personal flattery

of the kings they worked for, and sometimes gave expression to the highest ideals of their times and of their nation. Virgil was poet laureate to the Emperor Augustus. (221)

Smith lies out a similar view of intact aesthetic values in a literature integrated into a mercantile society:

All value is radically contingent, being neither an inherent property of objects nor an arbitrary projection of subjects but, rather, the product of the dynamics of an economic system. It is readily granted, of course, that it is in relation to a system of that sort that commodities such gold, bread, and paperback editions of *Moby-Dick* acquire the value indicated by their market prices. It is traditional, however, both in economic and aesthetic theory as well as in informal discourse, to distinguish sharply between the value of an entity in that sense (that is, its “exchange-value”) and some other type of value that may be referred to as its utility (or “use-value”) or, especially with respect to so-called “nonutilitarian” objects such as artworks or works of literature, as its “intrinsic value.” Thus, it might be said that whereas the fluctuating price of a particular paperback edition of *Moby-Dick* is a function of such variables as supply and demand, production and distribution costs, and the publisher’s calculation of corporate profits, these factors do not affect the value of *Moby-Dick* as experienced by an individual reader or its intrinsic value as a work of literature. (1560)

Mediatizing their work through movie adaptations and/or radio and television appearances may not only enhance the writers’ opportunities to communicate their ideas to

the whole postmodern tribal community, but may also optimize the authors' income, and thus change what Barth calls a "quixotic" profession into a top-dollar enterprise. For many writers at the end of the twentieth-century, such mediatized appearances constituted landmarks of their career⁴⁴. Chénétier's is an insightful analysis of the mercantile pressures that constrain writers and shape culture in the post-modern American mediascape:

Intellectuals are called upon to sell themselves or not be read at all, thought becomes a matter of marketing, roles become substitutes for functions, oversimplification makes everything incomprehensible. "Philosophy" makes itself "new" to get on the top-ten list, academics inquire what is the next "thing," the "coming thing," the ideas that sell, and there is toothpaste and detergent between the lines of treatises hastily written to satisfy the "cult of the new." The economic becomes the only ontology and profit treats itself to kept dancers, books of the week, writers of the month. Since culture is only being consumed as "shows," all attempts to judge, assess, or distinguish fairly are reputed "hierarchical," – and therefore condemnable – in a world where difference is only interesting when artificially created in order to generate surplus value. The "postmodern," even "postcontemporary," vulgate (Wake up, Hegel, they've gone crazy!) flaunts drifting, uncertainty, indecision, nondifferentiation, and simulacrum as values worth fighting for since it no longer has the courage to oppose them. One has to make a living. Or at least give oneself the impression of living. (196-7)

As part of his harsh criticism directed at some of the French literary televised shows, Michel Peroni observes that the authors who appear on these "variety shows" fulfill artificial

roles of stars or actors (109, 141). It is only fair to note that at no time has Oprah attached such a commercial veneer to her authorial presences on the Book Club shows. In 2001, following the ancient rule of storytelling empathy, Oprah selected Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* for her fall Book Club show because it is a book about things that happen in the families of our global village: career failure, dysfunctional relationships and marriages, decrepitude, anxiety, the wiping out of moral values, international complots around the fall of the former Soviet states, the battle between the inner canker of consumerism and the turbulent toppling of communism. But Jonathan Franzen was the first writer to react negatively to her patronage. A white American male who had sensed the importance of financial power for the male's identity in this country and had voiced it in the thoughts of his character Chip--who feels that "without money he was hardly a man" (*The Corrections* 105)--, Jonathan Franzen draws back in the face of a huge financial impact that his book could have made on Oprah's Book Club show. "I feel like I'm solidly in the high-art literary tradition," stated Franzen, "but I like to read entertaining books and this maybe helps bridge the gap, but it also heightens these feelings of being misunderstood." And further, referring to Oprah, he commented: "She's picked some good books, but she's picked enough smaltzy, one-dimensional ones that I cringe myself, even though I think she's really smart and she's really fighting the good fight" (qtd. in Edwards 76). Oprah not only excused Franzen from appearing on the show, as Edwards opionates, "perhaps after a heart-to-heart with his publishers?" (76), but she also stalled her Book Club immediately after that incident. (When Oprah resumed the Book Club in 2004, the new format, "Traveling with the Classics" no longer featured interviews with the authors, which shows how much her experience with Franzen impacted her.) Many have voiced an utter disapproval of Franzen's attitude toward

the Oprahification of his novel. “His seeming self-regard indicted him as an elitist or a snob; for not rejecting the Oprah selection outright, he was a hypocrite; for not joyfully swooning into the book club’s mass readership and uttering dutiful gratitude, he was simply stupid,” writes Chris Lehmann, summarizing the media reactions to the newly created media/literature conflict (40).

But Franzen was not alone in his reservations toward the mass media involvement in the marketing of literature. Pynchon represents another literary figure of the postmodernist era who has created for himself “a commercial image as a recluse” in the words of John Young (186). “By distancing himself from all public discourse about himself or his work,” comments Young, “Pynchon becomes an even greater, albeit more mysterious, celebrity than most authors manage in all their interviews and memoirs” (186). Across the ocean, in France, a leading scholar, Jean Peytard, also rose, in 1990, against the commercialization of literature through television:

Le livre est un objet de publicité: on en signale l’existence, on en dit la qualité comme on vante celle d’un paquet de lessive. Désacralisation et banalisation du livre, en conséquence de la littérature. (125)

The book is an advertising object; they indicate its existence, they state its quality the way one praises a pack of powder detergent. A desacralization and trivialization of the book, and consequently of literature.

Nevertheless, in the end, even fervent defenders of artistic values seem to be vulnerable to corrupting monetary advantages. Franzen, also accused in the press of misusing in 2002 a \$20,000 taxpayer-funded grant from the National Endowment for the Arts—he allegedly spent it “not on rent, but to buy sculpture from a friend” (Valby 23)--,

became incredibly tolerant with profitable advertising means. “Remarkably...it comes as news,” he stated in 2002, “despite initial suspicion of book clubs, I’ve come to think that they’re actually fine things and that anything within reason that gets books into the public eye is a good thing” (qtd. in Valby 23). Moreover, in February 2002, Franzen allowed producer Scott Rudin to option *The Corrections*, and agreed to entrust the screenplay writing to David Hare (Valby 24).

Negative reactions to such commercialization tendencies in literature abound in the twentieth-century scholarship. In September 2003, Harold Bloom deplores in *LA Times* the fact that the National Book Foundation’s annual award for “distinguished contribution” went to Stephen King. “By awarding it to King,” Bloom writes, “they recognize nothing but the commercial value of his books, which sell in the millions but do little more for humanity than keep the publishing world afloat. If this is going to be the criterion in the future, then perhaps next year the committee should give its award for distinguished contribution to Danielle Steele, and surely the Nobel Prize for literature should go to J.K. Rowling” (B13). And a Nobel Prize winner himself, Octavio Paz voices similar concerns regarding the commercial trends in the literature of the 1990s:

All too often the only bonds (in modern society) are the bonds of immediate interests and immediate worth and not of enduring value. For example, literature used to be an extraordinary celebration of those collected feelings, passions, desires and tragedies that endure over time. Just as we used to make cathedrals or palaces to endure for centuries, we also made literature to endure. Every word was chosen very carefully—with very consistent and solid power of meaning—with the intention of duration. But more and more,

literature has become cheap, instantaneous entertainment. Now, if they are fortunate enough, modern works of literature have the duration of one season. (36).

Along the same lines, Phillip Simmons writes that

[. . .] mass culture—particularly film, television, and the consumer culture built on advertising—shows up as a significant historical development in itself. Enabled by new technologies and multinational organizations of capital, mass culture has become the ‘cultural dominant’—the force field in which all forms of representation, including the novel, must operate. (2)

But, Simmons further assesses, “as commodities marketed and distributed by national and multinational corporations, commercially published novels are themselves mass-cultural artifacts” (5). Simmons voices a concern widely spread among scholars, namely that “mass culture, especially film and television, threatens ‘genuine’ historical understanding, giving us an awareness of ‘surface’ appearances only, and failing to penetrate to the ‘depth’ of an authentic understanding of historical process” (2). Contrary to Simmons’s view, I would like to propose that twentieth-century seminal fiction works, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, not only do not lose their historical meaningfulness when translated into oral media (film or audiobooks), but re-create history and offer to postmodern audiences an accessible, and therefore not less sophisticated, story version of the past. I believe that with all the mediatization pressures, the writers of 1990s in the United States still make a difference in the literary and historical developments, and that their answer to the question *why do you write?* would incorporate, as much as Robert Coover’s answer, the whole history of

philosophy of aesthetics from Aristotle's imitation theories to the social militant role of the contemporary writer:

Because fiction imitates life's beauty, thereby inventing the beauty life lacks.

Because fiction, mediating paradox, celebrates it.

Because God, created in the storyteller's image, can be destroyed only by his maker.

Because in its perversity, it harmonizes the disharmonious.

Because in the beginning was the gesture, and in the end to come as well: in between what we have are words.

Because, of all the arts, only fiction can unmake the myths that unman men.

Because the pen, thought short, casts a long shadow (upon, it must be said, no surface).

Because the world is re-invented everyday and this is how it is done.

Because truth, that elusive joker hides himself in fictions and must therefore be sought there...(11).

It certainly becomes difficult to reconcile these high ideals with the reality of commercialism invading the profession of writing. As Seger points out, "for many writers, *commercial* is a dirty word. It implies compromising, losing the integrity of one's project, adding a car chase and a sex scene⁴⁵ as the lowest common denominator to draw audiences" (4). It involves strengthening the dramatism of the story and "raising the stakes" (Seger 106). It also entails embracing a style that would earn the largest possible segment of audience. "The realistic style is the most accessible to mass audiences, the most easily understood, and the clearest. It's like real life," says Seger (156). And the real life implies Jung's mid-

twentieth century diagnosis of the modern man, a definition that perfectly fits the condition of the post-modern individual, as well: “Our intellect has achieved the most tremendous things, but in the meantime our spiritual dwelling has fallen into disrepair” (“Archetypes” 16). It is precisely this state of spiritual disrepair and decomposition that late twentieth-century novels and their film counterparts mirror. The car chase and the sex scene that Seger mentions, in other words the exhilaration of danger and sensuality that constantly defines audience appeal in our society, represent more than a vehicle of commercialism or a sign of art vulgarization; they virtually mirror the disintegration of the postmodern heroes. Nevertheless, because of the inherent commercial nature of oral media, such as radio, television, and film, scholars tend to associate these media with the corruption of aesthetic and moral values. Such is the view of Gilles Mayné, who explains the media aesthetization of violence and eroticism in the context of the psychological trauma of the twentieth-century individual who replaces ancestral community rituals (rooted in an oral tradition) with a malign orality which exacerbates his alienation from reality:

C’est l’ouverture à un état d’expectative, d’angoisse, d’incomplétude, de risque pouvant certes procurer les plus grandes désillusions, mais aussi les plaisirs les plus intenses. Or cet état est précisément ce dont la démultiplication et la récupération incessante de sons, des images, des mots semble vouloir nous éloigner de façon de plus en plus variée et insistante. Le martèlement des médias amplifie encore le mouvement : heure après heure les radios dispensent le même discours édulcorant, savant dosage d’abstractions journalistiques, de messages publicitaires suaves [. . .] Quant à la télévision, [. . .] ce pilonnage télévisuel coupe les spectateurs toujours plus de la réalité

tangible, tout en rassemblant, ce qui est plus grave, les conditions d'une *esthétisation* de l'obscénité [. . .], avec tous les risques d'identification primaire et d'abus extrém(ist)es que cela peut comporter à l'intérieur d'une société en plein désarroi affectif et à la recherche désespérée de valeurs sécurisantes. Pour preuve que cette identification primaire a déjà cours, et ce de façon massive, il suffit de considérer le succès inégalé que peuvent avoir, dans notre « société du spectacle », les films d'horreur, de violence musclée, et les shows pornographiques, signes ultimes d'un corps social en décomposition, en mal de héros et de rituels communautaires, au sein duquel l'individu, désabusé, au lieu de descendre dans la rue « recharger ses instincts vitaux », tends à se retrouver calfeutré chez lui, en train de recevoir sa dose de violence obscène virtuelle médiatisée : [. . .] l'érotisme « soft » à la maison, en pantoufles, à l'abri des regards indiscrets...(161-62)

It's an opening to a state of uncertainty, of anguish, of incompleteness and risk, which can certainly provide the greatest disillusionments, but also the most intense pleasures. But it is precisely the incessant reduction and recovery of sounds, images, and words pertaining to this state that seems to tend to alienate us in a manner more and more varied and persistent. The hammering out of media amplifies even more this process: for hours on end, the radio sends out the same sweetened discourse, the right amount of journalistic abstractions, smooth advertising messages [. . .]. As for television, [. . .] this televisual pounding is always cutting the viewers further and further away from the tangible reality, while mimicking, which is worse,

the conditions of an aesthetization of obscenity [. . .], with all the inherent risks of primary identification and extreme(ist) abuse that may exist within a society in a state of utter emotional confusion and which is desperately searching for secure values. As evidence that this primary identification has already occurred, and in massive proportions, it suffices to consider the unprecedented success that our “society of spectacle” bestows on horror movies, physical violence, and pornographic shows, which are final signs of a social body in decay, sickened by heroes and community rituals, within which the individual, disillusioned, instead of going down in the street to “recharge his vital instincts,” tends to find himself shut in his own home, about to receive his dose of virtual, mediatized obscene violence: [. . .] a “soft” eroticism that the individual views at home, in his slippers, sheltered from indiscrete looks.

In an image-dominated culture, “seeing, not reading, became the basis for believing” (Postman 74). “The more information spews out at us the less we believe,” write Nathan Gardels and Leila Conners. “The more channels there are to entertain us, the more bored we become” (2). Have we come to the point where “everyone chooses their own reality” in this “emergent Republic of the Image”? (Gardels 4) And what would be the most efficient method of balancing “the image with reality, immediacy with duration, movies with books, publicity with privacy, celebrity with greatness, spin with truth, voyeur with viewer, Dionysian sensuality with Apollonian rigor, hype with hope” as Gardels and Conners recommend (50)?

An American counterpart of Mayné, Neil Postman argues in his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, that television is one of the primary culprits for bringing our culture to an alarmingly low level of degradation at which, as Huxley feared for this *Brave New World*, “there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one” (vii). What the culture consumers want is, in Postman’s theory, sheer entertainment with insufficient substance. “Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice,” postulates Postman, and his sentence resounds with cynical pessimism: “The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death” (3-4). Postman stretches so far his attack on television as an image-centered media as opposed to the word-centered printed media that he subtly infers that for some reasons God must have warned against images when He gave the law through Moses (9), and he mockingly asserts that “television is, after all, a form of graven imagery far more alluring than a golden calf” (123). In other words, he transposes the religious connotations of idolatry onto the aesthetic discourse of printing versus the iconographic, and thus culturally perverted, broadcasting media.

Postman draws our attention to a simplified twentieth-century syntax that he labels as inferior to earlier American discourse. “People of a television culture need ‘plain language’ both aurally and visually, and they will even go so far as to require it in some circumstances by law,” writes Postman. “The Gettysburg Address would probably have been largely incomprehensible to a 1985 audience” (46). And here it is how Postman explains the superiority of earlier forms of discourse: “In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, print put forward a definition of intelligence that gave priority to the objective, rational use of the

mind and at the same time encouraged forms of public discourse with serious, logically ordered content. It is no accident that the Age of Reason was coexistent with the growth of a print culture, first in Europe and then in America” (51). Postman connects this oversimplification of syntax with the abundance of slogans that started to be used in advertising as early as the 1890s and with the increasing affordability of leisure for the American society at the end of the twentieth century (60-61). But the consequences acquire dramatic proportions in Postman’s view:

When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility. (155-6)

Holding the telegraph and the photography as the precursors of television, Postman warns that “television’s conversations promote incoherence and triviality; that the phrase ‘serious television’ is a contradiction in terms; and that television speaks in only one persistent voice—the voice of entertainment” (80). His horror knows no limits at the thought that “our culture’s adjustment to the epistemology of television is by now all but complete; we have so thoroughly accepted its definitions of truth, knowledge, and reality that irrelevance seems to us to be filled with import, and incoherence seems eminently sane” (80).

Have the nineties seen indeed a culmination of “the decline of the Age of Typography and the ascendancy of the Age of Television” as Neil Postman was warning in his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*? “We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not by the printed word,” complains Postman.

“To be sure, there are still readers and there are many books published, but the uses of print and reading are not the same as they once were; not even in schools, the last institutions where print was thought to be invincible,” he continues, and then radically dismisses any merit of what educators call teaching with technology: “They delude themselves who believe that television and print coexist, for coexistence implies parity. There is no parity here. Print is now merely a residual epistemology, and it will remain so, aided to some extent by the computer, and newspapers and magazines that are made to look like television screens” (28). Postman himself gives an answer to the low popularity of literature books as opposed to high television viewership ratings when he points out that as early as 1786, Benjamin Franklin had observed that “Americans were so busy reading newspapers and pamphlets that they scarcely had time for books” (37). The same attraction for flippant sensational news that lessened literature readership in the eighteenth century causes a decline in the Americans’ gusto for books at the end of the twentieth century.

What Mayné and Postman never consider is that, in fact, to some extent, twentieth-century audiences use literature, printed or mediatized, as “equipment for living” (Burke 253), and that the oral media often enhance the potential of literature. What Hayakawa calls “verbal hypnotism” or “a form of rudimentary sensual gratification” (103) presupposes the uttering of appealing sounds, which may very well attract the attention and interest of an audience without actually communicating a meaningful message. But it is precisely this meaningless cacophony that reflects the condition of the postmodern individual. During the post-modernist era, which McLuhan calls “the Age of Anxiety,” the dilemma of the twentieth-century hero seems to be deeply existential: he is “the man of action who appears not to be involved in the action” (20). Heroes as well as consumers manifest a certain

“aspiration of our time for wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness” which McLuhan identifies as “a natural adjunct of electric technology” (McLuhan 21).

This very aspiration for empathy constitutes a currency that shows like Oprah’s Book Club employ to stimulate the audience’s interest in literature. Talking about Oprah Winfrey’s aesthetic system, Mark Hall notes that it “reflects neither the values and assumptions of a high culture aesthetic, nor a more popular aesthetic. Instead,” Hall writes, “she combines something we might call a ‘celebrity aesthetic,’ one that celebrates the good taste of the rich and famous, with an ‘aesthetic of intimacy,’ one based upon trust in the recommendations of a close friend” (653). It is interesting to consider Hall’s remark that although Oprah “does not actively discourage intellectual responses to books⁴⁶, [. . .] affective responses are more highly valued because they are more consistent with the values and assumptions underlying the show, where sharing one’s feelings gets top billing” (658). If the goals of Oprah’s Book Club are “entertainment, self-improvement, and social reform,” as Hall proposes (655), where does literature fit in this equation of money, taste, and psychological therapy?

While “Winfrey has taken considerable cultural authority away from publishers” (Max 40), she has also brought them stellar profits (in spite of her persuasive insistence on affordable prices and donations to public libraries). “On a really good day, she sends more people to bookstores than the morning news programs, the other daytime shows, the evening magazines, radio shows, print reviews and feature articles rolled into one,” asserts Gayle Feldman her 1997 *New York Times Book Review* article (31). However, it remains debatable whether or not we can attribute or at least relate a tremendous increase of readership in the United States in the 1990s to an increased television viewership, as Michel Peroni does when

comparing statistics of consumers of books and television literary shows for France for the same decade (15). We know that people read more in the 1990s in America because Oprah's show boosted the books sales, but these numbers are not indicative of how many people actually read thoroughly the books they bought, and again these statistics cannot measure the impact these books had on the intellectual advancement of their readers. We can only assert with certainty the indubitable impact of the media on audiences. As early as 1963, Kurt W. Back remarked in his study "Prominence and Audience Structure" that "mass communication theories indicate that mass media sharpen and reinforce existing tendencies" in its audience's psychic and mental patterns (14).

Television literary shows like Oprah's and postmodern literature converge, perhaps, in their motivational nuances and in the unquenchable drive of postmodern writers to direct their narration flow not only toward an acute introspection, but also to self-redemption. Paul D's final statement in Morrison's *Beloved* "You, Sethe, you your best thing. You are" seems to echo the positive philosophy promoted by Oprah on her show. As Oprah says, "everyone has the power inside" (Krohn 103), and writers and media personalities that promote literature make not only a living, but also a mission out of raising this type of self-affirming awareness in their audiences.

The media principle of operating with empathical levers to allure viewers/readers into the act of consuming a work of art traces its roots back to the Aristotelian theories of dramatic purging effects and of *mimesis*. Aristotle would have clearly rejected the modernists' penchant for objective, detached works (imbued with Bertolt Brecht's dramatic "alienation effect" for instance) since one of the functions of the Aristotelian discourse is that of purging feelings of fear, pity, and anger. W. C. Booth also admitted the impossibility of

eliminating all traces of appeals (emotional or not) to the reader from a literary work (98-99). “The author cannot choose whether to use rhetorical heightening. His only choice is of the kind of rhetoric he will use,” writes Booth (116), thus implying that empathy will always be an inherent part of any piece of literature, but the manner in which the author toys with it will make the difference.

Johnston discusses the trends in the literature of the last three decades of the twentieth-century in terms of an aesthetic reaction to the Aristotelian mimesis and in the context of linguistic theories of sounds and signs. He argues that the novels written between the 1970s and the 1990s “demonstrate the necessity of discovering alternatives to mimetic and expressive models in a culture of noise and entropic dissemination, in which information constantly proliferates and representations insidiously replicate and in which human agency finds itself enmeshed in viral, bureaucratic forms and transhuman networks” (3). The Aristotelian basic emotions of fear, pity, and awe have certainly become infinitely more complex in the postmodern entropic society since “For the postmodern reader, in short, modern consciousness no longer conveys the idea of a necessarily prior state of which writing would be the expression,” as Johnston writes, “but rather of a conglomerate of effects (sensation, memory, fugue states, etc.) produced by new machinic assemblages specific to a modern urban/industrial milieu” (34).

Talking about the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*, Derrida postulates that “the artist does not imitate things in nature, or if you will, in *natura naturata*, but the acts of *natura naturans*, the operations of the *physis*” (“Economimesis” 9). In this context, I can infer that cinema productions follow the Derridian paradigm in that they imitate, or provide a reflection, of the acts (read actions) of heroes or antiheroes in constant motion. “The early

cinema was called ‘The Bioscope’,” remarks Giddings, “because it was claimed, it imitated life, but it was really a synthesis of early technology and the new electricity” (ix). This synthesis of technology and electricity, as Giddings calls it, “might serve as a stimulus to reading” (Tibbetts Introduction xviii). “The movies could bring literary properties to a public that otherwise would not bother to read them,” observe Tibbetts and Welsh in their Introduction to their 1999 *Novels into Film*. These authors warn that the argument that “Hollywood distorts and corrupts serious literature for the entertainment pleasures of a mass audience” relies on the choice of consumers to watch a mediocre adaptation while discarding the literary work “as one more disposable commodity in a throwaway society” (xvi). In this context, some critics, such as Kazin, deplore the mass culture fostered by television to the detriment of literature fomentation through cinema. “Television *is* a factory,” he explains in his Introduction to Nathaniel West’s novel *The Day of the Locust*, “and manufactures more products in gross than movies ever did. Television lends itself to parody, not literature. But Hollywood, from the beginning stimulated a remarkable amount of American writing—most of it satiric but impressed by the power exerted over American minds, morals, music, speech, even the shifting styles and issues in national politics” (viii). In spite of scholarship that categorizes movie adaptations as what Laurent Danchin called in 1975 “une sorte de version vulgarisé de la littérature” (12) – “a type of vulgarized version of literature,” I can only go so far as to acknowledge that “Movies do not ‘ruin’ books, but merely misrepresent them” (Tibbetts Introduction xvii) at times for obvious political and financial reasons.

Revenue figures differ for the industries of writing and film. While a best-selling book may hope for a readership of one to eight million, a movie will be considered a failure if only five million people go to see it (Seger 5). As harsh as it may sound, there is more than

one grain of truth in Tibbetts statement that “for motion pictures in America the ultimate failure is commercial, and when box-office revenues fail to cover production costs,⁴⁷ Hollywood gets the message. As the saying goes in the Industry, ‘You’re only as good as your last picture,’ and ‘goodness’ in this context has nothing to do with fidelity or art”⁴⁸ (Introduction xvii). This acerbic financial competition in the movies industry also dictates standards of value in the assessing of auteurs (directors, producers). Kazin’s observation that “the sense of status in Hollywood was fixed by the size of the salary check” still holds true today (Introduction ix).

In this context, Timothy Corrigan explains the consequences of the collaboration between film and writing:

[. . .] by the mid-seventies both film and literature were more blatantly enmeshed in the commercial shapes that determined their artistic possibilities. The value and meanings of both film and literature were determined by their status as saleable commodities, and what they shared as entertainment products began to overshadow the differences of the past. From this perspective, (1) the value and meaning of both forms are fundamentally determined by a marketplace economics rather than by aesthetic or social discourses, and (2) within this commodification of form and meaning, writers and filmmakers would, necessarily or by choice, learn to use the other’s commodified textuality as the focus for a self-promotion, critique, or play for consumer choice. (*Film* 68-9)

In a similar direction, Giddings expounds on the marketing differences, and inherently on the differences in aesthetic standards, between fiction and film:

Novels are produced by individual writers and are ‘consumed’ by a relatively small, literate audience. Film and television are the result of groups of people engaged in industrial production, and are consumed by a disparate, mass audience. [. . .] Cinema and television production is highly costly, and to justify this expenditure, audiences must be large; consequently, these commercial pressures, combined with the restrictions imposed by the more overt censorship of these mass media, create different requirements from those experienced by the novelist. (2)

Seeger argues that the novelists’ choice to go with a movie adaptation “to increase readership” and implicitly their own revenues often conditions them to write their fiction “with an eye to movie structure and characters” and places them in a position to sell their rights only if they get to write the screenplay (xii). The copyright world made giant leaps since Gene Gauntier adapted Lew Wallace’s 1880 novel *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ* in 1907 for the Kalem film company and was sued by the Wallace estate (Tibbetts Introduction xiv). In *The Threepenny Lawsuit*, Bertolt Brecht voices a general negative perception of a collaboration between literature and film, when he explains:

We have often been told (and the court expressed the same opinion) that when we sold our work to the film industry we gave up all our rights; the buyers even purchased the right to destroy what they had bought; all further claim was covered by the money. These people felt that in agreeing to deal with the

film industry we put ourselves in the position of a man who lets his laundry be washed in a dirty gutter and then complains that it has been ruined. (47)

If at the beginning of the twentieth century, film novels like Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* galvanized a critical perception of the Hollywoodian lack of values, the latter part of the century saw an ever-increasing collaboration of writers with the film industry not only in the U.S., but also elsewhere. In 1978, the Austrian novelist, screenwriter, and filmmaker, Peter Handke, wrote and simultaneously filmed his *Left Handed Woman*, a perfect coordination of the two processes of creation.

Nevertheless, most consecrated postmodern writers still hold on to the primacy of writing and to what they consider the cinema's dependence on literature. "It's movies in part that seduced people into thinking the novel was dead," says Don DeLillo. And he warns, "If the novel dies, movies will die with it" (qtd. in LeClair 84-5). Thomas McGuane supports the movies' indebtedness to the raw material of writing by asserting that "Contrary to what people think, the cinema has enormously to do with language" (qtd. in McCaffery 217).

Hence, I can infer that there is a transfer not only of linguistic-sign paradigms from literature to film, but also a translation of aesthetic parameters from writing to the screen. As early as 1965, Kluge noticed that "there is a tendency to impose upon the cinema the aesthetic ideals of the classical arts" (233). When this imposition of quality occurs with a movie adaptation, the product often encounters financial failures, given its reduced mass appeal. The movie *Beloved*, for instance, "the dearest thing to Oprah's heart" for which she felt "passionate," as Oprah's friend Gayle King observes, turned out to be a box office flop and did not bring Oprah an expected Oscar (Krohn 92). Bordwell illustrates the possibility of

an aesthetic transfer of artistic values between literature and movie adaptations by asserting that the evaluation criteria for movies, similarly to those of postmodern mediatizable literature, are reality, morality, coherence, intensity of effect, complexity, and originality (58-9). Artworks, whether they be novels or films, constitute products of culture that abide or not by conventions, concludes Bordwell (59).

Imelda Whelehan best summarizes the mechanism of interdependence and mutual influence between literature and film in the context of aesthetic appraisal. “The question is left open, however, as to how successful films are determined,” notes Whelehan, “but it raises issues of the relationship of box office success, target audience, and how, in particular, ‘high’ literature becomes popular culture with a corresponding effect on book sales and the perception of literary value and ‘high’ cultural tastes in the eyes of the mass viewing audience” (8). However, as early as 1975, Laura Mulvey expressed her confidence in the possibility of a merger between the financial and aesthetic standards of cinema:

Cinema has changed over the last few decades. It is no longer the monolithic system based on large capital investment exemplified at its best by Hollywood in the 1930’s [*sic*], 1940’s [*sic*] and 1950’s [*sic*]. Technological advances (16mm, etc) have changed the economic conditions of cinematic production, which can now be artisanal as well as capitalist. (7)

The opening of the academe to film as an aesthetic discipline as early as the sixties shows a major shift in the redefinition of artistic standards, which has been expanding to include productions of the broadcasting industry. Imelda Whelehan points to a certain apprehension, which emerged in the 1970s, that cultural studies dominated by popular culture will end up replacing English in our worldwide academic institutions (18). But is this fear

grounded in reality? What has certainly become a fact in English studies is that postmodernism has brought a tremendous opening of literary studies to cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary trends. To mention only an example, a leading academic institution, Stanford University, has initiated at the turn of the twenty-first century a program of modern thought and literature that enmeshes literature into the modern day's world.⁴⁹ If we think that adaptations earn 85% of all Academy Award winning Best Pictures and 70% of all Emmy Awards (Seeger xi), we should not be too skeptical about the chances of quality literature to acquire recognition in the film industry, and consequently we should not altogether dismiss the positive impact of quality adaptations entering the English curriculum to complement literature studies. But perhaps the contentions between the academe and popular culture productions such as movies actually stem from a constant conflict between writers on the one hand and film and media producers on the other. Stephen King's dispute with Kubrick over the adaptation of his 1980 novel *The Shining*, and Jonathan Franzen's resistance to Oprah's mediatizing his *Corrections* in the late 1990s indicate that the power conflicts between the traditional pen and the camera are far from blowing off.

As for the promotion of literature on radio, largely debated in chapter 4, this medium seems to escape the attacks of scholars who claim a demeaning of literary aesthetics on television and cinema. In fact, it is largely accepted that aesthetic literary standards are upheld on radio literary programs. Commenting on radio literary shows, Jean Peytard remarks that “*la critique radiophonique pourrait être une façon de pratique esthétique*” c'est définir celle-ci comme une technique d'art” – “the radio criticism could be a type of aesthetic practice, that is we could define such a criticism as an art technique” (Préface 8). On the same lines, Régis Labourdette contends that radio moderators become literature

sponsors or recommenders as much as television show hosts: “A la radio, la littérature vit, périclite ou périt, outre par sa qualité, selon la qualité des émissions qui l’introduisent, c’est une évidence,” – “It is a fact that on radio, literature lives, disintegrates, or perishes, overdone by its own quality, based on the quality of the shows that present it” (14). The features of *StoryLines*, a major radio literary program of the 1990s in the United States,⁵⁰ indicate, according to Henderson, that the producers strove to abide by high aesthetic standards, in spite of commercial constraints:

Storyline did indeed offer these listeners a different kind of talk: it was public; it was participatory; it often addressed intimate responses to a range of cultural experiences and to reading about cultural experience; it was framed by a different set of discursive practices than, say, the exoticizing discussions of intimacy on daytime television; it did not rely on taunting to enhance the dramatic value of the broadcast; and finally, it did not insist upon the celebrity or intentions of authors in creating meaning and value with books. (342)

In Linda Hogan’s novel *Power*, Ama Eaton kills the sick, dying panther, from which Oni (the spirit or the breath of life) is oozing out, and with that, she does away with an exhausted old order and tradition. The infusion of mass media into the postmodern world performs a similar act of exterminating the old, dying panther in literature, an act of eradicating the traditional concepts of writer and of literature. It is a phenomenon that concerns not only the United States, but also other media-dominated countries. Writing about the media-driven cultural changes in France, Laurent Danchin remarks that, “il est donc évident que le livre et la littérature, à l’ère de l’audio-visuel, tendent à perdre le rôle exclusif qu’ils occupaient traditionnellement dans la culture” -- It is therefore obvious that

books and literature, in the era of the audio-visual, tend to lose the exclusive role they had traditionally in the culture (2). Along the same lines, Birkerts noted in 1994 that the book was “no longer the axis of our intellectual culture” (152). However, some American voices, although acknowledging the media impact on literature, do not consider it destructive.

Fitzpatrick raises several pertinent issues regarding the reception of literature and the function of writers in today’s society as opposed to the past centuries, arguing that in fact, the replacement of literary traditions by mass media does not diminish the aesthetic value of the literary productions, nor does it demean the role of the postmodern writer:

The question then becomes whether all the books that are sold are (1) in fact being read, and (2) of literary importance; both of these subquestions raise for me a discomfoting sense of elitism. Moreover, to argue that the writer’s role in contemporary culture has been diminished—whether by film, television, computer, or other cultural shift—is of necessity to post an Arcadian past in which the writer was culturally central, an assumption that, like any such nostalgic utopianism, is suspect in its revisionism. (n. 7, 523)

When “the aesthetic of high modernism” became exhausted, postmodernist literature emerged as a discourse of replenishment, argues John Barth in his essay “The Literature of Replenishment” (71). Further, in his *LETTERS*, John Barth suggests that literature can be replenished if we “reinspect the origins of narrative fiction in the oral tradition” (438). Or it is precisely the mediatization of literature that proposes a re-enactment of the oral tradition as it has been shown in this study.

Danchin claims that to reconcile literature with the emerging mass media, we should not “revolutionize” literature, but “convert” writing to fit new marketing tools (19). His

solution addresses a necessary adaptation to new instruments of discourse and proposes a reconciliation among audio-visual arts and writing:

Exactement comme au moment où la guitare électrique, le synthétizer, l'orgue électronique ou les tables de montage ont commencé à remplacer dans les studios, dans les salles ou dans la rue même, les vieux outils artisanaux qu'étaient le piano, le violon et tous les instruments de l'orchestre classique, il faut que la machine à écrire, la caméra, le magnétophone, la presse ou la ronéo deviennent les instruments banaux de création d'une nouvelle variété d'artistes, spécialisés dans la parole, l'image ou l'écriture plutôt que dans les sons: c'est seulement à cette condition qu'on pourra vraiment libérer les arts essentiellement verbaux et visuels, autrement menacés de tous les risques de régression et de névrose qu'entraîne un travail solitaire avec des instruments dépassés, et qu'on pourra de même coup achever la régénérescence en cours de la culture, parce que l'on contribuera ainsi à la naissance collective d'une véritable "littérature audio-visuelle" ou illustrée (un Nouveau Cinéma, une nouvelle bande-dessinée, , de nouvelles formes de montages), défense et illustration de ce qu'on appellera bientôt définitivement la Nouvelle Culture, quand les générations montantes de créateurs en auront plus amplement consacré le mouvement.

Car c'est seulement en changeant d'instruments d'expression et de conscience qu'on transformera vraiment la vie et qu'en faisant changer les symboles, on favorisera une véritable Renaissance de la culture. (23)

In the same way in which the electric guitar, the synthesizer, the electronic organ or the consoles started to replace in the studios, halls, or even in the streets, the old craft tools that were the piano, the violin, and all the instruments of the classic orchestra, now the typewriter, the camera, the tape recorder, the press, the mimeo become the trivial instruments that create a new category of artists, specializing in words, images, or writing rather than in sound. It is only on this condition that we will be able to truly free the essentially verbal and visual arts, otherwise threatened by all the risks of regression and neurosis entailed by a solitaire work with outdated instruments; and only this way will we be able at the same time to achieve a regeneration pending in our culture, because in this manner we will contribute to the collective birth of a genuine “audio-visual” or illustrated literature (a new cinema, a new cartoon, new ways of directing), in defense and as an illustration of what we should soon definitely call the New Culture when emerging generations of artists will have been able to fully establish such a movement.

Because it is only by changing the expression and conscience instruments that we will indeed transform life and it is only by changing the symbols, that we will facilitate a genuine Renaissance of culture.

In 2002, Kathleen Fitzpatrick talks about a similar “symbiosis of text and machine” (521) in her article “The Exhaustion of Literature: Novels, Computers, and the Threat of Obsolescence,” a title drawn from John Barth’s 1967 article “The Literature of Exhaustion,” published in *Atlantic Monthly*. Both the narrative content and the dissemination of literature

have actually become imbued with technology. Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* is only one of the examples in this sense. If Crichton's novel abounds in interspersed mathematical formulas, diagrams, and computer screen transcripts, a rhetorical device that enhances the intertextuality of post-modern fiction, Spielberg's 1993 screen adaptation made use of ground-breaking computer technologies such as scanning sculpted dinosaur models and then juxtaposing to film cuts the computer-generated images of the monsters (Bordwell 28-30). Inadvertently, these technology infusions will bring about strong commercialization trends. In her 1998 book, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Janet Murray pleads for an intrinsic cultural need of developing writers who should be flexible and versatile enough to work with multimedia technology. "The computer is not the enemy of the book," she says. "It is the child of print culture, a result of the five centuries of organized, collective inquiry and invention that the printing press made possible" (8). Paraphrasing Murray, I can argue that cinema, radio, and television are not the enemies of the book, either.

Directors, radio and television hosts engaged in the promotion of literature do not proclaim the death of printed literature since that would do away with the very subject of their productions and thus it would be counterproductive for their industry. A television top professional in love with literature, Oprah Winfrey acknowledged the differences between reading and media consumption on receiving her AAP Honors Award in February 2003, an occasion on which she also announced her intentions to re-open her Book Club under the new format, "Traveling with the Classics:"

Our society values, for some reason, swiftness of experience—we've grown up with instant gratification. I ask, Can the slow art of reading—the slow, sensual art of reading—and its difficult pleasures survive? [. . .] The

reading of a book, as we all know, demands that we call time out from all of the business of our lives—to luxuriate in a nesting place for hours in solitude. [. . .] Mass reading, some say, has been going on for a relatively short time in human history and is destined to be supplanted by other, more technologically advantaged modes for understanding our common human experience. I don't believe it. I cannot imagine a world where great works of literature are not read as they have always been. (16)

But shows like Oprah's Book Club, radio literary programs, and movie adaptations make it a world in which readers become motivated to read in an oral, performative, mediatized environment. Commenting on Toni Morrison's presence on Oprah's show, John Young labels Oprah's Book Club as "the most dramatic example of the postmodernism's merger between canonicity and commercialism" (181). Contrary to Franzen's blunder, Morrison successfully negotiates between "both spheres, remaining visibly public as a producer of high art yet simultaneously discussing and marketing it through a mass cultural medium" (Young 182). Perhaps Morrison's success at settling her value between art and dollars to the detriment of neither areas is what all postmodernists writers should do. After all, postmodernism "operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first" (Huyssen 48). And as John Barth postulated in 1967 in his seminal article "The Literature of Exhaustion," "pop art, dramatic and musical 'happenings,' the whole range of 'intermedia' or 'mixed-means' art, bear [. . .] witness to the tradition of rebelling against Tradition" (29), so the mediatization of literature becomes an inherently postmodern, and inherently anti-traditional, phenomenon.

Conclusions

The thorough comparison of oral literature to postmodern mediatized literature that constitutes the subject of this study has shown that theoretical systems such as Saussure's concept of the linguistic sign, Jung's collective unconscious, the Bakhtinian dialogic paradigms, and the Aristotelian aesthetic standards represent critical tools that can be applied to both oral tradition productions and postmodern oral literary enactments. Elements of multimedia performative characteristics of oral genres, archetypes such as the trickster, tropes such as the "talking-book" (Francesca's journals in *The Bridges of Madison County*), socio-political issues (colonialism, immigration, authorship, racial and gender tensions in *Mambo Kings*, *The Joy Luck Club*), linguistic patterns such as bilingualism and use of dialect, stylistic tools (signifying, call/response in *Beloved*), all these penetrated not only printed literature, but also mediatized forms of literature in the United States in the 1990s. The selection of novels and their screen adaptations analyzed in this study demonstrate the connections between oral tradition and post modern orality since they represent a wide range of ethnicities and literary styles, from Native American to Asian, and from autobiographical (Hayslip) to Western (Blake) and futuristic (Crichton), and as they entail complex production, perception, and dissemination interdependencies.

But at the same time, the fiction of the 1990s, publicized in print, film, or on television literary programs, continues the Modernists' obsession with the camera as both subject and object of art. Authorship continues to be shared among indirect storytellers, writers, co-writers, directors, television hosts, editors and publishers, all of whom preserve an inherent indebtedness to the collective unconsciousness. The aesthetic standards of literature

remain negotiable with an inevitable polarity between specialization (of producers, products, and consumers) and simplification trends that attract a larger number of consumers while alienating an elite literary clientele.

Broadcast media have certainly altered not only the traditional dissemination, but also the consumption and assimilation, and at times even the production of literature. Radio, television, and film have created a postmodern orality that shares linguistic, socio-political, and performative features with the oral tradition, but these media also integrate commercial factors which have reshaped aesthetic literary standards. The political position of this study implies a tendency to negotiate a middle ground between commercialization trends in literature and radical attacks on broadcast media involvement in literary production and dissemination. Although offering fair representation for both sides of the scholarly conversation, my argument does not embrace Postman's utter rejection of television, nor does it recommend a full commercialization of literature. Instead, by showing orality features in broadcast literature as a post modern revival of cultural preservation trends, this study indicates that broadcast media can be beneficial to the development and survival of literature. After all, from the pidgin sermons of nineteenth-century African-American slaves to Oprah's televised lunch with Toni Morrison and to Jonathan Demme's adaptation of *Beloved*, from Native American war songs to Matthiessen's *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* and to Michael Apted's *Thunderheart*, from Hispanic oral histories to the tragic sense of Hijuelos's and Glimcher's *Mambo Kings*, from the Asian ancestral stories to Amy Tan's and Hayslip's novels and their movie adaptations, there is simply a road that the spoken literary word had to cover, an evolution trajectory that has cycled back through orality with the broadcast media.

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Endnotes

¹ Tzvetan Todorov's essay "Language and Literature" was one of the papers presented by over one hundred humanists and social scientists at the international symposium "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" ["Les langages critiques et les sciences de l'homme"], an event sponsored by the Ford Foundation and organized by the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center, and which took place in Baltimore during the week of October 18-21, 1966.

² Jacques Lacan's essay "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever" was one of the papers presented by over one hundred humanists and social scientists at the international symposium "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" ["Les langages critiques et les sciences de l'homme"], an event sponsored by the Ford Foundation and organized by the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center, and which took place in Baltimore during the week of October 18-21, 1966.

³ Charles Mozaré's essay "Literary Invention" was one of the papers presented by over one hundred humanists and social scientists at the international symposium "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" ["Les langages critiques et les sciences de l'homme"], an event sponsored by the Ford Foundation and organized by the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center, and which took place in Baltimore during the week of October 18-21, 1966.

⁴ Even some of the first Native American writings like Samson Occom's 1772 speech, "A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, demonstrate "natural and free and eloquent, quick and powerful" oratorical skills (Blodgett 35).

⁵ Shirley Ardener, borrowing the term from the social anthropologist, Charlotte Hardman, denominates as “muted groups” the “underprivileged” or “inarticulate” minorities which are perceived and evaluated culturally, socially, and economically based on the criteria of a “dominant model” created by a dominant social group (xii).

⁶ Bernard Katz refers here to Edward Long’s study *History of Jamaica* published in 1774, in which there are mentions of West Indian music known as Calypso.

⁷ I am reproducing here this sermon in its entirety:

I take my text from Genesis two and twenty-one (Gen. 2:21)

Behold de Rib!

Now, my beloved,

Behold means to look and see.

Look at dis woman God done made,

But first thing, ah hah!

Ah wants you to gaze upon God’s previous works.

Almighty and arisen God, hah!

Peace-giving and prayer-hearing God

High-riding and strong armed God

Walking across his globe creation, hah!

Wid de blue elements for a helmet

And a wall of fire round his feet

He wakes de sun every morning from his fiery bed

Wid de breath of his smile

And commands de moon wid his eyes.

And Oh—
Wid de eye of Faith
I can see him
Even de lion had a mate
So God shook his head
And a thousand million diamonds
Flew out from his glittering crown
And studded de evening sky and made de stars.
So God put Adam into a deep sleep
And took out a bone, ah hah!
And it is said that it was a rib.
Behold de rib!
A bone out of a man's side.
He put de man to sleep and made wo-man,
And men and women been sleeping together ever since.
Behold de rib!
Brothers, if God
Had taken dat bone out of man's head
He would have meant for woman to rule, hah
If he had taken a bone out of his foot,
He would have meant for us to dominize and rule.
He could have made her out of back-bone
And then she would have been behind us.

But no, God Almighty, he took de bone out of his side

So dat places de woman beside us;

Hah! God knowed his own mind.

Behold de rib!

And now I leave dis thought wid you,

Standing out on de eaves of ether

Breathing clouds from his nostrils,

Blowing storms from 'tween his lips

I can see!!

Him seize de mighty axe of his proving power

And smite the stubborn-standing space,

And laid it wide open in a mighty gash—

Making a place to behold de world

I can see him—

Molding de world out of thought and power

And whirling it out on its eternal track,

Ah hah, my strong armed God!

He set de blood red eye of de sun in de sky

And told it,

Wait, wait! Wait there till Shiloh come

I can see!

Him mold de mighty mountains

And melting de skies into seas.

Oh, behold, and look and see! hah
We see in de beginning
He made de beastes every one after its kind.
De birds that fly de trackless air,
De fishes dat swim de mighty deep—
Male and fee-male, hah!
Then he took of de dust of de earth
And made man in his own image.
And man was alone,
Let us all go marchin' up to de gates of Glory.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
In step wid de host dat John saw.
Male and female like God made us
Side by side.
Oh, behold de rib!
And let's all set down in Glory together
Right round his glorified throne
And praise his name forever. (qtd. in Courlander 359-61)

⁸ The text of this sermon is entirely reproduced in Harold Courlander's book *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore*, pp. 361-64.

⁹ All translations from German, French, and Spanish belong to Codrina Cozma, a professional translator.

¹⁰ But quality exceptions do happen, such as the adaptation of Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, to which two Nobel-Prize contemporary authors contributed (Hemingway with the novel and William Faulkner with the script).

¹¹ In a law and media-dominated society, authors and auteurs, although they often take risks of sending off a politically loaded message, have become highly vulnerable to lawsuits. Professional writers and directors can claim First Amendment rights as Paul Matthiessen did, but some of them (Hayslip, Stone, Apted) prefer to dip their narrative in cultural ambiguities rather than produce a liable work.

¹² For exemplification purposes, here is an abbreviated list of participants in the production of a movie: director, screenplay writers, art director, set decorator, set dresser, costume designer, make-up artist, hairdressers, drivers, graphic artist, first/second/third assistant director, script supervisor, dialogue coach, the cast (stars, supporting players, minor players, extras for crowds), stunt coordinators, wrangler, choreographer, dancers, production manager/production coordinator/associate producer, production accountant/production auditor, production secretary, production assistants, director of photography/cinematographer, camera operator, key grip, gaffer, greenery man, property master, production recordist/sound mixer, boom operator, third man (Bordwell 26-29).

¹³ Avrom Fleishman identifies four classes of voiceovers: "*voice-off* (heard and seen), *interior monologue* (not heard by others even when the character is on-screen with them), the *acousmêtre* (heard but not seen), and *voice-over* (neither heard nor seen by [other] characters" (75). Based on Fleishman's categories, the narratorial voiceover in *Heaven and Earth* constitutes an *acousmêtre* since it is heard, but not seen. The lack of the narrator's physical presence in such voiceovers resembles the anonymity, and implicitly the

universalistic character, of the narrator in oral traditions, in which the storyteller represented only the vehicle, the voice through which the story could be transmitted/performed.

¹⁴ Seger notes that the adaptation becomes more facile when the protagonist also functions as narrator in the novel (120).

¹⁵ When dealing with the parallelism or complimentary elements of printed versus filmed texts, terminology, as relative as it can be, plays an essential role in defining the operating criticism tools. Seymour Chatman coins the terms “presenter” (performing arts) as a pair for “narrator” (printed texts), but points out that either will actually become actualized through the “teller” and the “show-er,” which can function interchangeably in both literature and cinema (113).

¹⁶ If most modernists remained, at least in theory, under the Eliotesque hex of the “objective correlative,” a plethora of scholars following them have argued that I cannot deny the necessity and the existence of emotions in literary works. Hayakawa concludes, in his 1972 *Language in Thought and Action*, that “since the expression of individual feelings is central to literature, affective elements are of the utmost importance in all literary writing” (113).

¹⁷ Leaving aside all the “Whitmanesque” contradictions in Derrida’s theories of orality and textuality, I cannot help linking his previous statement with Emily Dickinson’s verses, which confer life-affirming power to the spoken word:

A word is dead
When it is said
Some say.
I say it just

Begins to live

That day. (qtd. in Portelli 138)

¹⁸ Jean Pierre Vernant's essay "Greek Tragedy: Problems of Interpretation" was one of the papers presented by over one hundred humanists and social scientists at the international symposium "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" ["Les langages critiques et les sciences de l'homme"], an event sponsored by the Ford Foundation and organized by the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center, and which took place in Baltimore during the week of October 18-21, 1966.

¹⁹ See Bluestone, George. *Novels into Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957. p. 48.

²⁰ Bruce Morrissette supports this view. See his *Novel and Film: Essays in Two Genres*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. p. 36.

²¹ The release of a VHS bilingual version of the movie with Spanish subtitles indicates that Glimcher's production targeted massive Hispanic audiences in the United States.

²² It is questionable if the "device of voiceover," as Wise says, always "approximates" the interior monologues. There are several ways of translating interior monologues into the language of camera productions, and Demme's alternate cuts of flashbacks and storytelling prove this point.

²³ Seger proposes that a character's declared intentionality initiates a story arc that will end with the fulfillment of the character's intentions (93). According to Seger, Dunbar covers two story arcs, one that finalizes with his cultural conversion to Indian tribal life, and

one that starts with his new hunted status and ends with his leaving the tribe with his wife to escape the search of the white soldiers (95).

²⁴ The iconography (recurring images) of a movie plays a crucial role in constructing the location; for instance, in Oliver Stone's adaptation, establishing shots that introduce us to the environment of Le Ly Hayslip's village in Vietnam are often repeated in key moments of the plot development (farmers on the fields, Le Ly's riding a bull, etc.).

²⁵ I cannot fully agree with Seger's statement "Film doesn't give us an interior look at a character. A novel does" (20). One of the insecurities of adaptations lies, according to Seger, in the difficulty of rendering in film "material that is internal and psychological, that concentrates on inner thoughts and motivations" (55). Nevertheless, movies like *Beloved* and *Mambo Kings* offer complex insights into the characters' psychic struggles: Sethe remembers her infanticide trauma along with her rape experience and the hanging of her mother while frantically building an unhealthy emotional attachment to Beloved; Cesar in *Mambo Kings* struggles with his vices, the love for his brother, the devastation of losing Nestor to death, and a passionate attraction to his sister-in-law. Although such adaptations do not employ restrictive narration (the telling of a story from the exclusive perspective of a character), the combination of omniscient narrative and point-of-view shots (constructing mental subjectivity through voiceover, flashbacks, slow-motion, slow-paced sounds) produce intricate psychological portraits of such characters (For more on these technical devices, see Bordwell 83, 85).

²⁶ Lorenzo D. Blackson, *The Rise and Progress of the Kingdom of Light and Darkness* (1867); Thomas Detter, *Nellie Brown* (1871); Emma Dunham Kelley, *Megda* (1892), etc.

²⁷ Thus, *Beloved* seems to have emerged out of the insular nation of children deprived of past and memory that the Czechoslovakian writer Milan Kundera fashions in his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

²⁸ In this respect, the movie adaptations of the 1990s resemble more Louis Lumière's penchant for recording current events or "actualities," than Georges Méliès employment of the magical and the fantastic in creating a "cinema of attractions" (Kaufmann 12). However, the abundance of thrilling scenes in Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, most of them created through computer-generated images and camera manipulations makes Jay David Bolter consider this genre of movies a new version of the early "cinema of attractions" (157).

²⁹ We have recently seen the exaggerated proportions of aversion and criticism triggered by a radical movie like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, which did not set out to specifically satisfy or attack any group.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that Tan produced *The Joy Luck Club* in only four months, writing fiction as a hobby, after her experience as a freelance business writer (Rozakis 388).

³¹ The reasons underlying the failure of the reservations mentioned by Wiget in his electronically published monograph, *Native American Literature*, and referring to the nineteenth-century circumstances, display striking similarities to the 1970s circumstances described by Peter Matthiessen in his journalistic manifest, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*: the "corruption of agents," the lack of material and financial resources necessary for development and progress, "the intrusion of outsiders" who appropriated more and more Indian land, and the Indian rejection of the federal intervention, all remained the same on the reservations up until the end of the twentieth century ("Chapter 3: "The Beginnings").

³² The great-great-granddaughter of Constantine and Violet Winfrey, “a Mississippi slave couple who had been freed after the Civil War” (Krohn 8), Oprah Winfrey interpreted the role of Sethe after a judicious training to get in the skin of what her forefathers had lived. Her preparation for this role included a “reenactment” of slavery during which Oprah was left “barefoot and alone, in the Maryland woods, at a spot that used to be part of the Underground Railroad” while white men acting as slave traders “harassed her and called her names. Oprah felt strong and unafraid at first, but then she broke down. ‘I became hysterical. It was raw, raw, raw pain,’ said Oprah. ‘I went to the darkest place, and I saw the light. And I thought, ‘So this is where I come from’” (Krohn 91).

³³ Following the developments that attribute violence to brain functions, Sanchou coins a new term, *violence “cognitive”*-- cognitive violence (164), which indicates that violent behavior is more often than not a result of complex brain processes, and not an impulse-based action.

³⁴ In post-modernist literature, even attempts to exile one’s traumatic psyche to a “children’s island,” in order to forget, or to erase trauma, as Tamina does in Milan Kundera’s novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, result in failure due to a generalized psycho-moral deterioration of the humans; in Kundera’s novel, the supposedly innocent angel-demon children behave as sexual perverts (238-51).

³⁵ Even in the France of 1975, Laurent Danchin voices concerns raised by Neil Postman in the 1980s’ America:

Pour beaucoup des parents, et pour la plupart des professeurs, l’audio-visuel et tous ses derives, en particulier la télévision, représentent par excellence le monde de l’anti-culture et de la facilité.

Il est bien connu que les jeunes «ne lisent plus», «n'ont plus le sens de de l'effort», etc...(11)

For many parents, and for most teachers, the audio-visual with all its derivatives, particularly television, represents, in and of itself, the world of anti-culture and of simplicity.

It is well-known that young people “are not reading anymore,” and “have ceased to have any sense of effort,” etc.

³⁶ Here is some of the students' feedback on the efficiency of oral learning approaches such as a book club: “Literature circles take the ideas out of your head rather than keeping all the ideas in your head,” says Jamie, a third-grader involved in a book-club type of learning experience. “In literature circles, you get to know a person better and how that book relates to their life and you and them relate” (Short 67). A similar view is shared by Carl, another third-grader quoted in Kathy G. Short's study *Literature Circles*. “When I am in a literature group,” says Carl, “I feel I am growing a lot in being able to understand the deep-down meaning of the book and how the author wrote that book” (Short 67).

³⁷ Among other television literary shows, which complement or continue Oprah's Book Club tradition, the following are worth mentioning: “Booknotes” on C-SPAN with regular televised author readings from bookstore readings; “Exxon Mobil Masterpiece Theater Book Club” on PBS; “Martha's Favorite Books!” on *Marta Stewart Living*, featuring one book selection per week; “Read This!” on *Good Morning America*, which profiles regional book clubs; “Reading with Ripa” Book Club on *LIVE with Regis and Kelly*; “Today Book Club” on *Today Show* (Moore 344).

³⁸ A childhood fan of Shirley Temple, Oprah Winfrey unleashed her acting energies in movies like *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and she professes her passion for the movies, saying that “I would rather do a film than take a vacation. This is the thing I’ve waited a lifetime for” (Adler 96). “*Beloved* is my passion,” says Oprah Winfrey, who acted as Sethe in the screen adaptation of Morrison’s novel. Oprah boasts having bought the rights to adapt this novel as early as 1987, before Morrison had been awarded the Pulitzer and the Nobel Prize (Adler 158).

³⁹ In addition to radio readings, some writers, like Toni Morrison, have chosen to market their writings as audiobook versions, a strategy which John Young calls “the commercialization of the African-American oral tradition” (198), and which indeed emerged as a post-modern re-enactment of “the talking-book” trope present throughout African-American orality. Sarah Kozloff acknowledges that “‘envoicing’ the narrator [through audiobooks] creates a sense of connection stronger than reading impersonal printed pages: the communicative paradigm—storyteller to listener—that underlies printed texts has again become flesh” (92).

⁴⁰ Chénétier’s x-ray of the post-modernist trends in American literature encompasses “the absurd, contestation, the picaresque, marginalism, and formal experimentation” of the 1960s, “the rise of parodies, demystifications, the denunciation of systems and caricature of them” and more experimentation in the 1970s, and the 1980s that saw “the beginnings of a vast synthesis” and “a partial reaction against the antirealism that had dominated the seventies” (59).

⁴¹ “American literature is male,” states Judith Fetterley in her “Introduction to *The Resisting Reader*” (991).

⁴² Involved in the books sale and mediatization, Oprah Winfrey, reaped an impressive amount of financial benefits from her culture-enhancing profession. However, she asserts that, “The one—the thing that I’m most proud of myself about is that I have acquired a lot of things, but not one of those things defines me” (Adler 115).

⁴³ Television channels, such as C-Span2/Book TV, often organize literary brunches that involve sponsorships from publishing corporations, such as NY Times, and entail high organizational costs related to renting ballrooms, catering services, etc.

⁴⁴ Siding with scholars who hold media involvement as a downgrading element in the formation of an educated, cultured public, Joan Shelley Rubin identifies as “middlebrow” the synthesis or symbiosis between commercialism and art. Thus, I can infer that post-modernism has seen the emergence not only of a middlebrow writers class, but also of a middlebrow readership.

⁴⁵ Linda Kaufmann extrapolates on the definition of pornography: “The Greek pornographos means ‘the writing of, on, about, or even for harlots’; by extension, it signifies the life, manners, and customs of prostitutes and their patrons. Not just scenes of sex, in other words, but descriptions of everyday life, from the viewpoint of the masses” (9). In other words, a mass-appealing discourse may constitute an act of art prostitution. If pornography is a commerce, as Mayné points out (150), I should also face the facts that eroticism in any book as well as in any Hollywood production makes the sales.

⁴⁶ Some criticize Oprah’s Book Club selections for not requiring a dictionary and for presenting little intellectual challenge besides their length (Crossen W15).

⁴⁷ The production and distribution of movies function on complex financial and legal interdependencies. During the preparation stage of a film production, the director and

producers carry on the screenplay treatment leading to shooting script and secure casting and funding, which fall under above-the-line costs or negative cost category, averaging \$50 million per movie (Bordwell 24, 25). The producer pays for the publicity campaign, but the distributor gets 90% of the total box-office receipts in the first week, after which their share goes down to 30% (Bordwell 13). Profits are generated through *commercializing sound tracks* and from *merchandizing*, creating products related to the movie); *cross-promotion* (movie features snapshots of a company's products); *ancillary markets*, such as cable TV, home video, movie websites, best-selling books derived from the movie (Bordwell 18,19).

⁴⁸ Video versions feature further adjustments from the movie adaptation, such as the elimination of R-rated elements, time-compression or a speeding up of the film to fit in ads, and “pan and scan,” which is an elimination or alteration of original images (Bordwell 21).

⁴⁹ For more information on this program offered at Stanford University, it is useful to visit the link <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/MTL/anniversary.htm>

⁵⁰ “Fresh Air with Terry Gross” on NPR may also be mentioned as a quality radio cultural program that features interviews with authors, film-makers, musicians, etc., carried out in a highly professional manner. For more information, it will help to visit its website at <http://freshair.npr.org>

About the Author

Codrina Cozma holds degrees in German, Spanish, and French, and an M.A. in English from Valdosta State University, in Valdosta, GA. She is currently fluent and accurate in five languages and has extensive experience as a teacher, translator, and editor. Codrina is the recipient of numerous teaching and publishing awards, and her scholarly articles have been published with prestigious journals in the U.S., New Zealand, and U.K. Upon the completion of her doctoral studies with the University of South Florida, Codrina has accepted an Instructor position with the English Department at the University of Central Florida, in Orlando, FL.