

the love of the same man, but, in fact, they end up allies. Likewise, in *The Bingo Palace* Lipscha and Lyman take opposite sides on several personal and tribal issues, but they finish on the same side in thinking about the future of the tribe. The extraordinary power of Erdrich's work, for me, lies in her ability to move beyond what might be seen as firmly entrenched oppositions between traditional and contemporary perspectives, between full-blood and mixed-blood Indians.

Although in *Tracks* it is tempting to see Pauline and Nanapush as opposites, both their narratives are necessary accounts of history—Pauline's vision of the razing of Fleur's land and of assimilationist schools actually happens, and Nanapush's vision of an unquenchable Anishinabe spirit and resistance is also true. And while I agree with Bell that Pauline is mad by the end of the novel (as I discuss in the essay), we cannot therefore simply dismiss her point of view. For one thing, she feels Fleur's power more impressively than perhaps any other character; it is in part through Pauline's longing to be near Fleur that readers begin to grasp Fleur's power, mystery, and significance.

Bell also criticizes my article for being too attentive to Western history and culture. The central conflict of *Tracks* involves the crucial moment when Western institutions and policies threatened to decimate the Anishinabeg (and other native peoples), so the novel invites an interrogation of certain aspects of Western colonialism. Moreover, the novel dramatizes that there can be no return to a pure precontact oral consciousness. Thus, *Tracks* calls for a "both-and" vision encompassing native ways of storytelling and Euro-American kinds of history writing. My essay gives more attention to the latter because of the problems surrounding history and historiography today—problems that affect not only Euro-Americans but Native Americans and other marginalized peoples as well. Erdrich creates historical fiction in a period when postmodern and poststructuralist theories have been used to characterize (and discredit) history as "mere" fiction; this theoretical move would seem to deny the efficacy of writing accounts that could challenge popular (mis)conceptions of (Native) American history. The crucial issue for contemporary writers like Erdrich—and Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, and others—is how to set the historical record straight in the postmodern cultural climate, where stories of genocide, slavery, and racism are apt to be dismissed as politically correct liberal propaganda. And a particularly insidious skepticism has arisen in this situation: we now have radical historical revisionists who argue, for instance, that the Holocaust never happened, saying that there is not sufficient documentary evidence to support the historical claims about

it. As Thomas C. Greene demonstrates, the epistemological problem of knowing the past has been scrutinized for a long time, but today epistemological skepticism has spilled over to ontological suspicion as well.

History is in crisis (I am writing this response in the aftermath of the controversy over the *Enola Gay* exhibit, to cite just one contemporary incident), and authors like Erdrich who write historical novels do so in the context of tremendous theoretical and political turmoil. My essay on *Tracks* tries to show the stakes of such a significant cultural and historical intervention.

NANCY J. PETERSON

Purdue University, West Lafayette

Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse

To the Editor:

Rosemary Jolly's timely article, "Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa" (110 [1995]: 17–29), betrays an ambivalence one can detect in Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and other postcolonial theorists. Their rejection of discourses that feed on "positive/negative" stereotypes such as insider/outsider, colonized/colonizer, occidental/oriental, and so on, makes sense for the postapartheid and postcolonial parts of the world. These critics seem to prefer a fluid discourse beyond political identities, consisting, in Bhabha's words, of "modes of differentiation, realized as multiple, crosscutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific and strategic calculation of their effects" ("The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al., 72). Nevertheless, these writers do not claim that stereotyped sociopolitical identities are not part of the reality. Bhabha argues that "the stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation" (80). Jolly too wants a critique of the stereotypes "[e]ven if," she quotes Albie Sachs with a nod, "the oppressor is there, physically is there, and is trying to penetrate our minds and to push us, and even to tell us how we should win our freedom" (26). Political resistance without self-exploration could be as misleading as a denial of political identities: resistance is difficult without the identities, and, as Jolly and Bhabha implicitly acknowledge, oppression thrives in the world.

What further complicates the issue is these writers' inability to give up dualistic political orientations. Jolly's accusation that Derrida is insensitive to "American and European colonialism" presupposes the polarized identities she wants us to reject (19). Moreover, Jolly's reading of Derrida's article in terms of the occasion it was written for reduces the aesthetic experience of visiting an exhibition to the cognitive price it often involves. The fact that the display of artworks weakens their value does not negate the validity of Derrida's article, which aims to celebrate the antiapartheid message of the works. To decry Derrida, as Jolly does, is to deny this message. Bhabha too is self-contradictory when, for example, he wants to inscribe a symbolic oriental space in the "polymorphous" postcolonial discourse, a space where the West can test its epistemological assumptions. After discussing Mark Cousins's claim that Western epistemology harbors a quest whose deconstructions are repetitive, Bhabha suggests, "If such repetitiousness is to be avoided, then the strategic failure of logocentrism would have to be given a displacing and subversive role. This requires that the 'non-satisfaction' should be specified positively which is done by identifying an anti-west. Paradoxically, then, cultural otherness functions as the moment of presence in a theory of difference" (73).

My focus on the implicit reinscription of the West-non-West distinction in Jolly and Bhabha is not to reject their general agenda but only to point out the inevitability of such political identities. Even though Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, recognizes Bhabha's complex use of the word *culture* in postcolonial contexts—the term's hybrid, entangled, and overlapping implications (317)—he maintains that imperialist assumptions persist in the West. A new critique for nations out of thrall need not completely reject binary oppositions like colonizer/colonized. Our world is far from ready for the apolitical and anesthetized discourse that such a rejection encourages. As Jolly herself points out, we should envision "a different future while remaining loyal to the present and aware of its historical production" (21).

Perhaps Jolly, Bhabha, and Said use the same discourse for different empirical situations (societies that are liberated and those still oppressed). The different discourses that these political contexts demand can and should coexist. A well-intentioned intellectual agenda that does not want to remind us of past agonies can elaborate its new priorities without implicitly or explicitly rejecting a previous political reality. Reminders of the past do not have to muddle present reality, however. While watching films like *Gandhi* or *Schindler's List*, we relive the past, but the memories do not create ani-

mosity; we realize with relief that these painful experiences are past, but we also become aware that history can always perpetrate more like them.

ARASU BALAN
University of Toledo

Reply:

If the ambivalence that Arasu Balan detects in my article is composed, on the one hand, of my recognition of sets of binary categorizations (insider/outsider, colonized/colonizer, etc.) and, on the other, of my desire to move toward a future in which those categorizations are not assigned to referents assumed to be naturally or inherently appropriate, then I fully intend the ambivalence. The point is not that such categories should be banned from our vocabulary, a move that, I agree with Balan, would be counterproductive. Rather, the history of the stereotypical assignment of their referents according to what Abdul JanMohamed calls "the economy of manichean allegory" and in the name of apprehending (someone else's) identity should be recognized ("The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 78–106). Recognition of the stereotypes associated with the allegory is important not simply "for the postapartheid and postcolonial parts of the world" but also for the First and Second Worlds; they are the ones that need to assume responsibility for the entrenchment of those stereotypes. It is in this context that I presuppose America and Europe to be complicit in international colonialism.

I did not aim to diminish the validity of the artworks about which Derrida writes in "Racism's Last Word." My critique concerns the way in which he writes about them. Despite Derrida's defense that he uses language prescriptively rather than descriptively ("But, Beyond . . ." *Race, Writing, and Difference* 158) when he claims that South Africa exhibits "the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many" ("Racism's Last Word," *Race, Writing, and Difference* 291), the phrase suggests that South Africa is atavistic and that racism has been deemed unacceptable everywhere else. Apartheid South Africa's racism is horrifying; I suggest that we examine racist practices elsewhere, many of them less obvious than South African ones, in the light of that horror rather than congratulate ourselves on not being party to apartheid South Africa, as if its racism were not related to European attitudes toward the indigenous peoples of Africa.