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Nothing Comes from Nowhere: Reflections on Cultural Appropriation as the Representation of Other Cultures

James O. Young and Susan Haley

'I feel some anxiety about the way in which I have appropriated this strange material. But appropriation is what novelists do. Whatever we write is, knowingly or unknowingly, a borrowing. Nothing comes from nowhere.'—Margaret Drabble

Introduction

Subject appropriation occurs when members of one culture (call them outsiders for the sake of brevity) represent members of other cultures (insiders for the sake of convenience) or aspects insiders' culture. (Subject appropriation has sometimes been called voice appropriation, particularly when outsiders represent the lives of insiders in the first person.) Subject appropriation occurs in two main contexts. It occurs in the arts, when artists from one culture represent aspects of another culture, or people who belong to it. These could be painters, writers, filmmakers or artists working in a variety of other media. Subject appropriation also occurs in the social sciences when investigators examine cultures other than their own, but we will focus on the arts. We believe that it is not possible to generalize about the morality of subject appropriation. Sometimes acts of subject appropriation are morally objectionable, but often they are not. Our intention in this paper is to begin the task of distinguishing between the objectionable and unobjectionable cases.

A few examples of subject appropriation will be helpful. W.P. Kinsella has been much discussed. This white Canadian has set a number of stories among the residents of the (actual) Hobbema Indian reserve of Alberta. Tony Hillerman, a white American author, has set many novels among the Navajo. The central character of these novels is Joe Chee, a Navajo policeman. In the 1930s, Archie Stansfeld Belaney (Grey Owl), an Englishman who emigrated to Canada, successfully passed himself off (on different occasions) as a full-blooded Ojibway and an Apache-Scottish half-blood. He then wrote about the traditional ways of North American First Nations. One of the authors of this paper, Susan Haley, has written several novels in which Native American points of view are represented. (These include Haley 1999 and 2002.) Not all subject appropriation involves the representation of North American First Nations by white outsiders. Alexander McCall Smith, for example, is also engaged in subject appropriation. This Scottish lawyer has written a series of bestselling novels featuring Precious Ramotswe, a Botswanan private detective. The motto given above comes from Drabble's *The Red Queen*, which appropriates the subject of eighteenth-century Korea.

Is 'subject appropriation' a misnomer?

Subject appropriation is in an important respect different from the other sorts of appropriation considered in this volume. All appropriation involves taking and it is not obvious that those who engage in subject appropriation take anything from insiders. Even if nothing is taken by subject appropriation, acts of representing cultures other than one's own can still be morally suspect.

Our claim here is intended to be perfectly general and not restricted to subject appropriation as practiced by artists. One could try to defend artists against an imputation of subject appropriation on the grounds that they produce works of fiction. One might hold works of fiction do not represent real things. Rather, they create fictional objects. One could conclude that artists create objects and do not represent anything real. Such a line of argument would be disingenuous. In works of fiction, including novels and films, artists can represent real things, including insiders and their cultures. There is no doubt that the Navajo are represented in Hillerman's novels, even if Joe Chee is a fictional character. So we are not claiming that novels do not represent real cultural contexts. Rather, our view is that an act of

representing is not an act of appropriating in the same way that taking the Parthenon Marbles or singing a song from another culture is an act of appropriation.

One way of putting this is to say that cultures do not own subject matters. One of the themes of this book is to explore the question of what cultures own and what is in the public domain (or the intellectual commons). Usually, subject matters are part of the public domain. Anyone may write about or otherwise represent what falls within his experience or with the ambit of his imagination. An exception to this rule can occur when members of a culture wish that something about their culture remain private. We will return to the question of privacy in a later section of this paper.

The claim that nothing is taken by subject appropriation, and so the claim that the term is a misnomer, may seem to have been unduly hasty. One sometimes hears the claim that, by writing, say, about First Nations, outsiders can appropriate an audience that rightfully belongs to members of First Nations. The suggestion is that the reading public, both among insiders and outsiders, will read books about First Nations by outsiders and the insiders will be left without a readership they rightfully deserve. That is, the potential audience for the material has been appropriated. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, for example, considers the film *Where the Spirit Lives* (1989). This film, directed by Bruce Pittman, an outsider relative to aboriginal cultures, is concerned with the experience of Indians who were taken from their communities and forced to attend residential schools. Keeshig-Tobias maintains that this film takes from native the opportunity to tell the story of residential schools. 'Even if we had access to financial backers,' she writes, 'they would say: "Residential schools? It's been done."' (Keeshig-Tobias 1997: 72) Let us call this the audience appropriation argument.

One problem with this argument is that it is not clear that any public audience rightfully belongs to anyone. The audience for works about, say, Italian-American culture no more belongs to Italian-Americans, qua Italian-Americans, than it belongs to anyone else. A public audience is something that a writer or artist earns by producing something that deserves attention. Just in representing another culture an artist takes nothing that rightfully belongs only to members of that culture. Insiders have the right to represent themselves, but this is not taken from them when others represent them.

The second objection to the audience appropriation argument questions the suggestion that artists are playing a zero sum game. Writers, both

literary and academic, might be thought to be in competition. This may be true in some sense. Writers may try to outdo others. More importantly, for present purposes, artists and writers may be thought to be competing for the same market. However, the audience for novels, research or films about a given culture is no more fixed than is the audience for murder mysteries or stories about wizards. If someone makes murder mysteries or wizard stories popular, the market for such books increases. Opportunities for other writers expand. They do not contract. There is a potentially limitless appetite for books about any given culture and it is likely that outsider books open up new markets for insider books.

Certainly, the appropriation of artistic styles provides us with a reason to think that this is so. Consider, for example, Paul Simon's appropriation of the music of South Africa's townships. This led to an explosion of interest in South African music and huge opportunities for musicians from South Africa. Think, for example, of the huge success enjoyed by the Zulu choir, *Ladyship Black Mombazo*. Another consideration reinforces this view. It is well known that collectors of Australian aboriginal-style art strongly prefer to buy works that have been produced by aboriginal artists. These are regarded as more authentic expressions of the style and it is probable that they will be preferred to artistic representations of the culture produced by outsiders. (This matter of authenticity will be taken up again below.) Similarly, all things being equal, we might expect the reading public will prefer insiders' representations of their culture over those produced by outsiders.

Just as Paul Simon's appropriation of content did not stifle Zulu voices, the appropriation of subject seems not to have hindered other cultures as they have striven to find a voice. On the contrary, we believe that writing about native people has helped them in a real practical sense to have a voice, in the sense that literary attention has helped them to become published. The fashionableness of native cultures actually draws attention to their problems and permits the voices of natives themselves to be heard. It seems obvious to us that the members of some culture are more likely to find an audience if the public is already aware of their concerns than if they do not even appear on the literary landscape. In Canada, non-aboriginal authors such as Rudi Wiebe and James Houston have been writing about natives of the Canadian West and North for some time. We suggest that the work of these writers is at least partly responsible for the strong interest that has been awakened in the work of native authors such as Thomas King, Thomson Highway and Robert Alexie.

This pattern can be observed in arts other than literature. Consider the movie, *The White Dawn* (1974). *The White Dawn* was undoubtedly, in many ways, the progenitor of *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* (2001), directed by Zacharias Kunuk and winner of the Camera d'Or at Cannes and an Academy Award for best foreign language film. Unlike its predecessor, *Atanarjuat* had not only an Inuit cast, but an Inuit director as well. *The White Dawn* did not steal the audience of *Atanarjuat*, which won a worldwide audience. Saying that *The White Dawn* did not harm *Atanarjuat* does not give sufficient emphasis to its importance. When *The White Dawn* was first shown in Arctic communities, the audience of native people found this movie completely gripping because they realised that it was about them. Previously they had only seen southerners represented in cinema and this movie contributed to the recognition that the Inuit could be the subject of successful filmmaking.

This is not to say that members of minority cultures have no difficulties in obtaining an audience. This evidence has sometimes been used to argue against the representation of other cultures. There is anecdotal evidence that publishers have been reluctant to print works by members of Canadian First Nations. Keeshig-Tobias reports that 'publishers have returned manuscripts by natives with "too Indian" or "not Indian enough" scrawled across them.' Barbara Goddard writes that some publishers have used 'not marketable' as a 'euphemism for concern about the race of the characters.' (Goddard 1990: 186–7) Discrimination against Indigenous artists by publishers or the general public is deplorable, but it is irrelevant to the question of whether artists may represent other cultures. The problem is not with artists who represent other cultures. They are not the ones who harm insiders by denying them opportunities. The claim that publishers or others discriminate is a *non sequitur* in any discussion of whether artists may represent others.

Rosemary J. Coombe's comments on subject appropriation identify some more *non sequiturs*. While considering debate over artists who represent other cultures, Coombe reflects on a whole range of issues. (Coombe: 1993) These include government policies that had as their avowed goal the assimilation of Indigenous cultures within the mainstream, laws against the Potlatch ceremony, the seizing of ceremonial objects, the suppression of native languages and many others. Coombe takes these factors to be relevant since they provide the background against which the representation of Indigenous cultures takes place. In fact, they have nothing to do with the question of whether artists act wrongly in representing others.

Many government policies and social attitudes have savaged Indigenous cultures. That does not show that artists who represent other cultures have done something wrong.

Coombe suggests that the reading public has 'no interest in hearing Native peoples speak on their own behalf.' (Coombe 1993: 280) This is questionable, given the success of Highway, Sherman Alexie and other Indigenous writers. (Strangely, the Goddard just quoted notes that Dry Lips Oughta Go to Kapuskasing, by the Cree playwright Thomson Highway was, at the time of her writing, playing in Toronto to 'packed houses and critical acclaim.' It was one of three plays by Highway produced in Toronto in the year she was writing.) Think, also of the huge popularity of Indigenous painters, sculptors and print makers. It is implausible that non-Native people would be happy to have Native speak through the visual arts but not through the literary arts. Still, even if Coombe is right, her premiss does not show that artists act wrongly in representing other cultures. We might hope that the voices of insiders would also be heard, but that is not a reason for not hearing outsiders.

Subject appropriation and misrepresentation

Let us leave now the question of whether subject appropriation takes anything from insiders. Even if insiders are not deprived of anything by subject appropriation, they could still be seriously harmed by it. The most obvious way in which they could be harmed is by misrepresentation. Misrepresentation can also be profoundly offensive.

The fact that misrepresentation has occurred and continues to occur in the treatment of minority cultures in fiction and film is undeniable. It is easy to identify works of art in which cultures have been harmfully or offensively misrepresented by outsiders. One need only think of old Hollywood Westerns which (mis)represent Indians as duplicitous and cruel. (Lutz 1990) No doubt these movies have harmed members of First Nation cultures. These misrepresentations expose members of First Nation cultures to ridicule and derision. Worse, these misrepresentations doubtlessly foster discrimination against aboriginal people. Such harmful misrepresentation is unequivocally wrong. Just as it is wrong to slander or libel an individual, it is wrong to misrepresent all members of some culture in a manner that harms them.

The harm a culture suffers from subject appropriation could be more subtle than the previous paragraph suggests. Artworks can perpetuate stereotypes that prevent audiences from seeing members of a culture as the individuals that they are. Janice Acoose takes W.P. Kinsella and Margaret Lawrence to task. Both Linda Star (in Kinsella's eponymous story) and Piquette Tonnerre (in *The Diviners*) are intended as sympathetic portrayals of native women but, Acoose maintains, they are stereotypes. (Acoose 1995: 66) The predicaments of these characters are typical, she claims, their reactions are typical, the way that they speak, dress and do their hair is typical. Stanley Cavell makes a similar point about the representation of African-Americans in movies. He writes that, 'Until recently, types of black human beings were not created in film; black people were stereotypes—mammies, shiftless servants, loyal retainers, entertainers. We were not given, and were not in a position to be given, individualities that projected particular ways of inhabiting a social role; we recognized only the role.' (Cavell 1979: 33) Members of other cultures are, however, misrepresented unless they are represented as individuals and this can be harmful.

However, it must be asserted against Acoose that *The Diviners* was a kind of watershed in Canadian literature. It made it clear to Canadians, perhaps for the first time, that their self-depiction was worthwhile. Once Canadians were depicted, the discrimination and the race and class hatred in rural Canadian society emerged. The representation of the Metis characters in *The Diviners* was crucial in that it picked out for Canadians a great historical injustice as an important subject for Canadian fiction. For this reason, it is not entirely clear what is the matter with the 'typicalness' of the Tonnerres, unless Acoose's criticism is not moral but aesthetic.

It is conceivable that even sympathetic portrayals of a minority culture could be harmful. Consider, for example, the adulatory depictions of native people contained in such movies as Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970) and Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990). These films provided a corrective to the view of North American Indians in earlier big screen productions, but did not necessarily depict cultural details accurately. Such works can convey and perpetuate stereotypes of the noble savage that are, in the long run, of no benefit to Indigenous peoples.

One could go further and maintain that outsiders necessarily (or probably) misrepresent insiders. Janisse Browning has written that, 'We persons of color [Browning is a woman of mixed First Nations and African ancestry] have hidden knowledge—a wisdom of experience we embody—that

can't be accessed by white people because they have not been forced to continually combat white oppression like we have.' (Browning 1991: 33) 1 Browning concludes that white artists who engage in subject appropriation will inevitably produce work that distorts minority cultures. Hurka has made a similar claim. He maintains that, 'if a white treats a Native subject, he or she is likely to get it wrong.' (Hurka 1994: 184) His argument is that there is no significant body of native writing from which whites can learn and against which their writings can be judged. Both Browning and Hurka may be said to be advocates of what we will call the privileged knowledge argument.

We ought not to conclude from the reflections of the previous paragraphs that outsiders ought not to represent insiders at all. For a start, let us not forget that harm can be done to a culture when outsiders do not represent it. The American author, Wallace Stegner has written a novel, *Angle of Repose*, about irrigation projects in nineteenth century Colorado. This novel has no native characters and does not contain any mention of Indian water rights, even though it is about a subject that deeply concerns their present day interests and the historical violation of their rights. In fact, the book contains only one instance of the word 'Indian' and this is in the locution, 'Indian Summer.' Despite this, *Angle of Repose* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972. This might be described as an outrage. More importantly, for present purposes, this example illustrates that if outsiders always refrained from representing insiders and their cultures, the result would be a misrepresentation of reality. Insiders could be harmed much more by being omitted than by being ignored. This argument does not, however, really tackle the privileged knowledge argument head on.

We can only do that by denying that outsiders must misrepresent insiders. Examples of non-distorting instances of subject appropriation are easy to find. Tony Hillerman's Joe Chee novels come readily to mind. They have actually been recognized by the Navajo as accurately representing their culture. In 1987 Hillerman was awarded the Special Friend of the Dineh (Navajo) award. The citation accompanying this award thanked Hillerman for 'authentically portraying the strength and dignity of traditional Navajo culture.' (Hillerman 2002) The Navajo and other First Nations use Hillerman's books in their schools. Anyone who maintains that outsiders are bound to misrepresent other cultures is also required to defend the position that such prominent outsiders as V.S. Naipaul and Michael Ondaatje necessarily misrepresent the European cultures they represent in their work. If it cuts at all, the privileged knowledge argument cuts both ways.

The aesthetic success of the novels of Naipaul and Ondaatje shows that it does not cut either way.

The success of outsiders in representing other cultures should not surprise us. The best biography is not always autobiography. Similarly, sometimes people with a little distance, a little perspective, on a culture may be in a position to interpret and understand it in a way that insiders cannot. We might like to say, for example, that Canadian criticisms of American political life are sometimes insightful (and, just possibly, vice versa). In general, we can learn something about ourselves from seeing how others see us. People within a given culture may not be aware of the significance of some of their own practices. The superstructure of culture is not necessarily apparent to those who live inside it. Outsiders do have some limitations. They may be ignorant of certain aspects of a culture simply because they have not lived as a member of the culture and do not have another source of knowledge. It does not follow from the existence of such limitations that outsiders cannot accurately represent many aspects of a foreign culture in valuable ways.

Edward Said famously argued that members of one culture are apt to create stereotypes about other cultures, but he also maintained that it is possible for members of one culture to understand another. He explicitly denied that, 'only women can understand feminine experience, only Jews can understand Jewish suffering, only formerly colonial subjects can understand colonial experience.' (Said 1993: 31) Said justifies his position by denying essentialism about cultures. We must 'acknowledge the massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences—of women, of Westerners, of Blacks, of national states and cultures—there is no particular intellectual reason for granting each and all of them an ideal and essentially separate status.' (Said 1993: 32) Humans, for all of their cultural and other differences, are not so different that they are incapable of understanding each other.

Said recognizes that artists from a given culture can have presuppositions and prejudices when they represent other cultures. He forcefully argues that Conrad (in *Nostromo*) and Kipling (in *Kim*) failed to question imperialism. Kipling never doubted for a moment the necessity and rightness of British rule in India and this shapes his perception of the country. At the same time Said recognizes that both Conrad and Kipling are great artists who, while writing about cultures other than their own, produced great masterpieces, ones that are full of insights into the cultures of others. These writers did not suffer from an aesthetic handicap.

In arguing as we have just done, we may have conceded too much to the privileged knowledge argument. At the heart of this argument is the claim that, in order to write insightfully about something one must have experienced it. To correctly depict a culture, the argument assumes, you must have lived it. But this makes no allowance for the exercise of the creative imagination. Many artists have succeeded in imaginatively entering into the lives of individuals from distinct cultures. *Light in August* was not written by an African-American. Yet Faulkner has the depth of insight, the imaginative capability, to reveal by his art what the experience of being African-American is like in a way that, perhaps, someone who has felt it nevertheless could not. One might compare *Light in August* with, for example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The former is not necessarily a less successful work of art just because the author has not been directly victimised by racism. Faulkner has not had the experience of victimization, but he has fully imagined it, and also has something to contribute to our understanding. Armed with a creative imagination an outsider can even convincingly assume the persona of an insider and write about an insider's experience in the first person. Salman Rushdie makes this very point. Speaking of his experience of being an expatriate Indian who still writes about India, he says that

There are terrible books that arise directly out of experience, and extraordinary imaginative feats dealing with themes which the author has been obliged to approach from the outside. (Rushdie 1991: 14)

The aesthetic success of *Midnight's Children* is evidence that Rushdie is correct.

Another benefit of subject appropriation is that the perspectives of others can help individuals and whole cultures better understand themselves. Edward Said makes this point about Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) as well as Kipling (*Kim*). Even though both of these great writers were limited by their European perspective, a whole new way of looking at a country and a people (in Conrad's case the Belgian occupied Congo and in Kipling's case, the native cultures of India) originated with their work. (Said 1993)

Said identifies another benefit that ought not to be overlooked. The novels of these outsiders opened out a literary field which is being mined by native insiders to this day. This is especially and obviously true of *Kim*. Probably all Indian writers detest this book's imperialist assumptions. At the same time it is beloved by most Indians and, in many ways, Kipling's

work is to be found at the heart of the explosion of Indian literature in English which is going on at the present time. The *God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, winner of the 2001 Booker prize, owes a great debt, for example, to *The Jungle Books*.

Said's view is that great literature can have the salutary effect of spawning other works both in imitation and in rebuttal. He sees the world of literature as a kind of giant global stage upon which works of art strive with one another in a huge free market. It is evidently his opinion that misrepresentation, at least of the type of which Conrad and Kipling were guilty, was the source of more great literature. Of course, it is undeniable that colonialism first, and now globalization, have resulted in the worldwide extinction of culture. Said's point is only that the voices of the best artists set up a counter-current to these forces. They do so, first of all, by awakening an audience to the whole idea of a different culture, and secondly, in creating cultural revival even in cultures other than their own.

Cultural Appropriation and Assimilation

In the previous section we considered the possibility that outsiders could, by engaging in cultural appropriation, put some culture in an unfavourable light and the further possibility that this could harm a culture. Perhaps the mechanism by which cultures are harmed by cultural appropriation was not properly captured in the argument of that section. Several writers have expressed the fear that certain small, often Indigenous, cultures will be overwhelmed if outsiders engage in cultural appropriation. A culture could be overwhelmed (and assimilated) by subject appropriation, if insiders begin to see themselves as others see them.

Hurka is among those who have argued that a culture could be distorted if outsiders engage in subject appropriation. He is particularly concerned about the danger that small, Indigenous cultures will be overwhelmed by the voices of outsiders. He considers the case of a white author who writes about a First Nation culture and, though ignorant, distorts the culture's symbols. 'If the white's novel is read by Natives, they too may understand the symbols inauthentically. The Native artists then can't speak even to his or her own people.' (Hurka 1994: 184–5) Native artists will have lost some of their cultural identity. They and, perhaps, some of their audience have been partially assimilated into the majority culture. This strikes Hurka (and

us) as unjustifiable harm. We will call this argument the assimilation argument. Note that the argument is asymmetrical. Members of minority cultures will not similarly hurt majority cultures by acts of cultural appropriation since members of majority cultures have enough access to accurate representations of their cultures.

The assimilation argument must be taken seriously since it correctly identifies the single most important threat to minority cultures: destruction by assimilation. While assimilation is the greatest danger facing minority cultures, the assimilation argument under consideration is not very persuasive. It depends on an unsupported empirical claim: that exposure to novels (or other works of art) will be sufficient to mislead insiders about their own culture. This is certainly possible, but insiders have many other sources of information about their culture. The insiders can check the outsiders' representations of their culture against their own experience and the inherited knowledge of other members of the culture. If insiders are worried about being harmed by artworks produced by outsiders, they can simply decline to be part of the audience for these works. We cannot absolutely refute the claim that artworks produced by outsiders will distort and overwhelm the some minority culture. The probability that this will happen is difficult to calculate. We think that it is small and that the threat of assimilation does not come from artists who engage in cultural appropriation, but we could be wrong. The mere possibility that insiders can check outsiders' representations of their culture is, however, enough to decisively evaluate the morality of outsiders' appropriation.

The mere fact that outsiders might, in representing a minority culture, contribute to its assimilation is not enough to establish that subject appropriation is wrong. The fact that it is possible that insiders can check any representations of their culture by outsiders is sufficient to undermine the assimilation argument. Insiders bear the primary responsibility for the perpetuation of their culture. They can be expected to take reasonable precautions to ensure that their cultures are protected. Insiders are able (and probably easily able) to avoid being harmed by any artworks produced by outsiders. Consequently, outsiders cannot be held responsible for any assimilation that results from their cultural appropriation. Here cultural appropriation is analogous to playing one's stereo at a reasonable volume. The neighbours might be disturbed, but only if they do not take care to close their windows. (We assume that there is no good reason, in this case, to keep the windows open. For example, it is not a hot or humid evening.) The analogy is not a perfect one. Indigenous cultures are at risk

because outsiders have (if we may continue with the same conceit) squatted next door to the insiders, pulled open the insiders' windows and turned on their stereos. Still, the annoyance caused by the music next door is easily avoided. The artists who turned on the stereos are not the real culprits. The real problem is that the outsiders squatted next door.

Harm and Accurate Representation

We have just considered the possibility that misrepresentation of a culture can be harmful and wrong. One might argue that, even when outsiders accurately represent a culture other than their own, they can do so in ways that are harmful and wrong. Consider, for example, a novel that does not misrepresent a culture (and, consequently, is not wrong on this ground) but still puts the culture in a bad light. Some cultures are plagued by serious problems. Colonization disrupts cultures and causes a series of problems such as high rates of violence and substance abuse. A novel may accurately represent this reality. One might think that when outsiders (accurately) represent the culture, its members may be stigmatized. Discrimination against members of the culture may be reinforced and perpetuated. In this way the insiders could be harmed and, one might conclude, even the accurate representation of insiders by outsiders is wrong. It might seem that it is more often wrong to represent other cultures than we have suggested. It might seem that the insiders have a right not to have their dirty laundry exposed to the world.

This is really an argument against the representation of a culture by anyone and not an argument against representations by outsiders. Representations of a culture by insiders could air dirty laundry just as surely as any representation by an outsider. Presumably these representations could be just as harmful as any laundry-airing representations by outsiders. They may even be more harmful, because they are seen as more credible. Furthermore, the argument is not a general one against all subject appropriation. Even if successful, it would only show that some instances of subject appropriation, those that revealed flaws in a culture, were wrong.

These responses do not, however, reveal the full problem with the argument at hand. It is premised on the claim that it is wrong, in certain instances, to reveal the truth and this is something about which we are skeptical. There may be a high rate of HIV infection in a given culture. The

correct response is not to ignore this fact. Any accurate representation of the social problems faced by a culture will reveal the sources of these difficulties. It will show when they have been externally caused and when they are not the responsibility of insiders. It will show that the appropriate response to these difficulties is understanding, compassion and assistance. The correct response is not discrimination. If problems are ignored, nothing can be done about them. It is better that artists have the opportunity to present social difficulties in a responsible and compassionate manner.

Privacy

Privacy is extremely important and the individuals who make up a culture have a right not to have their privacy violated by outsiders. It can be painful to be misrepresented and intrusive prying can be deeply offensive. The issue of privacy can be particularly sensitive when we are dealing with the representation of small cultures. Some Indigenous cultures are often very like extended families. Certainly some subject appropriation is wrong because it violates the rights to privacy of individual members of a culture. (Sometimes, all of the privacy rights of a culture's members are violated at the same time.) This is a delicate matter; it is a case where it may be appropriate to ask permission. Where permission may not be gained, or when there is no obvious way to seek it, it may not be clear at all what the right course is for the author. Still, we believe that the right of a culture's members to privacy does not rule out all representation of other cultures.

It is easy to see that representations that violate the privacy of a culture's members are wrong. It is clearly wrong for someone to record surreptitiously an individual's cell phone conversations and then write about them. Artists who obtain information about a culture by violating the privacy rights of individuals and then write about the culture act wrongly in precisely the same way that the recorder of private conversations does. Their actions are more wrong in that the privacy rights of more individuals are violated. The privacy rights of everyone who belongs to a culture are violated. So, for example, Richard Burton acted wrongly when, in 1853, he became the first Englishman to visit Mecca in the company of Muslim hadji. Non-Muslims were forbidden to take part in the pilgrimage to

Mecca. As it happens, Burton wrote a narrative account of his journey, but he would have acted just as wrongly had he written a novel about his experiences. Burton acted wrongly because he violated the privacy of individual Muslims. Muslims did not wish to have non-Muslims present and this wish should have been respected.

In determining the morality of any representation of another culture, a crucial issue must be addressed. This is the issue of how outsiders have obtained information about the culture they represent. We must ask whether any of the information gained by an artist (or anyone who engages in subject appropriation) was obtained surreptitiously, deceptively or coercively. Information ought not to come through the sort of stealth employed by Burton. Nor ought it to come deceptively, as it would if someone were to represent himself as an insider in order to obtain information. Neither should any form of coercion be employed. This is a point to which we will return in a moment. Outsiders can obtain information without violating insiders' privacy. The information outsiders possess about insiders may have been obtained in the open interaction between cultures or through the free communication of authorized insiders. When this is the case (and the insiders' culture is not harmfully misrepresented) the representation of other cultures in art is not wrong.

In the previous paragraph, we referred to authorized members of the insiders' culture. Sometimes information about a culture may only be shared with the approval of properly authorized members of the culture. Sometimes this may be individual members of a culture, but sometimes permission ought to be sought from some institutional authority, such as a band council. It is the responsibility of outsiders to ensure that any information that they use in representing a culture other than their own has been shared with the proper authority.

We have said that information outsiders use in representing cultures other than their own ought not to be obtained by coercion. Here coercion ought to be understood in a broad sense. Colonization has coerced Indigenous cultures in a wide variety of ways. Consider, for example, the documentation and photography of the religious ceremonies of the Hopi by the Mennonite missionary H.R. Voth. There is some evidence that he physically forced his way into religious ceremonies. (Talayasva 1942: 252; for a discussion see Brown 2003: 11–15) More likely, the Hopi were simply afraid to exclude him because they felt that, as a white man, he was under the protection of the government. If the Hopi allowed Voth to observe and document their religious practices out of fear, they were effectively coerced.

In general, the colonisation of Indigenous cultures is a coercive process. Consequently, any representation of a colonised culture may be ethically suspect.

Artists and others who represent other cultures face a difficult problem when others have violated the privacy of members of some culture. Let us assume that Voth obtained information in a manner that violated the privacy rights of Hopis. Voth published the information that he obtained and it is now widely disseminated. His photographs are easily accessible. It would certainly be wrong for a novelist, say, to obtain information in the way that Voth is assumed to have done and then to write a novel set among the Hopi that draws up this information. It is less clear that the novelist acts wrongly in using this same information once it has entered in to the public arena. On the one hand, it seems reasonable to expect outsiders to refrain from using intrusively obtained information for as long as the insiders object to its use. On the other hand, one might think, the damage caused by the violation of privacy has been done. Moreover, using the information, the outsider might be able to write sensitively and produce a work of real value about the culture whose privacy has been violated. The work might even benefit the insiders. This is a difficult issue and we leave it unresolved.

Authenticity and Subject Appropriation

One might object to works of art that represent other cultures on the grounds that they are inauthentic. In this context, to say that a work of art is inauthentic is to say something like that it is not a genuine expression of a culture. The implication is that since subject appropriators will produce works that are inauthentic, these works will suffer from an aesthetic flaw. We want to grant the premiss but deny the conclusion. There is a sense in which every artwork that involves the representation of other cultures is inauthentic. Inauthenticity, as the word is used here, is not, however, an indicator of an aesthetic flaw. A work that is inauthentic in the present sense can be vitally authentic in another sense.

Every work of art is authentic in some sense. A work by Grey Owl is inauthentic in that it is not an authentic expression of Ojibway culture. On the other hand, every literary work by Grey Owl is an authentic Grey Owl. It is an authentic product of Grey Owl's peculiar cultural perspective.

Outsiders cannot produce authentic expressions of insiders' culture. Even when outsiders are thoroughly acculturated in a new culture, they generally retain their previous culture and their perspective is not identical to that of a mono-cultural insider. Nevertheless, outsiders can produce authentic expressions of their own culture. As authentic expression of their author's culture, works involving subject appropriation are often works of literary or, more generally, aesthetic merit.

The authenticity of work of art is relevant to its evaluation. There is an empiricist tendency within aesthetics that denies that nothing is relevant to the aesthetic value of a work of art besides its observable properties. On this view, the provenance of a work of art is irrelevant to its aesthetic value. Advocates of this view hold that whether a painting was executed by van Meegeren or Vermeer is irrelevant to its aesthetic value. All that is relevant is how the painting looks. In recent years, however, many philosophers of art have argued against this empiricist approach to aesthetic value. In order to evaluate the work, these philosophers have argued, one needs to know the category to which it belongs. This trend in philosophy of art can be traced at least as far back to a classic paper by Kendall Walton. (Walton 1970) He argued that, for example, one cannot determine whether a painting is gaudy without first determining its category. If a painting belongs to the category of impressionist still lifes in the style of Fantin-Latour we might come to the conclusion that it is gaudy. If we decide that it belongs to post-impressionist still lifes in the style of Matisse, then we are less likely to judge it gaudy. Works of art are never, on this view, gaudy *tout court*. In determining the category to which a work of art belongs we take into account a wide variety of factors. Among these factors will be knowledge about the artist and his intentions.

This is relevant to our present concerns because, in evaluating a work of art, we may very well need to know the cultural background of the person who produced it. We may very well need to know the culture of which it is an authentic expression. Consider, for example, a novel set among slaves in the antebellum American south. A given passage might appear poignant if we believe it to be written by a freed slave. The very same words might seem callous if we know that a slave owner wrote them. (Whites wrote a number of books that were represented as the works of escaped slaves.) This is not to say that the slave owner could not write a novel of considerable literary merit. Outsiders can enter imaginatively into the lives of insiders. It is just to say that information about the cultural background of an artist can be relevant in the evaluation of their works.

Or, to put the same point in another way, in evaluating a work of art we need often to know the culture of which it is an authentic expression.

Since the evaluation of a work of art can depend on information about the cultural background of the artist who created it, artists ought not to pass themselves off as members of cultures other than their own. Over the years many artists have perpetrated this sort of fraud. We have already mentioned the case of Grey Owl. Others include Forrest Carter, author of *The Education of Little Tree*. Carter, like Grey Owl, was a white man who passed himself off as an American Indian. The fraud which these artists perpetrated has a moral dimension. It is a form of lying and, consequently, morally suspect. Here we are concerned with the aesthetic dimensions of the fraud. We have here cases of people who pass off as authentic expressions of a culture works that actually express quite a different cultural perspective. This hinders and distorts the interpretation, evaluation and appreciation of these works. The fraud is akin to that of which forgers are guilty. In order to determine the merits of artworks we need to know the categories to which they belong. Determining the category will involve knowing the culture of which they are authentic expression.

The conclusion of this section is that works that involve representation of other cultures are, in a sense, inauthentic. They cannot be authentic expressions of the culture of insiders. This inauthenticity does not make a work an aesthetic failure. It will still be authentic in some other way and potentially possessed of considerable aesthetic value. The representation of a work of art as an authentic expression of some culture, when it is not, is morally wrong and also a transgression against aesthetics.

Envoy

So far in this essay we have not challenged the accepted perspective on how 3 debates about cultural appropriation are addressed. In this framework, there is a clear and even essential difference between insiders and outsiders. Insiders fully understand the rules of their culture. Outsiders cannot. Insiders have privileged epistemic access to their culture. This view is closely aligned with cultural relativism, the view that we have no overarching standpoint from which to examine different cultures. We can only look at other cultures from inside our own. Viewing other cultures from within

our own, they will appear fundamentally differently than they appear to insiders. (The view that we have just described is not entirely consistent. One cannot really say that insiders have a privileged perspective on their own culture, if this means that their understanding is objectively right. One could only say that insiders have a different perspective that differs from that of outsiders.)

Cultures are much more porous than this picture allows. A culture is not like a windowless monad. As Said notes, we ought not to be essentialists about cultures. So the idea that one is either in or out, that one either has all the cultural information, or else cannot properly be said to have any of it is mistaken. In point of fact all cultures are in a more or less perpetual state of flux, and all of them historically have impinged to a lesser or greater degree upon one another. These facts about cultures render the accepted perspective on cultural appropriation highly suspect. Once we reject essentialism about cultures, the possibility emerges for avenues of communication between cultures that the essentialist does not recognize. Insiders and outsiders are likely to have a great deal more in common than the essentialist allows.

In the course of all this change and movement great historical wrongs have been perpetrated against individuals and groups of individuals through religious and racial hatred. None of these events should be forgotten or even perhaps forgiven; but somehow, as human beings, we have to try to understand what happened. We cannot possibly do that if we do not undertake to try to exchange cultural information. In fact, we risk perpetuating the misunderstanding and hatred if we do not. Exchange and communication are not really possible on the accepted perspective. Each of us lives in his or her own cultural monad and each monad is incommensurable with the others. Or, to vary the metaphor, we are condemned to aesthetic and cultural apartheid. Fortunately, we believe, this perspective on cultures and communication between them is wrong.

In the process of communication between cultures, literature has a vitally important moral role to play. It is through literature that readers undertake to imagine what it would be to be someone else, someone perhaps completely different. Just as women can understand and imaginatively identify with a male character from the inside and vice versa, so can members of other cultural communities. Literature is a crucial purveyor and carrier of social information, both the rules for what one should do, and the models of what one should be; and also the subversive information

about a society, which shows us how are rules are wrong and our models bad.

As between societies, literature is the main tool we have for understanding one another. It is not, in the famous example of Thomas Nagel, as though in following a work of fiction about a member of another culture, we were trying to imagine what it would be to be a bat. This character is human, he or she functions in a society; and literature places us in a position to better understand what that is like from the inside. It is a tremendously powerful and useful moral tool, which promotes mutual understanding and respect and which could serve to keep humanity from future holocausts.

The most terrible thing about globalization is the disappearance of culture, and the more or less hopeless subjection of a vast multitude of people to the forces of global capitalism. One of the few good things about globalization is that literature cannot completely be commodified and purveyed. Literature keeps breaking out of bounds and being carried here and there about the world. Writers are seizing upon the giant power of the global information systems to make their voices heard. The last thing we want in this sort of situation is to stifle the voices.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said sees a kind of great stage upon which great, agonistic works of literature coming from all parts of the globe arrive and duke it out, new literary voices from subjected minorities are heard refuting the assertions of the colonial writers, but also building upon the fact of their achievements. In this arena, as we said, Kipling has spawned a whole generation of superb South Asian writers who hate/love his work; while what we could hope for in North America would be a whole generation of Native American and black writers to take up the great themes of white settlement and slavery and turn the assumptions of previous writers upon their heads.

But this can only happen if writing upon these themes is open to all. The mimsy, fearful view that writing about culture is impossible does literature a great disservice. It is only in the attempt to imaginatively understand one another across the barriers of sex, race and culture that great literature is created. And even more, the view that this cannot or should not be done harms humanity as a whole. If we cannot make the attempt to cross those barriers and try to understand each other, we are condemned to repeat over and over, and possibly sometime in megatons, the mistakes of the past.

Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that merely calling something an example of subject appropriation is not a reason to think that it is morally objectionable. Some examples of subject appropriation are in fact harmful, but the story of how and why needs to be presented. We have tried to examine some of the types of cases where subject appropriation is problematic. However, we have concluded that in general literary fiction and film are appropriative by their very nature, and this can be a good thing.

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