

était sévèrement punie par les maîtres. Pendant son procès elle n'a jamais dénoncé son amant même sous la torture, en dépit de quelques témoignages qui le rendaient complice de l'incendie. Il a disparu à jamais.

Dans son introduction et dans sa postface, l'auteure nous assure que tous les personnages, sauf quelques uns de moindre importance, ont tous vécu. Ce qui fait de *l'Esclave*, un roman historique d'une grande valeur. Elle nous fournit une information fouillée sur la vie des Canadiens et Canadiennes de l'époque dans une belle langue imagée et sensible. Le sort de cette jeune fille nous émeut et on se prend à détester l'étroitesse d'esprit et l'hypocrisie de nos ancêtres. Le racisme qui prévalait envers les esclaves noirs et Indiens a fait des premiers Canadiens des maîtres cruels et insensibles qui ont perdu la notion d'objectivité et les ont menés à des injustices flagrantes. Le comportement de l'intendant Hocquart, chargé de l'enquête sur « l'incendiaire » Marie-Joséphé-Angélique en est la triste preuve.

Cette page peu glorieuse de notre histoire a connu une reconnaissance en février dernier, lors du mois des Noirs quand la Ville de Montréal a dévoilé une plaque à la mémoire de cette jeune martyre. Gravée dans le bronze, cette phrase:

En l'Année internationale de commémoration de la lutte contre l'esclavage et de son abolition décrétée par l'Organisation des Nations Unies, cette plaque est dédiée à la mémoire de Marie-Joséphé-Angélique, esclave noire, figure emblématique de l'esclavage au Québec, qui inculpée du crime d'incendiat fut jugée, pendue, puis brûlée sur la place publique à Montréal en 1734, et dont les cendres furent jetées aux vents. Pour empêcher l'oubli et rappeler que l'esclavage a été pratiqué ici jusqu'à son abolition en 1833.

Cette plaque a été remise à

la Ville de Montréal par le gouvernement du Québec, ce 23 février 2004.

Puisse cette plaque trouver sa juste place pour toutes et tous à contempler et à réfléchir.

WHERE I COME FROM

Vijay Agnew
Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2003

REVIEWED BY DANA
PALRASCU-KINGSLEY

Vijay Agnew's new book *Where I Come From* is a painfully honest account of her life in New Delhi and Bombay, her arrival to Canada as an international student, her marriage to a white Canadian and her academic career in Toronto. All these different aspects of her life that contribute to the forming of her identity are presented with the same honesty: her critical eye idealizes neither India nor Canada. The condescending labels that have been assigned to her during her thirty-year life in Canada—"foreign student," "immigrant," "Indian woman," "Indian feminist," "Third-World woman"—made Agnew aware of being perceived as "other," "different," "non-Canadian." But her memoir is a testament to the fact that identity (not only hers, but everyone's) is not and cannot be fixed. Identity is "socially constructed" (277), Agnew writes, and hers is the consequence of all her life experiences.

Agnew's memoir pointedly answers the question she has been asked too often in her private and academic life: where is she from? The presumptuous question implies that her brown skin is a sign of her "foreignness," and assumes the answer to be an easy one that would only confirm the suspicion of foreign-

ness. Having come to Canada as an international student myself (although a white Eastern European student who could be identified as foreign by accent and not by race), I too know that the "where do you come from" question would be asked right away by almost everybody, and that the answer they would expect is a straightforward one: Romania, or India, in Agnew's case. And this is the answer she does supply them with before she develops a race, class and gender consciousness. Later on, the answer becomes increasingly difficult, for after having lived in Canada for years she is made keenly aware of how she appears, and yet no longer thinks of herself as solely an Indian, but also individuates as a woman and a Canadian.

Agnew begins her memoir recollecting her coming to Canada and going to university in Waterloo and then in Toronto. The feeling of not fitting in Canada and being made to feel like an outsider instigates her quest for identity. With the application of analytical and critical skills acquired during her graduate studies and throughout her academic life, she reminisces on her time spent as a young girl in her aunt's house in New Delhi, and that spent at her father's house in Bombay, and understands that girl as essential to who she is today; her life in India provides her with a set of values that are later on augmented with the values of her Canadian community. Looking back, Agnew describes her happy well-provided-for childhood, not offering the story of a Third-World child growing up in poverty that some white Canadians might anticipate. However, she does recollect her childhood and her adult visits to India with the same critical eye that analyzes her Canadian experiences, understanding now, later on in her life, the set of values specific to the different cultures that she lived in, which have been instilled in her.

Her life in Canada is also critically recollected, with an excellent eye for the small details of everyday life that

gain so much significance for a newcomer to Canada. Agnew remembers with humour how she did not understand what “very cold” meant until she came to Canada; how she was taken by her friends (and not very impressed) to see the quaint Mennonites at the market, who would make preserves at home; and how she did not know where and how to buy herself food and clothes in the beginning. The details of everyday life and how she managed to deal with them are funny, though reflected on in solitude; one is made aware that, at the time, the adjustment must have been very difficult, although she is able to look back on them in a good humour. These everyday details are remembered together with the hardships of studying the involvement of Indian women in history when there were almost no resources in the discipline and close to no discipline at all. The racism and sexism that she experiences both in her everyday life and academic environment are again honestly (but not accusatorily) included in her memoir because to Agnew they have all been determining factors in her search of an identity, which results in the writing of this book, but does not end here, as, she writes, “who I am now is only one stage in a life long process of *becoming*” (5).

**BODIES IN A BROKEN WORLD:
WOMEN NOVELISTS
OF COLOR AND THE
POLITICS OF
MEDICINE**

Stanford, Ann Folwell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

REVIEWED BY STEPHANIE
HART

In *Bodies in a Broken World: Women Novelists of Color and the Politics of Medicine*, Ann Folwell Stanford

undertakes a broad textual analysis which seeks to explore the epistemic gap between institutional definitions of medicine and illness and a notion of health and well being as a communal endeavor mitigated by socio-economic specificity. Her analysis, which is situated in an American context, hinges upon the notion that western medicine has traveled along a singular road which deems illness as individual pathology. She further argues that this model actively erases the connection between social conditions, identity, and health. Through careful readings of texts such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*, and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, Stanford argues that these works offer a revolutionary reconfiguration of not only illness itself, but of the notion that in the absence of careful attention and sensitivity towards socio-cultural specificity and community, dominant medical practices are extremely limited, if not complicit in the marginalization of women across axes of race, class, religion, and education. Stanford makes this explicit in her introduction as she states, “feminist medical ethics strives to locate the patient in her or his socio-cultural context, not simply by way of an addition to the ethical process, but as an epistemological prerequisite to it” (Stanford, 2).

Stanford has carefully selected texts that are not simply ‘medical’: issues such as infanticide, domestic and sexual abuse, mental illness, gay bashing, and eating disorders are clearly conditions that can be explicated according to what Stanford names “a sick world”. In her analysis, she suggests that the broken bodies found within the texts are part and parcel of a diseased world in which the systematic oppression and abuse of the other is normalized under a distant and disinterested medical gaze: in other words, that racism, sexism, and classism share a vested interest in constructing a specific model of

health and disease; recovery and mortality, demonstrated as she writes, “Medicine...is...a culturally and emotionally anesthetizing and alienating practice, consigning people to a living death” (Stanford, 50).

Throughout the text, Stanford argues that what is needed, and what these texts offer, is a shift in definitions of healing: from an intrusive action placed upon an anonymous body to a more holistic, communal activity: an activity in which the (usually female) patient must be actively involved. In this sense, Stanford argues that by resisting the notion that health and illness equals the presence or absence of certain symptoms, the texts under examination also resist the power relations which allows women’s bodies to be absorbed into the larger discourses of racism and sexism, demonstrated as she writes, “The authors of the novels I have examined in this study construct representations of illness rooted in such social factors as racism, classism, homophobia, as well as corruption and greed and other factors that contribute to the creation of a kind of infecting world that renders medicine itself vulnerable” (Stanford, 217).

Ultimately, Stanford’s analysis is a powerful one because it poses more questions than solutions: to attempt to do so would re-enact the same dismissive, totalizing analysis that these texts seek to subvert, clearly articulated as Stanford writes, “sickness is not simply of individual biopathology, but is necessarily a symptom of a larger phenomenon” (Stanford, 36). Instead, Stanford offers her experience as both literary scholar and field worker to suggest that wellness, and in particular the wellness of those who are denied medical care or simply dismissed and silenced, cannot be treated as symptom or malady, but as a part of a larger community in which social, psychic, and bodily specificity is considered: health is never localized in an individual body, but is rather, as