

Obviously, Rampersad does not uncritically adore Ellison; in fact, some reviewers have accused him of leaning rather far in the opposite direction. However, while he may resist hero worship, Rampersad does not make a project out of lampooning the fêted author. He may seem to unnecessarily reiterate some criticisms – repeatedly highlighting, for example, Ellison’s vulnerability to white flattery and his reluctance to help younger black writers – but in a lengthy and chronologically sequenced biography such as this one, revisiting key issues is unavoidable if trajectories are to be established and patterns identified. In fact, Rampersad explicitly affirms that one crucial reason why he accepted the daunting task of being Ellison’s biographer in the first place was that he had “always admired Ellison’s work” (625). He acknowledges, as a matter of course, the inarguable and unique place of *Invisible Man* in the American literary canon and ranks *Shadow and Act* (1964) second among all single-authored African American essay collections, finding Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* its only superior. Rampersad’s Ellison is a tragic, complex, and unhappy figure, but far from a failure as a writer.

Before Rampersad started his project, he approached both Fanny Ellison (who has since died) and John F. Callahan, the executor of Ralph Ellison’s literary estate, and received unlimited access to the late author’s papers. Consequently, Rampersad’s book contains a plethora of minutiae, but his prose does not get bogged down in the wealth of historical detail. Any patient reader will be rewarded by a portrait of Ellison that, rather than cheaply going for the spectacular, is carefully carved from historical evidence. In a blurb on the hard cover edition’s dust jacket, Cornel West declares that “all serious scholarship on Ellison” must, from now on, “begin” with Rampersad’s book. Literary critics may have their quibbles with the concept of an appropriate starting point or beginning, but West’s statement holds: for a self-respecting Ellison scholar, ignoring this book is not an option.

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J. Brooks Bouson, *Jamaica Kincaid: Writing Memory, Writing Back to the Mother*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. 242 pages; ISBN-13: 978-0791465233 hardcover (978-0791465240 paperback); \$65.00 (\$21.95).

The Antiguan-born novelist and essayist Jamaica Kincaid is a contemporary U.S.-based author whose texts portray black diasporic identity formation, resisting any uncritical idealization of either the author’s birthplace or a mythical “America.” Her 1990 novel *Lucy*, an ostensibly straightforward but symbolically complex first-person narrative, is a case in point: the story of a West Indian au pair in the United States (a late-twentieth-century variation on the familiar American trope of the black nanny/maid), *Lucy* depicts a first-generation immigrant’s perpetual sense of in-betweenness as a source of both fresh psychological insight and chronic emotional pain.

The most recent book by Loyola University professor J. Brooks Bouson, the author of *Quiet As It’s Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*

(2000), is a detailed and lucid discussion of Kincaid's life and work. An updated chronological approach to Kincaid's oeuvre has been in demand for some time, and Bouson's book fills this void. Her analysis proceeds book by book, focusing on *At the Bottom of the River*, *Annie John*, *Lucy*, *A Small Place* (juxtaposed with Kincaid's 1991 essay "On Seeing England for the First Time"), *The Autobiography of My Mother*, *My Brother*, and *Mr. Potter*. *My Garden* and *Talk Stories* are addressed as well, albeit more briefly.

Bouson uses a plethora of Kincaid interviews to carefully and thoughtfully link the author's life with her fiction and essays. This is an exceptionally relevant task with Kincaid, who (in)famously keeps resurrecting her difficult relationship with her mother in and through her writings. From the point of view of narrative grace, however, Bouson's method has one inarguable disadvantage: since she discusses the works of an author who all but obsessively revises a handful of main themes throughout her oeuvre, Bouson's chronologically progressing analysis inevitably becomes repetitive as well. Scholars, depending on their needs and tastes, are likely to disagree on whether this feature of Bouson's text is too high a price to pay for chronological clarity; those checking what she has to say about a particular novel will be well served by her approach, whereas those reading the book from cover to cover may react less enthusiastically to the repetition.

This book indeed focuses on *the* recurring main topics of Kincaid's writings: Bouson explores "the ongoing construction of Kincaid's autobiographical self and writer's identity" and, in the process, examines "the 'mother mystery' that lies at the heart of [Kincaid's] work" (2). Because a fair amount of Kincaid scholarship has recently focused on this dual task, the merit of Bouson's book lies less in delivering drastically new insights than in demonstrating carefully and patiently, step by step, how Kincaid develops these important themes from one book to another and how the interviews she has given over the years shed light on the complex relationship between her life and her fiction. In terms of a wider intellectual framework, Bouson again mostly relies on theories of shame and trauma, as was the case with her book on Toni Morrison. Her theoretical touch is not heavy, however; this book is not designed to be an avenue to highly refined deconstructive and poststructuralist pleasures. Bouson's approach is, above all, biographical and historical, despite the framework of shame theory.

A pivotal question that continues to puzzle Kincaid's readers is how to interpret the relationship between the personal and the political in her oeuvre. Bouson recognizes that in writing about "the powerful mother and the powerless daughter... Kincaid eventually comes to attach a political meaning to this type of power-imbalanced relationship, seeing it as analogous to the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized" (13). Nevertheless, one of Bouson's main arguments is that Kincaid scholars too easily "shun the psychological and instead allegorize and politicize the personal and relational" (4). Bouson herself chooses to primarily focus on the psychological.

With Kincaid, however, keeping the political apart from the personal is a tricky task. Interestingly, Kincaid said in a 1994 interview with Moira Ferguson (which Bouson briefly quotes) that it was when she was writing the essay "On Seeing Eng-

land for the First Time” that “it became clear to me [Kincaid] ... that the mother I was writing about was really Mother Country” (Bouson 111). This comment, which speaks of a political awakening, raises the question of when exactly this turning point occurred; Kincaid visited England for the first time in 1985, but the above-mentioned essay, “On Seeing...,” was published as late as 1991. Did the crucial “writing” take place during the first trip (for example, through a diary entry anticipating the eventual essay) or several years later? And what does this turning point mean for interpreting Kincaid’s texts written before/after it? Bouson does not answer these questions as directly as her biographical approach would warrant and require.

Another difficult issue that Kincaid scholars perennially struggle with is the relationship between Kincaid’s life, interviews, and fiction. Are the interviews always where the “Truth” is found, as Bouson seems to assume – that is, can they always be unproblematically used to unlock the mysteries of Kincaid’s life as well as her fiction – or do interviews at times participate in Kincaid’s artistic and therapeutic project of (re)writing her life in ways that in themselves invite and merit further study? Bouson could have addressed this methodological conundrum more explicitly, either by convincing us of the desirability of her straightforward reliance on interviews or, alternatively, by overtly weighing the pros and cons of her approach.

This study does not answer all the questions that critics have raised about Kincaid’s multi-layered myth-making and masquerade and about the exact nexus of the personal and the political in her oeuvre; there is still room for further analysis and theorizing in Kincaid scholarship. Nevertheless, professors teaching Kincaid to undergraduates and graduate students will greatly benefit from Bouson’s solid academic prose and the wealth of information she has gathered. She has written a highly informative and accessible book that, in its clarity, provides an important service to the field.

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Jindabyne. Movie. Director: Ray Lawrence; Writer: Beatrice Christian; Producer: Catherine Jarman; Starring: Laura Linney and Gabriel Byrne. Australia 2006; U.S. release April 27, 2007.

Ray Lawrence’s *Jindabyne* is the first full-feature adaptation of Raymond Carver’s fiction since Robert Altman’s *Short Cuts* (1993). Exploring one story in depth, and set in Australia, the film’s beautifully menacing landscape matches the edginess of the characters and their struggles to come to terms with a horrific event.

While Raymond Carver buffs are still debating whether Robert Altman’s 1993 *Short Cuts*, based on nine Carver stories and one poem, should be set in Los Angeles rather than in the Northwest, director Ray Lawrence (*Bliss* 1985; *Lantana* 2001) daringly sets one Carver story in Jindabyne, Australia. Carver was indeed a Northwest writer, if only because he was born and grew up in Oregon and Washington State and was an ardent fisherman. Carver’s equal passion for fishing and story writing is brilliantly transferred to the screen and to the Australian landscape in *Jindabyne*. The