

The Heroic Anthropologist Rides Again

The Heroic Anthropologist Rides Again:
The Depiction of the Anthropologist
in Popular Culture

Edited by

Frank A. Salamone

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

FRANK A. SALAMONE

IONA COLLEGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

The papers gathered in this volume were presented at the 110th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Montreal, Quebec, in November, 2011. The idea for the papers came at a meeting of the Federation of Small Anthropology Programs (FOSAP) at the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans in November, 2010. Frank Salamone had presented a paper on “The Anthropologist as Hero” at the Anthropology of History session. He proposed that FOSAP sponsor a full session on the topic. The idea caught on after some discussion, and FOSAP sponsored the session.

Despite its 8:00 am starting time on the first full day of presentation, the session drew a sizable and enthusiastic gathering of scholars. There was a good deal of discussion, generally civil and good-humored, but also enthusiastic and sometimes heated. People made various suggestions on possible changes in the papers and new areas to pursue. Participants were given two months to make these or any other changes. The results can be seen in this work.

Frank A. Salamone sets the overall theme in “The Heroic Anthropologist Rides Again”, in which he looks at the way popular culture has depicted the anthropologist over the last 100 or so years. James Dow continues the theme in his “The Anthropologist in *Avatar*”. Although there is no named anthropologist in the popular movie, there is an anthropologist-like figure or two. As Salamone has noted and Dow demonstrates, the anthropologist in popular culture is one who defends the rights of the indigenous underdog, embracing cultural relativism and the cultural imperative to allow people to choose their own destiny. Those who represent cultural imperialism and capitalism are the enemies.

Debra Picchi in “Anthropologists and Adventurers: From Sages to Action Heroes” examines the transformation of the popular image of anthropologists from those who know to those who do. Indiana Jones has emerged as the ideal anthropologist; one who embraces the exotic world of danger and adventure. Simply knowing and withdrawing to the ivory

tower “far from the madding crowd” is no longer in style. Darlene A. Smucny and Merrily Stover continue to develop that theme in “Anthropologist as ‘Practical Adventurer’: Using Popular Fiction to introduce Undergraduate Students to Relevance of Anthropology in Today’s World”. They discuss the manner in which they have used popular fiction in their anthropology class to reinforce anthropological concepts and practices.

John Rhoades continues the discussion using “‘The Ugly American’ as a Misunderstood American Hero.” Rhoades indicates the general misunderstanding of the original Ugly American of the novel and the way the term has come into popular usage. He then looks at the character and reveals his similarity to everyday anthropologists in adapting solutions to the needs of the people among whom they work, framing these suggestions within these people’s own framework and understandings.

Stephan Glazier’s “Mel and Zara’s Excellent Adventure: Representing Haitian Voodoo to 20th Century Americans” notes the way in which even the most astute anthropologist can come under the sway of popular belief in exotic cases. Moreover, their work may provide fodder for popular cultural representations, as Herskovits’s and Hurston’s did in the case of zombies. The zombie genre has been one of the more popular in movie history and is one anthropology has influenced, although not proudly.

The authors hope that other anthropologists may spend some time contemplating these essays and turn their own skills to adding to the literature. There are many areas we have not touched, such as satire of anthropologists as in *Krippendorf’s Tribe*. However, this work is but an inauguration of the topic not its completion.

THE HEROIC ANTHROPOLOGIST RIDES AGAIN

FRANK A. SALAMONE

IONA COLLEGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

Susan Sontag, in a 1963 essay, famously wrote about Claude Levi-Strauss as “hero”, and by extension his fellow-anthropologists as well. In 1970 E. Nelson Hayes and Tanya Hayes’s collection of essays expanded on this theme. The notion of anthropologists possessing access to arcane information and innate qualities beyond those of other mortals has had a long run in popular culture, including fiction, science-fiction, movies, television, and magazines, among other outlets. This paper proposes to explore reasons for the fictional popularity of anthropology, as well as the manner in which popular culture has depicted it. Finally, the consequences of that portrayal are discussed, as well as the manner in which anthropologists themselves have fostered some of the images in their own professional and creative works.

Strangely, anthropologists have ignored popular accounts of themselves. Yet anthropologists are the most popularized academics in fiction. They are portrayed as either heroic or, much more commonly, pathetic. Fieldwork marks them out as distinctive and makes ordinary anthropologists odd and the already odd ones even odder. Writers of fiction exploit these characters to enable geographical shifts, debate cultural relativity, poke fun at the discipline, discuss anthropological ideas, and detect crimes (MacClancy 2005: 549).

Long before Susan Sontag chose to write about Claude Levi-Strauss as the model of heroic anthropology, fiction writers, especially science-fiction authors, had routinely included anthropologists as main characters in their works. Often these main characters were indeed heroic, or at least resourceful and clever. Certainly, both Isaac Asimov and Ursula K. Le Guin anticipated Sontag’s 1963 portrait of the anthropologist as hero. However, as MacClancy notes in the quotation above, there have been pathetic anthropologists in literature counter-balancing the Indiana Jones or Temperance Brennan figures. MacClancy suggests, indeed, that there is no room in the literary depiction of the fictional anthropologist for anyone

between the odd heroic anthropologist and the even odder pathetic anthropologist. To reiterate, he states, "Fieldwork marks them out as distinctive and makes ordinary anthropologists odd and the already odd ones even odder." While I do not totally agree with his declaration, I do believe that MacClancy is absolutely correct in noting the quintessential role of fieldwork in setting anthropologists apart from people in other disciplines, in their own as well as in the public's mind. Moreover, fieldwork is in and of itself exotic and mysterious, no matter how mundane we anthropologists may come to consider it in our less romantic moments. However, I would agree that the majority of anthropologists in literature are probably odd to the average reader. There are nevertheless some who are neither heroic nor pathetic in either literature or life. Certainly, heroic and pathetic characters of any profession make for more interesting reading but some "normal" anthropologists do sneak into literature and, alas, there are many of us dull and normal types in academe.

I differ from MacClancy's methodology in a few matters, while admiring his work in many ways. Unlike MacClancy, for example, I do include in my study people who are not termed 'anthropologists' when these people are indeed anthropologically inclined and functioning as anthropologists. Thus, many of Isaac Asimov's characters, including L. Daneel Oliver, are not termed anthropologists, but behave as if they are. Similarly, Ursula K. Le Guin's works are filled with people who function as anthropologists but are not so termed. Indeed, Le Guin is known to use her science fiction work to flesh out her father's anthropological studies. Whether Alfred Kroeber would have approved is an interesting question in itself.

I would like to look at three categories of people who write about anthropology in their fiction. First are those who are professional anthropologists and who write fiction as a secondary exercise. Second are authors who have some training in anthropology but are primarily professional fiction writers, novelists, or short story writers. Finally, there are all the rest who use anthropologists in their fictions and whose knowledge varies greatly from the rank amateur to those with a respectable grasp of the field.

Professional Anthropologists and Fiction

There have been a number of anthropologists who have written fiction. Certainly, Chad Oliver ranks among the elite of science fiction writing. Kathy Reich's excellent series featuring Temperance Brennan works in fine genre fiction, police procedural work, along with exciting forensic

anthropological work. The TV series has only added to her fans. Aaron Elkins had trodden some of this ground before her, leaving professional anthropology for a successful career as a novelist who writes about Gideon Oliver, a forensic anthropologist.

There is a long tradition of anthropologists writing fiction about their fieldwork. Laura Bohannan's *Return to Laughter* is the most famous, but there have been others. Issues of *Humanistic Anthropology*, for example, offer poetry and fiction celebrating the fieldwork experience. Certainly, the fieldwork experience is at the root of most anthropological fiction writing, as well as most anthropological writing in general. Timothy Mason spoke eloquently of this fact (Timothy Mason, Talk Given at Institut Catholique de Paris, during the Colloquium 'Mages et Magiciens', on Wednesday 11 December 2002).

Modern anthropology is - at least in the United States, and perhaps to a lesser extent in the UK - centred upon the conception of field-work as a rite of initiation. No-one can feel that they have been fully admitted to the inner circle of the trade until they have been out in the field. And even having been in the field will not suffice; stories circulate as to how X never really got on with the Bongo-bongo, and, really one shouldn't fully trust what he says about them. Much of this is rooted in Malinowski's own work; in the foreword and chapter one of *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, he gave a picture of the relationship between himself and the Trobrianders that set the highest standards for empathy and understanding. Yes, he said, you will find it difficult, you will suffer, but in the end, you will - you must - be accepted by them.

In some manner, this theme of seeking and gaining, or failing to gain, acceptance is common to all writings dealing with anthropological fictional themes, particularly those that deal with anthropologists themselves.

Although Elkins bills himself as a "former anthropologist" on his homepage (<http://www.aaronelkins.com>) his Gideon Oliver novels make it clear that the skeleton detective is very much a forensic anthropologist, and Elkins says he is the first in the literature. Drawing deeply on his anthropological background, he keeps the details of his work true to life in the midst of the derring-do.

Thus, the image which professional anthropologists generally give of their anthropological heroes is a sympathetic one. Temperance Brennan in the novels is competent, has human faults, but her work is professional. Indeed, many of her problems in everyday life, with lovers, her sister, or her daughter, result from being deeply dedicated to her anthropological work. Anthropology becomes an all-consuming endeavor, an entity which one could say we anthropomorphize. In the TV show *Bones*, which

portrays a younger version of Temperance Brennan, a great deal of humor is wrung out of this great dependence on anthropology and Tempe's belief that all one needs to know comes from anthropology and rationality.

It is true that Bohannon in both "Shakespeare in the Bush" and *Return to Laughter* pokes fun at herself and by implication her fellow anthropologists. The teasing is good-humored and one is left in no doubt that Red Woman has learned a great deal through having her field errors and presuppositions corrected through running up against the reality of real people in the real field. There is no substitute for the field and no other professional experience (some would add personal experience) in an anthropologist's life ever quite matches it. Its uniqueness adds to the fiction of those anthropologists who succeed as novelists and feeds the foundational myth of the Heroic Anthropologist.

E.R. Wayman (2006:560) reports Reich as stating that every book she writes is based on one of her own cases or something she has done. She does so to keep the focus on facts, providing an anthropological education while she entertains. She teaches through her fact-based fiction, providing that spoonful of sugar along the way. Whether Reich will eventually reach the status of Zora Neale Hurston is an interesting question.

Zora Neale Hurston's role in American literature has been acknowledged and no longer is it possible to see her as a lost or forgotten figure. Alice Walker, Tony Morrison and Maya Angelou, and Oprah Winfrey have rediscovered her and made her work known to a wider American public. The Library of America has published a complete collection of her works. However, her significance to anthropology has ironically gone largely unacknowledged.

There are, of course, works which focus on her contributions. As early as 1980 Robert Hemenway noted her contribution to anthropology and its influence on her work in his seminal *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Other works have followed, building on his work. Indeed about one-hundred other books cite his work. The question remains, then, why is her work not given the place in anthropological studies which it deserves? Certainly, Boas's historical particularistic views are reflected in Hurston's *Mules and Men*. Equally clearly, Hurston had her own influence, directly or indirectly, on Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, and George Marcus, among other anthropologists. Her insistence on what Geertz later termed "thick description" has become a major characteristic of much modern anthropology. Similarly, taking and presenting the perspective of those whom we study has become the ideal norm in many works, as has a more humanistic perspective. Although few anthropologists have Hurston's literary gifts, there is a greater attention given to narratives,

something she routinely constructed. 'Subjectivity', in sum, is no longer a universally "dirty word".

Indeed, one can argue that attention to what Geertz terms "mixed genres" is but a continuation of much of what Hurston did in her own work. Hurston fostered an anthropology which embraced every aspect of human life. She also knew that poetic or literary truth revealed a good deal about human culture and ways of behavior. Therefore, she did not clearly delineate between one form of capturing human culture and another.

It is an attitude deeply embedded in Creole culture, what Robert Farris Thompson terms a "this and that too" perspective, a view traceable to West Africa and certainly to Yoruba cultural ways of knowing. Hurston combined literature with anthropology, employing indigenous dialects to tell the stories of people in her native rural Florida and in the Caribbean. She became one of the most widely read authors of the Harlem Renaissance but died penniless and forgotten, her eight books long out of print. Her reputation was resuscitated after Alice Walker's 1975 essay, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," led to rediscovery of novels such as *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Hurston also collaborated with Langston Hughes on the 1931 play *Mule Bone*, which was never performed during their lifetimes due to disagreements between them over authorship.

The question may be asked, however, "Where is the anthropologist or anthropological figure in her fiction?" Rather than conducting a search for anthropological avatars in her work, it is easier to answer that the anthropologist is not found in her characters but in the narrator; that is, in Hurston herself. Moreover, her ability to speak through, rather than for, her characters is one of her great strengths, perhaps presenting early a more contemporary vision of the anthropologist.

Students of Anthropology

There have been a number of authors who have gone on to great success as novelists after studying anthropology at university. Among these literary luminaries are Saul Bellow and Kurt Vonnegut. Not only do we have a great diversity of temperament and style among these authors, we have different views of life. However, amid this diversity there is a deep grounding in humanistic perception and an allegiance to promoting human values. If one adds Ursula K. Le Guin to this list then we simply deepen the rooting in human values and expand the diversity.

Barbara Pym worked from 1946 to 1974 as an editor at the International African Institute's journal *Africa*, where she became familiar

with Britain's most famous anthropologists. The well-meaning but bumbling anthropologist has nowhere found a better home than in Barbara Pym's novels. In his opening to "Barbara Pym and the Africans" Charles Burkhardt gets quickly to the core of the issue of the misunderstood and faintly exotic anthropologist whom Pym portrays so well.

In Barbara Pym's third novel, *Jane and Prudence*, there is a discussion among some village ladies about the marriage of Mildred Lathbury, the heroine of the preceding novel, *Excellent Women*. In all ten novels characters appear and reappear, in a way that makes a reader feel at home: 'Who has she married?' asked Miss Morrow. 'An anthropophagist,' declared Miss Doggett in an authoritative tone. 'He does some kind of scientific work, I believe. 'I thought it meant a cannibal-one who ate human flesh,' said Jane in wonder. 'Well, science has made such strides,' said Miss Doggett doubtfully. 'His name is Mr. Bone.' 'That certainly does seem to be a connection,' said Jane, laughing, 'but perhaps he is an anthropologist; that would be more likely. They don't eat human flesh, as far as I know, though they may study those who do, in Africa and other places.' 'Perhaps that is it,' said Miss Doggett in a relieved tone. There is ignorance and confusion throughout the novels about what an anthropologist is, and what exactly he does. Even a very bright person like Sophia Ainger in *An Unsuitable Attachment* says of her neighbor, the social anthropologist with a rather anthropological sounding name, Rupert Stonebird, "I suppose he goes around measuring skulls and that kind of thing." Her young sister Penelope, intent on marrying someone, anyone, even an anthropologist, has her reservations: "It seemed a dark mysterious sort of profession, perhaps in a way not quite manly, or not manly in the way she was used to." Rhoda Wellcome, a suburban lady in *Less Than Angels*, has similar doubts: She liked to think of her niece as being courted by suitable young men, though from what she had heard of them, she rather doubted whether anthropologists could be so regarded. There was something disquieting about all this going out to Africa to study the natives; she felt (Burkhardt 1983:45-46).

These same misunderstandings exist today, allowing for the portrayal of anthropologists as both heroes and slightly less than heroic. It is a thin line that separates the two. One Pym's characters cross rather easily in fact.

With a keen ethnographic eye, often compared with Jane Austen's, in one of Pym's models, Pym documents and analyzes genteel middle-class British life. Her detachment and observation are indeed anthropological as Burkhardt notes (1983: 47).

Objective; but all-observant. Already there are other random entries in the notebooks which show her seizing upon this new life, the anthropological life, for part of the raw material-the field notes-of her novels. Here is one

of her inspirations, in a notebook of the early 1950s: "An anthropologist who had been among the head-shrinkers of the Amazon and whose own head was already beginning to look a little shrunken (Bodleian MS PYM 44 (1953-54), p. 19)."

Both Bellow and Vonnegut attended the University of Chicago. Kurt Vonnegut's academic career was as idiosyncratic as any one of his novels. He worked on his MA in 1946 and 1947 at Chicago. Although his course work was completed, his thesis was rejected because his study of the Ghost Dance and cubist painters was considered inappropriate. However, in 1972 Chicago awarded him his MA in Anthropology for his novel, *Cat's Cradle*, which made a significant contribution to anthropology. Times had changed. (Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s Homepage http://www.wdog.com/rider/writings/KVJ_soitgoes.htm).

Vonnegut remained enamored by anthropology, seeing it as a religious endeavor. A composite of *Paris Review* interviews makes clear his love for cultural anthropology and its role in his work (<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3605/the-art-of-fiction-no-64-kurt-vonnegut>). He notes,

VONNEGUT: After the war, I went to the University of Chicago, where I was pleased to study anthropology, a science that was mostly poetry, that involved almost no math at all. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did the study of anthropology later color your writings?

VONNEGUT: It confirmed my atheism, which was the faith of my fathers anyway. Religions were exhibited and studied as the Rube Goldberg inventions I'd always thought they were. We weren't allowed to find one culture superior to any other. We caught hell if we mentioned races much. It was highly idealistic.

INTERVIEWER: Almost a religion?

VONNEGUT: Exactly. And the only one for me. So far.

Vonnegut's works are deeply steeped in anthropology and his creation of alternate worlds reveals his continued fascination with anthropology. Anthropology also influences Saul Bellow's works, but with the notable exception of *Henderson the Rainmaker* in less obvious ways.

However, it is not difficult to find many anthropological references in all his works, and his treatment of relationships is quite anthropological. In *Henderson*, Bellow has a strong anthropological figure, one whose best intentions to help African villages go awry. After a series of adventures with tribes taken from his course with Melville Herskovits, Henderson leaves Africa, fleeing for his life but still optimistic. One cannot help but think of anthropologists who may have been in similar situations.

Judie Newman, in “Bellow and Social Anthropology” (In *Saul Bellow at Seventy-five: A collection of critical essays* (Studies & texts in English) Tübingen: G. Narr 1991, pp. 137-150), focuses on the short story “Cousins” in which the main character wonders why so many Jews have been attracted to anthropology. The main character is poring over Boas’s Jessup Expedition. The idea is that Jews are immigrants to America and outsiders. They are studying a foreign culture from their arrival, seeking to understand its society and culture. They need to know the hidden traps, ways to precede, the customs, and mores of the people. It is an instructive short story whose themes resonate throughout Bellow’s works. The anthropologist is one who knows, or should know, what is happening in a culture, including one’s own culture.

Non-Anthropologists

There is a long history of non-anthropologists writing about anthropological themes. I place here those who have had little if any training in the field. There has been some excellent, even exciting, writing among the generally mediocre material. Accordingly, no matter what one may think of the H. Rider Haggard novels, they have endured for many years. Archeology came to life, or at least a more exciting version of everyday life, and the archeologist as hero assumed a place still held in popular imagination, as Lara Croft and Indiana Jones demonstrate. Interestingly, Indiana Jones is the second most popular film hero in history, according to the American Film Institute (<http://connect.afi.com/site/DocServer/handv100.pdf?docID=246>).

In a brilliant article Tim Murray notes the mutual relationship that emerged in the Nineteenth Century between science and science fiction. The rapid changes in science and redefinitions of the world which science wrought, including not only material changes such as steamships, but also perceptual changes, for example those in the understanding of the vast stretches of time of human occupation of the earth, had shaken up old convictions. These changes led to new styles of fiction, which had an impact on anthropological and archeological narratives as well. Murray writes (1993:176):

Given that both the novelist and the prehistorian needed to tell a story of origins and outcomes which linked 'events' and motivations in a meaningful way, intuitively it seems proper that the form and content of fictional narratives of human prehistory (which might be found in the late nineteenth-century 'science fictions' of Jules Verne and Rider Haggard) should resemble those found in scientific prehistories produced during the

same period. What is perhaps of greater interest is the extent to which prehistorians were themselves influenced by the constructions of the novelists . . .

Murray adds that both narratives essentially became unchallenged and accepted as “natural” and true.

In her blog Vanessa Uyy writes

The cultural anthropologist Franz Boas has shaped modern anthropology by emphasizing the collection of facts about primitive cultures, instead of resorting to mere speculation. But when it comes to the study of alien or extraterrestrial cultures that live on planets maybe light-years away from us, one can't help but resort to mere speculation since the technology that allows us to travel to these worlds might still be centuries off. Yet this hasn't stopped science fiction authors from transforming mere speculation into one of the best-loved forms of literature in the past 200 years. When the science fiction visionary Gene Roddenberry conceptualized the alien beings and their cultures populating one of his famous works like *Star Trek*, he did so with an uncannily believable accuracy that many of Roddenberry's fans probably think that he works as a university-tenured anthropologist as his day job. By just using the data collected by cultural anthropologists of the 19th and 20th Centuries, Gene Roddenberry populated his *Star Trek* universe with beings that are not only pass muster as speculative anthropological constructs of an organized culture, but also as accurate predictive models of our own still-existing-somewhat-primitive-cultures evolving without outside help into a space-faring civilization.

Among those who are not anthropologists but who have some knowledge of the field, Joyce Carey is prominent. Carey served as an Assistant District Officer in Northern Nigeria in the post-World War I era, having served in the military in Nigeria during World War I along the Cameroon border. Malinowski was quite influential in developing training programs for colonial administrators and Carey's personal notebooks in the Bodleian library at Oxford clearly demonstrate his ethnographic interests.

Carey wrote a series of African novels, reflecting his Nigerian experience. In these novels he offers a broad portrayal of colonial life, much as an ethnographer would. The central relationship of his best African novel, *Mister Johnson*, is that between Rudbeck, the young colonial officer, and Mister Johnson, his clerk. Rudbeck is one of those figures who take on the characteristics of the well-meaning anthropologist but whose actions lead to disaster. Although tolerant of Mister Johnson's odd behavior and genuinely fond of him, Rudbeck never truly understands him nor is he able to bridge the cultural gap between Johnson and himself.

This failure leads to Johnson's death sentence and death, both at the hands of Rudbeck.

Aissa Saved, the first of his African novels, shows his propensity for depicting power as freedom and his belief that African women best demonstrate that relationship. As Virginia Ola notes,

Its theme of religious war, its "primitive" setting in a Northern Nigerian district and its mixed community of Christians, Moslems and Pagans offer perfect ingredients for the exploration in human terms of violence and irrationality as Cary saw them in his contact with Africans. The conflict among the population eventually becomes polarized into a test of power among the different gods the inhabitants worship. God, Allah, and Oke are prayed to in turn to bring an end to the drought which has made life impossible for their worshippers. Aissa, a half-breed Fulani girl and female monster created by the Carrs, a missionary couple in Yanri, is the leader in this war of devastation. She herself eventually sacrifices her only son, Abba, in a rain-making ceremony designed to prove the superiority of the Christian god.

Cary notes the fact that Nigeria has three main religious traditions; Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion. He also notes that these cultural differences are volatile and will lead to conflict. Although he has no named anthropologist in his cast of characters, the British administrator functions as one. The richness and ethnographic quality of Cary's descriptions and its ambiguities remind one of the best anthropological writing. The stand-in anthropologists, however, often seem bumbling and set on knowing what is best for those whom they seek to understand.

Although not so well-versed in anthropology as Cary, Mischa Berlinski shows a keen appreciation for anthropology and anthropologists. He does state that his contacts with them have been minimal and that their culture is weird.

In stark contrast to missionaries, who are down-to-earth, good-natured, humble people, anthropologists are really weird. I found everything about anthropologists and the culture of anthropologists very, very strange (<http://www.berlinski.com/mischa/thebook/interview.php>).

The plot of the novel is straight-forward and is based on Berlinski's detailed research for a book he never wrote, a study of the Lisu people's conversion to Christianity. When no publisher wanted it, he recycled his material into fiction. As one reviewer notes,

Newly out of college, a young American journalist follows his schoolteacher girlfriend to a post in the hill country of northern Thailand. There, another

expatriate tells him the story of a brilliant American anthropologist, Martiya van der Leun, who has committed suicide in a Thai prison, where she was serving a 50-year sentence for murder. Her victim was a charismatic young American Protestant missionary whose family — like Martiya — had spent years working among the people of a traditional hill tribe called the Dyalo. In fact, the missionaries and the anthropologist have befriended one another (Tim Rutten Los Angeles Times, 2007, February 7).

Of course, we have a recurring theme of anthropological writing, the anthropologist versus the missionary, or rationality versus religiosity. Indeed, too much rationality leads ironically to irrational actions and tragedy.

Berlinski says he met two anthropologists. The first was a professor who had, so it appears from his description, little interest in anthropological fieldwork, and who did not seem to like the people whom he studies. However, Berlinski did gain valuable insights into fieldwork from him. The other was Otome Klein Hutheesing, who left sociology after a successful academic career to become an ethnographer of the Lisu people.

Here Berlinski returns full-circle to echo Susan Sontag's take on the heroic anthropologist.

Anthropologists really did tend to see their fieldwork in almost mystical terms. They saw entering into the life of another people as nothing less than liberation from the self. This attitude began with Bronislaw Malinowski, who is generally considered the founder of anthropological fieldwork — Malinowski famously wrote that fieldwork was to anthropology what the blood of martyrs was to the Church — but can be found in the writing of almost all the great anthropologists, people like E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe-Brown and Claude Lèvi-Strauss. I think that it was Lèvi-Strauss who referred to anthropology as a vocation, in the classic sense of the word.

In that light, it may appear rational for Berlinski's anthropological protagonist to murder a young evangelical missionary, who is her friend, to save the fictional Dyalo people from his proselytization. The heroic anthropologist, female or male, has, after all, her or his own religious tradition rooted in the lonely search for meaning in the anthropological field — at least in Sontag's and Levi-Strauss's version of anthropology.

Science Fiction and Anthropology

At least a few words need be said regarding the relationship between the image of the heroic anthropologist and science fiction. Ursula Kroeber Le Guin is certainly a leading figure in that area. There are many others such as Kurt Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, and others, including some anthropologists, primary among whom is Chad Oliver. Also worthy of note is Sharlotte Donnelly. Donnelly's heroic anthropologist is a female anthropologist who struggles to keep the government from moving the Kasker Nomads. ShandraTrax is the anthropologist and hero; ironically, her work involves government research on doing studies of people slated for resettlement. The crisis comes when the government or Imperium assigns her to study the Kasker, the people with whom she did her first fieldwork, work of which she is proud. Until this assignment she has more or less been able to ignore the ethical problems involved in her work. Unwilling to aid in the removal of the Kaskers for the sake of more profit for the Imperium, she seeks the aid of her ex-husband, whom she does not fully trust. And therein lies the rest of the story. Although set in the near future, it has lessons for today's world, including anthropologists.

There is some similarity, obviously, with the movie *Avatar* in the seeking to keep the capitalistic greed of those who have despoiled their own planet from relocating an indigenous population. Although there is no clear anthropological figure in the movie, there is a scientist who has written an ethnography of the Na'vi, Dr. Grace Augustine. Grace acts much like most anthropologists I know hope they would act. She also does work befitting her formal title of xenobiologist. However, as Kerim (2009) notes, it is not Grace but

Jake Sully who is offered a chance to learn the ways of the Na'vi and who goes "native". The use of avatars to do ethnographic research is interesting enough, but what really makes this notable is the fact that he's doing it for the military. In fact, his triple loyalties: to his military/corporate bosses, to the scientists, and to the Na'vi themselves, are a central source of tension in the film.

In many ways *Star Trek* was the model for TV and movie depictions of anthropological worlds. As "What is a Trekkie" states, "*Star Trek* tended to be similar in nature to the goals of cultural anthropology, to watch, but not interfere with other cultures. It is fair to say, however, that the original series often messed with other cultures, particularly in the way the captain of the ship took liberties with various female aliens." Mr. Spock, as the resident anthropologist was responsible for keeping ship members faithful

to the prime directive. Unfortunately, people were caught up in situations which made it difficult to stick to their goals. Captain Kirk's liberties were one such example, but they also have correlates among real anthropologists (Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999).

Conclusion

The close bond between anthropology and literature is exemplified in the work of Barbara Pym. As an editor of the International African Institute, she had spent most of her working life dealing with anthropologists and their African ethnographies, and her own novels capitalize on that relationship; her attention to the importance of the mundane details of everyday life clearly reflects anthropological influence. Her total immersion in anthropology enabled her to make the familiar world of England exotic, and the exotic anthropologists but one more type of the familiar English eccentric. Perhaps more interestingly, in her novels one finds some of the most sympathetic and devastating portrayals of anthropologists. Pym captures their contradictory natures exquisitely, especially in *A Few Green Leaves*.

Two anthropologists appear in the movie *The Iceman*, one a linguist loosely based on Courtney Cazden, the other an all-around old fashioned generalist. Both fight the rather cold-blooded hard scientists who view the recovered Neanderthal as an object of research rather than a feeling human subject. Similarly, the fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin, the daughter of Alfred Kroeber, often takes the form of a rewriting of her father's anthropology, just as science fiction has frequently employed anthropologists such as Mr. Spock to draw attention to the humanity of alternate realities. In general, when they have not been used as exotic characters like Indiana Jones, they have been cast as outsiders raising troubling questions about the nature of assumed reality.

In recent work by anthropologists, the bond with literature has manifested itself in two major ways: theoretically, especially in the concern with ethnography as rhetoric consisting of various texts, and practically, in the turning to fiction itself as a form of ethnography. The trend, moreover, in humanistic anthropology is to see certain novelists as trailblazers in this type of analysis. In their study of Jane Austen's fiction, for example, Richard Handler and Daniel S. Segal demonstrate that good fiction of manners with its nice attention to details often yields ethnography. In the same way it can be demonstrated that Sinclair Lewis's fiction, especially *Main Street*, yields descriptions of small-town Midwestern American life and analysis of underlying social relationships

that are of immense value to the anthropologist. Moreover, like contemporary anthropologists, Lewis stressed the cultural, that is, created, character of "established" values. In each of his novels he has individuals question and subvert the "agreed upon meanings of their society," that is, "culture" in an older definition.

The anthropologist is not only the mourner of the cold world of the primitives, but its custodian as well. Lamenting among the shadows, struggling to distinguish the archaic from the pseudo-archaic, he acts out a heroic, diligent, and complex modern pessimism (Sontag 1966: 81).

Others have been equally effuse concerning the role of Levi-Strauss in fostering the myth of the heroic anthropologist. Doja (2005:650) states, for example, "In the form of the standard prophetic myth of the heroic quest, with the anthropologist as its hero, as Richard Shweder put it, Levi-Strauss transformed an expedition to the virgin interiors of the Amazon into a vision quest, and turned anthropology into a spiritual mission to defend mankind against itself." While a bit over the top, this passage does reflect the feeling of many anthropologists regarding the protection of "their people". Many examples could be given, but a perusal of the voluminous documentation on the Yanomami Controversy would provide a clear example (see Chignon and the Yanomamo Long Version, http://www.darwinwars.com/cuts/oddsnsods/chignon_written.html; also, see Chignon Still Controversial, <http://www.edhat.com/site/tidbit.cfm?nid=26193>, among many other works, such as, Salamone 1997). Chignon, of course, has always presented himself in a heroic mold while simultaneously donning the persona of a scientist (Chignon *Noble Savages*, in press). Mason (n.d.) presents an excellent argument placing him into the "heroic anthropologist" mode of the lone jungle anthropologist going forth to study his people. This image has persisted in the literature, movies, and television presentations about anthropology and anthropologists.

It is important to note that the link between anthropology and literature is an old one, as Handler and Segal (1999) have noted. Handler also explored the issue in 1985. They see Jane Austen as modeling the ethnographic method, which anthropologists used later. They also see in her fiction an exploration of the meaning of kinship, rank, marriage and courtship in late 18th and early 19th century England. Using Austen's writings, they demonstrate how good fiction is ethnography, and good ethnography follows the methods of fiction. Remember, for example, Chignon's entrance into the field as he depicts in his first chapter of *Yanomamo: The Fierce People* (1983:4 ff). He enters like a conquering hero, unafraid and ripe for adventure, the lone anthropologist conquering new worlds. It is an image he repeats in his videos and subsequent

writings. It is novelistic and cinematic. To a lesser extent others have followed suit. Paul Stoller in a number of his works continues this tradition, especially in his *In Sorcery's Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger*, 1987. Once again, the image of the heroic anthropologist is depicted in an ethnography, which, with just a few changes could easily have been a novel, and not just a mediocre novel, but a great one.

One further example will strengthen my point. Kirin Narayan has proved herself one of the more creative anthropologists of her generation. She has written excellent ethnographic narratives, witty and sensitive. However, she has shunned the heroic anthropological image in both her narrative anthropological works and her fiction. Her *Love, Stars, and All That* (1993) is an honest reflection of the anthropological experience, filled with self-deprecating humor. The fact that, in my mind, she emerges as heroic in this depiction is a consequence of her honesty and modesty. The work parallels her "Shared Stories" in *Grindal* and Salamone *Bridges to Humanity*, yet her novel is not simply fictionalized anthropology, nor her "Shared Story" ethnography striving to be fiction. They are examples of mixed genres, but each is also fully a novel or fully ethnography. Each is informed by excellent writing.

Although other examples could be given, some good and others not-so-good, the point is clear. Anthropologists have long sought to tell stories, construct narratives. It is nothing new. It has gone on from the earliest days, and fiction writers who wrote of heroic explorers or proto-anthropologist, like Alan Quatermain, led the way. Quatermain, by the way, always claimed to be a cautious man who sought to avoid danger but circumstances always pulled him back to the fray. He was more Odysseus than Achilles, a bit of a trickster whose wits, as much as his strength, led to success. His love of mystery and the unknown led him into adventure despite his stated aversion to it.

It is, however, the adventure that people see and anthropologists talk about. Even the parodies and satires of anthropological work usually focus on the adventures, the unknown. There may be many versions of the anthropologist in popular culture, but the romance of anthropology has always been its emphasis on the field, on entering a village as Chagnon or Stoller depicts or as Levi-Strauss relates in *Tristes Tropiques*. The lure of leaving the known behind and testing oneself does have the aura of the heroic about it. It may not be a true depiction of the anthropologist, but the myth is always more interesting than the truth.

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THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN AVATAR

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Abstract

On a far distant moon in the far future, technological civilization has reached its final limits. A race of hunter gatherers is facing the onslaught of human technology. Who is there to save them from the ghastly destruction of technological warfare? Why, who else but anthropologists. Well, at least they look and act like anthropologists. Perhaps they should be called na'viologists, for the Na'vi race has gone beyond humans to establish a closer contact with the forces of life. For that reason, the film writers could not use the word "anthropologist," or perhaps, it is too dangerous for Hollywood to recognize the actual moral and scientific stance of anthropologists in the real world.

The film *Avatar* is chocked full of the moral dilemmas of our times: runaway technology, resource greed, environmental imbalance, etc. The movie anthropologists are right there in the middle of these conflicts, ready to offer their lives to save na'vianity. In previous Hollywood movies anthropologists are often discounted. Finally, *Avatar* has made them into heroes, and it has moved them from quirky fantasy into a more realistic portrayal. In this movie, anthropologists finally do look like real anthropologists.

Avatar, a Unique Film about Anthropologists

Looking at the past appearance of anthropologists in Western cinema, we see that *Avatar* is unique in the way that it presents them. The anthropologists, or xenoanthropologists as the science fiction world refers to them, are far more realistically portrayed in *Avatar*, a 2009 film directed by James Cameron, than they are in preceding movies. I can think of only two important cinema anthropological heroes preceding *Avatar*: Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the lost Ark* and Dr. Robert Campbell in *Medicine*

The Anthropologists in Avatar

Man. Neither of them had bona fide credentials as anthropologists. Jones was a scallywag archeologist interested more in spiriting off valuable antiquities than in investigating ancient cultures. He certainly lacked the ethics of modern archaeology. Campbell, on the other hand, was working to find new medicines by studying the native use of plants. He had the ethics of a modern medical researcher, but was a bit of a rebel like Jones. The film *Medicine Man* portrays him more as a botanist or general biologist. It gives him some credit for understanding native culture, implying that understanding native cultures is a rebel activity not in the mainstream of American intellectual life.

There have been many spinoffs of the Jones character in films like *The Librarian*, and *National Treasure*. All of these have moved away from a true archeologist identity. They tend to identify the hero as a treasure hunter or as a maverick intellectual rather than as an anthropologist. Note that the jungle hero Bill Markham in the *Emerald Forest* was an engineer, and Father O'Reilly in *Where the River Runs Black* was a priest. This leaves *Avatar* as a unique realistic advancement in the cinematic portrayal of anthropologists as heroes.

The heroes of *Avatar* are not called anthropologists, but they act like anthropologists, they use anthropological methods, and they exude the ethical stance of anthropologists. To someone who knows anthropology, they sure look like anthropologists. Correctly, they should be called xenoanthropologists, the term used in science fiction for scientists who study extraterrestrial cultures. In the original 1995 script by James Cameron, the Avatar Project was headed by a person whom he called a xenoanthropologist. In the final version of the film, this person was removed, but the other characters carried on the same plot. Grace Augustine, portrayed by Sigourney Weaver, took over the job of leader of the xenoanthropology team.

The anthropological goals of the Avatar Project were abundantly apparent. Although xenoanthropology is a nonexistent future science invented and used by a number of science fiction writers, such as Algis Budrys and Frederik Pohl (Pohl, 2004), it looks and feels like real anthropology. Norm Spellman, Jake's companion avatar is clearly an anthropologist. Grace Augustine, the head of the Avatar Project is an anthropologist interested in culture, language, ethnobotany, and biology. Jake, the main hero, never loses his marine warrior identity but becomes enveloped in these anthropological modalities as the film progresses. We never learn much more about the other members of the avatar team whom we assume are other xenoanthropologists working to understand the Na'vi culture. They act more as a background to the plot.