Semantics—that unruly world of shifting, multiplying, and thickening meanings, a world "empirical" only in the sense that it is sheer phenomena—has long been a headache to those who would like to study language as a physiological grammar, equatable with the wiring of the brain. Cognitive scientists interested in semantics (Douglas Hofstadter, to name just one) have thus devoted their efforts, not to the grounding of language in brain structures, but to the creation of a more or less free-floating register of fluid analogies. I would like my concepts of "resonance" and "noise" to operate within this register. More important, it is also within this semantic register that literary studies can prove its mettle, can begin to fashion a set of practices overlapping with cognitive science but not reducible to it.

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Ethnic Literature in the Classroom

To the Editor:

The Forum contributions (113 [1998]: 449–52) about the journal's special issue on ethnicity testify that the topic is still a hot commodity and prompt me to affirm what I have been refraining from expressing for some time now, partly because of a suspicion that I have nothing new to say. Indeed, the many positions on the "marginality" of ethnic literature(s) have filled the pages of scholarly publications. Yet the stark fact that ethnic literature *is* marginalized remains pretty much unacknowledged and seems to be in constant need of reiteration. This letter may be an attempt to vindicate ethnic literature—and hence be de facto evidence of its marginalization.

It is no secret that maintaining the ethnic-mainstream dichotomy, or what Sander L. Gilman describes in his Forum reply as the "center-periphery model" (451), reinforces an opposition that everyone would like to see dismantled. The desire to end the dichotomy is a noble desire. It would be naive, however, to pretend that there is no such opposition simply because one does not want to perpetuate a pernicious way of thinking. When something is treated as a category, one has no choice but respond to it as a category, even while acknowledging the inevitable contextuality and uniqueness of every situation. Vincent J. Cheng is therefore right to claim in his letter that there is an ongoing marginalization of minority scholars and of issues of ethnicity. My attempt to include literature by Armenian American writers, specifically Peter Najarian's 1971 *Voyages*, in my classes College Introductory Literature and World Literature is a good example.

I introduced *Voyages* into my course Introduction to Fiction in 1995, encouraged by the focus on multiculturalism in institutions of higher learning nationwide. Throwing in *Voyages* alongside *Pocho* and *The Bluest Eye* in an introductory course focusing on twentieth-century fiction writers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds seemed like the right thing to do. Postmodern inclusiveness, I argued, allows one to foreground oneself and to celebrate one's culture. In addition, I reasoned, Najarian's novel is a unique resource for exploring the many concerns of ethnic groups living in a multicultural society. Nevertheless, introducing *Voyages* into my booklist required some "apologizing." I felt the need to justify the choice of a book that would pass the test of good writing with high colors. Such justification must be evidence of exclusion.

One might of course ascribe this need to apologize and to justify to some feeling of inferiority or marginality of mine. I grew up, however, in a context that fostered nothing but pride in my ethnic identity and cultural heritage. I am unlike Michael J. Arlen, who writes in his much acclaimed *Passage to Ararat*, "I have always hated being an Armenian [. . .] because I was given the values of the Europeans and *they* despised the Armenians" ([Saint Paul: Hungry Mind, 1996] 101–02). I was born and grew up in the Middle East, in Beirut, Lebanon, a cultural center for Armenians in their diaspora where absorption into the host country is minimal. The feeling of marginality is a construction, often imposed by the context one lives in.

More important, I consider *Voyages* a good novel, beautifully written and dealing with issues of great relevance to anyone living in America. For, while rooted in Armenian history and culture, the book embraces modern American culture. The references to the characters' past are always subordinate to the references to the present. *Voyages* is the story of Aram, a son of Armenian immigrants who was born in America because his family survived "the march in the desert and the rivers of blood." The allusion here is to the deportation and the massacre of the Armenian people planned and systematically executed by the Turkish authorities in 1915–22 in what came to be known as the first genocide of the twentieth century. Plagued by his people's trauma and by his own subversive and rebellious character, the young protagonist remains alone and angry, eternally conflicted, unable to come to terms with his "difference." Najarian deals with issues with a rare intensity. Aram emerges as a complex human being, not simply a victim. The appeal of the novel is much enhanced by Najarian's powerful

use of language and imagery, testimony indeed to "the enthusiasm of a young man in love with language."

It would be safe to claim that *Voyages* succeeds as an aesthetic creation and transcends cultural and national boundaries (while remaining immersed in them). Yet the fact that the book is by an Armenian and deals with Armenian concerns—among much else—seems to require special pleading. I could not get over the guilty sensation that I was engaging in propaganda and perhaps forcing on my students a history and a culture they had no desire to unfold. I was plagued by the uneasy feeling of doing something that had not been done before. The book clearly belonged outside.

The students' intense interest in the literature, once it has been introduced to them, is telling. "How come we don't know?" and other genuine expressions of surprise and their disbelief at the enormity of the horrors committed imply that something must be wrong with an educational system that does not make available good and relevant material. Every time I have shared Armenian American literature with my students, the level of their interest and excitement has been at an unprecedented high and my experience of teaching exceptionally rewarding. Enthusiasm, I hope we all agree, is not something to be shunned and mistrusted.

My suggestion, I hasten to add, is not to replace Shakespeare and Hemingway but to expand the canon to include ethnic writers. We need to start teaching ethnic writing because it is good (that is, when it is good) and not because it is politically correct to do so. The difficulty of finding good literature that deals with the complexity of the immigrant experience—the American experience—should make a book like *Voyages* doubly welcome in our classrooms.

Blatant exclusion becomes even more ironic when we consider the trend to contextualize in contemporary literary study. Historical and cultural context has been a dominant focus in theory and criticism for many years, and one would think that ethnic writing, in which frontiers are endlessly crossed and boundaries redrawn, should provide the perfect context for the exploration of the larger cultural and social issues that are inevitably connected to literary texts.

Also, what better way of enhancing our students' critical thinking, a much stated aim of education, than introducing them to the literature of "others," to the perspective(s) of "others"? I have found ethnic writing to be a great tool in promoting the critical thinking and writing skills of my students at all levels in my teaching.

Our task as educators is crucial. To say, as we sometimes do, that students don't know anything because they don't read is an easy way out of a situation that needs to be confronted so it can be corrected. Student apathy, undeniably, is part of the problem. I strongly believe, however, that if the material we make available to our students is relevant to their experiences, the students do read, and good literature goes a long way toward creating that relevance. The story of Aram, alone in a country where no one understands him, alienated and frantically searching, is everyone's story. Najarian states it best in his preface to the 1979 edition of the novel: "The massacre belongs to everyone somehow."

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Script and Performance

To the Editor:

In "Drama, Performativity, and Performance" (113 [1998]: 1093–1107), W. B. Worthen would rescue scripted dramatic performance from neglect by denaturing it, minimizing the importance of the script. As he sees it, the performance of plays in theaters is in decline and destined for no more than "residual" status as a fading subdivision within the much wider and flourishing realm of performances that take place throughout a culture, a realm dominated by unscripted nontheatrical events. He blames this loss of status on those who understand "dramatic performance as authorized in a relatively straightforward way by a scripted text" (1094). Worthen's solution is to look as much as possible for authorization outside and largely apart from individual authors and their texts. To me diminishing the writer's role in written drama in this way seems fundamentally misguided, writers having been integral to the making of dramatic meaning since Aeschylus.

Worthen is right to take sharp issue with those who, in disregard of the collaborative nature of theatrical production, give total sovereignty to the playwright's text over performance. But instead of examining the complex and subtle ways in which the two in fact interact, he himself goes to an extreme. Insisting that there is an "untenable opposition" between them, he maintains that "it is time for the presumed authority of texts over performances to be displaced" (1100) and for primacy to be given to performance: "dramatic performance, far from being authorized by its script, produces the terms of its authorization in performance" (1104). He sees as "normative" *Going, Going, Gone*, a stage production conceived by Anne Bogart in which—by his account—part of the film version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia*