

E. Jane Gay. *With the Nez Perces: Alice Fletcher in the Field, 1889-92*. Frederick E. Hoxie and Joan T. Mark, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981) xxxvii, 188 pp., \$7.95 paper.

Persons interested in Indian history will not want to overlook this collection of E. Jane Gay's letters written from Nez Perce (Nimipu) country between 1889-1892. On four separate trips to the West, Gay accompanied her friend, special agent and anthropologist Alice Fletcher, whose job it was to coordinate the allotment of the Nez Perce reservation in Idaho. While "Her Majesty" (Gay's endearment for Fletcher) figures prominently in the correspondence, the letters tell us less about Fletcher than the subtitle suggests. What they do provide, however, is an insightful account of the allotment process at the local level, and herein lies their value. *With the Nez Perces* gives its readers the opportunity to better understand the period by looking beyond the implementation of policy, as Gay did, to the ways in which individuals coped with changing circumstances. Editors Hoxie and Mark augment Gay's twenty-seven letters with thirty-eight of her own photographs, a sound introduction, and interpretive endnotes.

Gay's insights are important because she tried to understand what the Nez Perces were asked to accept. Shortly after they arrived in the Indian community of Lapwai, Fletcher met with local residents to explain the allotment policy. When writing about the meeting, Gay asked her reader to imagine what it would be like if, on some bright May morning, an "agent comes round the house and tells you that the Empress of all the Indies . . . has sent him to divide your lands according to [an] act of Parliament." Likewise, Gay explained the difficulties Fletcher encountered when registering the names of allottees by writing that "to arrive at an Indian's personal name is a triumph of diplomacy. The name is sacred, not to be lightly spoken." In spite of Gay's pride in her own "Yankee" heritage, the ethnocentric bias typical of writings from this era does not mar her prose. In fact, because Gay perceived Nez Perces as human beings first, and members of an Indian tribe second, her letters convey multidimensional images of the people she wrote about. It is ironic that one hundred years later scholars could still learn from Gay's example.

Above all, Gay's letters tell a story of adaptation. Whether allotment was welcomed or resisted, and whether individuals lived off the land or left it to the management of others, the Nez Perces made difficult choices during the entire allotment process. Moreover, attitudes among Indian agents were often inconsistent. Some four years and almost two thousand allotments later, Gay summed up Nez Perce experiences with federal bureaucrats by writing that "officials have come and gone; some bad, others better, and some worse, and the Indians have accommodated themselves to each as best they could, as best they must."

With the Nez Perces is also a valuable source of information about

women in positions of authority. It is not surprising to discover that some non-Indian Idahoans believed it was “folly to give the best land to the Indians.” What is revealing, however, is that Fletcher and Gay persisted, even though they received little support from local Indian agents. It is odd that leading women’s studies/history journals have not reviewed this book; it is their loss, because Gay’s letters and photographs make an important contribution to the history of women and cultural contact in the American West.

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Simon Gikandi. *Reading the African Novel.* (Portsmouth, NH; Heinemann, 1987) xi, 172 pp., \$15.00.

Gikandi, has added an excellent critical work to his earlier volumes on new African writers. Employing the techniques of modern criticism, he analyzes significant works of eleven African writers including, among others, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ferdinand Oyono, and Ayi Kwei Armah. He is concerned with the form-content relationship in the novels examined, as well as the part played by centers of consciousness of main characters. As he states, he set out to “show how . . . life and consciousness” move from external reality of the novel to “interiority.”

All the novels are concerned with the peoples of the post-colonial era and deal variously with the search for or the recovery of a national and a personal identity, or the relationship between the two. A reader of this criticism will find that although Gikandi is sympathetic to all the novelists, he does identify technical problems that a few of the authors face. His citation of these points does not detract from his overall appreciation of their artistic successes.

Gikandi categorizes the novels examined into parabolical, biographical, subjective, and political narratives. In a fifth chapter “Rereading the African Novel,” he deals mainly with myth in the modern novel. In each chapter, for purposes of astute comparing, he pairs or groups fictionalists who may have similar approaches, themes or techniques. For example in the chapter on psychological novels, he compares Camara Laye’s work with Armah’s since both novelists are deeply believing narrators and regard themselves as traditional storytellers.

In his chapter on the biographical narrative, he finds in each author chosen narrators in the process of self interpretation. Each is a colonized African. This is true in Fernando’s *Houseboy*, Mongo Beti’s *Mission to Kala*, and Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*.