"As I Write": Narrative Occasions and the Quest for Self-Presence in the Travel Diary

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PAUL CARTER IN The Road to Botany Bay offers a challenging rereading of the source documents of Australian history; his remarks concerning travellers' diaries, particularly sea diaries, prompt the present essay. Carter's suggestion is that contrary to what we might expect the diary of a land or sea journey is not so much a record of the country or ocean through which the traveller passes as a reflection of "the peculiar circumstances in which they [the travellers] wrote" (140): diary writing is dependent on moments of stasis, moments when the traveller can actually put pen to paper. Instead of a record of travelling, the travel diary gives us a record of stopping places and, less obviously, a description of "the conditions in which writing itself was possible" (140).

Such a suggestion usefully explains why journals flourished on board ship, the reason being simply that a ship provides good conditions for keeping a diary; ships are, according to Carter, "houses on the move" (141). Yet, while the advantage of sea travel over land travel is that it provides better conditions for keeping a diary, the monotony of life at sea and the lack of worthwhile events to record force the diarist to concentrate, paradoxically, not on any empirical event or geographical feature, but upon the experience of travelling itself: "nowhere was that experience brought home to them more clearly than in an environment devoid of external distractions" (141). Thus, "when a sea passenger undertook to keep a journal, it was the absence of incident as much as anything else that forced his hand" (142). The diary which records the conditions on board ship is, in short, primarily self-referential in character.

We can extrapolate from Carter's remarks two linked yet distinct types of self-referential diary entry. The first is that entry which records the lack of events to record, a type particularly common in the sea diary; I offer as example two extracts from the sea diary of Richard Watt,² who emigrated from England to Australia in 1864:

Friday, May 27. Monotonous in the extreme. Besides suffering again from calm we have had no occurrence of importance. (251) Saturday, June 18. Uninteresting day. Winds still in the same quarter — south-east. (320)

The monotony and routine of life on board ship preclude reference to remarkable incidents and show us, in Carter's words, "that, even in the absence of such stimuli, it is possible to speak and write; that, in fact, the true dialogue the writer conducts is not with external reality, but with language itself" (142-43). In other words, the diarist is exploring "the resources of meaning implicit in the mere repetition of conventional phrases" (143). In recording nothing, the diary is referring less to an event than to "a spatial occasion, a moment on the journey when the journey became an object of consciousness" (143). The spatial occasion is dependent upon language and syntax rather than upon external events, and the diary entry is self-referential by virtue of recording the lack of matter to record.

The other kind of diary entry that Carter considers self-referential is that which refers to the material conditions in which the diary is written. Again, I quote as example two entries from the diary of Richard Watt:

9 p.m. The vessel is at this moment rolling frightfully, making it next to impossible to write; utensils falling about quite alarmingly. (254)

Now as I write the ship rolls frightfully, upsetting everything movable and creating destructive havoc all about. Twice has my lamp been pitched off the table and Mr Smith has just informed me that our berth is in the greatest disorder from the fact of my box having changed its position so that it now rests in the middle of the floor on the deck. (323)

Such entries are again spatial in character, and the space they bring into being is not a natural or objective space through which the traveller passes but the space in which writing itself can take place, the space necessary for its own recording. Or, in this case, that space under threat. The focus of the spatial occasion here is placed on the way in which language brings space fully into being at the present moment, "as I write."

Carter's book is subtitled An Essay in Spatial History; in his thesis as a whole the idea of spatial history is used to highlight the deficiencies of an imperial history, which talks primarily in terms of temporal progress and legitimates events retrospectively in terms of cause and effect. Specifically, Carter is keen to counter not only the notion that "Australia was always simply a stage where history occurred" (xiv), but also its consequence, that, "in reality, historical individuals are actors, fulfilling a higher destiny" (xvii). We can see, therefore, the importance for Carter of the notion of selfreference in the diary since it focuses on "the intentional world of historical individuals, the world of active, spatial choices" (xvi; Carter's emphasis), which is ignored by imperial history. Selfreference, as Carter defines it, releases spatial history by countering both the hindsight and the linear movement which underpin the concept of destiny, emphasizing instead the way language enables subjects to inhabit space at a particular moment. Spatial history evokes "the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence" (xxii); it traces the bounding of a cultural space in a present moment, and, as such, "begins and ends in language" (xxiii).

To recapitulate, Carter uses the notion of self-reference to examine cultural space. The diary is self-referential in that the diarist employs language to construct both the space and the occasion in which to write. This act is *intentional*, to use Carter's term, because it marks an active, though not necessarily a conscious, choice by a historical individual; the diary is an active transformation of space in time which, reflecting the motives and viewpoint of the subject, brings that space into consciousness.

It seems to me, however, that the notion that the diary ultimately refers to the condition that makes writing a diary possible, its self-referentiality, can equally be used to examine the writing self. If the diary transforms space in time, it might also have a similarly intentional effect on the diarist. Following Emile Benveniste, it is

now widely accepted that use of the first-person pronoun relates to two selves, the present subject which writes (the subject of the énonciation) and the subject which is written about (the subject of the énoncé) (218). In autobiography, this division is commonly represented as the present self writing about the past self. In the diary, because of its so-called non-retrospective form of narration and its emphasis on the time of narration, this scheme has been amended. Here the argument is that the telescoping of the autobiographical past into the writing present has the effect of similarly telescoping the two selves into one subject position. As Jonathan Rée puts it in his discussion of Descartes:

In a pure diary like the *Meditations* there is no scope for the autobiographer's wisdom-after-the-event: there is no distinction between the present "I" and the past "I," for the dominant time of a diarist's thoughts is discursive, not historic: it is the fugitive present of their own inscription. (19)

I am unsure how far Rée himself accepts this, but it has clear implications for Descartes' "cogito ergo sum." The "pure diary" here is a commentary on thoughts and events as they occur, and the writing self is held to be present unto its thinking self. It is a small step from this mode of narration to a stream-of-consciousness technique in which the whole notion that the commentary is being written is dropped; we move, in short, to what Lorna Martens has termed the fictive "quasi-diary," a periodic form of narration characterized by a combination of present-tense forms both appropriate and inappropriate to the diary (136-37).

Such a scheme, moving from autobiography through the diary to the interior monologue of the quasi-diary, is more complex than I have represented it, as any reader of Genette will know (216-23). My point, however, is that it is erroneous to assume that the diary is a mode of narration that can somehow make whole that split between protagonist and narrator to be found in the first-person autobiography, can somehow make the diarist more self-present than the autobiographer. Consider another instance of the type of diary entry held by Carter to be self-referential, again from the diary of Richard Watt: "I write under the greatest difficulty on account of the Ro-o-lling" (409). Here the graphetic representation of the present motion of the ship ("Ro-o-lling") is self-

referential in Carter's sense as it refers to the condition in which the diary is being written; the diary here makes clear its condition as a written narrative. What is also apparent, however, is the selfconsciousness of the entry, the represented self being at once the subject tossed around by the sea and the narrating subject aware of himself as reporter. The graphic onomatopoeia of the "Ro-o-lling" attests, I would suggest, to Richard Watt's embarrassment, an embarrassment caused precisely by a split between sensory experience and its recording. That is to say, Watt represents his sensory experience to another self. Ostensibly, the private diary is written for the diarist's eyes alone, but all forms of narration presuppose an addressee, a figure to whom the work is addressed. And since one cannot not imply an addressee, it is beside the point here whether or not Watt intended his work to be read by others. The important point is that Watt suddenly finds himself narrating to a reader, hence the self-consciousness of the narration, and the air of play-acting which derives from his uncertainty. It is the same self-consciousness that Trevor Field notices in the formula "Dear Diary": "'Dear Diary' is a form of mock address by means of which embarrassment is recognised and overcome" (129). Moreover, it is arguable, I think, that one of the main motives for keeping a diary of travelling comes from the novelty of being transported into an alien environment. It seems possible, therefore, that the decision to keep a travel diary entails not only the projection of the diarist as protagonist into an alien geographical environment but the projection of the diarist as narrator into an equally unsettling and potentially embarrassing narrating environment. Indeed, beyond embarrassment lies the uncertainty of subjectivity itself. There is a double self-consciousness in the travel diary, which means that while, according to Carter, the diary is self-referential by its linguistic bounding of a spatial occasion, it is also self-referential by making the narrator an object of consciousness. The diary brings into being not only the space necessary for its own recording but the necessary narrator: it is a narrative occasion as much as a spatial occasion.

The embarrassment the diarist may feel at finding his or her subjectivity becoming split through the act of writing can be mitigated by a number of strategies. Louis A. Renza considers the problem in terms of autobiography and asks this question: "how can he [the autobiographer] keep using the first-person pronoun, his sense of self-reference, without its becoming in the course of writing something other than strictly his own self-referential sign — a de facto third-person pronoun?" (278-79). According to Renza, there are three strategies the autobiographer can adopt to overcome the division inherent in the self-referential pronoun "I": "One can try to suppress the consciousness of pastness; or one can 'confess' it openly to oneself; or one can even extol it and emphasize the narcissism proposed by the autobiographical act" (279). Renza goes on to suggest a typology of three modes which correspond to these autobiographical strategies: the memoir, the confessional, and the narcissistic code. In the memoir mode, the autobiographer presents himself or herself in public, intersubjective terms; in the confessional mode, the autobiographer confesses that the self presented is different from the "real" self; and in the narcissistic mode, the autobiographer extols the split and emphasizes the autonomy of the present, writing self.

Renza's premise is that the writer is already conscious of himor herself as the narrator, the problem for the autobiographer being that the past self written about is no longer congruent with the present self. My own feeling is that in the case of the diary the reverse is true: that because the diarist is recording events close to their occurrence, the incongruity is less obvious. In the case of Richard Watt, therefore, and possibly in the majority of travel diaries, the memoir mode is the dominant strategy because it relies less than the confessional or narcissistic modes on the foregrounding of a narrating self: the narrator is effaced by the presentation of an active public self. This intersubjective or public dimension can be gauged from the following extract from Watt's diary:

Our berth is one that has neither port nor skylight hence it is very dark and while the warm weather lasted was as close as the "Black Hole of Calcutta"....

Our neighbours on the left ("Billy" Lynch Bolingbroke and V. Bunbury)... are two jolly Irishmen (gentlemen of good family and education) and we must consider ourselves very fortunate in having such capital company for our immediate associates; more hospitable fellows there are not on board. (412-13)

The diarist is using language here, as Renza puts it, "to declassify information about his life" (10), to mitigate the division between himself as a private (classified) writing subject and himself as a public figure. In the case above, this mitigation occurs through the use of the collective pronoun "our," and through the use of a public rhetoric, both acknowledged (as in the quotation "Black Hole of Calcutta") and unacknowledged ("capital company," "hospitable fellows"). Throughout the diary, events are legitimated by such social coordinates as religious observance, the playing of games, and the relationship between the "Second Cabin" passengers and the other social groups. Watt has a particularly strong notion of his public self: he makes little reference to any private autobiographical details, and the events on board ship are all presented to an implied addressee who shares Watt's social reference points.

Moreover, Watt's public persona is also reinforced through its representation in a matrix of more public texts, and the shipboard diary is only one of many narratives: on the appearance of any homewardbound ship, the passengers rush to write letters to be carried back to England; the communal diary the passengers keep, the ship's newspaper "Etches and Sketches," not only is circulated amongst the passengers themselves, but also is professionally printed and bound on arrival in Australia. All these documents reinforce the social reality of the voyage and the voyagers.

In contrast, it is precisely at those moments, when the social order and the dependent public self is threatened, that the narrator comes into being:

At the time I write the ship is rolling amusingly with the heavy swell, sending pots, pans and passengers from side to side in chaotic confusion. (166)

Movable articles of all descriptions are at this moment performing peculiar antics on all sides. (167)

I hear (as I write) that the purser has been ordered by the "skipper" to his bunk for attempting on the poop to trip up (whilst dancing) one of the petitioners — Phillips. (321)

It is difficult to realise at this moment that as I write with the wild elements raging and holding a grand carnival with lightning flash-

ing and adding grandeur to the scene that [sic] it is midday at home in the beautiful English August. (15; emphases mine)

Although to control the threat to his public self Watt attempts various strategies, ranging from humorous understatement ("rolling amusingly") through hyperbole ("a grand carnival") to the invocation of the captain's powers or an ordered English August, it is notable that precisely at these moments of "chaotic confusion" the diary entry becomes a self-referential narrative occasion, with the first-person pronoun referring to the narrator — "as I write" — rather than to the protagonist. We can see once again, therefore, that at moments of self-reference, when the predominant memoir mode is suspended, when the diary, that is, refers primarily to its conditions of production rather than to any social event, the "intentional" effect is to bring into focus the otherwise effaced narrator. Indeed, it could be argued that the function of this focusing is precisely to control and displace threats to the social. Yet, paradoxically, the division inherent in the self-referential pronoun "I" becomes most apparent to the diarist in those entries that seem to collapse the time-lapse between the writing and what is written about. Writing the words "as I write" does not so much increase self-presence as reduce self to a repeatable mark on the page. It is a signature with all its Derridean ontological uncertainties.

So far, I have been concerned to look at those self-referential entries in the traveller's diary that constitute, according to Carter, a "spatial occasion" and that bring into being the space necessary for the diary's own recording. My own argument has been that the self-referential diary entry also constitutes an analogous "narrative occasion" that brings into being the narrator necessary for the diary's recording. Moreover, a diary might attempt to efface the narrator by placing the diarist's actions in a public framework, but when such a framework is threatened the diarist would seem, if we can generalize from Watt's diary, to focus on the figure of the writing self for a mark of self-presence and a means by which the threat can be displaced and controlled. What the diarist, of course, finds is that the narrator is, like the spatial occasion, purely specular, purely graphological. The narrator exists as an outcome of narration.

I turn now from considering the individual diary entries to the travel diary as the narrative of a journey. In the same way as the diarist uses public or cultural codes to mitigate the split between narrating self and narrated self, he or she can also fall back on an analogy between a geographical journey and a spiritual journey: the traveller can view the journey as destined towards a place in which narrator and actor as reconciled in a visionary self-presence. Renza himself points out, with regard to autobiography, that "the teleological pattern — the convention of treating one's life as a story - encourages the writer to use socioreligious quotients of success or failure in viewing his life as having a beginning, middle, and end" (281). The journey offers a similar teleological pattern and its movement towards an end also encourages events to be seen as a journey towards success or failure. This point is made by Jonathan Rée who emphasizes the split perspective of the journeystory:

The art of the journey-story is inescapably visual and perspectival: it depends on getting the reader to see the journey both from the point of view of the traveller, and from the point of view of the gods or the birds, who can see the path beyond the traveller's horizon. (67)

In a classical epic, such as the Odyssey, the gods have a vantage point inaccessible to Ulysses. Ulysses follows the prescribed path and returns home to be restored to his former self. By contrast, in Judaeo-Christian journey-stories, such as Dante's Divine Comedy and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, the hero is educated and transformed by his trials, and rewarded at the end of his journey both by enlightenment and by a vision of the city of light. The success of such journey-stories depends, according to Rée, precisely on the dual perspective, for the reader is invited by the retrospective narrator to concur with the god's-eye map of the journey, while at the same time competing with the traveller who is making the journey and who cannot see beyond the horizon. The journeystory, Rée suggests, is like a spiritual boardgame: we can argue, therefore, that the success of the traveller/pilgrim/player is gauged by his or her success in arriving at a vantage point where the two perspectives converge, halt the journey, and win the game. The traveller and the autobiographical narrator occupy the same space:

the winner is, in my terms, rewarded with a visionary self-presence.

The autobiography and the retrospective journey-story, however, differ from the diary because in the diary there is no god'seye view, no stable and independent vantage point from which to narrate and assess the journey. Certainly, as K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius has shown, the diary can overcome a tendency to plotlessness by "latching on to well-known story lines, especially travel and historical events" (172). The diarist places individual events in a larger context, one of many strategies which entail "a 'deprivatization' of the diary, a jump from the privacy of experience into the public realm of speaking and telling" (172). As in the case of the memoir mode of narration, the narrator attempts to mitigate the split between the narrator and the narrated subject by privileging an intersubjective or public frame of reference. Yet, the problem for the diarist is that, while the framework of a journey may provide a teleological narrative structure, the diarist, unlike the autobiographer, cannot see beyond the horizon. Unless the diarist succumbs to the temptation to rewrite the diary retrospectively there are many such instances — the map signifies not the course the traveller will take but only the intention to travel.

One way out of this impasse is for the diarist to try to attain a succession of temporary vantage points which correspond to the instances of narration. The diary is retrospective as regards each section narrated. Yet, as I have argued above, the quest for a unified selfhood, in which the pronoun "I" is at one and the same time both a private and a public self, is continually being deferred. Any attempt to collapse the time-lapse between what is narrated and the point of narration results in a self-referentiality which exacerbates the split, the narrator becoming aware of himself or herself as merely a specular effect of the text. The spatial occasion is also a narrative occasion.

A second strategy would be for the diarist to project an endpoint into the future, a point from which the diary, had it been a memoir, might have been written. Thus, the journey itself becomes a quest for self-presence. Here, we return to Carter's notion of intentionality:

The essential journeying recorded by both the traveller and the letter writer at home was *intentional* in character. The motive of

the writer was always, in some sense, to project himself where his writing was addressed.... His "here" implied a "there" towards which he trended. His "here" was a place for writing; his "there" a place to write about. (143)

This means that the journey's end was not simply a pre-existent and self-sufficient geographical location but a space created through language during the journey, a space in which the diarist has made an emotional investment. Thus we find Watt noting in the middle of his diary, "once past the Cape we shall then have before us a very definite object — our destination, Australia, straight ahead, to which all our thoughts must necessarily be directed" (409-10). With no more landfalls between South America and Australia, Watt strains to peer over the horizon. At the end of his diary he concludes: "This then is my arrival in Australia, a country that has occupied my imagination for many months" (92).

Watt's first sight of Australia, however, is not propitious. The excitement of his first view of the mainland — "Sighted land early in the morning. Australia at last!" (83-4) — is followed shortly by "On getting nearer land, I must confess that I was more disappointed by its monotonous outline, regularity of shape in the hills, and especially the unvarying colour of the vegetation, than I could well have expected to be" (84). Carter argues that in such descriptions "monotony was not an objective fact: it was a function of the intention to travel and to settle down" (247); a land-scape was called monotonous because "it did not share the traveller's sense of direction," or because it was unnamed. It is significant, therefore, that the only land feature Watt records that day is Moreton Island lighthouse, "rising like a factory chimney" (84), a feature which not only gives direction but can be named and described in familiar terms.

However, next morning Watt comes on deck to find that the hills themselves are now more accommodating: "I was never more astonished in my life at the singular sight of the country. . . . Everywhere the land itself seemed like so many gigantic molehills" (85). And, similarly, in the afternoon he realizes that on closer inspection the Glasshouse Mountains "form the most prominent objects, and are very singular in appearance, and very appropriately named"

(85). The coastline here becomes "singular" rather than monotonous because it emerges as a cultural space; it becomes a recognizable space brought into being by such words as "molehill" and "glasshouse." For Carter, "framed and isolated, such features are brought close, made homely, domestic" (31). Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "It was the act of language that brought a living space into being and rendered it habitable, a place that could be communicated, a place where communication could occur" (143-44).

At the end of his diary, Watt appears to have finally arrived at a point at which the "there" towards which he tended coincides with the "here" as a place for writing. Watt's quest finishes and his diary looks back on Brisbane:

On recrossing the river by the ferry I was much struck with the romantic appearance of everything on the banks, the city with all its glittering lights was reflected in the water, and the moon, being just at the full, brought out all the light and shadow of the hills dotted up the country, the curious immovable wavy white clouds encircling the heavens, made in effect the most perfect picture of the kind I ever beheld. This then is my arrival in Australia, a country that has occupied my imagination for many months. (92)

Like Pilgrim in Bunyan's journey-story, Watt has arrived at the shining Celestial City, "the city with all its glittering lights." And yet, this static endpoint to the journey, "the most perfect picture of the kind I ever beheld," is no less intentional than the Australia that has occupied his mind for so many months, and that we saw him constructing in his diary as he sailed along the coastline. The "curious immovable wavy white clouds" belong to Richard Watt, the voyager who has just spent over three months at sea and who is once again on a boat looking towards the horizon. The light of the moon and the light of the city both act as a symbol of home and homecoming (Carter 261). As a picture, the whole depends on the perspective of a specific viewer, a picturesque bounding of space by the hills in the background and by the river in the foreground, a viewpoint which, according to Carter, is characteristic of the settler: "It is only the settler, looking reflectively back towards his cottage, and beyond it to the nestling horizon, who finds the backdrop of hills attractive: to the traveller they are merely an obstacle" (246). Watt here writes Australia according to the cultural viewpoint of a prospective English settler rather than describing a place that existed prior to his journey.

Clearly, then, the arrival at one's destination does not reward the diarist with self-presence. To view the city Watt stands outside it, both physically and culturally; even now, the "there" of the city still depends upon the "here" of the viewer. Indeed, to a certain extent, Watt is already constructing a kind of imperial history, adopting "history's celestial viewpoint" (Carter xx) and presenting Brisbane as a kind of stage, complete with footlights, background lights, and cloud-like curtains. Watt is mythologizing the landscape in terms of his own journey and of a higher destiny. In addition, as an ending to the diary, the account depends on the diarist's already having crossed back into the city and having written the description, a narrative occasion not represented in the diary. The narrator is effaced, elsewhere, leaving his travelling companion, like Pilgrim's, outside the Celestial City looking in. Watt's arrival in Australia, therefore, though it marks the end of his geographical journey, does not result in a fused perspective, a visionary self-presence in which the writer and the traveller become one and the same, despite the promise contained in the paradigm of a quest-story. Watt can look back on his journey as destined towards a self-sufficient and static vantage point, yet the destination evoked at the end of the travelling is testament only to his desire for self-presence. That such a desire might have motivated the journey in the first place is, of course, another story.

In examining the self-referentiality of the phrase "as I write," and in considering how the diary narrative might become a self-fulfilling quest, one must guard against one's own desire for transcendence; to the extent that I have generalized from my reading of Watt's travel diary in the light of Carter's remarks, it might seem that my argument applies equally to other travellers' diaries. Yet, it would be quite wrong to understate the cultural specificity of Paul Carter's notion of spatial history, and to reduce it to an essentialist or generic necessity which can be applied to any text at any time and place. It remains questionable, for example, to what degree women share the concern for a public self that I have argued is evident in Watt's diary. Sara Mills usefully argues that women's travel writing differs from men's in that the discourse of femininity

allows women to take a less impersonal or authoritarian stance to what they describe. And Annette Kolodny, dealing exclusively with the language of New World exploration, suggests that there are differences in the way men and women use language to inhabit space, women seeing the unexplored less as a virgin paradise needing to be possessed and more as an extension of the home needing cultivation: "we need to identify the distinctive metaphorical complexes exploited by each sex for naming and, thereby, knowing the landscape" (200). In addition, in terms of class differences. Regenia Gagnier has proposed that the teleological structure of "the classic realist autobiography" clashes with the life experience of working-class writers who have no access to the ideological paradigms of a middle-class literary form: "The bourgeois climax-andresolution/action-and-interaction model presupposes an active and reactive world not always accessible to working-class writers, who often felt themselves passive victims of economic determinism" (45).

It is important, therefore, to bear in mind the cultural relativity of the discourses available to any particular writer at any particular time. Certainly, in a comparative discussion of Richard Watt's diary we would want to consider the class specificity of Watt's public persona and the ease with which other writers might adopt one; what is the diarist's investment in a fixed social order? We would also want to know whether women employ the paradigm of the spiritual journey-story in the way I suggested it was being employed by Richard Watt: is the Celestial City the object of a specifically male desire? And how, we might ask, is the spatial experience of travelling affected by childbirth at sea, of which Watt's diary notes as many as five by midpoint in the voyage?

Yet, my main aim, apart from drawing attention to the importance of Paul Carter's work and to the complexities of Richard Watt's diary, has been to draw out some of the implications of the travel diary as diary: the difference between memoir and diary, and the specific narrative features of the diary, its self-referentiality and its non-retrospective narration. Without forgetting the broad cultural situation of the travel writer, there is still much to be learned, it seems to me, by paying close attention to the particular

textual form being used, about exactly how travellers wrote and still write of the experience of travelling.

NOTES

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- ² I am grateful to the BBC and to Mrs. Joan Leach for providing me with the publication details of Watt's diary; unhappily, since publication, the original manuscript seems to have been lost.
- ³ I am indebted to Dr. Mills for generously supplying me with a draft copy of her paper, "'Going Native?': Resisting Voices to Orientalism."

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