

Jackson, Michael. 2013. *The Other Shore: Essays on Writers and Writing*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 205pp. Pb.: £19.95. ISBN: 9780520275263.

In writing *The Other Shore*, Jackson engages the complex world of writing and writers. He is, of course, a highly accomplished author, both inside and outside of anthropology. In a way, he is studying his own kind, but approaches it as we expect he would: both personally and anthropologically.

The book is fascinating throughout, with Jackson's personal stories highlighting the aspects of the writing that he is exploring in that chapter. His exploration of why writers write is provocative and engaging: 'the need to belong to lifeworlds wider than their own, to feel that they can act on the world rather than merely suffer its actions upon them...' (p. xi). Each point has an added gravity in that it is sourced from his personal experience as a writer and not simply from studying writers.

Jackson sets out on his exploration with a clear argument in mind. He states, 'My argument is that writing is like any other technology of self-expression and social communication' (p. xi). While this is no doubt true of his exploration, writing has a strong hold on Jackson. Such a hold can be seen in how he describes writing: 'In the act of writing, as in spirit possession, sexual ecstasy, or spiritual bliss, we are momentarily out of our minds' (p. 3).

Connecting writing with almost transcendental experiences furthers the somewhat other-worldly vision he holds for the art. In discussing an abandoned idea for a book, Jackson says that he learned 'what it means to be possessed by another, by the shadow side of oneself, and how one might understand the connection between the characters that take over a writer's life and the personae he or she might take on' (p. 18).

At times, Jackson relays the conflict he and those around him felt in his dual-world identity: writer and anthropologist. He speaks of some colleagues telling him he needed to decide between being a writer and being an anthropologist. It is interesting and compelling to see a sort of existential struggle between worlds that need not be separate. That perhaps is the fundamental strength of anthropology as a field: it facilitates entering so many other fields. In fact, Jackson notes this about ethnography, describing it as his entry method into different worlds, realms that fuelled his anthropological and non-anthropological writing. Jackson speaks several times of concepts of identity, which raises a question in the readers mind when considering ethnography. As we study, are we one person, perhaps characterised as an academic, but morph into another person, a writer, when we attempt to set to words our experiences? Is not such a dual personality almost required to do justice to the story in which the anthropologist has participated?

There are great insights to be gained from Jackson's book. One that resonated with this reviewer was a rather small but significant sentence. Jackson, in discussing a talk he gave at a workshop, says, 'I wanted to demonstrate that detail determines good writing, not bright ideas. Ideas will come to light, but only if one first yields to the ethnographic particulars' (p. 128). This is simple, yet impactful. Too often, writing, academic and non-academic alike, falls victim to advancing the next idea, something that gains notice and citations. That said, details speak truth and build both a reputation and a concept

of trust in the author. With this as a foundation, the bright ideas that result are fact-based, and more durable than those ideas that are leapt to instead of built.

Jackson's book is an accessible, poignant exploration of what it means to be a student of the human condition. The book, like its author, bridges worlds, uniting anthropology and writing to form the basis for examining identities and our engagement with other worlds, real and imagined. This book could easily find a place in an English class, yet also be perfectly at home in an anthropology course. Really, it would be at home any place where people wonder how and why they write and what this means to the world around them.

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