
Navigating *Mama Day* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as Islanded Narratives of Community

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Abstract

My proposal for this panel proceeds from a book-length project exploring Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*. I pair these texts as narrative companions within the genre identified by Sandra Zagarell as "Narratives of Community." Both novels link multiple matrilineal generations, traverse cultural and ethnic divisions, foster community, and immerse the reader as privileged participant. For this presentation, I focus my discussion on *Mama Day* and draw parallels to *Pointed Firs*. I discuss how being water-bound establishes liminal borders, develops a unique narrative cartography, and fosters secrets (that are revealed through paratextual documents). I explore how by crossing the bridge to the island, one engages in the slippery act of cultural and linguistic translation, where meaning making is localized, immersive, multimodal, and unique to the island. In both these texts, the islands become characters. To live harmoniously in Willow Springs or Dunnet Landing, characters must listen to indigenous island wisdom, participate in island customs, and accept the authority of local island experience. For it is here in these liminal places where inhabitants are free to explore their identities unfettered by mainland hegemony, yet are connected like spokes to cultures nearby and abroad.

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