A major sociological view of romance associates it with social structures that privilege the strategic solidarity of the husband-wife dyad. In stories of spouse-selection told by young men from the Murik Lakes in Papua New Guinea, representations of agency are organized by a Homeric chronotope in which actors are motivated by events and obstacles rather than inner desire. Although Murik culture has been subjected to important transformations in the twentieth century, its sociology and associated concept of the person have not given way to modern subjectivity. Among young men, the relationship of culture to modernity has not resulted in a psychological construction of spouse-selection. Attraction is not defined by romantic love but is rather set amid events that are fixed in the foregrounds of specific times and exact locations. (Modernity, romance, masculinity, chronotopes, Bakhtin, Papua New Guinea, Sepik River, Murik)

One theme in the anthropology of young men in postcolonial Papua New Guinea has been moral rupture, the moral rupture in the historical moment in which they have come of age and which they have aggravated. A segment of these youth has been repeatedly portrayed as violent, irresponsible rascals, defiant, dreadlocked, gun-toting, criminals. Caught as they have been between a weak state and a withered, atrophied locality, it is hardly surprising that they have been unwilling to take up legitimate (defined in local terms) adulthood. Educated for nothing, yet compelled by the allure of modernity outside the village, male youth have been cast adrift. As a dramatic and violent presence on the postcolonial scene, it also is not surprising that such youth have drawn anthropological attention (Dinnen 2000, 2001; Dinnen and Ley 2000; Goddard 1992, 1995; Harris 1988; Kulick 1993; Roscoe 1999; Sykes 2000; see Butt, this issue). Other kinds of young men, of course, exist. Their voices are less morally spectacular, but they are no less engaged than the rascals in asserting themselves in dialogue with both local culture and modernity (see Jourdan 1995, Herdt and Leavitt 1998, Wilde 2004). As the concern here is with the poetics of courtship narratives told by young men, this paper focuses on a different moral disposition than that which has been attributed to rascals.

I (Lipset 2004) previously argued that romantic discourse was viewed as consisting of, among other qualities, an idealized desire to merge with a beloved; but in courtship stories told by young men from the Murik Lakes in Papua New Guinea...
Guinea, this discourse was largely absent. Taking an analytical clue from sociological theory of romance, according to which romantic love has been seen as functionally tied to the relative import of the husband-wife dyad to society (Goode 1951), I made the case that, despite 100 years or so of state-based disembedding of various local-level institutions—e.g., the ending of male cult initiation, warfare, outrigger canoe construction, shamanism—by Christian missionization, education, and capitalism, in some ways the social organization of Murik culture has remained unchanged. The extended family has remained tied to important resources vested in sibling/descent groups and these groups have remained embedded in a concept of personhood based in the symbolics of generalized reciprocity; e.g., the gift. In this value system and form of solidarity, the self is presumed to be part of, rather than separate from, the other. Its persistence is of a piece with a nonromantic construction of courtship and marriage, at least from the standpoint of the young men whose stories I interpreted in the earlier article.

Those narrators did not practice, or talk about, courtship in romantic terms, although they did choose their own spouses independently of parental authority. Instead, they preferred to discuss this experience in terms of the surfaces of their masculine identities; that is, in terms of their travels, challenges to male honor, and the social obstacles they had to overcome in order to marry. They did so, in part, because the atrophy of ritual masculinity had combined with the atrophy of the state, capitalism, and so forth, to privilege courtship and marriage as an important arena in their young lives as emergent adult men. In the narratives offered here, there is less valorization of masculine agency, but still little talk about the merger of the self with a beloved.

Not content with a negative characterization of courtship discourse as nonromantic, I (Lipset 2004) also introduced a methodology for the analysis of the poetics of courtship discourse in the previous paper. If in romantically informed courtship discourse, the self seeks to enter into some Utopian sort of relationship with the other, then it must do so socially, temporally, and spatially. The Bakhtinian (1981) notion of chronotope, by directing analytical attention upon the relationship of space, time, and person in narratives, is therefore exegetically useful. I then distinguished between two ideal type chronotopes of romance in courtship narratives: the modern and the Homeric.

In the modern chronotope, the self is figured as merged together with an etherealized beloved. During the merger, quotidian time becomes obliterated and intimate spaces become privileged. The self may become instantly transformed, somewhat along the lines of a charismatic conversion (Lindholm 1995). The settings of the world then become subjectively opposed to the broad
expanses of everyday life, and are reduced to microcosms in which self and beloved are understood to speak in their true, authentic voices.

In the Homeric chronotope, the self is not changed. I liken the portrayal of person, time, and space in this kind of narrative to Auerbach’s (1957) rendering of Odysseus in Homer. In the chronotope of Homeric romance, the person is presented in clearly circumscribed, wholly realistic and perceptible, yet temporally static, terms. Events occur in the foreground, and they are uninterrupted in their interconnections. Character does not change. Psychological development does not take place. The self is not subject to the passage of time. Homer casts Odysseus abroad, as Auerbach observes, into a geography that receives more elaborate attention than the subjectivity of the hero.

Analytically, the Homeric and the romantic chronotopes of courtship narrative are meant to oppose each other. In practice they may be rather more problematic. They may co-occur within an individual’s story, life-history and, surely within a single culture, perhaps according to other criteria, of which gender and religious conviction come to mind. Their use, in addition, may also be affected by context of elicitation. So, they can become blurred and cross over. I certainly do not mean to imply that the one may have evolved from the other. My argument nevertheless is that in Murik, young men tend to tell courtship stories in terms of the Homeric chronotope, despite a century of pressure from state-based forms of modernity.

DESIRE, COURTSHIP, AND MARRIAGE IN MURIK SOCIETY

In early twentieth-century Murik marriage, the expression of male sentiment was objectified through several flawed strategies. Society was divided into ceremonial groups led by their senior siblings. The ceremonial groups possessed ornamental insignia which were associated with incest taboos, albeit continuously ignored. Parents or elders might try to arrange a marriage for the purposes of obeying these taboos, expanding ceremonial or regional exchange networks, or fulfilling sister-exchange reciprocities, very loosely defined. Sexual activity during adolescence was freely, permissively, actively, and wholeheartedly pursued by boys and girls, who were not in the least repressed by culturally constructed inhibitions. For men, sexual desire of women was viewed as uncontrollable. For women, sexual allure was seen as very powerful. The young sought to seduce one another, often if not always defying parental wishes; the outcomes of such generational conflict would inevitably favor youth over age. A couple would simply begin to have sexual intercourse, and upon eating together before one set of parents next morning, would thus declare themselves as married. No exchange of bridewealth marked the union. There was no uniform rule of
post-marital residence. An elaborate set of avoidance and joking relations were begun with affines to whom the ongoing fulfillment of brideservice and groom-service obligations was then expected.

First marriages were brittle. Youthful marriages amounted to little more than a series of trial relationships. They were usually subjected to the pressures of extramarital affairs. Divorce simply involved moving home. A steady hum of gossip and violent outbursts preoccupied youth, which might lead to fistfights between coeval rivals that occasionally escalated into community-wide brawling and/or sorcery accusations (see Lipset 1997). Father Schmidt, the residential Catholic missionary, kept a diary between 1918 and 1920 about the intrigues of youth. One young man in whom he took an interest had evidently married two girls. His first wife left him for someone in another village; this led to a melee during which the cuckolded youth was badly injured.

After eight days, he was already running off with another girl D (while still married to C) to another village. Then he returned and had two wives again. Once, he also inflicted a big head wound on C and was frequently separated from her. And so, he was switching between C and D. Then C died and D left him [because] he had also beaten her. Now he is single again, alone in the world. A short time ago, he was here. I was supposed to help him to get D back. (D is Catholic, he isn’t). He had not married any of them in church; I threw him out. (Schmidt 1926:48)

Father Schmidt clearly disliked Murik marriage and favored the sacramental form of marriage that he was then proselytizing. His emphasis on courtship’s fissile ethos and domestic violence omits attention to the moral idioms through which courtship took place. A youth, for example, might offer a gift to a girl as a gesture of his attraction to her, or do something to honor her parents by way of requesting permission to marry their daughter. Also missing from Schmidt’s account is any reference to the magico-religious basis of seduction. From the perspective of men, attraction of the other was enchanted by the agency of love magic (numaruk mwari). Thus the episode in the myth of the spirit-man, Kumbun, which Schmidt also collected (Schmidt 1933:20–24), features its power rather than personal qualities of the suitor.

The Spirit-Man, Kumbun, Helps Taimor Marry

After discovering that Kumbun has taken a second wife in another village, Kumbun’s first wife decided to leave him. She bespelled Kumbun to arouse his concern for their little son. Kumbun then became worried that his son would need a father, and arranged that his first wife remarry. There was a bachelor called Taimor then visiting the village to which his wife had run away (Watam). But she rejected Taimor and fled inland.

Kumbun then went to Taimor and asked him: “Do you have a wife already?”
He said, “No.”
Kumbun asked, “What are you doing?”
Taimor said, "Always, as soon as I want to marry, the woman doesn't want to."

Kumbun went into the bush and got all the things (herbs, etc.) to make women well disposed/amenable [to a man], and showed [e.g., taught Taimor how to use] them ... Kumbun took a flying fox bone and blew it. ... Thereafter, a big storm ... arose and Taimor and the son of Kumbun were instantly [magically] transported home. The next morning, Taimor watched closely and a girl came to get water and then went back into her house. Taimor immediately went down, took two grasses [which he bespelled] and laid them on the step of the girl's house. As she came down again to get water, she stepped on the blades of grass and fell down. She got up, went to the sea and fetched the water. When she came back, she was constantly thinking about Taimor. "Where can he be, I didn't see him yesterday nor today." Then, she called Kanis [Taimor's sister] and she asked her, "Where is Taimor?"

Kanis answered, "He is in the men's house, sleeping. He is a little ill." Kanis left and called to Taimor.

He answered, "Why are you calling me?"
She said, "A girl asked me to call you."
He said, "I can't come; I'm sick."

Kanis then went back and told her that Taimor was sick. The girl said, "Go to him again and say that he should come to me right away." She did so, but Taimor did not want to. During the night, the girl herself went to Taimor in his sleeping bag. They slept together till the next morning. On the next morning, all the people knew: Taimor married the girl. (Schmidt 1933:19-22)

The excerpt clearly illustrates several apt points: the brittleness of marriage, the independent will of Murik women, the role of magic in courtship, the Murik definition of marriage as nothing more than public knowledge of lovemaking, and the Homeric chronotope in a narrative. Taimor is cast as a helpless man. Kumbun intervenes on behalf of the ineffective lover by casting spells rather than teaching him etiquette or some other type of social skill. The spells create a sort of compulsive frame of mind in the girl, the unnamed object of Taimor's desire. Interestingly, although it creates unmistakably romantic feelings in her, these sentiments are not represented in specific detail; e.g., what about Taimor, other than his presence, is she idealizing? Presumably, all that is meant here is to reflect the efficacy of male love magic upon women. By contrast, what do we learn of Taimor's subjectivity? First, he selects the girl, seemingly by virtue of seeing her doing chores (at least, this is what we know from the narrative). Then, upon bespelling her successfully, he becomes ill and retreats to the darkness of his mosquito basket. The construction of space and time in the story is detailed and concrete, rather than condensed. Taimor and Kumbun's son visit Watam village and are then magically transported home. A night passes. The girl leaves her house, is bespelled, goes to the sea, and returns home. Taimor retreats to a specific spot in the Male Cult hall. The girl goes there. As Auerbach writes, the "basic impulse" of the Homeric style is "to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations" (Auerbach 1957:4).
Marriage and desire were also subjected to another kind of externalized form in Murik culture. In Male Cult exchange, husbands were rewarded for secretly allowing their wives to seduce their cult partners in the sanctum. In return, they received sacred invulnerabilities; rights and status in the secret society (Lipset 1997). If public knowledge of intercourse was equated with marriage, then these sexual exchanges did not quite qualify as marriages. But they did of course affect marriage, since husbands had to send their wives into the Male Cult hall to give themselves to their partners. These relationships were meant to be a training in the control of jealousies, stoicism, and control. The Homeric heroes of the Male Cult were thus removed from an emotionally troubled and turbulent world. Heterosexual exchanges in the Cult expired during the 1970s after many years of condemnation by the Catholic and the Seventh-day Adventist missions. But apart from the atrophy of this aspect of Murik marriage, the pre-colonial construction of the marriage process seems to have persisted in contemporary practice and meaning.

The adolescent sexual freedom, the privilege of independent choice, the loosely defined notion of sister-exchange, the gesture of gift-giving, the efficacy of love-magic in courtship, the equation of intercourse with marriage, are all of a piece with pre-colonial practices. In other words, courtship and marriage have altered little. Young men and women go on possessing the same sort of choice and go on expressing those choices in the same sort of idioms and imagery that they did earlier in the twentieth century. And the narratives in which they talk about it reflect this situation. They do not presume a self that is bounded under the control of the individual. They do not presume a self that is owned, like property (Strathern 1988). So they are not cast within a chronotope of romance, in which the self yearns to compress space and time into a utopian merger with the beloved.

A METHODOLOGICAL ASIDE

Two methodological issues may concern the reader: (1) the normative context to which the concept of personhood delineated in these stories pertains; namely, the expression and narration of emotion by Murik men; and (2) the context of their elicitation, which might be likened to that of a life-history interview, since narrators answer a question about events that shaped their identities (Linde 1993, Behar 1993, Peacock and Holland 1993).

Generally, Murik men do not express emotion freely or informally (see Bateson 1956:153–55). The range of male emotion includes unselfconscious displays of grief during mourning rites; outbursts of anger in public or during physical conflict, or when drunk; mischievous pleasure amid various kinds of
play with joking partners; and in playful or compassionate attention to very young children. Narrative discourse in which emotion is expressed is conspicuous in song lyrics, the most important contemporary genre of which is called Woyon, "The Songs of the Mangroves" (cf. Harrison 1986). Lyrics of these songs express grief and nostalgia for deceased kin and sometimes lonely longing for kin, age-mates, and lovers who have been away for extended periods, or with whom failures or ruptures have taken place. The songs are said to be composed in the lakes where their authors find the privacy in which they give free rein to their emotions. They are then performed before groups of men, or of men and women, during all-night end-of-mourning celebrations or during informal entertainments. Apart from displays of rage, the ethos of Murik men (if one can still talk this way) is such to dispose them to express sentiment in culturally formal rather than individuated spontaneous settings.

Turning to the issue of elicitation raised above, it is true that life history accounts may be jointly co-created by the storyteller and the listener in an interlocutory mode. It is also true that the dialogics of this social background may be of consequence. "In this sense, even the most silent of listeners is an author of an emergent narrative" (Ochs and Capps 1996:21; see also Bakhtin 1981). In this instance, however, there are two different contexts of elicitation to take into account in order to assess the extent to which narrators might have distorted their stories to conform to circumstances, e.g., to me, the audience, or to other purposes. I was not involved in the first one, but was in the second.

I did not collect the first story presented below. While working on the companion piece to this article (Lipset 2004), I recalled its presence in Sana: The Autobiography of Michael Somare (1975). A Murik native son and the first prime minister of the postcolonial state, Somare wrote the book in the run-up to the independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975, presumably for an elite audience of general readers, both European and local. Broadly, it was meant to show its hero to be a man acting in two moral worlds, with a strong loyalty for village relationships and customs as well as for Catholicism and the modern, democratic polity. The excerpt included here is drawn from the first part of the autobiography, which is largely oriented toward the relationship of Sir Michael to Murik culture.

I did elicit the latter pair of stories in 2001 while researching romance narratives told by Murik youth. The narrators were both young men with whom I have fictive kin relations since 1981, when I was first adopted into their respective families. Of this pair, the first narrator, Tom, regards me as a brother-in-law; the latter man, Ryan, takes me for a father's younger brother or a father. Both men know me well, seem relatively at ease in my presence, and know that their confidences are well protected from village gossip. They view me as a
white man who is interested in the customary and modern lifeways in the community of Darapap. The two interviews were done in a combination of Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin and Murik that I have come to speak. They were conducted in a private one-to-one context. I turned on a tape-recorder and initiated the inter-view by asking each to tell me how he came to marry his wife. I did not, for the most part, follow up this orienting question. It therefore is possible that had I asked a different sort of question—such as, “What initially attracted you to the woman you married?”—I might have been told a different kind of story in which my informants afforded emotion as a more central motivation. But, from elbow knowledge about young Murik men, I did not think that the latter phrasing would be an appropriate way to put the question.

Perhaps I was right because the answers poured out with little or no prompting. Therefore, I do not believe that any of the three stories that follow suffers from bias or distortion arising from their elicitation. However, although they do strike me as candid and authentic perceptions of courtship and attraction, I do not view the following stories as a transparent reflection of the narrators’ sentiments. They do not correspond in any simple or exhaustive way to experience. Whatever their relationship to experience, I can vouch that they are the stories Murik young men told me at a particular time, in a particular place. But the way they were told, as I shall argue, depicts a notion of personhood. That is to say, the way the narrator situated himself in time and space in his story took a discursive concept of self for granted. Narrative and identity were thus a congested intersection of meaning at which cultural convention and modern currents simultaneously met through a voice which was at that instant made up of an encounter between the storyteller and his audience, me, the anthropologist. Culture, history, fieldwork, and personhood momentarily fused in the composition of the story (Peacock and Holland 1993). The narrative produced, or co-produced, did not mirror the totality of reality, but it did reflect a fragmentary or partial version of it.

In the earlier paper (Lipset 2004), the stories were tinged with a concern to defend male honor. I suggested then that other inflections might exist. The following three narratives represent young men who were less concerned with their masculinity than they were with succeeding in the marriage process. I have arranged them, more or less, historically.

"I was immediately fascinated..."

The first story is set in 1965, at the beginning of the end of the colonial era, when Papua and New Guinea was still a territory of Australia. It was lifted from the autobiography of Sir Michael Somare (1975), who was then a politically
active young man of 29, and beginning to take the lead in the slow buildup to independence. At the time, he had finished high school and had applied to Administrative College. He was then working as a reporter and newsreader on the local radio station in Wewak, the administrative capitol of the Sepik District, and had evidently gotten into trouble with the station managers for allegedly using the airwaves for anti-colonial purposes. Local officials had given him 24 hours to get out of Wewak and return to headquarters in Port Moresby, the territorial capitol, (Fleetwood 1984:63) when he met Veronica, the woman he would marry.

I courted her in the village fashion. I remember the very first time I saw her. I was immediately fascinated and said to my cousin, “Who is that girl?” And she said, “Oh no, don’t. She is a relative of some sort.” I had no idea who she was, but I thought, “I will have to go and ask the father. I really want this girl.” A few days later I met her in the market in Wewak. I went straight up to her and said, “Why don’t you accompany me to my flat?” We went to my flat, and I introduced her to my friends. She said, “My father will be angry with you.” And I replied, “That’s all right, I will go and speak to him.”

I had taken her to my place in the morning and by the afternoon her father was ringing the police. He also rang Radio Wewak because he had already heard that she had been seen with me. I answered him on the phone. “Yes, she is in my flat. I shall bring her home when I finish my work.”

I took her back at about six o’clock that afternoon. We sat down—Veronica and I sitting together. Her father sat opposite. I said, “I have brought your daughter. I want her” (“Mi laik holim han bilong pikinini bilong yu”). He knew who I was. “Well, it’s up to you two. If that’s what you both want, then what you have to do is to come together.” ... From then on, we walked around together in public. I paid her father no bride price. In Murik, we don’t have that custom ... (Somare 1975:44-45)

If a “crush” is, as the attachment theorists construe it (Bowlby 1953), the desire to recapture the warmth and comfort of the earlier love of a mother, then one wonders if the self is more vulnerable to falling in love at first sight when in stress. On the verge, as he then was, of being expelled from his home town for political insurgency, I speculate that young Sir Michael was exposed to love because of the anxiety of the moment. Whatever the motivation, upon first seeing Veronica, Sir Michael was instantly attracted to her. He conveys nothing about what caught his eye, however, except that he does not know the woman’s identity. Love, particularly when felt at first sight, is and must be an act of creative imagination. Singer (1984a, 1984b, 1987) has distinguished between two kinds of romantic imagination. The self appraises the beloved as an idealized means to satisfy needs or attain a higher plane of being, or else the self may “supplement ... the human search for value with a capacity for bestowing it gratuitously” (Singer 1984:14). That is, the self creates the perfection it attributes to the beloved.
In the Homeric chronotope organizing Sir Michael’s narrative, however, the self is largely expressed in terms of movements through space and in time rather than in terms of an elaborate subjectivity. Neither appraisal nor bestowal is voiced, although presumably, since he “had no idea who she was” and the two had not yet spoken a word to each other, but nevertheless he “really want[ed]” her, he must have made use of the latter imaginary device. The spectre of the incest taboo, raised by an unnamed kinswoman, constitutes but a momentary obstacle. Somare ignores her and it. Instead, his thoughts turn ever firmly to a collective definition of his beloved. He wants to pursue his desire by seeking permission from Veronica’s father to court her. There is no disruption in the narrative sequence. A short time—“a few days”—elapses; he introduces himself for the first time to Veronica in the town market. He invites her to visit him in his apartment. She accepts. The dialogue is simple and direct. Unlike his sentiments, the passage of time is precisely kept. Movement in space is precisely described. “I took her back about six o’clock that afternoon. We sat down—Veronica and I sitting together. Her father sat opposite.” The father, who was then employed as a nurse at Boram Hospital, is anticipated to be upset, is indeed upset, but is easily mollified—all without any kind of hitch, dilemma, or difficulty for the couple. Sir Michael is careful to be a deferential suitor and therefore avers that although he paid no bridewealth, he was not evading the obligation, at least from a Murik cultural perspective. Of course, he fails to mention that Veronica was not a Murik woman but came from Kis village, where bridewealth might have been expected. The Homeric chronotope of romance constructs personhood in time and space in clearly circumscribed terms, which are wholly realistic and perceptible.

“We were going around together . . .”

The second story, which took place about 30 years later in 1993, is no less informed by this self-same chronotope. Tom, the narrator, was about 25 years of age, a grade-10 school leaver and a longtime member of the SDA church. Both his parents were villagers. The woman he married, Glendess, was also a church-goer, and both of her parents were villagers as well. I interviewed him in Wewak town, where he was living in one of the Murik squatters’ camps while his children were going to school.

Tom: We were going around together as friends. Her parents objected to me and to the prospect of our marriage. I never knew why. Maybe they wanted to protect her and the possibility of her going to school some more. I don’t know. I went off to visit my elder brother, Anton, who was working as a policeman in Kainantu. I had been away about nine months. I stayed with a brother of his wife for another couple of months. Finally, he saved a little money for [me to take]
the bus back to Madang. I knew nobody in Madang and was going to have to sleep on the street. But, I ran into a wantok [tribesman] who put me up and bought me a ticket on a boat back to Wewak. I returned to the village and resumed my friendship with Glendess. After she got pregnant [in 1990], her parents gave up their objections to me.

DL: Had she wanted to marry you?
Tom: Oh, yes. She did.

As narrative, the elements of the story move along briskly from moment to moment. They are fixed in time and space. They are conjoined without interruption. As discourse, the desire of the couple for each other is reduced to the expression that they two were “going around together as friends.” In other words, they were having sexual intercourse but had not undertaken to live together. They had not done so because of the disapprovals of Glendess’s parents. Instead of defending his desire against them, Tom left the village. What of uncertainty? Tom admits to not knowing why they were rejecting him. Rather than objecting to the marriage on customary grounds (e.g., that they shared descent insignia), he can only speculate that they were trying to protect Glendess’s access to education, the modern valuable. But he reveals nothing about his own motives—most likely being frustration and anger at their disfavor—for leaving. Through kin relations and chance encounters with tribesmen, and the impersonal outside world of employment, quantified time and money is easily bridged. In Madang, he only suffers through a brief moment of anonymity. However, Tom’s travels leave no trace upon his feelings for Glendess, feelings to which he instantly returns upon coming back to the familiar, if intrigue-ridden, moral landscape of the village. He then cites the metaphor of reproductive success, Glendess’s pregnancy, to vindicate the ensuing marriage in the parents’ eyes, rather than the mutual desires of the couple to make it.

Tom’s affection for Glendess is certainly represented directly and unambiguously. But how is this subjectivity voiced? Tom relates it in its perceptible and palpable consequences. It causes him not to begin but to already be involved in a relationship with the girl. As his story opens, the couple was already “going around as friends.” It apparently causes him to flee the village. It also causes him to renew his relationship with Glendess despite her parents’ objections. But expressly, there is only the simplest of reports about the subjectivity of his desire in his narrative. In the Homeric chronotope, “never is there a form left fragmentary or half-illuminated, never a lacuna, never a gap, never a glimpse of unplumbed depths” (Auerbach 1957:4). The self is closely identified with the wider locales in which groups play out the politics of social process. There is no imaginative fancy, no narrative either of intimacy or the contrary demands of entangled hearts. Neither, for that matter, is the willingness of Glendess to marry him subject to question.
“She isn’t my girlfriend.”

The third narrative also took place during the mid-1990s. It is included to confirm that the Homeric chronotope organizing Tom’s story was not exceptional. Ryan, its narrator, was then a young man about 25 years old. He had been raised in Darapap, a Murik village, by parents who were villagers. He had completed the eighth grade, and had worked several jobs in various cities in the country. In the 1980s, he was not attending the Seventh-day Adventist church in which he had been raised, but he evidently returned to the fold by the 1990s. I interviewed him in Darapap village. As his story opens, Ryan was living in Wewak, now the capital of the East Sepik Province. Vanimo, a city located about 200 miles along the coast to the west of Wewak, and Big Murik, another Murik village, also figure in the geography to which he refers in the story.

[Anna] was from Vanimo. She came to . . . Wewak and was adopted there by a Big Murik family. Her father had gone to Vanimo to work as a policeman. He was from Big Murik and had married a Vanimo woman.

I went with a friend to take him to school on Kairiru at St. Xavier’s. While I was gone, Anna came to my sister’s house at Kreer where I was staying. She had been watching me, when I went to the market.

Annette, my elder sister, told me that she had come to see me. I said, “She isn’t my girlfriend. I will send her home.”

Annette said, “No, you can’t. She has come to stay. You can’t send her back.”

Julie, her elder sister, got angry at me for sending for her younger sister. I said, “No. This girl has come to stay here because of her own desire [to do so].” But anyway, I told Anna to get her things together and go home.

Annette, my elder sister, told her to go with her younger sister but to leave her things. She left in the morning and came back in the afternoon on the same day. So we stayed together.

Her family in Vanimo sent for Mathew, her big brother. He took Airlink and went to Aitape and got a car and went to Paup, nearby.

He sent word to us to come see him, via his younger brother, Jacob. Jacob met us with the message at Kreer. We went to see Mathew [who had returned to Wewak]. He told us that he gave us . . . a green light. I married her then.”

In the Homeric chronotope of romance, the self is rendered as passing through a concise, definite geography, traveling unambiguously without elaborate attention to internal subjectivity, ambivalences, moral dilemmas, and the like. Anna travels from Vanimo to Wewak where she joins a specific family because her father had traveled to Vanimo to work for the state and had married there. The hero travels to Kairiru Island offshore of Wewak town to escort a friend to the Catholic high school located there. The elder brother of the girl travels to Wewak and the narrator names the airline. The narrator claims to have had no prior knowledge of the existence of Anna before she appeared at the house of his elder sister. Nevertheless, he accedes to her insistence and marries
her. Neither self nor other is set against or is isolated from kin relationships. The
girl is supported by the narrator’s elder sister. Ryan is attacked by the girl’s elder
sister. There is a moment of conflict, not between the lovers and collective
authority, but between the suitor and Anna’s elder sister, who assumes that he
has been trying to seduce her, which Ryan denies. The confusion is quickly
resolved. Ryan marries Anna, after receiving permission to do so from her elder
brother. The narrator casts that permission in terms of a modern metaphor: he is
an automobile waiting at an intersection who receives a “green light.” Again,
there is no appraisal of or bestowal of attributes upon her in the story. There is
no idealization of the beloved. There is no fusion of or transformation in identity.
There is no portrayal of sentiment that is removed from or opposed to the social.
There is no elevation of the marriage relationship over all others. Instead, the
narrator represents the course of his courtship as contingent upon deference to
the authority of her senior kin. This theme recurs in the following coda to Ryan’s
story.

Mathew returned to Vanimo. He sent us a letter with K200 to come to see Anna’s mother in
Vanimo. We got a ship and went then. Next day, in the morning, we got to Vanimo, which we
had [visited] . . . before. . . . We quickly met one of her Big Murik brothers, Pascal. We asked,
“Where does Mathew live? We want to go see him.” Everyone in Mathew’s house was sleeping.
Mathew got up and was surprised to see us so soon after he sent the money. He got a company
car and brought us to pick up our cargo. We then went to visit her mother. She didn’t have a
proper house. We stayed for a year and helped her build a house. We finished the house. A
message reached us from [Darapap, a Murik] village about the death of [my mother’s brother]
Joel Gobare.

We returned to Wewak by air. A man from Big Murik had also died. We got a lift there with
a copra boat [on its way there]. We returned to [Darapap] village and stayed there.

The spatial and temporal movement of the hero and his bride up and down
the coast is represented in detail and without disruption. Connections between
people are made seamlessly. The narrator is content to portray himself as moral,
dutifully building his wife’s mother a new house. A year goes by; the death of
a kinsman presents another obligation to be fulfilled. The couple returns to live
patrilocally in Darapap. Courtship and marriage have neither removed them from
nor returned them to a relational world of collectively registered identities in
which the self is cast as part of the other. Despite practices to the contrary—in
their use of currency, or their travels by car, ship, and airplane—they had never
left it.
MALE YOUTH, MARRIAGE, AND HISTORY

Having presented and interpreted four courtship narratives drawn, in turn, from the pre-colonial era, the end of the colonial era, and from the current post-colonial period, it remains, in conclusion, to assess the following two issues, the one exegetical, the other explanatory. The first is to identify differences and continuities in the chronotopes informing and organizing the stories in this paper and the previous one (Lipset 2004). Then, it remains for me to connect these in terms of, or in relationship to, the transformations that have overtaken Murik society during the twentieth century.

There is a strong affinity in the chronotopic structure of the stories; their heroes appear unambiguously in a foreground of space and time. They deal very minimally with inner turmoil, with subjectivities that consist of contradictory emotion, insecurity, indecision, or uncertainty, about their beloveds. In this regard, one difference does emerge clearly, a difference between the construction of agency in the story of Taimor, the bootless hero of the pre-colonial narrative, and the heroes of the more contemporary ones. Taimor marries, having been endowed by Kumbun with the power of love magic, while the young Michael Somare, Tom, and Ryan apparently select their mates, or at least decide to marry, via “secular” attraction, the details of which nonetheless remain unvoiced. Taimor sees a girl fetching water. Sir Somare is instantly “fascinated” by the sight of a girl and pursues her. Tom begins his story already involved and mentions nothing at all about her qualities. Last, Ryan accedes to the initiative of a girl who wants to marry him yet spares us an account of his heart’s reasons for so doing. Lest some suspect either sample or analytical bias, I cite a relevant passage from the conclusion of Jenkins and Alpers’s (1996) report, “Urbanization, Youth, and Sexuality”:

For most young people, sexual encounters predate the emergence of deep feelings for one another. Romance, in the Western sense, does not figure prominently in the discourse of either male or female informants. ... Young men ... have no vocabulary of love, no way to talk about ... feelings except in terms of sexual pleasure ... (Jenkins and Alpers 1996:249)

The difference between the narratives presented in Lipset (2004) and the ones appearing here is the presence of a concern to defend masculine honor in the first set which is absent in this second group. To account for this difference, which may be more apparent than real, I can only speculate that none of the three narrators in the first set were Christians, while those of the second group were members of the two churches, Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist, that have missionized the villages where they were raised. Having been raised outside the orbit of the Male Cult, and within that of the cross-sex church, one may suppose
that they possess a somewhat different concept of masculine identity, one that is less vulnerable to perceived slights, disparagement, and the like. This issue, however, exceeds the empirical reach of my data.

Pacific societies are no longer autonomous, self-sustaining sites of cultural production. They are connected to and integrated in new, globalized fields in which identity may become more individuated, on the one hand, while citizenship may become more diffused, on the other (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Fabian 1978; Hannerz 1987, 1992; Small 1997; Ong 1999, 2003). Narrative, as I concede, is not transparently equivalent either to experience or subjectivity. But these stories allow me to reasonably understand something about the relationship of their Homeric structure, so persistent as it seems to be, to the history of Murik culture in the past hundred years or so. A second question therefore arises. Why does the chronotope of romance in young Murik men’s courtship narratives appear to be so enclaved from or impervious to the influence of modern individualism?

Analytical clues may be gleaned from the study of romantic love in the social sciences. Psychoanalysts have viewed romance as an exceptional, utterly key, yet ambivalent institution in modern Euro-American society. By arguing, on the one hand, that romance restores and recreates the lost love of a pre-oedipal mother, yet on the other hand, that it is an imperfect form of sexual sublimation, romance is seen as a frustrating basis of moral order, agency, and culture itself. Freud took a bittersweet position about love (Freud 1960, 1961). Functional sociologists have also viewed it ambivalently, seeing it as both the result of as well as a solution to anomie, to excessive individualism, the collapse of moral community, and so forth. Thus Lindholm (1995:57) has concluded that romantic love is “a cultural expression of a deep existential longing for an escape from the prison of the self.” Giddens (1992) argued that romantic love not only reflects the isolation of the modern self, but it further separates the individual from society. It promoted the rise of a discrete subjectivity in the West. It contributed to the creation of a new form of self-narrative. “The telling of a story is one of the meanings of ‘romance,’ but this story now became individualized, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes” (Giddens 1992:39–40). Goody (1998) rejected Giddens’s claim, arguing that romance did not create a new form of introspection but arose from and is present in all literate cultures, and not just in Euro-American society (see also Besnier 1995).

Ethnographers of romance, meanwhile, have also rejected the view that romance is exceptional to the West. They have encountered elements of romance in many different kinds of society throughout the colonial and postcolonial world (Malinowski 1987, Wolf 1972, Bell 1995, de Munck 1998, Plotnicov 1995).
They have also studied the relationship of romance to modernity outside the West, focusing on how romance, transmitted by the missionaries and the popular media, may become a tactic in inter-generational politics, asserted by youth, resisted by age (e.g., Burbank 1995), or else found in cross-gender politics, asserted by women and resisted by the patriarchy (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1990, Maggi 2001). It seems that there are three directions this dialogue has taken. One has seen romantic love as in an ambivalent or contradictory relationship to Western individualism. A second has related romantic love to literacy. And the third has related it to colonial and a postcolonial influence that then becomes tactically useful in generational and gender conflict at the local level.

To respond to each of these in reverse: the first point is that in Murik before the arrival of the state, marriage was organized on an optative rather than a prescriptive basis. Its relationship to local level authority was elaborated in the fulfillment of bride- and groomservice obligations to affines rather than within the lineage. Therefore, romantic love (which has been promoted as progressive and modern by the mass media as well as by missionary Christianity of all denominations) has not entered into the dialogics of generational conflict advanced by youth seeking to free themselves from the authority of a gerontocracy. In the context of marriage, Murik youth were not shackled by a tradition either of arranged matches or of having to rely on elders to provide them with bridewealth.^2

The second point is that while Western education made its first entry into the lives of many Murik men and women in the early years of the twentieth century—and one often sees letters written today, and addressed to different categories of recipients, lovers, trading partners, and kin dispersed throughout the region and country—Murik is not a literate society in Goody’s (1998) sense of cultures with traditions of writing that go back a thousand years or more, such as China (see also Ahearn 2001). I also doubt that literacy per se may give rise to romantic sentiment (see Besnier 1995). It is relevant, in connection to the latter doubt, to point out that the narrators of each of the three tales cited in this paper were relatively well educated and their writing skills far exceeded the general level of literacy achieved in Murik society. The absence of romantic chronotope in their stories lends some confirmation to the view that the relationship of literacy to this sentiment is questionable.

The third, and from a cultural perspective most important, point is that Murik society remains embedded in noncapitalist social relations, kin-based collectivities, and generalized reciprocities. Despite the atrophy of several institutions, filial and sibling relations, rather than the husband-wife dyad or the individual, continues to be the basis of economic production and social reproduction among the Murik (Hsu 1972). In the stories presented, the other is not fundamentally
differentiated from the self. Rather, narrators construe or presume that the other is part of the self, and not isolated from or foreign to it. In this sense, these men were not raised in, or today perceive, an anomic, highly individuated, lonely environment. They do not need to experience the "compulsive authority" of love (MacFarlane 1986) to force them to choose to marry. The boundaries of the self do not need to be obliterated by a kind of charismatic conversion (Lindholm 1995). It is not the case for them that "only the beloved can . . . bring about what . . . human limitations deny, a total blending of two beings, a continuity between two discontinuous creatures" (Bataille 1962:15, 20) As they told it, the process of courtship and marriage (whose goal essentially is to create a kin-like relationship with the other) is neither a profound challenge to the integrity of their identities nor a solution to their yearnings. In the Homeric chronotopes that inform these stories, both prior to and after the arrival of the state, they essentially become involved with women without qualities. In the tales, love neither appraises nor bestows. Instead, the imaginative creativity demanded by courtship concerns how to present themselves as possessing qualities appropriate to a groom, not to the intended but to her kin. If the moral of romantic love narratives is that of "personal freedom and respect for the individual" (Collins and Gregor 1995:91), then those told by young Murik men come to another conclusion: even where and when individuals are permitted to choose their own objects of desire, love need not be seen as exclusionary in the course of its dialogue with both custom and modernity. Instead, the form of its expression may remain, as in this case, shaped by a Homeric chronotope in which identity is more externalized than subjective and asserts an unproblematic agency to create relationships—to court and marry—in a way that appears oddly indifferent to the restless, open-ended chaos of present day Papua New Guinea.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally prepared for a session, Youth in the Pacific, at the 2004 meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, organized by Christine Jourdan and Jean Mitchell. Its title, of course, was inspired by Musil's novel.
2. On a related note, I have never heard the voices advancing modernity condemn as backward, primitive, or pagan the fulfillment of bride- or groomservice obligations to affines.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


