

**"NEW" EXOTICISMS. CHANGING PATTERNS
IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS**

Isabel Santaolalla (ed.)

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(by Mónica Calvo Pascual. University of Zaragoza)

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This volume of the series "Postmodern Studies" is an interesting compilation of eighteen papers that focus on different ways in which "exoticism" and Otherness have been used, abused, and analyzed. These papers were selected from among the many lectures delivered at the international conference " 'New' Exoticisms in Literature, Film and Other Media in English" organized at the University of Zaragoza by the editor, Isabel Santaolalla, in 1996.

The chapters of the book are divided into three groups: Part I gathers a variety of critical and theoretical perspectives on the issue of "the exotic" that serve as an introduction to the analyses of more specific texts in Part II —devoted to film— and Part III —to literature.

Part I opens with Kateryna Olijnyk Longley's discussion of the question of the exotic ethnic authenticity of creative writers who claim first-hand, insider knowledge of the colonization or oppression of their own peoples, taking as her starting point a comparison between her interpretation of exoticism as contrasted with Edward Said's notion of Orientalism.

Ron Shapiro debates in the second paper of the book the "fine political line" (p. 41) that exists between the exoticizing and the suppression of the Other. Moreover, Shapiro exposes what he understands to be the shortcomings of current postcolonial theories and fiction. For a start, he questions the identification of exoticism with Orientalism, and then criticizes the failure of postcolonial criticism

to recognize and value the literary, creative and imaginative quality of both colonial and postcolonial writings, reducing the former to an extension of oppressive governmental strategies, and the latter to vindictive political statement.

Ovidi Carbonell's article, "Exoticism in Translation: Writing, Representation, and the Postcolonial Context", mainly focuses on the defamiliarizing process and misrepresentation that "exotic texts" and identities undergo when translated or relocated in the West.

Else R. P. Vieira's "Ex-otic-isms on Location: Re-situating the Offshore" explores the shift from the *visual* —the "tropical exuberance and sexuality [...] foregrounded in Brazil as the stereotype of the exotic" (p. 65)— towards the *aural*, the influence of the oral tradition and linguistic violence adopted by immigrant Caribbean and Indian British poets as their means of political and artistic expression.

Satendra Nandan's "The Other Side of Paradise: from Erotica to Exotica to Exile" closes the theoretical background in Part I. Nandan explores, through his analysis of Walter Gill's *Turn North-east at the Tombstone*, the recurrent association of the exotic and the erotic, together with the actual distance between nineteenth-century idealizations of the colonized South Pacific as "paradise" and the factual experience of the indentured (slave) Indians in Fiji.

Graham Huggan's "Exoticism, Ethnicity, and the Multicultural Fallacy" opens Part II with a fruitful approach to two self-consciously exoticist films: Canadian Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* and Australian Stephan Elliott's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. This paper explores the ways in which "multiculturalism" can be commodified given the high market value of "the exotic" in the present day Western world. In fact, *Priscilla* and *Exotica* are presented as two films that, "well aware of their commodity status, [...] play ironically on the marketability of exotic myths" (p. 92) in terms of both ethnic and sexual difference. At the same time, through his study of the official discourses of multiculturalism in both Canada and Australia, Huggan denounces the opacity of their rhetoric and a conspicuously white-dominated, monolithic notion of "ethnic identity".

Bernard McGuirk's "London Black and/or White: *My Beautiful Launderette*" offers a colourful approach to Stephen Frears' 1985 film: through detailed and innovative analysis of three cross-cuttings, McGuirk manages to interpret the film as a disturbing attack upon the binarisms that constitute the foundations of Western thought —and, foremost, conventional, conservative conceptions of London and British society— opening new spaces for "new" hybrid identities and positionalities.

In his paper "Whites are Nothing: Whiteness, Representation and Death", Richard Dyer goes beyond the dominant view of white people as the "non-coloured", the racially unmarked —and thus the norm(al) and *real people*. Dyer unravels how, in

different times, contexts and, more recently, film genres, whiteness has come to be associated with non-existence and/or death.

After exposing the Orientalist character of Hollywood Easterns and their fetishization of the East (and its women) as a "sexual space", "a land of erotic mystery and danger" (p. 157), Peter Evans' "From Maria Montez to Jasmine: Hollywood's Oriental Odalisques" explains how Middle Eastern physiognomies, settings and traditions are nothing but the reflection of Western stereotypes and fantasies. As his point of reference, Evans takes three "exotic" actresses that incarnated Eastern characters in the 1940s and 1950s (Maria Montez, Maureen O'Hara and Yvonne de Carlo), and traces the way in which the figure of the Eastern heroine or princess has evolved since then to a figure such as Jasmine, to take a contemporary example from the post-1960s Women's Movement.

To conclude this section, Isabel Santaolalla's "Three Colours: White, Black, and Italian" goes beyond categories like colour or gender in order to show how not only racial difference but also national identity can be exoticized in a recent Hollywood film such as Spike Lee's 1995 *Jungle Fever*. Indeed, this perception can be taken a step further as it goes beyond the limits of visibility: it is a group of whites that is turned into an Other among the other whites on the basis of their national ancestry. Equally remarkable is the fact that this division between whites and the decontextualized traditions attributed to the minoritized group are the work of a *black* filmmaker.

Juan Antonio Suarez's "Exotica in Cyberspace: The Geographies of Hybridity in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" opens Part III with an analysis of the exotic in the dystopic, cyborg-inhabited future devised in Gibson's 1984 novel.

In the chapter "Intertextuality and Exoticism in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*", Beatriz Penas and José Angel García Landa study the role of narrative voice and of intertextuality and their interconnection with the construction of the subject and the exotic in Rushdie's 1995 novel. As Penas and García Landa show, Rushdie's use of intertextuality plays a fundamental part in the accommodation of a variety of cultural discourses and in the creation of a *postcolonial* approach to exoticism.

In "Facing the Other: Bharati Mukherjee's Healer of the World", Francisco Collado analyzes the ways in which typically postmodernist strategies and trends such as the use of parody, intertextuality, historiographic metafiction, Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, and a self-conscious, inventing narrator combine in Mukherjee's 1993 novel *The Holder of the World* to create a subversive type of exoticism that challenges both patriarchal and Western white domination.

After summarizing the kind of criticism written on the genre of autobiography in the past, Aitor Ibarrola Armendariz argues in his chapter "Hybrid Identities: New Forms of Autobiography in Ethnic American Literature" how those critical strategies are no longer suitable when it comes to studying the autobiographies written by authors who belong to different minority ethnic groups in the Americas. Finally, after noting several attempts to devise a new typology for the autobiographic genre, Ibarrola concludes that the special quality of "ethnic" autobiographies stems mainly from elements which our traditional definitions cannot categorize.

The great variety of texts under analysis in this volume, together with the richness of critical and theoretical perspectives gathered in each particular study, and the prolific use of updated specific bibliography make this compilation of papers highly useful and interesting for any student or scholar involved in the fields of cultural, cinema and literary studies, or in the representation of categories such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

TRANSLATING KALI'S FEAST. THE GODDESS IN INDO-CARIBBEAN RITUAL AND FICTION

Stephanos Stephanides with Karna Singh

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(by Dora Sales Salvador. University Jaume I de Castellón¹)

"It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained."

Salman Rushdie (1982: 17)

Recent developments in the humanities have upset existing disciplinary boundaries and shown the need for their reinterpretation. Interdisciplinarity is constantly showing rich paths and avenues for research. Indeed, a book like this can only emerge and be understood within the context created after and thanks to the "cultural turn" experienced by many disciplines of the humanities in the 1980s. Among many other things, this volume shows that when people travel, they take their culture, worldview, thought and values with them, trying to accommodate that entire emotional luggage in new places. In order to do so, the study carried out by Stephanos Stephanides and Karna Singh explores and fosters attention to the cultural, aesthetic and spiritual aspects and presences of the Goddess Kali in Guyana, in a postcolonial diasporic and cross-cultural milieu. Considering the importance of the channel of translation (linguistic and cultural), Stephanides and Singh enhance the hybridity and multiculturalism of contemporary Guyana. The country became independent in 1966, and one of its main features is its great ethnic diversity: people of Indian or African origin, Amerindian people and white people. English is the official language of this heterogeneous place, though Hindi, Urdu and different Amerindian tongues are also spoken.