

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.

Significantly, *Translating Kali's Feast* is both interdisciplinary and intertextual. It is not only a critical study, but also a creative hybrid text written at a contact zone between ethnography, literary criticism, literature and translation theory. Its intertextuality is favoured by the inclusion of ethnographic accounts (oral transcripts, photos, excerpts of fieldnote journals) and creative pieces (poems written by Stephanides himself). Stephanides and Singh carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Guyana, so that they really attended ritual performances. The sources they used to produce this critical work are indeed varied: literary works of fiction, critical and theoretical bibliography, fieldwork and ethnography, including the gathering of oral testimonies provided by Guyanese informants.

With regard to the convergence between ethnography and literature, it is of interest that the study developed by Stephanides and Singh enters into the realm of *ethnocriticism*, in Arnold Krupat's sense: "*Ethnocriticism* is the name I give to a particular perspective as this is manifested on the level of critical writing" (Krupat 1992: 3). This is, above all, a criticism that insists on its betweenness (Krupat 1992: 28), connecting and interspersing literature, anthropology and history. Stephanides and Singh are indeed very concerned with the fact that, after the ethnographic work they developed, they are now *writing* their translation of Kali's feast. Methodologically, this book combines ethnography with literary criticism, within the theoretical framework of translation studies.

In a very clarifying way, the authors structure their study into four main sections, which take the reader from real life and history, to fiction, ritual performance and translation theory. In section one, "Remembering and Forgetting", the authors set the context of Kali's story. Kali, the Hindu Mother Goddess, the main *Shakti* (female power), is characterized by her dynamism and powerful energy. She is both the symbol of destruction and of creation: the cosmic female principle and creative life-generating power, but also the one who devours all, including time, at the end of specific cycles. Kali, who has been named in many diverse ways, has been worshipped from ancient times on the Indian subcontinent. And after her journey to Guyana, she still remains a figure of strength and vitality.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immigrants from the Indian subcontinent (in fact, indentured labourers, that is, workers transported to different colonies, mainly to the Caribbean, as a source of cheap labour) brought spiritual and cultural traditions of practice and belief to Guyana, which at that time was, like India, still part of the British Empire. In the process of forced migration, in that difficult passage, there were many losses; but also many resistances and abilities to survive and cope with deterritorialization. The popular preservation of Kali worship in the daily lives of Indo-Guyanese Hindus represents a response to this issue. Though in multicultural and multiethnic societies like the Caribbean ones, cultural

survival or change is complex and often unpredictable, Hinduism in Guyana is maintained by "Madrasis" (this is what labourers from South India are called). Far from the Indian subcontinent, Indo-Guyanese Hindus support their cultural memory by means of ritual feasting and storytelling. Evidently, this takes into consideration the creation of new cultural forms and the maintenance of traditional ones.

In section two, "Ritual Desire and Postcolonial Fiction", Stephanides says that Julia Kristeva's notion of poetic language and art as the semiotization of the symbolic was helpful in his reading of ritual as a healing process, and also in his reading and writing on postcolonial literature. He is especially interested in drawing a comparative approach that would examine how the poetics of Kali ritual can be profitable in order to read postcolonial fiction, by considering the relevance and meaning of Mother Goddess in five writers: Wilson Harris, V.S. Naipaul, R.K. Narayan, Sonny Ladoo and Arnold Itwaru. At the same time, English language usage in fiction adds an interesting facet: the idea that for the postcolonial authors the process of writing is also, in more than one sense, a process of translation.

In Stephanides's opinion, Wilson Harris stands out among postcolonial West Indian writers because he really manages to intersperse his novelistic writing with the ritual process. Also, especially in his novel *Jonestown*, translation is a relevant topic. Harris's fiction serves to delve into the question of translation as mediation in the process of recovering, pointing to the complex issue of translatability, that is, the capacity for some kind of meaning to be transferred from one language/culture to another. The Indian author R. K. Narayan and the West Indian V. S. Naipaul are considered from a comparative-contrastive perspective, taking into account their shared though different interest in the need for translation, in the interacting space between cultural text, literary genre and the English language. In this sense, Narayan and Naipaul display two dissimilar approaches to crossing-translating a Western language (English) and genre (novel) with their Indian cultural background. Stephanides posits that Naipaul feels the anxious self-consciousness of a translator required to translate his cultural world into the dominant system. On the contrary, Narayan does not feel that anxiety and seems to welcome the new chances offered by cross-cultural transfer. Narayan accepts in a different way the possibility of appropriating Western genres and the English language, intertwining the traditional and the modern. For him, translation, as most of the contemporary translation theories acknowledge, is a two-way transfer, enriching for both spheres. In that way, Narayan successfully translates Kali into the modern novel, contributing both to the Goddess's survival and to the expansion of the genre's possibilities. Above all, the authors show their appreciation of Narayan's fiction and its ability to translate and enact rituals of mobility. Moreover, Sonny Ladoo and Arnold Itwaru are two Indo-Caribbean

novelists who migrated to Canada. The point here is to show how both writers compose their fiction between the disenchantment of history and the original force of the Mother Goddess, between nostalgia and energy.

Section three, "The Feast and Festivities of Mother Kali", contains detailed descriptions of the ritual performances and festivities of the *Kali Puja*. Here the study is focused on the spectacle of the ritual performance and the ways to apprehend it. This is, by far, the most ethnographical part of the book. It is illustrated by photographs taken from real ritual performances, which also contribute to the rich intertextuality of the work. Stephanides and Singh describe the Big *Puja*, the annual invocation and worship of Mother Kali, which is the most important festive play in her honour, full of ceremonies and songs. This very popular feast, taking place at the time of the full moon, extends over three days and nights that the authors, having participated in many *pujas* over several years, relate (describing and interpreting) accurately, producing a textual reconstruction of the Kali ritual in Guyana. Kali worship is eclectic, being sustained by sacred images, temples, songs, dance-dramas, chants and stories. The feast itself, Mother's *Puja*, is performed in different ways. Being alive, it continues to create new forms and representations as time goes by. Some fieldnote journals excerpts, which help to the translation and representation of the ritual reception, are also included, together with some creative touches, namely some poems written by Stephanides himself. The section ends with a very useful contribution: a Guyana Kali *Puja* lexicon, where the authors gather and explain concepts related to the feast.

Section four, "Translating Culture", is where the theoretical contentions of this heterogeneous study are explained, considering in retrospective the problematics involved in choosing translation strategies. Modern translation studies provide considerable insights into the cultural processes and passages involved in both ritual performance and postcolonial fiction. Stephanides and Singh echo the recent dialogues set up between translation, ethnography and literature, since ethnography has been progressively related to cultural translation and discursive practices. As this book aptly demonstrates, the translator, the ethnographer and the writer of postcolonial fiction are caught between cultures. After the "cultural turn" experienced by translation studies in the 80s,² it is acknowledged that translation is, above all, a process of intercultural transfer. Translation helps to examine the translational process regarding the unequal relationship between dominated and dominant cultural or literary systems. In the particular case of this study, translation is put forward as the means by which the Goddess Kali, in both fictional and real performances, manages to survive in a new system, in a postcolonial multicultural arena such as the Caribbean.³ To make their point, Stephanides and Singh take into consideration the theory of Brazilian cannibalism, one of the most interesting and subversive postcolonial translation theories. This cannibalistic contention challenges

both the traditional hierarchy and the boundaries between source and target. As a brief summary, I would explain that the image of cannibalism expresses the experience of a colonized people who devour what is offered to them by their colonizers (e.g. language, literary genres), without swallowing it whole: they expel what is harmful to them, but what they keep they make wholly theirs by altering and changing it to suit their nutritional needs (e.g. interspersing it with their own cultural worldview, reshaping the colonizer's language and literary genres). Indeed, Stephanides and Singh believe that mutual cannibalism is central to Kali's ritual drama. As they postulate, perhaps the Goddess Kali signals translatability, above all.

As translators of Kali's feast, as ethnographers who attended the performances, Stephanides and Singh assume both their participation in the process of representation and the subjectivity of their mediation. They actually became a part of what was observed, and in this book they offer their translation, their interpretation, their representation, their ethnography, their reception, their own living of the feast.

Reading this book, one can have the feeling that, though it is not possible to go back to a pristine origin, there is no return in that sense; it is indeed possible to maintain, preserve and nurture what is felt as an inseparable part of one's cultural identity. Constant negotiations, reinventions, transformations and translations of form and meaning take place among colluding worlds. Cultural configurations and social practices go hand in hand, and Kali's feast is shown to be a dynamic cultural force, beyond the frontiers of location and language. All in all, Stephanides and Singh show that, after the long journey from India, the tradition of Kali's worship is very much alive in the Caribbean, both in real life (by means of the ritual performances) and in imagination (as it is shown by Indo-Caribbean fiction). At a certain point, after Julia Kristeva, Stephanides and Singh (2000: 49) suggest a parallel between "write" and "rite". This association holds a powerful image that is also cleverly expressed in the following words: "translation (...) is a route, a voyage if you like, through which a writer/translator may seek to reconcile fragments: fragments of texts, of language, of oneself. More than a moment of interpretation, translation is a (w)rite of passage" (Levine, 1992: 85). A (w)rite of passage that, as shown in this book, has indeed been experienced, in diverse ways, by Goddess Kali, by the feast, by Indo-Guyanese Hindus, and by the authors-ethnographers-translators. A (w)rite of passage in which something gets lost, though hopefully something remains, while, at the same time, new creations and practices are born.

Notes

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2. On this "cultural turn", see, among others, Bassnett (1980; 1993; 1998) and Bassnett & Lefevere (eds.) (1990).

3. For those interested in postcolonial translation studies, where literature plays a main role, it would be helpful to read the works collected in Bassnett & Trivedi (eds.) (1999).

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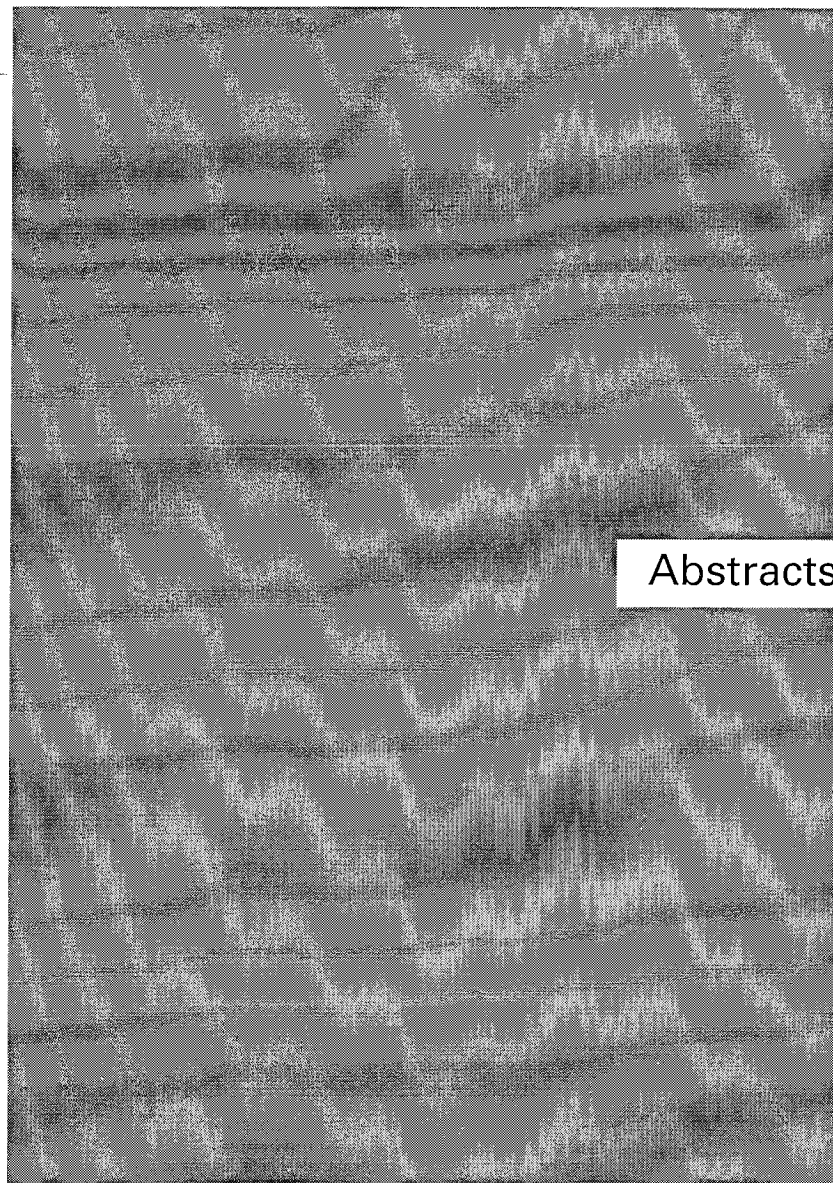
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Abstracts