

INTRODUCTION

The commonwealth of other literatures in English has acquired an international reputation over the last twenty years, the starting-point being probably when Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* won the Booker Prize in 1981. Nowadays, émigré writers of diverse origins who are living not only in the United States, Canada and Great Britain, that is, the most important literary centres for the English language, but also in Australia, New Zealand, the African continent, or the Caribbean, are contributing to a revitalization of literatures in English at the end of the millenium, with their particular styles and heterogeneous approaches. Either living in exile, as immigrants, or simply as second-generation nationals of English-speaking countries, they have been grouped under somewhat inadequate terms such as "transnationals" or "diasporic," being the second one a complex phenomenon that links several million people scattered throughout the globe; although the term "diaspora" is now somehow problematized—due to its etymological association with the exile of the Jews and the religious search for a promised land—it is, however, frequently used for the sake of conciseness and currency.

Indeed, the issue of identity remains one of the most complex since the British Empire proclaimed the independence of new "nations," in accordance with their growing process of decolonization that affected primarily the second half of the twentieth century. This process derived in sometimes arbitrary divisions, among which the most flagrant, as can be seen nowadays, proved to be the split between India and Pakistan, according to dominant religious creeds, Hinduism and Islam, in 1947. Due to impossible geographical limits, the latter also divided into two separate regions, one of which is now Bangla-Desh. A year later, Ceylon (now Sri-Lanka) became independent as well. After a hundred and fifty years of the British Raj there remain economic, political and cultural reverberations and parallelisms between the four countries, of which the linguistic stands as one of the strongest and gives rise to Indo-English literature. Bhagwat Goyal states, in relation to this (something that can be applied to other cases of literatures in English):

Indo-English literature is basically a bi-cultural product. Though it is written by Indians and thus is an ostensible expression of Indian sensibility and its socio-cultural and philosophical milieu, it is written in English, a language that the Indians received as a colonial heritage. Now, a language cannot be considered as totally natural, for it is shaped and nourished by the cultural soil of the place where it is born and bred. And yet, if it is flexible enough, as English certainly is, it can accommodate the experience of diverse people belonging to diverse races and cultures. Therefore, though English is not an Indian language, it occupies a privileged position in India even today, not only because of historical conditions but also because of its resilient flexibility that makes it possible to be a medium of expression of Indian experience and sensibility.¹

Also, the phenomenon Marshall McLuhan called “the global village” implies that contemporary literatures interrelate increasingly, by means of the mass-media information: As said before, Salman Rushdie is the most famous case—born in India from a Muslim family that emigrated to Pakistan, married to an American and a holder of British citizenship. He points out about an “imaginary homeland”:

Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands. Indias of the mind.² (76)

The situation of the emigrant is, thus, both frustrating and enriching, in a fascinating paradox that proves, on occasions, to be very creative in the hand of artists and intellectuals. On the one hand, the recent emigrant loses the power of roots and the knowledge of both the traditional and the imposed rules and language, that is, he/she lives in an unknown territory, with the fascination and vertigo of the discoverer of a new reality; on the other hand, as time passes, both worlds begin to meld, slowly building a new reality which is much richer than that of the monochrome citizen but, at the same time, is less safe and less comfortable. Depending on the level of adjustment and the cultural power of the subject it can result in a very rich and metaphoric literary force, leading to the creation of a hybrid. The possibility of watching and comparing the new with the old, after initial culture shock has passed, becomes the unique privileged condition for the emigrant, and saves her/him from schizophrenia. This is also a fascinating border condition because the eye watches from the ex-centric position so that one can sense reality from the outside, from the first non-implicated, innocent situation of the newcomer, mocked by the experts but, at the same time, mocking their certainty.

Sri-Lankan born, Shyam Selvadurai, in this sense, writes about his biographical fiction only when he has emigrated to Toronto, or so to say, from the physical distance and the critical detachment of his past. This is what the critics call the “literary journey home,” the same metaphor that appears in the novel of the Indo-Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*:

Emigrants/immigrants occupy a borderland country, which provides them with a double vision, often propelling them into the act of writing. The impulse to take the literary journey home *towards* “history,” *towards* “memory,” *towards* “time,” “is

¹ Bhagwat S. GOYAL, “Indo-English,” *Contemporary Indian Literature and Society*, ed. M. Jotwani (New Delhi: Heritage, 1979) 32-49.

² Salman RUSHDIE, “The Indian Writer in England,” *The Eye of the Beholder: Indian Writing in English*, ed. Maggie Butcher (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1983) 75-83.

a result of the migrant's long journey away from home. A case in point is Rohinton Mistry, who confessed he had no intention of becoming a writer until he emigrated to Toronto. (.../...)

The imperative need to journey home arises in part from the nostalgia that the diaspora cannot help but feel for the country left behind. Extensively, the need to be Indian and feel Indian seems to grow in inverse proportion to the distance one travels away from India and Indians. The writing process assuages the homesickness which is so much a part of the exiled psyche³.

On the contrary, in the writers born inside Western society whose literatures deal with Western topics there is what the Nobel prize winner Seamus Heaney has called —to other purposes— “Englands of the Mind,” that is, a need to affirm their own complex and diverse identities to improve the hostile conditions they live in, through the making of a “better” England:

It is in the context of this auditory imagination that I wish to discuss the language of Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin. All of them return to an origin and bring something back, all three live off the hump of the English poetic achievement, all three, here and now, in England, imply a continuity with another England, there and then. All three are hoarders and shorers of what they take to be the real England. All three treat England as a region —or rather treat their region as England— in different and complementary ways. I believe they are afflicted with a sense of history that was once the peculiar affliction of the poets of other nations who were not themselves natives of England but who spoke the English language. The poets of the mother culture, I feel, are now possessed of that defensive love of their territory which was once shared only by these poets whom we might call colonial —Yeats, MacDiarmid, Carlos Williams. They are aware of their Englishness as deposits in the descending storeys of the literary and historical past.⁴ (250-251)

The objectives of our analyses are, then, firstly to establish critical values for stylistic studies in this type of literature, and secondly to uncover the physical and emotional effects of exile and migration in these “transnational” writers. Theoretically speaking, this work can be classified as *Class, Gender and Race Studies*, within Postcolonial criticism. Postcolonialism is considered one of the most enriching areas of study, nowadays; it is influenced by some important poststructuralist thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida and the School of Deconstruction who contribute the notions of “otherness” and “difference,” in the case of Michel Foucault of “power,” alongside the feminism of the French psychoanalytic school of Julia Kristeva. Among the most important precursors are Frantz Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952)

³ Roshan G. SHAHANI, “In Quest of a Habitation and a Name: Immigrant Voices from India,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* (1990).

⁴ Seamus HEANEY, “Englands of the Mind,” *Literature in the Modern World*, ed. Dennis Walder (New York: Oxford UP, Open University, 1990) 250-257.

and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (*The Empire Writes Back*, 1989); however, the foundations of the movement lie undoubtedly in Edward Said's revision of *Orientalism*, (1978), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "centres and margins" and "ethnicity" (*The Post-Colonial Critic*, 1990), and Homi K. Bhabha's sense of "hybridization" and "ambivalence" (*The Location of Culture*, 1994).

Consequently, the analyses presented here are divided into twelve contributions, arranged in alphabetical order and concerning mostly issues of class, gender, race and postcolonialism —as well as intersections and connections between them. The Gender issue is very well represented through articles written by C. Blanco, A. Gomis, and M. Morales. Blanco's and Morales's are comparative studies, the first one is about North American women writers of Asian-Indian origins, Bharati Mukherjee and Amy Tan, and how they deal with cultural clashes and the role of women in society; the other uses two novels written by British writer Angela Carter and Spanish writer Carmen Matín Gaité, and the way they deconstruct (and reconstruct) the fairy tale myth of red riding hood and the male-centered wolf, an archetype of gender rewriting of gender-oriented classic tale stories. Gomis's essay mixes gender and cultural identity in an interesting research about the fashionable topic of purdah and power structures through two novels by Hindu Rama Mehta's novel, *Inside the Haveli* and Muslim Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Connected with those three works is mine, which analyses the rise of Chicano activist groups since the decade of the sixties and how they begin to differ from the reaction of Chicanas themselves, when faced to pyramidal power-situations and intersections of class, gender and race.

Another block is more directly related to cultural clashes, power-oriented theories, and historical evolution. A. Bloch studies the fight in favour and against the issue of multiculturalism in North American universities in the decade of the eighties, especially through the analysis of the figure of political thinker and activist, Sidney Hook. Respectively, J. Cañero explains the presence of legal intimidation through political institutions in the treatment to Chicanos as a minority in the USA —using the narrative of Rudolfo Anaya as an example. The colonial reality leads Chicanos to other postcolonial ethnic groups of diverse origin in their quest for an identity of their own. Finally, C. McLuckie uses Scottish writer W. McIlvanney's novel, *The Big Man*, to illustrate the viability of postcolonial analyses (mainly postcolonial resistance, racial and linguistic imbalances) in old colonial terrain, broadening so the scope of straight postcolonial theory.

Other articles deal with more specific and literary concerns: A. Ibarraran, for instance, lights up the metaphor of the river as a borderline, turned into a dystopian image inside the Chicano communal reality, in Chicana writer Montserrat Fontes's novel *First Confession*. J. Fernández, respectively, uses the intertextual call for Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* inside David Dabydeen's novel, *The Intended*, to illustrate how the Eurocentric cultural imperialism exerted upon the postcolonial individual is transcended and leads, through reaction, to the formation of a so-called hybrid identity. In that same line, M. González explores the construction of a problematic masculinity under class, gender and race issues, leading to the formation of the artistic consciousness and the need for exile in the *bildungsroman* novel

Funny Boy, written by Sri-Lankan Canadian Shyam Selvadurai. And C. Wallhead's article analyses the ancient myth of the Fisher King (and its correlates) in the newest novel by Paule Marshall, precisely titled *The Fisher King*. The rewriting of the myth mixes with transnationalism and uprooting of African American identities, leading to postcolonial race issues.

Finally, M. Dueñas & M. Cerezo contribute with an interesting linguistic paper that applies colonial and postcolonial items to practical English language classes, using the methodology of Content-Based Language Instruction. It is included here (in spite of the distance from the matter proposed) because it shows the richness and growing importance that the field of (post)colonialism is acquiring nowadays, even if it is with a secondary or indirect purpose.

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