

Plurilingual Writers and the Third Language: From Migrant to Nomadic Literature

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Abstract

This inquiry is a case study of 'writing in a third language'. It highlights three elements of identity, abstraction and oblivion as its main features. Among plurilingual writers, there are some 'migrant writers' that move to a third country and write in a third language in order to free themselves from the hybrid state that limits their identity and writing. They deny their dualistic cultural and social identity and write in an abstract language that gets them close to the state of becoming nomads. An illustrative example of this group is the Indian-American writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, who, after gaining success as a writer of migration literature in the United States, moved to Italy and wrote in Italian. Writing in a third language, Lahiri concerns herself no more with cultural and social matters, instead focuses on language as its main theme. Therefore, this essay by referring to the multilingual and multicultural experiences of Jhumpa Lahiri, demonstrates how writing in a third language can free the migrant writer from his/her memories and dualistic identity and gets him/her close to a nomadic identity.

Keywords: Third language, linguistic nomad, post-hybrid identity, abstract writing, oblivion

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1. Introduction

Immigration literature, often written in the language of the host country of its author, is concerned with themes such as cultural conflicts, exile, homelessness and nostalgia. It permits its author to create a hybrid and dualistic cultural, linguistic and social identity. However, several writers find it restrictive and in order to free themselves from the socio-cultural conflicts that define their identity and writing, move to a third country and write in a third language. They try to forget the past and deny their former dual identity and opt for a plural and dynamic one. Oblivion of the past and adoption of a post-hybrid identity gets them close to the state of becoming nomads.

An illustrative example is Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indo-American writer who, after years of writing in English and winning literary awards for her immigration literature on the Indian diaspora in the United States, sought to free herself from the identity of an immigrant writer by moving to Italy and writing in Italian. The results of her writing in Italian are the books, *In other words* (2015) and *Whereabouts* (2018). By writing in a third language, that she had not yet mastered, Lahiri turned her attention to 'language' as the main theme of her writings and created an abstract style that did not carry traces of any socio-cultural background or conflict.

Thus, in this article, adopting a comparative approach, the three elements of 'post-hybrid identity', 'abstract writing' and 'oblivion' are considered as the main features that define nomadic literature and differentiate it from immigration literature. It demonstrates how these features can free the author from a hybrid identity and the conflict between two languages and cultures.

Research Questions

1. What are the major differences between immigration and nomadic literature?
2. How the features of nomadic writing can free its author from the hybrid identity of the immigrant writer?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multilingual Writers

Multilingual writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, Andrei Makine, Samuel Beckett, Oscar Wilde, Amelia Rosselli and Toni Maraini, by expressing themselves in several languages, free their writings from the cultural limitations of a single language (Kellman, 2003: ix).

Steven Kellman, in his books, *The Translingual Imagination* (2000) and *Switching Languages* (2003), provides a comprehensive study of multilingual authors. For Kellman, their writings, like Esperanto, liberate the author from socio-cultural conflicts (Kellman, 2003: ix).

2.2. Immigrant Writers

Immigrant writers, who belong to the category of multilingual writers, always combine the linguistic, cultural and social characteristics of their homeland and those of the host country in their writings and thus create a new dual identity. Immigration literature creates an intercultural space that allows the author to express his/her cultural, linguistic and geographical memories in contact with another language, culture and geography (Seyhan, 2000: 15-15). In fact, immigration literature is a change of identity, an experience between oneself and the other to create a new and ambiguous identity (Blair, 2004: 480).

Although immigration literature is a crossroad of cultures and languages and allows the author to form a new and dual identity, many writers find it restrictive.

2.3. Nomad Writers

The concept of nomadic thought and style was firstly introduced by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the late twentieth century, and then the Italian philosopher Rosi Braidotti expanded it. Braidotti argues that the nomadic lifestyle is associated with displacement, but this movement does not regard any homeland or any predetermined

destination. In fact, physical movement does not define the nomad, but rather it is the mental and behavioral transformation that defines it (Braidotti, 2011, p. 60). The nomad undergoes a constant change and evolution in order to escape any fixed and defined identity (Braidotti, 2011, pp. 45, 57-58). The nomad has a post-hybrid identity free from cultural and national constraints.

3. Methodology

Lahiri's works in English and Italian are not only thematically different, but their main difference is markedly linguistic. Thus, this research highlights the main features of nomadic writing in Lahiri's works in order to provide a clearer definition of nomadic literature.

It, firstly, examines the issue of identity and shows how Lahiri seeks refuge in oblivion in order to free herself from the identity of an immigrant writer. For this, she moves to a third country and writes in a third language. In this manner, she gets closer to a nomadic identity.

Then, it examines the linguistic poetics of Lahiri's writings in Italian and demonstrates how the use of an abstract language, or in Lahiri's own words, a "linguistic autobiography" frees her from cultural conflicts and gives her the necessary freedom to express her true self.

4. Results

Writing in a third language is associated with the negation of the language, culture and memories of the past. It is a post-hybrid identity free from cultural and national constraints. It gives the writer the necessary freedom to write regardless of boundaries surrounding him/her.

Lahiri's writings in English symbolize her dual identity between two cultures and languages. From this dual space, she takes refuge into a third language. By moving to Italy and writing in Italian, Lahiri creates a new ideological or nomadic space that allows her to overcome the existing and stable principles and create a new identity in constant change (Bostrom, 2009: 201).