

Palacios, M. (Ed.). *Forked Tongues*. Translation by Manuela Palacios. Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2012, 184 p.

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The collection of poems under review is grounded in the tradition of the bilingual publication and the parallel relationships between the original and target languages. However, by gathering women poets of three communities of postcolonial heritage: Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia, translated into English by Irish translators, it posits a new set of associations arising from the feminine expression in poetry, the minoritized vernaculars of the original poems and their (hegemonic) English counterpart in translation, and the very bilingual condition — what is indeed meant to be alluded to by the title “forked tongues” — shared by the writers and their translators. The volume is divided into four main sections, three of

which presenting the productions by Galician, Basque and Catalan writers and their respective translations, and an Introduction by Manuela Palacios, the editor, which precedes the poems. In it, Palacios gives details of the background of each author and how the poems were selected, by the poets and herself, to feature the anthology. The level of experimentalism of the visual poem on the page follows the extraordinary idea of having poets translating poets from an initial, literal translation. Thus, most probably, Palacios’s choice of the poet translators was marked by the common themes and styles that are inherent to each of the poets and poet translators.

*Forked Tongues* is affirmative of the position occupied by women poets in postcolonial literature. The majority of the thirteen authors portrayed in the anthology has long developed their careers and been published individually in their respective communities, the exemplars presented being selected among their previously published (not rarely acclaimed) works.

However, when put together, in spite of the different ways the tropes and moods of each generation were organized to make each poetic manifestation so singular, the poets can also be seen as a unison. In this sense, *Forked Tongues* becomes expressive of the individual efforts of each author transformed into a diverse, yet cohesive collective unity, so as to make their voices cross the boundaries that they represent, and be heard in other scenarios, either as women, as political beings, or as authorial voices. The book can be seen as representative of identities that are beyond the dual or bifurcated realities attributed to them. Palacios's efforts in gathering such rich communities of multiple belongings meet the political need to go back to subjectivities that are traditionally invisible, and 'silent', either for their female genres' identities or for their long excluded places of enunciation — fortunately, not in *Forked Tongues*, from which world readers can depart into journeys of sociopolitical revision.

The collection opens with the Galician poets, Pilar Pallarés

(1957), translated by Maurice Harmon, followed by Chus Pato (1955), translated by Lorna Shaughnessy, Lupe Gómes Arto (1972), translated by Anne Le Marquand Hartigan, Yolanda Castaño (1977), translated by Máighréad Medbh; and María do Cebreiro (1976), translated by Mary O'Donnell. We see the pleasant combination of poet and translator in Pallarés's "O desexo era un lóstrego...", transferred by Harmon as "Desire, a lighting strike..." (p. 30, 31). Harmon is known for his lyricism and deep reflection upon trivial imagery, such as we see happening in Pallarés. Similarly, "unha lingua de fogo que a todos e a cada unha pertence." (in Pato's "Eleusis," p. 36), finds harmonic resonance in "a tongue of fire that belongs to each and every one" (as transcreated by Shaughnessy, p. 37). Probably, the most evident correspondence that meets the political agenda of feminism is in the pair Arto and Hartigan, as attested in the poems "Tenda De Cosméticos"/"Making Up" and "Enfoque Teórico"/"A Clinical Stare". The already conventional, feminist

deconstruction of the image of the woman and the nation, by means of social complaint, as regards the place/space of the woman writer in society, is also found in both Hartigan's and Arto's works. And, likewise, Castaño and Medbh, in "Corrupciòn"/"Corruption," point out to the easy and conflicting political ground from where most forked identities move and against which the writers in the anthology strike.

Basque poetry is represented by Itxaro Borda (1959), translated by Celia de Fréine, Miren Agur Meabe (1962), translated by Catherine Phil MacCarthy, Castillo Suárez (1976), translated by Susan Connolly, and Leire Bilbao (1978), translated by Paddy Bushe. The first pair of author and translator signals to the exercise of freedom that is the writing struggle in the (yet unplublished) poem "Maria Merceren (B)egia" and its counterpart, "The Eye of Maria-Mercè Marçal" (p. 84, 85). But the Basque context is also expressive in the partnerships Meabe and MacCarthy and Suárez and Connolly. Both these pairs materialize hybridity in

their poetic structures, examples in which this occur being the poems "Patti Smith Rimbaudekin ametsetan" and "Salmoa" (p. 94, 100) (rendered "Patti Smith Dreams of Rimbaud" and "Psalm") (p. 95, 101), by the former pair; and "Panpina mutuak" and its recreation, "Mute Rag Dolls", by the latter. And subjectivity is deeply embraced in the poems "Terra Nova" and "Kaleko zakurra", by Bilbao (p. 116, 118) and Bushe's versions, "Terra Nova" and "Stray Dog".

The anthology is closed with the Catalan poets, Vinyet Panyella (1954), translated by Michael O'Loughlin, Susanna Rafart (1962), translated by Paula Meehan, Gemma Gorga (1968), translated by Keith Payne and Mireia Calafell (1980), translated by Theo Dorgan. Both Panyella's original poems and O'Loughlin's translations are framed in the intertextuality with painting, which helps construct the importance of hybridity in an allusive form of understanding the sociopolitical, conflicting basis of these poets' sense of belonging. In the same vein, Rafart and Meehan, along

with Gorga and Payne and Calafell and Dorgan bring up the relevance of subjectivity for an overall discussion of society, from the Arts. Themes worked out in these poems range from the constructions of the female body through discourse to women's renunciations and defeats; and from the dialogue between poetry and painting (and how pictorial elements such as colours, shapes and textures are reflected in literature) to the rewriting of the very literary traditions pertaining to poetic creation.

The common denominator uniting the poets is translation, transcreation of selves and societies. From selves to societies. From political conflict to hybridity and understanding. It is by means of translation that these authors are seen both as individuals and as representatives of their communities in their quest for expressiveness. Thus, in addition to giving rise to queries about how these discourses are organized in both languages, implied in/by the poets'/ translator's "forked tongues", the anthology can promote new views on the different angles from which discussions about

translation/transcreation can proceed. Examples of these could be the fact that some of the poets are transcreated by male translators and that all of the translators are poets themselves. Regarding the former aspect, Palacios sees it as contributing to the visibility of women in literature (p. 9); but it could also be seen as challenging the conventions of language, posited by the very poets — or both — and certainly as one more aspect which makes the book unique in its conception.

Looking back in time and along it, one can never escape Shakespeare's lines on poets and their task (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*):

The forms of things unknown, the  
poet's pen

Turns them to shapes, and gives to  
airy nothing

A local habitation and a name (Act  
5, scene 1).

Yet, with poststructuralism one is also inevitably led to read from the deconstructed

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notion of an unstable, poetic and aesthetic logocentrism, of which translation is so much of a proof. Poetry is already a translation. Translated poetry, as the object-subject of which *Forked Tongues* is made, is no attempt to answer the conflict of multiple, forked identities, even though it suggests that exposure and transference may help break the silence and invisibility. The reading of *Forked Tongues* in the also plural Portuguese context provides one with the dimension of the importance of plurality,

by comparison. *Forked Tongues* answers the gaps of ruptures caused by the illusion of ready-made artistic contexts. *Forked Tongues* blades its own sharpened edges, by cutting into slices any naïve, linear content of belonging.

Nilce M. Pereira  
Universidade Estadual Paulista

Gisele G. Wolkoff  
Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná

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