

## Reviews

Jussawalla, Feroza (2003): *Chiffon Saris*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 92 pages.

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Feroza Jussawalla's *Chiffon Saris* is a precious gift. In this beautifully constructed collection of poems, the reader comes to know and understand, page after page, how Jussawalla writes herself and her world(s). While writing on life, illness and death, Jussawalla bravely declares in "The Life and Death of a Death Mask": "Surrounded by a tin halo, embellished with a/marital tili, my eyebrows affirmations,/I am that I am. Om bhur buh svaha/" (35; my emphasis). This not a quest for identity, it is a firm, intensely poetic and fiercely committed *declaration* of identity. The climax of her highly Romantic claim "I am a poet" ("Rainbow", 89), is the last in a book that transmits with great emotional strength the complex net of interlocking knots weaving Jussawalla's self-portrait. In her book *Sexing the Self*, a study on the relation between theory and practice in the definition of selves, Elspeth Probyn argues that by defining ourselves and our identities, "We can ... talk of an active voice, one that is actively implicated in and spoken out of gendered everyday practices and places" (1993: 87). This is exactly what Feroza Jussawalla accomplishes through her poems. The woman, the migrant, the writer, the theorist, the mother, the daughter, as well as her ordeals of infertility and cancer, are encapsulated in these four words, "I am a poet".

Words become the tools the poet uses to write her self as a diasporic subject that exists in-between languages, cultures, religions, traditions. In "Tierra de la Luna" she proudly claims: "Soy de la India, pero también de Nuevo México./Of India, but also of the soil of New Mexico,/ .../I've lived longer here, than there,/But I'm always asked, 'What are you?'/What AM I? Can I say, 'I AM that I am?'" (10). In the opening poem, "Indian", English and Spanish intermingle and carry us from Jahilia to Medina to Chimayo, through colonial and postcolonial geographies, colours, expressions. In the last verses Jussawalla shows her concern and empathy with the displaced, regardless of homeland, concluding: "We are all the same, people/coming overland through the/northwestern passages into the hinterland,/over air, into the northeastern passages~/coming to fill this vast/*Diaspora*" (1; my emphasis). This is just the beginning of an intimate journey that shuttles the reader through shrouded, private spaces; poems like "Garas", "Indigent" or "Golden Girls" are representative of the metaphysical dimension as well as of the daily flux of life and the small events that make it worth living.

We as readers follow the poet's thoughts while she delves into her feelings and paints her everyday life. In the purest Wordsworthian style, Jusawalla moves from common details to a higher understanding of the meaning of life and death, remaining socially-committed. Her first person poetic writing develops through a time line that maintains a strong connection with nature without leaving history aside; for example, in "Terror", a poem on September 11, she voices her grief and rage: "Terror/strikes the heart/of those who speak out/after the attack/September 11, 2001./Terrorists/silenced us/here, in our adopted homelands..." (87). Senseless violence may silence the voiced subject and push her

back to subalternity. But this is not what happens in Feroza Jussawalla's case, for she is unwilling to learn to live "in-between" the old carefully constructed, yet agonizing, society and the new explosion of emotions resulting from the terrorist attack. Her poetry and her cry against death amount to an answer to the question: Can the subaltern speak?

If we analyse the process of identity formation depicted in this collection from a Gramscian perspective, we can claim that the poet's autobiographical "I" takes shape by transmitting the reader the intimate process she has gone through in order to understand her own needs and fears and how important relations among individuals are in this process - *intimacy*, to borrow his own words. I would argue that the poem "My Mother" is one of the most touching illustrations of the intimate relations that Jussawalla transforms into textuality. Being herself a mother and struggling with cancer, the poet can finally come to terms with past emotions and write: "But older and wiser/now/I give myself and her/a new lease on life./Forgiveness" (42). In this sense *Chiffon Saris* is the manifesto of a successful negotiation between the poet's own identity, the people that surround her and the places in which she lives. It is a powerful life statement, where words become a path to the self-awareness that gives the author the power to act on her own destiny.

#### Works cited

Probyn, Elspeth (1993): *Sexing the Self. Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

**Fernández Álvarez; M. Pilar and Antón Teodoro Manrique (2002): *Antología de la literatura nórdica antigua*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad.**

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Few universities in Spain offer specialized courses on Old Scandinavian Languages and Literatures today. However, every scholar involved in Germanic Linguistics is aware of the historical relevance of Old Norse and the Sagas, which have played a vital role in the development of other Germanic languages, namely English. Although originally designed as a textbook, this elegantly edited anthology of Old Scandinavian texts can also serve as an excellent introduction to the history of Old Norse and Old Icelandic and to their respective literatures.

The book *Antología de la literatura nórdica antigua* can be clearly divided into three different sections: The first section (Chapter 0) offers a concise and clear-cut introduction to some literary and cultural aspects of Old Norse and Old Icelandic from a comparative European perspective. Here the authors comment on the origins of the early poetry and prose written in both languages along with their historical background. In the last part of this Introduction they also provide a coherent classification of the different Old Icelandic