Abstract

This dissertation attempts a cross-cultural, comparative study of the poetry of exile during the second half of the twentieth century, as manifested in the poetic works of Derek Walcott (1930-2017), Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996), Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) and Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990). It tries to bring together varying templates of exilic literary subjectivity, produced under conditions of historical dispossession, banishment, voluntary migration and coerced exile pertaining to the Caribbean, Soviet Union, Northern Ireland and post-revolutionary Cuba respectively. The temporal scope of the work broadly covers the period spanning between the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s.

The project takes its theoretical cues from the work of Edward W. Said, Salman Rushdie, Homi K. Bhabha, Claudio Guillen, Julia Kristeva, Sophia A. McClennen, Paul Tabori, Andrei Cordescu and Rosi Braidotti to properly contextualise the notion of exilic/emigre subjectivity.

It begins with an elaborate genealogy of the poetry of exile ranging from the work of ancient and medieval exemplars such as Ovid and Dante, the British Romantics and Alexander Pushkin, as well as glossing over the literary output of major twentieth century figures of exile and diaspora literatures such as Osip Mandelstam, Czeslaw Milosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Paul Celan, John Montague, Patrick Kavanagh, C.L.R. James, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Thomas Venclova and Heberto Padilla. The historical events covered across this dissertation concern the Cold War years and the political tumults it spawned across diverse geo-political and socio-cultural contexts.

Using textual and historical analysis as its research methods, and a host of context-specific theoretical models, this dissertation proposes the existence of a global "exilic imaginary" during the Cold War years-one that is being constantly metamorphosed through newer representations. The totality of the experience of exile gets framed through the constant interplay between the "real" and the "fictive".