

**'Don't be afraid of what you have to tell': REVIEW of:
Dora Sales Salvador, *Puentes sobre el mundo: Cultura, traducción y forma literaria en las narrativas de transculturación de José María Arguedas y Vikram Chandra***

(Bridges over the world: Culture, translation and literary form in the narratives of transculturation of José María Arguedas and Vikram Chandra)

Details: Berne, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2004; Series: 'Perspectivas hispánicas', No 21; soft covers, 677 pp.; ISBN 3-03910-359-8 - <www.peterlang.com>

Review by Christopher Rollason

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ABSTRACT

Spanish-American literature and Indian writing in English are both often evoked as key instances of third-world or postcolonial writing. However, comparative critical studies have been thin on the ground. A major contribution to filling that gap is now offered, from the Spanish-speaking side, by Dora Sales Salvador's book, whose title reads in English: *Bridges over the world: Culture, translation and literary form in the narratives of transculturation of José María Arguedas and Vikram Chandra*. Dora Sales Salvador, who teaches at the Universidad Jaume I de Castellón (Valencia region, Spain) and originally submitted this work as her doctoral thesis, weaves a dense and convincing comparative analysis of two texts from those two literatures, successfully integrating her discussion within a multidisciplinary theoretical framework.

The novels analysed are *Los ríos profundos* (*Deep Rivers*, 1958), by the Peruvian José María Arguedas, and *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), by the Indian Vikram Chandra. Dora Sales powerfully illuminates these texts with the aid of an elegant five-branched candelabrum, deploying theoretical perspectives embracing the following disciplines: literary theory (especially postcolonial); comparative literature; anthropology; translation studies; and cultural studies. She places a salutary emphasis on non-Western theoretical currents: Latin American anthropology, notably Fernando Ortiz's concept of *transculturation*; and the Sanskrit literary model of the *rasas* (emotions), as an alternative aesthetic to Aristotelian orthodoxy. She further offers a close account of the language aspects of both novels (integration of elements from Quechua and Indian languages) and their textual interface between elite and folk cultures (incorporation of Quechua song; imprint of Indian storytelling).

The study is of great stylistic elegance: Dora Sales' Spanish is enormously cultivated and highly expressive, and her prose burns with emotional commitment to the texts and writers. The reader is led to share an experience that recalls Edward Said in affirming, in Dora Sales' words, the 'willingness to assume as one's own, not what is single but what is diverse'. The vital cause of intercultural communication is most excellently advanced by this fine volume, which serves as an eloquent testimony to the power of literature - and especially postcolonial or transcultural writing - to construct, in a phrase taken by the author from Arguedas' novel, *bridges over the world*.

*'Otro modo de ser humano y libre' - 'Another way to be human and free'
- Rosario Castellanos*

'Don't be afraid of what you have to tell. Tell the story' - Vikram Chandra

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Hispano-American literature and Indian writing in English are both often evoked as instances of what is termed third-world or postcolonial writing, while celebrated works from both cultural areas (Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de*

soledad/One Hundred Years of Solitude) are frequently cited as canonic or founding postcolonial texts. Among writers themselves, Octavio Paz, in his book *Vislumbres de la India/In Light of India*, has stressed the parallels between Indian and Aztec cultures, while Anita Desai has located her latest novel not in India but in Mexico, also claiming cultural similarity. Nonetheless, comparative critical studies aimed at identifying the characteristics (parallels and divergences) of representative works of the two literatures, in the context of a global project of cultural resistance, have been thin on the ground. One reason for this is the regrettable but undeniable lack, in English-speaking countries, of scholars with the necessary language skills (i.e. knowing Spanish). A major contribution towards filling that gap is now offered, from the Spanish-speaking side of the divide, in the shape of the text under review. This study by Dora Sales Salvador, who teaches in the Department of Translation and Communication at the Universidad Jaime I de Castellón (Valencia region, Spain), was originally presented as her doctoral thesis. The author has not only woven a dense and convincing comparative analysis of two texts from the two literatures in question, but has successfully integrated that analysis within a multidisciplinary theoretical framework which harmoniously combines elements from a wide range of discourses. The book appears in the publishing house Peter Lang's prestigious collection *Perspectivas hispánicas*, whose objective is to bring together works resulting from 'high-level research' in the field of literary criticism related to Hispanic studies.

The two works - both novels - on which Dora Sales' theoretical and critical enterprise centres are: *Los ríos profundos* (1958), by the Peruvian José María Arguedas, and *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), by the Indian Vikram Chandra. We may note that Arguedas' text exists in English (as *Deep Rivers*), and Chandra's in Spanish (as *La tierra roja*). The study is of course written in Spanish, but the quotations from Vikram Chandra and other anglophone sources appear in English, without translation, and we may therefore presume that this volume is aimed at a specialist, effectively bilingual readership. Dora Sales is, additionally, the co-translator into Spanish (with Esther Monzó Nebot) of Chandra's second book, *Love and Longing in Bombay/Amor y añoranza en Bombay*, and has also translated two novels by Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters/Hijas difíciles* and *A Married Woman/Una mujer casada*. Her study was compiled with the full cooperation of both Vikram Chandra and Sybila Arredondo de Arguedas, José María's widow.

Los ríos profundos is the best-known work of a writer no longer living (Arguedas died in 1969), while *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* is the first book of a living novelist, still relatively young, with a considerable and growing critical reputation. In the light of the so-called *new paradigm* of comparative literature, the author states that her aim is not to identify direct links or influences between the two writers (indeed, no such links exist), but to highlight parallels and affinities of a theoretical and textual nature. Starting out from this position, a series of points of convergence are identified between the respective works of Chandra and Arguedas. Both write from within a postcolonial or decolonised context and a language reality that is bilingual (Spanish/Quechua) or multilingual (English/Hindi/Indian regional languages) but where languages do not have equal power; both make use of elements deeply rooted in the oral tradition (Quechua popular song; Indian storytelling); and both, in the texture of their prose, achieve an original form of adaptation, comprehensible but visibly manipulated, of the colonial language to the autochthonous cultural substratum. Here, the present reviewer feels a number of qualifications may prove desirable. Arguedas, a child from a white family, learnt Quechua as his mother tongue in atypical circumstances, while the case of Chandra, who grew up speaking Hindi but was educated at English-medium institutions, is more representative. Some might further object that Hindi, the co-official language of a vast country, remains today a highly resilient language which enjoys considerably higher prestige than a marginalised tongue like Quechua; it is, though, equally the case that in both India and Peru, in today's globalised context, the dominant language (English, Spanish) is of European origin and as such alien. Others might wish to stress

that, while there are literary texts in Quechua, the major languages of India historically draw on a huge and prestigious heritage of written literature; again, however, it is no less true that in both cultures oral expression dominates at the popular level. It is also legitimate to recall that, if both India and Peru have suffered, and still suffer, from the imprint of colonialism, Peru became independent *before* the British formalised their rule over India, and that, while one may indeed speak of neocolonialism, Peru's neocolonial master is not the former European coloniser but a different power altogether, namely the United States. Ultimately, however, any such refinements are best described as nuances, and the parallels traced by Dora Sales between the Peruvian and Indian realities remain fundamentally legitimate, while at the same time defining the space of her analysis.

To read the texts, Dora Sales deploys a wide-ranging set of theoretical perspectives embracing and synthesising a total of five disciplines. These are: literary theory, notably from the perspectives of Bakhtinian postformalism, postcolonial currents and the polysystem model of the Israeli theorist Even-Zohar; the already mentioned *new paradigm* of comparative literature; anthropology (theories of ethnoliterature); translation studies, especially in their postcolonial dimension; and the postulates of the largely Anglophone tendency that has been baptised *cultural studies*. These multiple discourses are interwoven across the text in an exemplary fashion: the author succeeds in avoiding both unstructured eclecticism and indeterminate vagueness (some of the approaches employed are in any case interrelated, as witness the postcolonial currents in both literary theory and translation studies). The cultural studies approach could, in other hands, have ended up preaching the disappearance of Literature as such, sucked into a dubious melting-pot along with a homogenised and idealised 'popular culture': fortunately, however, the author avoids any such temptation, offering, rather, a finely-balanced modulation of the complex dialectic between erudite and popular, written and oral. The reader will meanwhile note the absence, no doubt intentional, of certain 'other' currents, such as psychoanalytic criticism or genre studies: indeed, this is not the place to look for those seeking an exposition of the much-trumpeted 'magic-realist' mode of fiction. The methodologies employed by the author emerge overall as the product of a conscious and controlled choice: Dora Sales powerfully illuminates the two novels with the aid of an elegant five-branched candelabrum.

The study abounds in insights of major interest, among which a few may here be highlighted. In the area of theory, the author places an unexpected, and eminently salutary, emphasis on non-Western currents. Particular stress is laid on Latin American anthropology (the *anthropophagy* of the Brazilian Haroldo de Campos, the *transculturation* of the Cuban Fernando Ortiz), while, at the same time, centre stage is given to the Sanskrit theory of *rasas* (emotions) as a tool for literary analysis which offers, in potential, an alternative aesthetic to Aristotelian orthodoxy. While the transfer to literary studies of the transculturation model (originally devised for anthropology) is not an innovation in itself, what is remarkable is Dora Sales' highly articulate and particular use of it. She explains: 'Fue el antropólogo e historiador cubano Fernando Ortiz quien planteó el concepto de *transculturación* en 1940 para sustituir al de *aculturación*, empleado hasta entonces. Este último término designa, básicamente, los complejos procesos de contacto cultural en cuanto a la asimilación y recepción, por parte de unas sociedades, de rasgos procedentes de otra' ('It was the Cuban anthropologist and historian Fernando Ortiz who, in 1940, proposed the concept of *transculturation*, to replace that of *acculturation*, which had been used up till then. This term designates, essentially, the complex processes of cultural contact relating to the assimilation and reception by certain societies of features originating in others' - 41). A concept devised for the understanding of a Latin American reality is thus appropriated for application not only to texts from Latin America but also to literature from another continent, in the form of Indian writing in English. Also highly significant in this context is the idea advanced by Dora Sales with regard to transcultural productions such as those of Arguedas and Chandra, to the effect that such texts have, in a certain sense, *already been translated* in the very act of

writing, since they are already the fruit of a process of intercultural negotiation and transfer bearing considerable similarities to the act of translation proper: 'Las narrativas de transculturación (...) son textos *originales* que en sí ya llevan la carga de la traducción, ya constituyen una traducción, han surgido como resultado de un proceso traductor en el ámbito de la creación' ('Transcultural narratives (...) are *original* texts which already bear the burden of translation, *are* already a translation, having arisen as the result of a translating process in the framework of creation' - 466). While this position is not new as such, Dora Sales most certainly offers, by means of painstaking textual analysis, a remarkable illustration of it. Her study, all in all, reveals a critical voice marked by an advanced gift of synthesis and an ability to communicate and filter others' ideas with exemplary clarity, thus arriving at a final vision of substantial originality that exhibits maximum coherence with the texts studied.

The volume is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. The second part (a close analysis of the two texts by Arguedas and Chandra) is organised not into discrete blocks, but, rather, by means of a sedulous counterpointing of themes and elements in which the two strands, Indian and Peruvian, intertwine in complementary fashion. The author undertakes, notably, a finely detailed analysis of the language aspects of both novels, in the context of transculturation (lexical and discursive borrowings from Quechua and from Indian languages) and the interface between elite and folk cultures - in Arguedas, the incorporation into the text of traditional Quechua song; in Chandra, the influence of the non-linear narrative of the Sanskrit epics and the storyteller figure. At all moments, Dora Sales evidences a knowledge of both novels from the inside, considering them not only through the prism of Theory but also in their autonomy as literary texts, thus conferring appropriate shape on her vision.

Across the entire study, the author's scholarly prose is of a quite unusual stylistic elegance. Unlike the majority of Theory-oriented academic texts, this volume impresses by the attractiveness and distinction of its writing: as, alas, happens only very rarely, the language of the works studied and the language of the scholar who studies them are on one and the same aesthetic level. Dora Sales' Spanish is enormously cultivated and highly expressive, and her prose burns with commitment to her ideas and emotional engagement with the texts and writers. Her sentences are balanced, harmonious and never over-length, while on the lexical level her writing eschews the dire attritions of repetition. The following sentence may serve as an example: 'Se construye una esperanza, un futuro discernible: el ser humano puede actuar sobre su mundo, puede elegir sus querencias y sus alternativas, a pesar de las fuerzas que lo rodean y en gran medida lo determinan' ('A hope is constructed, a discernible future: human beings can act on their world, can choose their desires and alternatives, despite the forces that surround and in large part determine them' - 609). Dora Sales the critic dives into the depths of the texts which she explores, to bring up stylistic pearls which then reappear in her own graceful prose. Her writing emerges as a generous manifestation, on its own terms, of the human and aesthetic possibilities offered by the study of literature: as she puts it, 'la literatura transcultural late como hospitalaria posibilidad de comunicación' ('transcultural literature offers wide-embracing potentialities for communication' - 14). The reader is thus led to share with the author (who may here remind us of the Edward Said of *Culture and Imperialism*) 'la voluntad de asumir como propio no lo uno sino lo diverso' ('the willingness to assume as one's own, not what is single but what is diverse' - 594).

Ultimately, while this study most certainly and remarkably achieves the ambitious objective that it sets itself (how can we read transcultural literatures with a view to intercultural communication and understanding?), it remains but one piece of something far larger than itself. Dora Sales' volume is part of a collective project, and in the light of its exceptional value it is essential that future studies should go on mining a similar vein. From this perspective, various further lines of research could be proposed. These could include: applying the ethno-literary approach that

imbues this study to other texts, both Latin American (say, García Márquez's *Del amor y otros demonios/Of Love and Other Demons* or Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo/The Kingdom of This World*) and Indian (e.g. Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* or Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*); and, equally, extending the notion of the *already-translated text* to other Indian writers, for instance Amitav Ghosh, whose most recent novel, *The Hungry Tide*, focuses, precisely, on translation as its cohering theme. The challenge is enormous, and in this connection the success of Dora Sales' project should provide an especial stimulus.

By way of conclusion, the reader may wish, having absorbed the fertile lessons of this excellent piece of theoretical and critical writing, to enter the world of Vikram Chandra and José María Arguedas on a more emotive level, in the light of the major contribution that such an experience can make to the cause of promoting understanding between cultures and avoiding sterile confrontations and polarisations. We shall here propose the image, taken from the pages of Arguedas, which Dora Sales has appositely chosen for the title of her book. The *puentes sobre el mundo (bridges over the world)* of which she speaks are simulacra of the bridge across the Pachachaca that looms large in *Los ríos profundos*. Here it is that Ernesto, Arguedas' young hero, comes to escape from the closed environment of the white boarding-school and reconnect with his true self and the Quechua imagination. The bridge across the river is an emblem of the possibility, perhaps utopian but at all moments necessary, of communication between peoples and cultures: 'El Pachachaca gemía en la oscuridad al fondo de la inmensa quebrada. Los arbustos temblaban con el viento (...) Por el puente colgante de Auquibamba pasará el río, en la tarde' ('The Pachachaca moaned in the darkness at the bottom of the immense ravine. The trees trembled in the wind (...) Past the hanging bridge of Auquibamba will flow the river in the evening' - Arguedas, quoted in Sales, 557; reviewer's translation). *Puente sobre el mundo (Bridge over the world)* is the title of one of the chapters of Arguedas' novel. In its turn, Dora Sales' study serves as an eloquent testimony to the power of Literature - in the face of all technician or instrumentalist ideologies seeking to deny its usefulness - to construct, notably in its transcultural manifestation, *bridges over the world*. Thus, on her closing page (622) the author leaves the reader with this fecund observation, whose validity has been forcibly demonstrated by her outstanding study: 'La literatura, como mundo posible y territorio limítrofe con la vida, es un excepcional punto de partida' ('Literature, as a possible world and territory bordering on life, is an exceptional starting-point').

NOTE:

Vikram Chandra's official website is at <www.vikramchandra.com>. It has a bibliography including more material by Dora Sales, one of whose articles may be found (in English) at: <www.unirioja.es/Publicaciones/ej/jes/jes02/art07.pdf>. The author of this review has also written on Chandra, at: <www.sekilos.com.ar/Chandra_en.html> and (on Dora Sales' and Esther Monzó's translation of Chandra): <www.sekilos.com.ar/LoveAndLonging.html>.