
Otherness, Translation, and Biomythography

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Abstract

Travel has been widely studied in literature and translation studies with writers such as Swift creating fantastical countries, translators such as Borges using their experiences abroad in their writings, translations, and explorations of translation theory, and scholars such as de las Casas seeing their journeys as opportunities to effect activism. What has not been as widely considered is the concept of otherness which comes from travel, and how translation, or the lack of it, can emphasize that otherness. This paper will address the use of translation in terms of otherness, and will do so through the reshaping of genre conventions as expressed in Audre Lorde's *Zami*. The paper will analyze Lorde's concept of otherness as portrayed in *Zami*, beginning with her childhood as the daughter of immigrant parents whose native patois fills her life not only with the exotic sounds and souse of the West Indies, but with the unmistakable impression of being "other" than the American families they meet. Balancing between West Indian and American cultures, unsure where she belongs, Lorde spends her young adulthood considering the nature of otherness. Traveling to Mexico gives her the feeling that being "la negra" is positive-words she does not translate. The gift of the nickname "La Chica" brings her into the Mexican community, even as she translates this nickname for her own readers. Lorde's selective translation of her own and other expatriates' nicknames highlights the nature of difference, exemplifies her ability to withstand life as a black woman and as a lesbian in the United States, and ultimately leads to the coining of the "biomythography" genre to characterize her historical-mythological memoir, *Zami*. This paper hopes to shed new light on the nature of otherness and the use of translation to highlight that otherness and transform genre.

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