

The 'Atravesado' in the Borderland(s): Agha Shahid Ali's Poetics of the Margin

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Abstract

The diasporic poet Agha Shahid Ali is usually referred to by using designations like Kashmiri-American poet, Indian-American poet, South Asian-American poet, or a Muslim-American poet. These hyphenated terms mark the poet's position of liminality in the regional, national and international space. The hyphens are also indicative of a sense of transition and fluidity—the marker of an impossibility of assigning any particular identity to the poet. Like an 'atavesado' Ali moves from one identity to another and crosses the borders of regionalism, nationality and religion. A reading of Ali's poetry reveals that as poet Ali is always found in the in-between-ness of the hyphen rather than in the hyphenated content words. The article aims to trace Ali's efforts to break these boundaries and his search for a 'city of evanescence' where all borders crumble. The reading involves an exploration of the paradox of the exile's life which is characterised by a desire to transcend borders and a simultaneous desire for a homeland.

Key words: diaspora, liminality, atravesado, border

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