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**"COMING INTO BEING":  
METAPHORS OF SELF AND BECOMING IN CARNIVAL,  
ON THE AEGEAN ISLAND OF SKYROS**

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## ABSTRACT

Carnival is a symbolically intense ritual field that offers abounding interpretations of the cultural and social reality upon which it muses. In this thesis, I explore a carnival held on the Aegean island of Skyros, Greece, focusing on how participants metaphorically express and experience their carnival. Each year, troupes of *Yeri* (quasi goat-shepherd masqueraders strung with hefty bells), accompanied by a colourful array of absurd masqueraders and pranksters, pour into the township's streets, resounding their social presence and heralding a culturally potent celebratory season. Communities such as Skyros, with a rich subtext of oral tradition in cultural life, perceive their world through figurative devices, that is, non-literal language. Drawing upon metaphor theory (Fernandez 1991), I use indigenous tropes as analytical keys that embrace meaning in its experiential dimension, to fathom symbolic expressions of subjectivity and selfhood in ritual practices.

Various facets of Skyrian carnival unfold ethnographically, each emphasizing different analytical/tropic features. To understand the cultural dynamics embedded in the poetic interchange during the *Trata* satirical performance, I employ the metaphor of the antiphon — a musical form of call and response. In relation to the Lenten celebration of Clean Monday, I address its paradoxical 'purgative' nature, in addition to themes of folk dress and dressing as evoking cultural memory and social relatedness.

However, my main focus is the dominant trope of carnivalesque transformation, "coming into being" — Skyrians' idiomatic notion of metamorphosis — as a metaphorical expression of ritual subjectivity and practice. Detailing predominant features of carnival, such as masquerade and concealment and its relation to the face and masking, I explore concepts of masquerade that better depict the bodily emphasis of transformation in carnival. Enmeshed in the metaphors of becoming are sub-tropes of altered states of consciousness, such as *methi* (inebriation) and *kefi* (merriment), which accentuate communal revelry and "becoming together" in Skyrian carnival. The central trope of "coming into being" illuminates culturally specific notions of the ecstatic and social self. I argue that the ethnography of carnival demonstrates that metaphoric discourse emanating from, and shaping ritual action can provide a particular understanding of ontological questions surrounding selfhood and becoming, as they arise from carnivalesque twists of social-cultural reality. Such an approach can fruitfully reveal cultural nuances of indigenous celebratory practices that have an elevated place in a community, as is the case with carnival in Skyros.

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